HOW TO OCCUPY THE REAL: POSTCOLONIAL LITERATURES BEYOND REPRESENTATION

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HOW TO OCCUPY THE REAL: POSTCOLONIAL LITERATURES BEYOND REPRESENTATION

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This dissertation addresses the ways in which postcolonial authors from the Caribbean and the Maghreb, anglophone and Francophone such as Frankétienne, Edouard Glissant, Abdelkebir Khatibi M. NourbeSe Philip and Dany Laferrière respond to a historical exclusion from the symbolic; an exclusion that affected and continues to affect colonial and postcolonial subjectivities. How is it possible, from the perspective of the colonized (non)subject, to express a (post)colonial experience? Is bearing witness to past colonial events possible when the constitution of the modern paradigm itself necessitated the erasure of such events? How does one project a voice that bears the possibility to be heard when the structural stability of language and communication—in other words, the "symbolic"—is secured by deafness to these voices? To examine these questions, I look at works of fiction (poetry, novels, spiral) that do not fit easily into a specific genre precisely because they experiment with literary forms of representation. Deploying strategies ordinarily viewed as negative, such as schizophrenia, disidentification and opacity, the authors of my corpus push language to its limits in order to express postcolonial traumatic experiences. Drawing on Lacan's concept of the real, trauma studies, postcolonial theory and Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy, I demonstrate that they successfully "occupy the real:" their dismantling of traditional literary forms–and sometimes of language itself–questions western forms of representation and opens up an ethics of reading that demands the reader takes responsibility for the object of his or her gaze.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Alex Lenoble was born in Paris, France. He did his Maitrise at Paris X Nanterre and after spending a year teaching in Guadeloupe did his M.A. at Paris IV-Sorbonne. Before coming to Ithaca, NY, for his Ph.D., he published translations of the South-African poet Dennis Brutus and articles on the literary work of the Haitian author Frankétienne. During his time at Cornell he taught French, Literature and Culture in the Romance and Africana Studies Departments. He was a member of Diacritic's editorial board and an active contributor to the Intergroup Dialogue Project. He also taught French language courses at Ithaca College. He will soon start his new job as an Assistant Professor at the University of South Florida in Tampa.

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Though I am the only signatory of this thesis, it is my conviction that writing is not and should not be a solitary act. English is not my native language, and I would never have gained the confidence I have today without my readers and editors who are also dear friends. I owe a great deal to Valeria Dani, to her critical eye and her generous comments. During our nightly epic writing sessions, she rescued me many times from the Mallarmean syndrome of "blank page anxiety."

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INTRODUCTION

How is it possible, from the perspective of the colonized (non)subject, to express a (post)colonial experience? How can they bear witness to past colonial events when the constitution of the modern paradigm has itself necessitated the erasure of such events? How to project a voice that might be heard when the stability of the structures of language and communication–in other words, *the symbolic*–is precisely secured by deafness to these voices? There is not one single answer. In *She Tried Her Tongue*, M. NourbeSe Philip declares: "For me the imperative was to move beyond representation." What does it mean to move beyond representation? Why is moving beyond representation an imperative? What kind of literature accomplishes this challenge? And for what purpose? These are some of the questions that were on my mind during the journey of which this dissertation is a result. For Philip, moving beyond representation was the only ethical way to approach the experience of those who were enslaved, murdered and irretrievably silenced in the events of modern/colonial history. She refused to work within the "order of logic, rationality and predictability" because it would be a betrayal: it would exert a second violence, this time "to the memory of this already violent experience." This experience, as far as it radically exceeds rationality and order, cannot be told in a language whose grammar expresses rationality and is inscribed in linearity. And yet, it is a story that "must be told." The authors I convoke in this thesis as poets and writers whose unique tool is language–a language they inherited from the colonizer–are all caught in a similar deadlock: I interpret this move beyond representation as a refusal to partake in the

western “symbolic” order.

One of my goals is to investigate the possibility for these authors to occupy the “real,” a domain at once excluded from *and* constitutive of the symbolic. If the later can be described as the psychic structure through which subjects access reality via a selection and an ordering of the chaotic elements of the real symbolized in language, I maintain that what belongs or does not belong in the symbolic has been historically fixed by the West. Psychoanalysis has a history… a colonial history. Indeed, the “universal” subject itself was constituted through the exclusion of others (among whom women, slaves, animals, psychotics) who inhabit the “impossible” space of the real. This is why I characterize the Lacanian symbolic as “western:” drawing on Freud’s theories, the symbolic recognizes only the western, “civilized” structure of thought, in which rationality, order and law is predominant.

Giving an account of the Lacanian real, if at all possible, is not easy. In Lacan’s writing the real is mainly depicted as the negative of the symbolic: there is no language and no representation of the real because it is precisely constituted by what resists symbolization. However, encounters with the real do happen but almost always by accident… through “holes in the symbolic,” breaches in its smooth fabric. It can be in the form of enigmatic messages of which the subject cannot make sense, such as “dreams,” “*actes manqués*” or “symptoms.” These “ratés” manifest the incompleteness of the symbolic; signal its constitution around the real that it lacks. Contrary to the symbolic, the real is whole, undifferentiated and chaotic: it does not miss anything. It is always in its place. In Seminar 11 Lacan also affirms that the real presents itself in the form of trauma. Gayatri Spivak famously said “the subaltern cannot speak.” This does not mean that the subaltern cannot articulate words or

meaning. It means that as long as she is maintained in the status of "subaltern" she cannot be intelligible or heard in the common, public sphere. Similarly, being excluded from the symbolic means not being able to participate in the production of a meaningful reality shared through common language; identification by another subject is impossible. The other who cannot reach subjectivity does not even possess a unified sense of self. This fragmentation of the ego is at the center of Fanon's narrative of the Black Man's in *Black Skin, White Mask,* where the narrator's unity is shattered after each failed identification by white subjects.

When contemporary postcolonial authors want to be heard, when they want to participate in political public debate, they have no other option than to integrate themselves into the current symbolic order. They have to compromise with a language that has silenced their voices in order to claim a role in a global history whose principles have negated their humanity. It might sometimes be necessary or even inevitable. Occupying the real, I argue, might be the only other possibility. By experimenting with literary forms, pushing language to its limits and blurring the borders of identity, the authors I investigate in this thesis express that which cannot be told in a linear temporality or described in homogeneous spatial terms: silenced histories, repressed feelings, historical non-events, and fragmented identities. I look at works of literature–from the Haitian Frankétienne to the Moroccan author Khatibi– that disrupt traditional forms of representation and push the colonizer's language to its limits.

In the first chapter, I examine how what I call Frankétienne schizophrenic's writing constitutes an aesthetic response to the American occupation of Haiti (1915-1934). I hold that the US occupation reconfigured the very limits between the symbolic

and the real, and, by the same token, marginalized–once again–the Haitian subject as other. After a short overview of the occupation that inscribes the episode into the global context of US imperialism, I address some preliminary questions, such as the specificity of the occupation compared to other phenomena such as colonization, economic exploitation and military or even humanitarian intervention. Next, building on Judith Butler's critical reading of the Lacanian real, I demonstrate that historicizing psychoanalysis as a discourse conveying power and knowledge structures allows us to conceive of the US occupation as a reconfiguration of the symbolic order that once again excludes the Haitian subject. Finally, elaborating on trauma theory and on Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the "Schizo," conceived as a "limit of capitalism," I investigate the notion of schizophrenic writing, understood as a means to occupy the real. Indeed, it is in elaborating a "schizophrenic" writing that Frankétienne is able to give an aesthetic response to the double event of his conception and the US occupation thus grounding his work on these personal and collective scars. In order to do so, he has to accept the gaps in the signifying chain of both personal and collective history. If the colonization of and subsequent interventions in Haiti had an impact on the distribution of the symbolic, then occupying the real becomes a political gesture of resistance at once critical of western ideologies and constitutive of a chaotic reality encompassing the relationships between the local (Haiti, the individual) and the global (the global order and the collective).

The second chapter proposes a critical perspective on the concept of identification in light of the socio-historical context of colonialism, arguing that the logic at work in Freud and Lacan's theories fails to account for colonial and postcolonial subjects precisely because of their specific positions in space and time. After a tentative

description of the process of identification as described by Freud and Lacan, I turn to Diana Fuss and Frantz Fanon to unveil the contradictions and limitations of the concept when taking into account the history of colonialism. Colonialism participated in the constitution of modern subjectivity by excluding "others" from its domain and creating a strict division between colonizers and colonized. In my first chapter, I exposed how schizophrenia as a writing strategy could be a creative response to the exclusion of the colonized from the symbolic. Here, I explore the ways in which postcolonial authors respond to external identifications and imposed identities. By doing so, they refuse the colonizer's imaginary order. Drawing a parallel between identification/disidentification (Muñoz, Butler) and territorialization/deterritorialization (Deleuze and Guattari), I look at identitarian strategies developed by francophone Caribbean authors in the first half of the twentieth century, from Fanon to Glissant. These strategies were imagined at a time when it was possible to think that decolonization would transform and restructure the world geographically, economically and politically. It was possible to imagine new Nations (new territories), new geopolitical powers and new identities. Alternative imaginary identities, such as *Nègre*, *Antillais*, or *Caribbean* were articulated and "re-territorialized" on imaginary spaces (Africa, the Caribbean, the Archipelago) and imaginary times (the past or the future). However, in the postcolonial context of globalization (in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century), this option drifted away. I look at works by authors from this period–Abdelkébir Khatibi and Dany Laferrière–who turn to forms of radical disidentification to write back (but also from inside) this context of late capitalism. What I call "radical disidentification" implies a refusal of any imposed identity category, a constant deterritorialization. It is not an

easy task as the need to identify is crucial in most social interactions; identification is a continuous, repetitive process. In the (utopic?) space of literature, Khatibi and Laferrière trace "lines of flights" in an attempt to recover the revolutionary potential of desire and imagination, beyond any identification and identity category.

In my third chapter, "A Throw in Circumstance: The Postcolonial Event and the Poetic Real," I turn to the book-length poem *Zong!* by the Trinidadian-Canadian author M. NourbeSe Philip. I investigate the nature of the post-colonial event, its paradoxical temporality, and its inscription in history through its erasure and the possibility to recover and transmit the truth of the experience. I read Zong! in parallel with Mallarmé's *Throw of the Dice* (*Un coup de dés n'abolira jamais le hasard*) in order to distinguish what I call the "modern event," articulable in a "pure symbolic" realm, and the postcolonial event that I posit as structurally–and concretely–traumatic and therefore non-symbolisable. *Zong!* starts as a repudiation of the language of the colonizer, the symbolic language of law, order and ratio unable to recognize the being of slaves. I interpret this "work of destruction" as the necessary sacrifice of the symbolic, a revenge (and here I quote: "I am *fucking* with this *language* in a way I have wanted to do all my life!"). But it is not only a destructive force that carries the *Zong!* poem: from the ruins of the colonizer's language, voices and affects emerge. In the second movement, the lyric reasserts itself through music and chant, through the haunting language of the ancestors. I argue that in occupying trauma, Philip explores the possibility of "an ethical relation to the real" (Cathy Caruth) through the (un)telling of the victims' erased stories.

The final chapter is focused on the Glissantian concept of "opacity" as a site where aesthetics and politics converge. Though appearing infrequently in Glissant's work, I

suggest that Descartes might be an important interlocutor and opponent for him. Indeed, who better than Descartes embodies the foundation of modernity, western rationality, and the epistemological shift whereby human reason, "the best-shared thing in the world," became the center of knowledge and judgement? Moreover, my argument stresses how through time, especially in the nineteenth and twentieth century, Descartes' writing came to be read as the point of convergence between an epistemology of transparency and an aesthetic of clarity, so predominant in the "French classic period." I investigate this slippage between epistemology, aesthetics, and politics, where the universality and transparency of the French language came to justify the colonial project of francophonie. This chapter offers a new perspective on Glissant's claim for "the right to opacity for everyone," which is currently so hotly debated in the Caribbean/Postcolonial field, and concludes my inquiry into unrepresentability and its political signification for postcolonial authors. It also proposes an ethics of reading by reinscribing the reader into the process of meaning production or of its refusal: it is the reader's responsibility to overcome the difficulty of certain texts and to stay with the discomfort they provoke. Occupying the real is not a pleasant experience. However, accepting to stay and dwell in this place of discomfort can teach us to recognize the effects and affects of colonialism and break the cycle of denial and repression.

CHAPTER 1

US OCCUPATION AND FRANKÉTIENNE'S SCHIZOPHRENIC WRITING

"The year 1935. Just one year after the dis-occupation of the Haitian territory by the American troops. It was a beautiful period of vertiginous utopias with a dream's inflation and fabulous myths within sleep's reach, eyes closed" ["L'an 1935. Juste une année après la désoccupation du territoire haïtien par les troupes américaines. C'était la belle époque des utopies vertigineuses avec inflation de rêves et de mythes fabuleux à portée du sommeil, les yeux fermés."] (Frankétienne, *H'éros-chimères* 184).[1] This is how in *H'éros-chimères* the Haitian author Frankétienne describes 1935, the year of "the accident" of his own conception, when his "hypothetical father"–Benjamin Lyles, a US man affectionately nicknamed "Tonton Laï"–raped Janette, the thirteen-year-old peasant from the province of Ravine-Sèche (Frankétienne, *H'éros-chimères* 208). Only one year prior, the US troops had left the Haitian territory. For the first time in his work appears a date referring to an actual historical event; and for the first time, Frankétienne addresses events of his own life. *H'éros-chimères* in effect marks a turning point in his writing. According to Jonassaint, "In it he succeeds for the first time in making magnificently the synthesis between image and text that he sought in *L'Oiseau*, pushing to theretofore unparalleled limits the desire (quest) for a

[1] Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

differentiated and significant typo/topography, which harks back to Mallarmé and beyond" (Jonassaint 120).

Far from a return to more traditional forms of narration, the insertion of autobiographical elements into *H'éros-chimères* carries out the project of a nonrepresentational account of Haitian history, reshaped by the double event of the US occupation and Frankétienne's own birth. In 1915, the US army disembarked in Haiti, confiscated all the gold from the National Bank, and took over all positions of authority. The reason invoked for this intervention was the incapacity of Haiti to govern itself, and therefore the need to bring order to a chaotic political situation. To support and to legitimate the intervention–whose real causes where economic and imperialistic–the marines and other officials constructed and spread a paternalist discourse that established the people of Haiti as inferior. Haitians were shocked by, and resentful of, the overt racism deployed by US marines. If the US army found supporters in the elite Haitians, some seeing the occupation as the only way to stabilize the country, there was also growing resistance among the people–the armed peasants of the mountains–of whom the Cacos, eventually repressed and killed, were the most famous of the antioccupation fighters. These rebels revived the tradition of *marronnage*, a practice from the times of slavery where fugitive slaves organized themselves in autonomous communities, potentially threatening the plantation system. The US troops finally departed in 1934, but not without leaving traces, such as segments of the railroad leading from Cap-Haïtien to Port-au-Prince.

Frankétienne, the Haitian author responsible for the creation of the Spiralist movement with René Philoctète and Jean-Claude Fignolé, is another unexpected result of the US occupation in Haiti. If the "mulâtres" [mulattoes] are for Patrick Chamoiseau

and Raphael Confiant unexpected outcomes [l'inattendu] of the colonial process, what can be said of this "chabin," white-skinned with negroid features, "nègre haïtien natifnatal avec peau à l'envers," (Frankétienne, *H'éros-chimères* 241) as he described himself?[2] As Frankétienne narrates in *H'éros-chimères*, one of his spiral poems, he was the offspring of a US businessman working in the railroad company and a poor Haitian peasant from the countryside. According to his narrative, his mother had been adopted by this rich foreigner, nicknamed "Tonton Lai," and brought to his imposing mansion to receive a proper education. Instead, soon after her thirteenth birthday, she was raped and then abandoned while pregnant.

The US occupation of Haiti does not by itself constitute a sufficient explanation for Frankétienne's writing. Rather, I argue that this original and traumatic event returns in the text–and in the Real, to borrow a term from Lacan–in the form of an obsessive repetition of violence, paternalism, exploitation, and even "cannibalism" (Douglas). A military occupation does not mark only the physical body of the country in terms of its economic wealth, its political organization, and its geographical landmarks; it does not consist only of a deployment of physical violence; it also has consequences for the personal and collective unconscious, consequences that imprint their mark on the minds of an occupied people. Putting pressure on the Lacanian notions of the Real and the Symbolic, I argue that from a postcolonial perspective, these psychoanalytic concepts–despite their supposed timelessness and universality–are not adequate to

[2] "Les mulâtres issus de ces amours nouvelles aparaissent aussitôt. Aucun plan colonial n'inscrit leur perspective. Plus qu'une ethno-classe, ils sont une dynamique qui, même en dehors d'une volonté très claire, minera la nuit esclavagiste et l'ordre colonial. Et nourrira literature" (Chamoiseau and Confiant 22-23).

describe the power struggles at work in the global geopolitical order. I hold that the US occupation reconfigured the very limits between the symbolic and the Real, and, by the same token, marginalized–once again–the Haitian subject as other. It is in elaborating what I describe as a "schizophrenic" writing and in occupying the uninhabitable space of the Real that Frankétienne is able to give an aesthetic response to this double event–historical and autobiographical–thus grounding his work on these personal and collective scars. In order to do so, he had to accept the gaps in the signifying chain of both personal and collective history.

After a short overview of the occupation that inscribes the episode into the global context of US imperialism, I address some preliminary questions, such as the specificity of the occupation compared to other phenomena such as colonization, economic exploitation, and military or even humanitarian intervention. Second, building on Judith Butler's critical reading of the Lacanian Real, I demonstrate that historicizing psychoanalysis as a discourse conveying power and knowledge structures allows us to conceive of the US occupation as a reconfiguration of the Symbolic order that once again excludes the Haitian subject. Finally, elaborating on trauma theory and on Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the "Schizo," conceived as a "limit of capitalism," I investigate the notion of schizophrenic writing, understood as a means to occupy the Real. If the colonization and subsequent interventions in Haiti have appropriated the domain of the symbolic–reserving it for Western subjects–then occupying the Real can become a political gesture of resistance that undermines the validity of Western ideology in its globality.

The US occupation marked the second inscription of Haiti into modernity, for better and for worse, and its insertion into the global order: relatively isolated from the

rest of the world until then, the Haitian socioeconomic structure was mostly based on subsistence agriculture, in which the village was the basic social unit. In 1915, the US army disembarked in Haiti. Their nineteen-year stay on Haitian soil transformed the socioeconomic landscape of Haiti radically, and not for the better. According to Laurent Dubois, Haiti was left poorer than ever, with power structures ready to welcome the Duvalierist dictatorship:

> The US occupation had profoundly changed the country, smashing the political and economic order that had emerged during the nineteenth century and deepening the poverty of the countryside. It had centralized and strengthened the government's authority, giving the country's leaders more power than they had ever had to control the masses and suppress dissent. (Dubois 267)

Officially, the intervention was always described as a charitable civilizing mission, the same rationale by which France justified its colonial expansion in West Africa. Apparently, the US government felt that it was its duty to send the army in order to help stabilize the Haitian regime and allow the "Black Republic" to enter modernity, and as a consequence to participate in international capitalist exchanges.

> The United States, as the self-appointed trustee of civilization in the Caribbean, was obligated to maintain minimal standards of decency and morality. The weakness of this argument was readily demonstrated by opponents of the intervention. A prominent Haitian writer, referring to an incident in a southern United States town where a Black man was dragged from the local jail and burned alive in the town square, pointed

> out that barbarity also existed in the United States. In a 1929 US congressional debate, several congressmen noted that the number of Haitian presidents assassinated over the years was almost the same as the number of American presidents assassinated and that since 1862, the year of the American recognition of Haiti, the number was identical–three presidents killed in each country. (Schmidt 66)

Looking back at the more general context, it becomes obvious that the invasion of the Haitian territory was in fact pure imperialism. At the turn of the century, the United States was in the process of becoming the first world power. In order to establish domination over the rest of the world, it tried to occupy strategic geopolitical positions. A new form of imperialism, allied with capitalism and democracy, was being developed. Nicknamed "perle des Antilles," during the French colonization, Haiti was indeed the most fertile land and the wealthiest colony. Complex geopolitical reasons led the United States to intervene in Haiti by completely taking control of the country.[3]

Colonization, Occupation, Humanitarian Intervention

I now investigate the ideological shift that is reflected in the terms "colonization," "occupation," and "humanitarian intervention" in order to appreciate more concretely the practical consequences of such a displacement of the borders of the symbolic in the geopolitical arena. While I agree with Nadève Ménard when she declares that colonization and occupation are both manifestations of imperialism–and I

[3] For more information on the history of the US occupation, see the work of the Haitian historians Suzy Castor, Roger Gaillard, Hogard Nicolas, and Dantès Bellegarde.

would suggest that humanitarian intervention is, as well–I would not go so far as to say that the distinction between the two concepts is not relevant.[4] To justify her position she quotes Said's definition of imperialism: "Imperialism means thinking about, settling on, controlling land that you do not possess, that is lived on and dwelled by others" (Edward Said 7). Every semantic shift in designating a political practice implies a shift in its juridical definition, and carries with it an ideological paradigm informed by a historical situation. The substitution of "colonization" for "occupation" signals a shift from a centralized territorial imperialism to a subtler democratic and capitalist form of imperialism. Hardt and Negri develop a contrast between "Empire" and "imperialisms." If imperialisms are situated historically in relation to the European context of colonization, they suggest, "Empire" (Hardt and Negri capitalize the word) is timeless and omnipresent: "It is a 'decentered' and 'deterritorializing' apparatus of rule that progressively incorporates the entire global realm within its open, expanding frontiers" (Hardt and Negri xii). I believe that their concept of "Empire" as abstract machine, without borders, completely independent from nation-states is problematic; however, if their definition is applied to the period of the Haitian Occupation and the US empire, whose primary weapons have been liberalism and capitalism along with its legal international apparatus, it provides a pertinent description of US imperialism. Moreover, this fitting description of the US empire draws attention to the symbolic dimension that modern forms of imperialism were taking at that time.

[4] "I further consider colonization and occupation to be similar experiences since in both cases foreigners control land and people who had previously governed themselves" (Ménard 18).

Even from a legal standpoint, almost no exceptional circumstances justify foreign military intervention into a sovereign country. Ménard, quoting the political scientists Little and Navari, argues in this direction:

> Regardless of the ways in which the United States government may have tried to justify the presence of Marines in Haiti, "in contemporary international law states are clearly proscribed from intervening in the domestic affairs of other states. Intervention is, under most circumstances, an illegal act" (Little, *Recent Literature on Intervention,* 13). Indeed, "in the international arena intervention is generally seen to be a violation of sovereignty, and a threat to world order." (Little 13)

She continues, stating that even Navari, who defends the idea of legitimate intervention in specific cases, agrees that "any act of intervention threatens the independence of a state, which threatens the independence of all states and, therefore, all governments have a general interest in opposing all interventions for the sake of international order" (Ménard 50). To supplement the juridical weaknesses of arguments justifying the necessity of an intervention in Haiti, a paternalist discourse is constructed and spread by (and among) the US participants of the occupation. Mary A. Renda's *Taking Haiti* is essentially devoted to tracing and deconstructing this paternalist discourse, treating it as the sign of an obvious racism presupposing a hierarchy among races.

> Paternalism in Haiti always embodied the logic of domination.
>
> . . . It was based on the assumption that Haitians were, as yet, in the early stages of their evolutionary development as a people. It posited

> that Haiti would come into its own as a nation only after a period of tutelage under the guiding hand of that paternal figure known affectionately as Uncle Sam. (Renda 115)

As the United States was consolidating its domination over the rest of the world, a capitalist humanitarianism paradigm came progressively to replace the Christian humanism that had arisen with the beginning of colonization. Extending Dipesh Chakrabarty's argument, I would argue that while the previous sovereign holder of the universal, Europe, grounded its authority in the Judeo-Christian ideology (the figure of the colonizer being the priest, the missionary), the United States as the new legislator of what constitutes the universal founds its legitimacy on capitalism along with its juridical and discursive apparatuses.[5] The figure of the occupier thus becomes the volunteer of a Western humanitarian association. Despite the substitution of the ideological paradigm, something remains stable in the process: the presence of soldiers and guns, formerly to establish order in the occupied country, and now to guarantee the safety of the occupier.

In an essay titled "Who Is the Subject of the Rights of Man," Jacques Rancière critiques the notion of human rights as misleading. Human rights, he explains, are the rights of those who have no rights on their own; they do not have access to any political agency because they do not belong to any recognized nation-state. Thus, are distinguished human rights–the rights of those who have only bare life–and citizen

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[5] In *Provincializing Europe*, Chakrabarty argues that Europe stands as the unique place holder for rationalism and universal values. He does not acknowledge the geopolitical shift at the beginning of the 20th century through which the US acquire Europe's former symbolic place as the new sovereign holder of the universal. See Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, Introduction and Chapter 1, 4-46.

rights. Since the bearers of human rights cannot exercise their rights on their own, they need someone else to represent them and exercise their rights on their behalf. Human rights appear to be an abstraction, but rights are in fact always attached to a national community. The legitimation of "humanitarian intervention" can therefore be understood as nothing other than a "right of invasion" legitimizing the continuation of a hierarchy between real, functional nation-states and countries that are considered as no-man's-lands regarding national laws (Rancière 297). Denouncing the UN occupation in Haiti after the 2010 earthquake, Justin Podur conceptualizes its dynamics as a "humanitarian market" that regulates the sociopolitical life of the Haitian people. He says:

> Specifically, [the humanitarian market] leaves little room for a relationship of equality between sovereign citizens of two countries. In the humanitarian market, the recipient of aid, the victim, has no sovereignty and lacks any right to control where largesse is directed. In Haiti, where foreign aid and foreign governments effectively rule the country, the ideology associated with the humanitarian market is a powerful brake on relations of mutual respect and reciprocity. (Podur 6)

A Reconfiguration of the Symbolic Order

The reconfiguration of the world power structures that occurred at the beginning of the twentieth century led to a reconfiguration of the order of the symbolic itself. I am here looking at Judith Butler's critical reading of the Lacanian Real in order to demonstrate that the borders of the Real and the Symbolic are not fixed once and for

all, but can be displaced by a shift in the historical and geopolitical context. Insofar as psychoanalysis constitutes a discourse and as such conveys the structures of knowledge and power corresponding to an episteme historically and spatially situated, it can and must be historicized.[6]

According to Lacan, the symbolic order can be defined as the set of all signifiers, the realm of alterity, and the realm of the law–the law of the father, a universal law which constitutes the Symbolic order's cornerstone. As Willy Apollon et al. explain the concept, "In a general sense, the Symbolic order is made up of the cultural and historical demands that social life imposes upon the human being. Put in a more structural sense, the Symbolic concerns the subject's relation to the phallus, to law and to the signifier" (Apollon et al. 31). The Real, on the other hand, is defined by its resistance to symbolization; it does not lack anything, and is defined as pure excess. For Lacan, the Real, because it is undifferentiated, unattainable through the Symbolic and unimaginable, is impossible. We must be careful to distinguish the Lacanian "Real" from what we call "reality:" reality, characterized as the way the subjects experience their daily lives, relate to their objective environment and to other subjects, is part of the symbolic.

For Lacan, it is only through traumatic encounters, psychotic experiences, or hallucinations–holes in the Symbolic–that the subject gets a glimpse of the Real: "What is refused in the symbolic order re-emerges in the real" (Lacan, *The Psychoses*

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[6] Here I disagree with Foucault who, in *The Order of Things*, attributes to Psychoanalysis a "critical function" and distinguishes it from other discursive formations. Appreciative of the subversive potential of psychoanalysis beginnings, Foucault does not take into account its constitution as a discipline. See Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 374.

13). In order to give a more fluid account of the Real, an account that does not preclude historicity, Judith Butler in *Bodies That Matter* sheds light on the contradictions of the Lacanian Real, or more precisely, of Slavoj Žižek's account of it *(Žižek, The Sublime Object of Ideology*). For Butler, the universality of psychoanalysis–more specifically, the "law of the father" that determines the borders between the Real and the Symbolic–makes no sense: it would mean conceiving this law as prediscursive, presymbolic, and ahistorical. And here is the contradiction, for this law "is posited as accountable for the contingency in all ideological determinations," yet it is never subjected to the same logic (Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 195). On the contrary, the law of the father has to be thought in history, as the setting of the patriarchal heterosexual order that produces and normalizes sexed positionalities. Moreover, historicizing the law of the father displaces the limits between the Real and the Symbolic: the symbolic is constituted by the foreclosure, but this foreclosure does not appear by chance or by the transcendence of a universal. This explains her equivocal epigraph at the beginning of the chapter "Arguing with the Real": according to Butler, if "what is refused in the symbolic order returns in the Real" (Lacan, *The Psychoses* 139), this means that it was in the symbolic order *before* being in the Real. If the signifier "woman" returns to the Real, it is because it has already been rejected, foreclosed outside the symbolic order. Thus, in the Lacanian system the woman does not exist: she is conceived as the symptom of the man, and as such she belongs in the Real. If the law of the father can be historicized, the unconscious becomes a production of a discourse situated in time and space, and the limits that separate or distinguish the Imaginary, the symbolic, and the Real from one another are not fixed once and for all. The configuration of the Symbolic order results from the exclusion of specific subjects and concepts, or, stated

differently, from the continual process of "othering" the other, a process associated with power and knowledge in Foucault's terminology.[7]

From this perspective, it can be said that the colonized does not exist, in almost the same way in which the woman does not exist for Lacan; he/she does not have access to the symbolic, and therefore cannot speak. For Lacan, the symbolic is both contingent and universal whereas Butler, in *Antigone's Claim*, maintains that the fact that psychoanalysis does not reflect on its "universalizing effects" is one of its limits:

> That is not to say that the symbolic is universal in the sense of being universally valid for all time but only that, every time it appears, it appears as a universalizing function. It refers to the chain of sign through which it derives its own signifying power. . . . In no way however is the universalizing effect of its own operation called into question by the assertion of contingency here. (Butler, *Antigone's Claim* 44)

Dipesh Chakrabarty, in *Provincializing Europe* (2000), also points at the paradoxical status of the notion of the universal: "The universal can only exist as a place holder, its place is always usurped by a historical particular seeking to present itself as the historical universal" (Chakrabarty 70). Indeed, although Europe dominated the production of discourses and knowledge throughout the nineteenth century, the United States at the time of the Haitian occupation was progressively

[7] Though I am conscious that this hypothesis would necessitate further development, I am here trying to bridge the gap of two concepts of "the other" coming from two radically different systems of thought: continental philosophy (from Hegel to Foucault) and psychoanalysis (Lacan).

becoming the preeminent world power. As such, it was, and still is, imposing its ideologies and structures of thought on the rest of the world. Occupying the site of the universal, the United States devises the limits of the Symbolic order itself, in the sense that what has meaning and what does not go through the US system of discrimination and judgment.

Contrary to what Lacan and psychoanalysis imply, therefore, the constitution of the Symbolic is not situated outside history. The limits of the Symbolic order are not fixed; rather, the fluctuation of its borders reflects a political power game that always requires the foreclosure of concepts and subjects outside its domain. Concurringly, Michael Dash in *Haiti and the United States* rightly notes that Haiti was "imaginatively and culturally reconstructed as the 'other,' the negative or feminine and marginalized in a Symbolic order devised by the United States" (Dash 3). In his argument, he retraces the representation of the Haitian subject as other, starting from the US occupation. Renda goes further, demonstrating the general impact of this historical event on the development of US imperialism and on US ideological and cultural structures in general. She concludes her analysis by positing that the US occupation of Haiti contributed to both the bolstering and the reshaping of prevailing conceptions of national identity for individual marines and other Americans between 1915 and 1940. On the one hand, the first military occupation of Haiti was not just an instance of U. S. imperialism but also a motor for it. It propelled the cultural logic of "American greatness" in a variety of ways. On the other hand, the cultural implications of the occupation in the United States provided the means for US Americans in and out of the military to shake the structure of gendered, racial, and sexual meanings on which

a hegemonic conception of US national identity had rested. The consequences of this process were at once diffuse and far-reaching (Renda 306).

The Spiralists

Frankétienne is not only a byproduct of the US occupation: he is also the funding member of Spiralism, probably one of the most important Haitian literary movements to emerge from the Duvalier dictatorship. Founded in the mid-1960s by Jean-Claude Fignolé, René Philoctète, and Frankétienne, it is a movement without definition, rules, or even a program. From the start, they conceived this movement as an opposition to bourgeois tendencies in the Haitian novel. The Spiralists' works are at odds with novels that seek to imitate classical French literature, as well as didactic novels–in French, "*romans à these*"–where ideology overcomes aesthetics. Despite their debt to the indigenist movement, Spiralists always privileged aesthetics over the transmission of ideas. This does not mean that they inherited the apolitical conception of literature of the symbolists of the group La Ronde, for instance. Rather, I suggest, they would defend the Rancierian idea that literature is political not because an author is politically committed or because it transmits a political message. Literature, according to Rancière, is political *as* literature. Its contribution is to be found in the "re-distribution of the sensible," which is a way to contribute to a more democratic representation of the people. For Rancière, literature opposes the State's predefined laws of perception that dictate what is possible to hear and to see, to say and to think:

by giving voice to subjects traditionally silenced by the political order of the state and by allowing their views to be expressed, literature opens up a space of negotiation.[8] The Spiralists found their voices in a quite literal struggle against silence. Pressured under the crushing weight of the dictatorship, the three authors were searching for a breakthrough, a spiralic "line of flight" (see Deleuze and Guattari) that would allow them to express themselves in spite of the terror that reigned in Haiti at that time. Interestingly enough, this movement, as opposed to Negritude or Noirisme, does not refer to race, or for that matter to any kind of identity.[9] Spiralism is a way to express life, to develop an aesthetic that would not be at odds with the Haitian reality. Here is the definition proposed by Frankétienne in an interview for the French journal *Dérives*:

> It is a method of approach, which tries to grasp a reality that is always in motion. The fundamental problem for the artist is: trying to capture reality, to transmit this reality while keeping its lines of force so that

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[8] "The distribution of the sensible reveals who can have a share in what is common to the community based on what they do and on the time and space in which this activity is performed… it defines what is visible or not in a common space, endowed with a common language, etc. There is thus an 'aesthetics' at the core of politics that has nothing to do with Benjamin's discussion of the 'aestheticization of politics' specific to the 'age of the masses'… It is a delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience. Politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time." Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 12-13.

[9] Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus, 9. Brian Massumi notes that in French, "Fuite covers not only the act of fleeing or eluding but also flowing, leaking, and disappearing into the distance (the vanishing point in a painting is a point de fuite). It has no relation to flying." Brian Massumi, "Notes on the Translation and Acknowledgments," Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, xvi.

this real transmitted on a literary level will not be a frozen thing, a dead thing. This is the miracle of art: trying to capture the real without killing it. To capture: that is to grasp, to immobilize. It consists in apprehending without suffocating it. Fundamentally, the writer is a hunter on the lookout for prey. But you have to catch the prey without killing it. At this level, Spiralism is called to help out. Trying to be in motion at the same time as the real, on board with the real, not staying outside of the real, but boarding the same wagon. This, over time, reproduces the spiral's movement. The spiral is like breathing. Spiral means life in opposition to the circle, which according to me translates death.

[C'est une méthode d'approche pour essayer de saisir la réalité qui est toujours en mouvement. Le problème fondamental de l'artiste est celui-ci: essayer de capter une réalité, transmettre cette réalité, tout en gardant les lignes de force, de manière que ce réel transmis sur le plan littéraire ne soit pas une chose figée, une chose morte. C'est là le miracle de l'art: essayer de capter le réel sans le tuer. Capter : c'est saisir, c'est immobiliser. Il s'agit : d'appréhender sans étouffer. Au fond, l'écrivain est un chasseur à l'affût d'une proie. Mais, il faut saisir cette proie sans la tuer. À ce niveau, le spiralisme est appelé à rendre certains services. Essayer d'être en mouvement en même temps que le réel, s'embarquer dans le réel, ne pas rester au-dehors du réel, mais s'embarquer dans le même train. Et, cela, à la longue, reproduit le mouvement de la spirale.

> La spirale est comme une respiration. Spirale signifie: vie par opposition au cercle qui, selon moi, traduit la mort]. (Kauss)

Describing Spiralism's principles, Frankétienne insists on the ideas of motion, reality, and life. The point is to seize the movement of the real without fixing it. Because they opposed Duvalier's promotion in Haiti of a politics founded on the privileges of Blacks, the Spiralists turned away from racial literary schools. Under Duvalier, the structure of Haitian society–far from being disrupted–remained hierarchized according to the skin color of its citizens. Using the ideas of intellectuals and anthropologists of the preceding era (particularly Jean Price-Mars's theses) Jean-Claude Duvalier managed to turn them into a national ideology. Profoundly disappointed by the way a new ideology always replaces an old one, the Spiralists sought an aesthetic solution, a way out of the silencing forces of censorship and dictatorship.

Schizophrenic Writing

Confronted by the totalitarian language of the dictatorship and the demagogic discourses of the Western democratic countries, and in no small part due to the reconfiguration of the Symbolic that the US occupation involved, Frankétienne despaired of the possibility of any sort of language. The words no longer bore meaning; they were just empty shells devoid of substance. It is at this time that Frankétienne faced the temptation of silence. The reader finds traces of this temptation in *L'Oiseau schizophone*: "Only one grain of dirt would have sufficed for my voice to die at the bottom of the abyss and for the rush of the twin words to be suddenly broken." ["Il n'eût vraiment fallu qu'un seul grain de poussière pour que ma voix

s'éteignît au fond du gouffre et que se brisât d'un coup l'élan des mots jumeaux"] (Frankétienne, quoted in Chemla) For a poet, whose only weapons are words, silence equals death. Eventually, Frankétienne became aware of this reality, and his writing of *L'Oiseau schizophone* represents the experimental attempt to regain mastery over language even if it meant giving up on articulation and rational meaning, and experimenting with the limits of signification in the invention of a new language.

> I went in *L'Oiseau schizophone* to the extreme limit, the writing of the cry. . . . For me who lived through the doublespeak (langue de bois) of the Haitian politicians and then of Duvalier, this is key. That's why during the gestation period of *L'Oiseau schizophone*, I lived with the awareness that words had lost their meaning. The possible powerlessness of language was my main concern while writing this text.
>
> [Je suis arrivé dans *L'Oiseau schizophone* à la limite extrême, l'écriture du cri. . . . Ce qui pour moi qui ai vécu d'abord la langue de bois des politiciens haïtiens [puis] celle de Duvalier . . . est décisif. . . . C'est pour ça que dans la période de gestation de *L'Oiseau schizophone*, j'ai vécu avec la conscience que les mots avaient perdu leur sens. La possible impuissance de la parole a été ma préoccupation principale lors de l'écriture de ce texte.] (Frankétienne, quoted in Chemla)

To overcome this crisis, Frankétienne let the " schizophrenic" forces lead him to the frontiers of reason and language and to write from the position of the schizophrenic (non)subject, a position from which the signifying chain is

disrupted, the boundaries among Real, Imaginary, and symbolic are blurred, and time and space are conflated. Fragmentation is the only way to "signify" the Caribbean (non)subject's critical experience. In agreement with Jean-Claude Fignolé–and also Michael Gilkes, who called for a creative schizophrenia in Caribbean literature–Frankétienne typifies schizophrenia as a specific Caribbean illness but also as a possible means of expression (Gilkes). Fignolé explains how history (colonization, slavery, African population transfers, revolutions) and geography (the particular closed space of the island, the archipelago isolated rather than united by the sea) provide the Caribbean subject with a peculiar experience of space and time: a schizophrenic experience. In taking up this identity, the Caribbean artist discovers a force, a line of flight, a collective voice that neither eliminates its multiplicity nor resorts to any other reductive move:

> Because our profound Being escapes us, the demands of History in the Caribbean area have given rise to a schizophrenic personality which tests itself and is exalted in creating. Art collectively experienced as another way of being in the world. It has produced an understanding of the tour and the detour by which we delight at living in hiding both with our being and with our reality. Barroco. Also another way of seeing the world. Of speaking of others.
>
> [Parce que notre Être profond nous échappe, les exigences de l'Histoire ont déterminé dans l'aire caraïbéenne une personnalité schizophrénique qui s'éprouve et s'exalte dans la création. L'art collectivement vécu comme une façon autre d'être au monde. Il en est résulté un sens du

> tour et du détour par lequel nous marronnons avec délices et notre être et notre réel. Barroco. Une manière autre aussi de voir le monde. De parler les autres.] (*Jean-Claude Fignolé–Haïti, Revue Noire*)

Fignolé, as Frankétienne does in his spirals, associates schizophrenia with artistic creation, a definition in which "creation" refers also to a means of revolt, a path toward the poetic "marronnage" that Césaire had already called for in his poems.[10]

Summing up the plot of *L'Oiseau schizophone* is an impossible task since its logic exceeds the linearity of any kind of narrative, the characters do not possess a delimited psychology, and space and temporality are unclear. At the beginning of the book, the poet Philémond Théophile (the author's alter ego) has been captured by state forces for having written a monstrous and unreadable book, in which the tyrannical "zozobistes" see a threat against the stability of their regime:

> It seems that you experience a morbid pleasure in shocking everyone. We read your last book, full of gibberish that might damage the readers' brain and destabilize the system. You are a schizophrenic, lost beyond help in masturbation's vertigo, and what is more, you are suffering from an incurable schizophasia.
>
> [Il semble que vous éprouvez un plaisir morbide à choquer tout le monde. Nous avons lu votre dernier livre truffé de magigridis qui pourraient détraquer le cerveau des lecteurs et déstabiliser le système. . .

[10] See for instance the poem "Le verbe marronner," in which Césaire exhorts Depestre to renounce his decision to rally Aragon's poetic program of national realism.

> . Vous êtes un schizophrène irrécupérablement perdu dans le vertige de la masturbation, et de surcroît souffrant d'une schizophasie incurable.] (Frankétienne, *L'Oiseau schizophone* 19)

In this sentence, being a schizophrenic is directly associated with the possibility of destabilizing the authoritarian regime of the zozobistes. Instead of reading this schizophrenic, or rather, as Frankétienne puts it, "schizophonic" writing as a symptom, I would like to ask, along with Deleuze and Guattari: "How does it work," and "what does it produce?"[11]

Interestingly enough, Frankétienne's writing uses the same strategies as Louis Wolfson, the "student in schizophrenic languages" whose book *Le Schizo et les langues* was prefaced by Deleuze (Wolfson and Deleuze 8). Wolfson is a diagnosed schizophrenic whose project is to deconstruct the maternal language–English–that "hurts" him and to find a new mode of expression via multiple linguistic devices. In his schizophrenic logic, the act of writing is neither about representation nor meaning. Writing means for Wolfson to struggle against language, to break it into pieces, to empty it of ideology, to crack the words and open them to the flows of desire. He is deconstructing the maternal English language whereas Frankétienne is grappling with French language; both deconstruct the language they do not want to write into phonic elements so that the result associates sounds instead of producing meaning. Deleuze describes the linguistic process in this manner: "Any maternal sentence would be analyzed in its elements and phonetic movement, to be converted, as quick as possible

[11] This substitution is called for throughout *Anti-Oedipus*.

in a sentence of one or several foreign language at the same time, which would not only resemble in meaning but in sound." (Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical* 8) [Une phrase maternelle quelconque sera donc analysée dans ses éléments et mouvements phonétiques pour être convertie en une phrase d'une ou plusieurs langues étrangères à la fois, qui lui ressemble par le son et le sens] (Deleuze, *Critique et clinique*, 18-19). In a chapter of *The Logic of Sense* titled "The Schizophrenic and the Little Girl," Deleuze explains how for the schizophrenic subject, the body ceases to be perceived as a stable boundary between outside and inside, container and content, surface and depth. Everything, every word becomes bodily or corporeal. The violence of words, consonants, and even sounds become affects that are felt physically.

Following the same logic, in Frankétienne's texts, "la langue"–in French, both language and tongue–is always simultaneously the medium, the language, and the physical organ. For instance, in this sentence, which can be read as a commentary of Frankétienne on his own writing practice, one can see that the tongue is first and foremost the physical organ: "Unrestricted from my complexes, I unwind my tongue, I voluptuously lick my wounds, my tenacious graffiti, my insular navel, my earth-bitch, which bleeds bitter. And my wound pulsates, like a huge vulva in turgescence and transfugescence." [Désétriqué de mes complexes, je désentortille ma langue, je lèche voluptueusement mes plaies, mes graffiti tenaces, mon nombril insulaire, ma chienne de terre qui saigne amère. Et ma blessure palpite, telle une immense vulve en turgescence et transfuguescence] (Frankétienne, *L'Oiseau schizophone*, 42). In this accumulation of fragmented bodies, every organ conceals a phallic power. The tongue is always an instrument of *jouissance* in which pain and pleasure are mixed indistinguishably. The space, the land, the body, the wound, the writing, the sex, the

ego: all come to constitute a new entity able to bring pleasure to itself in a masturbatory act. In this process the wound becomes the sexual organ, at the same time male and female, growing and transfigured by the writing process. While Wolfson's work, according to Deleuze, eventually fails to grasp the vital force of desire (his new language, while creative cannot be compared to literary or poetic language; Wolfson fails to create a work of art), Frankétienne, as a poet, is able to exploit this process of becoming schizophrenic in order to build a new language. As stated by Deleuze in *Essays Critical and Clinical*, "The problem is not to go beyond the bounds of reason, it is to cross the bounds of unreason as a victor" (Deleuze, *Essays Critical And Clinical* 20). Frankétienne returns victorious from his travel, and his work stands bearing witness to his victory. To give an example, here is the poetic result of this schizophrenic writing, where the language sounds both almost French and almost foreign. Instead of using words to construct meaning by means of syntax, Frankétienne links one word to another by associating etymology, sound, or meaning:

> [Chrysanthemum of blooming cries through the morpholunes of art and the granule of soul.
>
> It grows my crisis in love in the glaucous stories of vice. It crosses my rutting isle my recidivist bitch. Null bank out of season, of pure reason, death activates the derision that nothing happens when everything happens in paradox. And to be born in it by my lips to my pelvic embrace, to the true crime of my rhymes, to the reflex of my sex in distress to the fire of risk.

> Chrysanthème de cris en fleurs à travers les morpholunes de l'art et la grâlune de l'âme.]
>
> Elle croît ma crise en t'aime aux glauques récits du vice.
>
> Elle croise mon île en rut ma chienne récidiviste. Rienne rive hors de saison, de pure raison, la mort active la dérision que rien n'arrive quand tout arrive en paradoxe. Et d'y naître par mes lèvres à l'étreinte de mes reins, au si crime de mes rimes, au réflexe de mon sexe en déroute au feu du risqué. (Frankétienne, *L'Oiseau schizophone*, 8)

In this example, the syntactic mastery of language is perceptible, but a global meaning escapes us. The entire paragraph seems to be a development of the initial word "chrysanthème," decomposed in its phonic elements "cris," "crise," "en," "t'aime," then derived and recomposed in other elements. While no definite meaning can be extracted from this, fragments of signification appear: the idea that there is a kind of crisis on the island, crises of desire, crises of reason, crises of narrative. The text seems to be produced by a jubilation of language, where the energy of desire appears in words and in their linking. Here again Deleuze's analyses of Wolfson's writing seem perfectly relevant to Frankétienne's project, that is, his own healing process relying on poetry–conceived as a language recomposed out of the symbolic, closer to the Real:

> The healing of the psychotic is not to become conscious but, to live in the words, the love story that they imbricate and which breathes life into them, singular Eros. Not to designate something or to signify some knowledge, but to live insufflated and interlocked in the procedure itself. Then the procedure ceases to gather and distribute the figures of

> death, and liberates this Eros, this sexual history that was hidden in its laws.
>
> [La guérison du psychotique, c'est non pas prendre conscience, mais vivre dans les mots l'histoire d'amour qu'ils imbriquent et qui les insufflent, Eros singulier. Non pas designer quelque chose ni signifier un savoir, mais vivre insufflé et emboîté dans le procédé lui-même. Alors le procédé cesse de réunir et distribuer les figures de la mort, et libère cet Eros, cette histoire sexuelle qu'il cachait dans ses lois.] (Wolfson and Deleuze, *Le Schizo et les langues*, 23).

It then becomes possible to reformulate Spivak's statement that the subaltern cannot speak. What if the subaltern could actually speak but in a language that is not understandable? What if he/she could write but in an unreadable writing? It would be then possible to say that schizophrenic writing operates a shift from the ethics of writing to the ethics of reading, learning, and understanding. Frankétienne's opaque prose calls for an active reader, ready to produce his or her own interpretation, ready to plunge into the chaos of the Real and to enter the network of fragmented and excessive meaning.

Writing the Traumas of History

As a genre, Frankétienne's spirals are intriguing and puzzling to the reader. His books are oversized, in size and in length (more than six hundred pages for *L'Oiseau schizophone*, for example), and are composed of heterogeneous materials, narrative episodes and drawings, advertising formulas, and political slogans. Frankétienne plays

with different typographies; some words or expressions are obliquely glued on the page. The materiality of the book itself constitutes a challenge for the reader. To this already confusing mix he adds his own drawings, representing rather frightening creatures, vaguely human, with multiple sexes, male and female; eyes are the equivalent of vaginas and all protuberant members are potential penises.[12] There is no narrative that the reader can follow, no hero with whom to identify, almost no real characters.

H'éros-chimères, published in 2004, is part of the later work of Frankétienne (he had published his first novel, *Mûr à crever*, in 1968) and represents another stage. As Jean Jonassaint describes it in his article "The Course of an Opus," the inclusion of modified photos of his family, as well as a self-portrait, makes it resemble a literal family album. At the crossroads between the personal history of the poet–more precisely the history of his conception and birth–and the collective history of Haiti, *H'éros-chimères* is the first spiral to include an autobiographical dimension. Qualified as "textamentaire" by Frankétienne himself, the text becomes the body in which personal and collective disasters are inscribed (Frankétienne, *Anthologie secrète* 153). Also, for the first time, the pictorial takes up a good deal of room. It has to be noted, though, that Frankétienne's drawings are not illustrations, nor is his writing

[12] This mode of writing recalls the way Deleuze describes the schizophrenic expression. See for instance in *Logique du sens*: "Tout est corps et corporel. Tout est mélange de corps et dans le corps, emboîtement, pénétration. . . Un arbre, une colonne, une fleur, une canne, poussent à travers le corps ; toujours d'autres corps pénètrent dans notre corps et coexistent avec ses parties. Tout est directement boîte, nourriture en boîte et excrément. Comme il n'y a pas de surface, l'intérieur et l'extérieur, le contenant et le contenu n'ont plus de limite précise et s'enfoncent dans une universelle profondeur ou tournent dans le cercle d'un présent de plus en plus rétréci à mesure qu'il est davantage bourré" (Deleuze, *Logique du sens* 107).

representation. Rather, a postmodern aesthetic of collage, images, and texts articulates the syntax of a new language that Frankétienne calls *schizophonie*. In other words, Frankétienne deploys his schizophrenic writing in order to resist the closure of ideology that any form of representation implies.

Throughout *H'éros-chimères*, as it is the case in the former spirals, similar scenes are repeated over and over: a scene describing a revolt is replaced by another one, followed by a scene of extreme violence and/or institutional repression, torture, and murder. The latter opens on depictions of sexual orgies. Sometimes all of these aspects–sex, violence, terror, political repression, and revolt–are combined and then the meaning escapes once more, as neologisms saturate the sentences and the words seem to spin into nonsense.

Schizophrenic writing allows Frankétienne to express the traumas of history as well as the traumas of his own story. In Greek, "trauma" means "wound" and refers to a violence inflicted to the body. From this original meaning, Freud elaborates a theory about a psychic wound, a wound caused by a violent event whose memory is lost, and whose lasting effects affect the development of the ego. This event cannot be expressed in words, and remains forever separated from meaning. And yet, as long as the meaning remains out of reach, the trauma repeats itself not in the form of articulate language but in acts. What is particularly interesting in the case of Frankétienne is that the psychic (the rape of his mother) and the historical trauma (the US occupation) are inscribed as traumas on the body, scars visible on the skin of Frankétienne himself. As mentioned above, Frankétienne describes himself as "nègre albinos" or "nègre peau à l'envers." A genetic accident along with an historical accident was at the origin of his own birth. *H'éros-chimères* attempts to express how history can be inscribed at the

heart of the self, Frankétienne being in some way the exemplary model of this hybridization.

In *Héros-chimères* he explores the consequences of the US occupation but also, in a way, sums up the whole history of Haiti. Frankétienne is particularly interested in US/Haitian relationships, and he often refers to the United States or to US characters throughout his work (as Jonassaint demonstrated in his short discussion of Frankétienne in *France and the Americas* (Johnston 418-20)). However, if the occupation is present in his work, it is not so much as a specific historical event, but more as a repetition of traumatic events that keep happening over and over, as if history were stuttering. All these events refer to the initial traumas (slavery and colonization of course) as well as to the Haitian event par excellence, 1804, Haiti's independence. Frankétienne refers to the Haitian Revolution as "un bel accident de l'histoire" (a beautiful accident of history).[13] Calling this crucial event for the history of Haiti an accident shows the disillusionment that Frankétienne entertains regarding the possibility of making sense of it. Not without grim irony, the rape of his mother occurs on the fourth of July, the United States' Independence Day, another absurd coincidence. Historical events return in their own parody, totally deprived of meaning. Refusing to even try looking for some kind of signification, Frankétienne renounces representation and narrative.

Instead, his writing stumbles and stammers in lockstep with history–a series of repetitions as variations, as if he were playing jazz. If the figure of repetition is so significant in Frankétienne's spirals, it may be related to the fact that he is dealing with

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[13] See Interview with Daniel Maximin in Touam Bona, "Ecrire' Haiti." (Touambona)

traumas. Repetition is a characteristic of trauma as a psychic wound. In *Unclaimed Experience*, Cathy Caruth explains:

> In the third chapter of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud describes a pattern of suffering that is inexplicably persistent in the lives of certain individuals. Perplexed by the terrifying literal nightmares of battlefield survivors and the repetitive reenactment of people who have experienced painful events, Freud wonders at the peculiar and sometimes uncanny way in which catastrophic events seem to repeat themselves for those who have passed through them. In some cases, Freud points out, these repetitions are particularly striking because they seem not to be initiated by the individual's own act but rather appear as the possession of some people by a sort of fate, a series of painful events to which they are subjected, and which seem to be entirely outside their wish or control. (Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* 1–2)

The vocabulary Caruth employs–"uncanny way," "some sort of fate"–recalls the idea of curse attached to Haiti, and all the catastrophes it went through, the latest in date being the earthquake and the outbreak of cholera brought by the United Nations. However, subscribing to this theory of malediction would lead one to discount the political responsibility of the countries that have sealed the fate of Haiti. The starting point is the cruel irony that Haiti, after winning the war against France, had to pay 150 million francs (modern equivalent of $21 billion today), the price for its independence, in order to compensate the financial loss that the deprivation of the colony represented for the colonizers and France itself. In the same manner, the US occupation, which was

supposed to allow Haiti to finally attain stability and enter modernity, has left the country poorer than ever (e.g., by bankrupting the National Bank). On the other hand, US businessmen have been able to make a lot of profit, as they continued to do after the departure of the occupation troops. Their involvement in the exportation of wood contributed to the erosion of the soil, which in part explains why the 2010 earthquake was so deadly.

In his spiral Frankétienne addresses the enigmas of Haitian history (Haiti is the Sphinx): how the ancient epic of the great heroes, Toussaint Louverture, Dessalines and Pétion (L'antique épopée) has mutated into a "grotesque farce" (Farce grotesque), a "ridiculous joke" (ridicule plaisanterie), a "puppet play" (jeu de marionettes) led by "vile profiteers, fools and pimps"–"vils bouffons profiteurs et maquereaux"– (Frankétienne, *L'Oiseau schizophone* 17). In these circumstances, is there still a possibility to represent Haitian history? Frankétienne feels the moral obligation to override the silences of the past; he has to conjure the unsaid of History ("conjurer les non-dits de l'histoire"), renouncing any compromises, at the risk of exposing the shameful acts of his own ancestors.

> Major calamity and historical wrongs, to my criteria's cries by never staying quiet, as long as I had not said what ties my heart to the confessions' flooding where the river of white ignominies abolishes itself, of antique servitudes and African fears, as well as my Black ancestors' shame and cowardice.[14]

> [Calamité majeures et méfaits historiques, aux cris de mes critères à ne jamais me taire, tant que je n'aurai dit ce qui me noue le cœur aux grandes crues des aveux, où s'abolit le fleuve des ignominies blanches, des servitudes antiques et des peurs africaines, aussi bien que la honte et les lâchetés occultes de mes ancêtres noirs.] (Frankétienne, *H'éros-chimères*, 116).

Following Césaire, Frankétienne lends his voice to the totality of the suffering slaves: he takes upon himself all the throes of the muted subjects of history, of their absent witnesses, be they the African slaves dead in the plantation or his mother in labor.

Frankétienne is in quest for an unarticulated truth to express the cry of the unfathomable wound of trauma: as Caruth explains, "Trauma seems to be much more than a pathology, or the simple illness of a wounded psyche: it is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available" (Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* 4). The experience of trauma is paradoxical because the remembering of the initial event prevents the traumatic subject's healing. At the same time, it is the very memory of the traumatic event that demands its duplication in a new kind of writing, its repetition on the space of the page, its repetition not as representation but as act. Trauma becomes constitutive of the subjectivity of the traumatized by its inscription on the body–the social body as well as the body of the poet himself. Such traumatic experiences can lead to the development of neuroses–traumatic neuroses, in Freud–or what we nowadays call post-traumatic stress disorder. Such neuroses are paralyzing; they deprive the subject of agency and creativity, and lead to the "acting out" of the traumatic event, as

Dominick Lacapra points out in *Writing History, Writing Trauma*.[15] Acting out derives from the repetition compulsion, a major symptom of traumatic neurosis according to Freud. Though coming from an attempt of the psyche to bind the traumatic event to signifiers, the repetition compulsion prevents the traumatized subject from "working through" the traumatic experience. As Dominick LaCapra suggests, for the subject, working through implies reintegrating the Symbolic order: in other words, constructing a meaningful narrative (LaCapra, *Writing History,Writing Trauma*). Frankétienne's writing never works through the traumas–there is no resolution possible–but it does more than "acting out." To overcome the barren paralysis of the traumatic neurosis, Frankétienne, as stated earlier, embraces his becoming psychotic (schizophrenic). Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus* contrast the figure of the artist as a neurotic–on the side of conservatism–to that of the psychotic, who threatens the Symbolic order (the Oedipal form of literature) and the social order of capitalism itself:

> The hypocritical warning resounds: a little neurosis is good for the work of art, good material, but not psychosis, especially not psychosis; we draw a line between the eventually creative neurotic aspect, and the psychotic aspect, alienating and destructive. As if the great voices, which were capable of performing a breakthrough in grammar and syntax, and of making all language a desire, were not speaking from the depths of psychosis, and as if they were not demonstrating for our benefit an eminently psychotic and revolutionary means of escape.

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[15] For a discussion of the differences between "acting out" and "working through", see Lacapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, 141-181.

> There will always be a Breton against Artaud, a Goethe against Lenz, a Schiller against Holderlin, in order to superegoize literature and tell us: Careful, go no further! No "errors for lack of tact"! Werther yes, Lenz no! The Oedipal form of literature is its commodity form (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus,* 132).
>
> [Retentit l'hypocrite avertissement: un peu de névrose, c'est bon pour l'oeuvre d'art, une bonne matière, mais pas la psychose, surtout pas la psychose; nous distinguons l'aspect névrotique éventuellement créateur et l'aspect psychotique, aliénant et destructeur. . . Comme si les grandes voix, qui surent opérer une percée de la grammaire et de la syntaxe, et faire de tout langage un désir, ne parlaient pas du fond de la psychose et ne nous montraient pas un point de fuite éminemment psychotique. . . . Il y aura toujours un Breton contre un Artaud, un Goethe contre un Lenz, pour sumoiser la littérature, pour nous dire: attention pas plus loin! . . . La forme oedipiene de la littérature est sa forme marchande] (Deleuze and Guattari, *L'Anti-Oedipe*, 292–293).

A byproduct of capitalism–and here of imperialism and colonization–schizophrenia constitutes also the limit of capitalism:

> Hence one can say that schizophrenia is the exterior limit of capitalism itself or the conclusion of its deepest tendency, but that capitalism only functions on condition that it inhibit this tendency, or that it push back or displace this limit. . . Hence schizophrenia is not the identity of

> capitalism, but on the contrary its difference, its divergence, and its death. (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 246)
>
> [On peut donc dire que la schizophrénie est la limite extérieure du capitalisme lui- même ou le terme de sa plus profonde tendance, mais que le capitalisme ne fonctionne qu'à condition d'inhiber cette tendance, ou de repousser et déplacer cette limite. . . La schizophrénie n'est donc pas l'identité du capitalisme, mais au contraire sa différence, son écart et sa mort.] (Deleuze and Guattari, *L'Anti-Oedipe*, 159)

When Deleuze and Guattari valorize the schizophrenic as the limit of capitalism, they do not refer to the clinical version of schizophrenia that one would encounter in hospitals. Rather, schizophrenia can be viewed as a process working against the societal repression of desire. Capitalism, which in their analysis constitutes the final stage of history, is the most ambiguous one, because, instead of controlling–coding–the flows of capital and of desire, it redistributes everything, constantly deterritorializing what it codes, so that it is always unreachable. Capitalism produces the "schizo," the only subject able to let the flows traverse him or her. As such, by escaping all the coding, the "schizo" becomes the figure of the creator who allows the flow of desire to be productive through his scattered, multiple, unbounded (non)subjectivity. Schizophrenic writing thus overcomes the sterile process of repetition compulsion typical of traumatic neuroses and instead duplicates the order of the real.

To write Haitian history, Frankétienne had to go against the grain of the process of historical writing as described by Michel de Certeau. In *L'Écriture de l'histoire* (Certeau), he explains that history is neither an objective statement of continuous facts nor the retrieval of a truthful causality in past events. History is a construction of the past always open to new interpretations. Writing history implies organizing events in a chronological way, designing a coherent narrative leading to a specific meaning. In Frankétienne's spirals, it is quite the opposite; the past collapses with the present in an achronic representation of time, and the facts evoked do not point to a coherent discursive narrative. There is no attempt to reach meaningfulness, no sorting of what happens: events are narrated pell-mell without reference or identifiable subject. The loss of spatiotemporal reference that affects the narrative process even appears thematically in the text, in sentences like these: "No wild animals. No dragons. No flames. No darkness. No time. No space. No place. . . . I do not subscribe to chronological references or fallacious logics, which more often than not constitute erroneous landmarks and misleading beacons." [Ni fauves. Ni dragons. Ni flammes. Ni obscurité. Ni temps. Ni espace. Aucun lieu. Aucun repère. . . Je ne souscris guère aux références chronologiques et logiques fallacieuses qui le plus souvent constituent des repères erronés et des balises trompeuses] (Frankétienne, *H'éros-chimères*, 14). There is no separation between reality and imagination. Frankétienne reproduces this impossibility in his text in the form of hallucinatory nightmares, both real and imaginary. Here is one of his descriptions of the Haitian political arena:

> Then started the long reign of ruthless sorcerer's mafia horrendousness, of souloucoutoux bocors, of cabalistic seers, of false omnipotent prophets and opportunistic politicians outstandingly virtuoso in the sprinkling of demagogical promises.
>
> The adepts of the first group were relentlessly blowing humongous cloudy masses in order to erect a monumental phallic castle whose summit sculpted in the shape of a penis head would rush forward in the milky eternity of the stars.
>
> [Alors commença le long règne de la maffreuserie maffieuse des sorciers impitoyables, des bocôrs souloucoutoux, des devins cabalistes, des faux prophètes omnipotents et des politiciens opportunistes éminemment virtuoses dans le saupoudrage esthétique des promesses démagogiques. Ils constituaient deux camps adverses irréconciliables.
>
> Les adeptes du premier groupe brassaient avec acharnement d'énormes masses nuageuses pour ériger un monumental château phallique dont le sommet sculpté en forme de gland devait s'élancer dans l'éternité laiteuse des étoiles.] (Frankétienne, *H'éros-chimères*, 239)

Throughout the text the impossibility of articulating the event's relationship to the signifying chain becomes more and more obvious. How would it be possible to link the 1804 revolution of Toussaint Louverture with the Duvalier dictatorship? What kind of meaning could Frankétienne, the writer and the intellectual, give to the rape of his mother by a white US businessman?

Signification is sacrificed in favor of truth. Rather than enumerating the historical events in a chronological manner, Frankétienne in his text performs the movement of history, the movement of chaos. Events occur by chance, and repeat themselves in a spatiotemporal void. If Frankétienne gives a voice to the "silent body," it is without creating any gap between the "quiet opacity" (l'opacité silencieuse) and reality (Certeau 15). The body of the text becomes the common body in which are inscribed physical human wounds (those visible on Frankétienne's body, his mother's, the Haitians', and the former slaves') as well as the ones of the Haitian social body.

When Freud first defined trauma, he described acts of sexual violence that happened in the past but were still at work in the traumatized subject's unconscious. In the second part of the spiral–in passages titled "ob-scenes I-X"–Frankétienne exposes the sordid details of his own conception, narrated from the viewpoint of his mother's *jouissance*:

> I go up. I go down. I go up again. I go down again. Lost madness inside out. Twisted reason upside down. It is raining tongues in delights of unexpected misfortunes. It is raining legs in a curve of fascinating torments. It is raining joyous pains in my body ruffled with scorching thorns. I am swooning. . . A tiny drop of blood on the blue sheets shot by a moon ray. Did I live jouissance in a marvelous dream or nightmare in an infernal fantasy?
>
> [Je monte. Je descends. Je remonte. Je redescends. Folie perdue dedans dehors. Raison tordue devant derrière. Il pleut des langues en délices de malheur imprévus. Il pleut des jambes en courbure de tourments

> fascinants. Il pleut des douleurs joyeuses dans mon corps ébouriffé d'épines brulantes. Je tombe en pamoison. . . Une toute petite goutte de sang sur le drap bleu irisé par un rayon de lune. Ai-je vécu jouissance dans un rêve merveilleux ou cauchemardé d'horreur dans un songe infernal.] (Frankétienne, *H'éros-chimères*, 254)

The omnipresence of sex in *H'éros-chimères* is ambivalent: sex and sexuality are on the side of violence; power on the side of the US rapist, the amateur dictator of orgies. At the same time, sexual desire also represents the vital impetus through which the poet finds creative energy. The multiple sexual organs in the text and drawings never represent the phallus or the law of the father. They are nothing else than asignifying partial objects; partial objects connecting, on the surface of the body without organs, Eros and the former heroes of the past, bringing into existence the chimera of the historical and autobiographical Real in a hallucinatory experience for the reader.

CHAPTER 2

DETERRITORIALIZING THE MIND:

TOWARD DISIDENTIFICATION

In 2005, in an interview with Françoise Vergès, Aimé Césaire recalled his years of study in France, his encounter with Léopold Sédar Senghor and their philosophical discussions. They were about to create the Negritude movement and to give it its most important voices. During one of their discussions, they came across this essential question: "Who am I? Who are we? Who are we in the white world? Such a problem?" ["Qui suis-je ? qui sommes-nous ? que sommes-nous dans le monde blanc ?"] (Césaire and Vergès 23). They had just discovered the problem that would concern almost all postcolonial writers: the question of identity for the "black man."[16] If in continental philosophy identity, as a concept, is thought in universal terms–in terms of the unity of the self (Descartes), self-consciousness (Kant), or the self's relationship to the other (Hegel and Sartre)–this universality is always already denied to the black man. For him, the question of identity could not be related to an existential question that would be valid for a universal subject. A purely theoretical approach would be immediately refuted by the living experience of any black man living in France or in a French colonial territory, for other people have framed the

[16] The expression "black man" is the common translation of the French "homme noir" used by Fanon. I reproduce it here, though I do not condone the usage of "man" as a generic term for "human." Consequently, I use the pronouns he/him/his when they refer to "black man."

contours of his *umwelt* in order to realize the ambitions and serve the needs of what can be called the imperial subject. “Who am I?” is not a linguistic, abstract question, nor even an individual one. The question “Who are we?” displaces the singular “I” and turns it into a collective “we.” Rather than reassuring–in the sense that it creates a community[17]–or pointing to the possibility of a subject’s recognition by another, this displacement confirms a radical isolation. “Who are we in the white world?”: the dialectic of self and other has to be deferred for an indeterminate time period, for Césaire and Senghor could only see in their common skin color the sign of a collective, white rejection. The black man is not a being-in-the-World (Heidegger), he accesses his own consciousness in a world-for-the-other, a world belonging to whites.

Identification, defined as the multiple operations through which an individual acquires a stable identity under the traits of a unified ego, is a psychoanalytic concept, defined by Freud and later rethought by Lacan. In this chapter, my goal is to propose a critical perspective on the concept of identification in light of the socio-historical context of colonialism, arguing that the logic at work in Freud and Lacan's theories fails to account for colonial and postcolonial subjects precisely because of their specific positions in space and time. After a tentative description of the process of identification as described by Freud and Lacan, I turn to Diana Fuss and Frantz Fanon to unveil the contradictions and limitations of the concept when taking into account the history of colonialism. Colonialism participated in the constitution of modern

[17] Glissant and others however will precisely return this slippage from the “I” to the “we” into a resistance strategy. Glissant narrator in most of his novels is precisely the “we” that founds and allows the community to express itself.

subjectivity by excluding "others" from its domain and creating a strict division between colonizers and colonized. In my first chapter, I exposed how schizophrenia as a writing strategy could be a creative response to the exclusion of the colonized from the symbolic. Here, I want to explore the ways in which postcolonial authors respond to external identifications and imposed identities and refuse the colonizer's imaginary order. Drawing a parallel between identification/disidentification (Muñoz, Butler) and territorialization/deterritorialization (Deleuze and Guattari), I look at identitarian strategies developed by francophone Caribbean authors in the second half of the twentieth century, from Fanon to Glissant. These strategies were imagined at a time when it was possible to think that decolonization would transform and restructure the world geographically, economically and politically. It was possible to imagine new Nations (new territories), new geopolitical powers and new identities. Alternative imaginary identities, such as *Nègre*, *Antillais*, or *Caribbean* were articulated and "re-territorialized" on imaginary spaces (Africa, the Caribbean, the Archipelago) and imaginary times (the past or the future).

However, in the postcolonial context of globalization (of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century), this option drifted away. I look at works by authors from this period–Abdelkébir Khatibi and Dany Laferrière–who turn to forms of radical disidentification to write back (but also from inside) this context of late capitalism. What I call "radical disidentification" implies a refusal of any imposed identity category, a constant deterritorialization. It is not an easy task as the need to identify is crucial in most social interactions; identification is a continuous, repetitive process. In the (utopic?) space of literature, Khatibi and Laferrière trace "lines of flights," in an

attempt to recover the revolutionary potential of desire and imagination, beyond any identification and identity category.

Identification and Its Discontents: Provincializing Identification, Deterritorializing Psychoanalysis

In what ways is the psychoanalytic account of subject formation inadequate for postcolonial authors? Identification is a complex notion that carries several meanings, some of which may seem opposite or contradictory: it can refer to the act of identifying but also to the fact of being identified. For Freud, the ego has to go through a series of identifications to acquire its unity. In this sense, identification designates the projection of the ego's libidinal energy (*cathexis*) onto an object or another subject. Identification, in the singular, came to define the whole process, the series of identifications, by which the ego becomes unified and the subject constituted. Freud distinguishes several phases of psychic development (oral, anal, phallic) that correspond to different ages and different corporeal zones of libidinal investment.

The Freudian concept of identification becomes central in Lacan's theory. The latter sought to grasp a better understanding of different identification stages that constitute the individual as a subject. For the clarity of my argument–and following Kaja Silverman's account of this issue in *The Subject of Semiotics* (Silverman)–I will distinguish three different stages of identification, broadly corresponding for Lacan to the psychic development of the infant and its consecutive access to the status of subject. However, in Lacan's texts, the temporal linearity does not follow a straight

axis, and the question of which stage is prior or anterior to the other is extremely complex.

a) A first type of identification, called by Silverman, pre-oedipal "territorialization"[18] of the subject's body takes place as the child receives care such as feeding or cleaning. In its previous comprehension, the infant did not distinguish itself from the mother, the objects that surround him or even the world. By taking care of the child, the caregiver delimits specific zones on the surface of the body, called erogenous zones, that channels the child's libido. This stage represents a first imprint on the body of the symbolic order prefiguring Oedipus.

b) In his classic article - originally a paper presented in 1936 in Marienbad at an international psychoanalytic conference–*The mirror stage or the function of the I in ego formation*–Lacan describes the reaction of an infant who catches its reflection in the mirror for the first time. Following the works of Henri Wallon about the different reactions between the chimpanzee and the human child presented with a mirror, Lacan developed his theories on ego formation. The child is still an infant, which means it does not yet walk or talk and is still dependent on others to meet his needs. As opposed to the chimpanzee that quickly loses interest in the image, the infant

[18] To my knowledge, and contrary to what Eugene Holland affirms "territorialization" does not appear in Lacan's writing (Holland) If Kaja Silverman describes the pre-oedipal delimitation of erogenous zones as "territorialization," it is only to clarify her explanation of the Lacanian stages. It is possible however that Deleuze and Guattari were influenced by Lacan's mention of "territory" in the Seminar on Anxiety (Lacan), and the importance of the "mark" or "signature" that delimits a territory. Contrary to "deterritorialization," the term is not invented by Deleuze and Guattari–it might be a borrowing from the vocabulary of German historiography–but their work was probably at the origin of its diffusion and broader application to different fields of study.

experiences the spectacle of its image with “jubilation”. According to Lacan, this jubilation comes from the fact that the infant is able to recognize its own self in the image, and to experience this self as a unity. Yet this realization comes with its share of anxiety, for in the same moment that the child grasps the unity of itself in the imago, the ego is irremediably alienated from its own self in the image that presents itself as an object. Here is how Lacan describes this founding experience:

> L'assomption jubilatoire de son image spéculaire par l'être encore plongé dans l'impuissance motrice et la dépendance du nourrisage, qu'est le petit homme à ce stade infans, nous paraitra dès lors manifester en une situation exemplaire la matrice symbolique où le je se précipite en une forme primordiale . . . (Lacan, *Ecrits, tome 1* 93)
>
> The jubilant assumption [assomption] of his specular image by the kind of being—still trapped in his motor impotence and nursing dependence—the little man is at the infans stage thus seems to me to manifest in an exemplary situation the symbolic matrix in which the /is precipitated in a primordial form . . . (Lacan, *Écrits : the First Complete Edition in English* 76)

The mirror stage is here described, in a hyperbolic and almost religious way, as an ecstasy. If “assumption” here refers to the fact that the infant assumes its image in the mirror, it also contains the religious connotation of the religious event, the assumption of the Virgin Mary. In this sense, the advent of the ego is also an event, a revelation, where the child becomes conscious of the limits and unity of his body and at the same

time of its fragmentation and powerlessness. This "drama" (looking at oneself in the mirror) is not a necessary step or a unique situation, but it is an exemplary character in the sense that it makes visible the psychic transformation that occurs in the child in the first stage of his life. This event is not only jubilatory: it is also a fall. Lacan uses the term "précipiter" which literally means "to hurl oneself head first." It is a fall from a state of innocence. Here, Lacan is close to the Genesis narrative in which access to knowledge, the capacity of differentiating between good and evil, is linked to man's definite exile from Eden. "Précipiter" also means "to precipitate," when in a solution, a chemical component solidifies through contact with another. Through its identification with the image, the ego solidifies, acquires its reality and is extracted from the primordial chaos where the elements were indiscernible from one another, where the child could not differentiate itself from his mother, her milk, her breasts and the objects around him/her. The "ego" appears in the imago in a primordial form, as a unified, organized body but still in need of articulation through language. Here the usage of the word "assumption" reveals its true meaning, and the impossibility for the subject to ever incarnate a unified body:

> Mais le point important est que cette forme situe l'instance du moi, dès avant sa détermination sociale, dans une ligne de fiction, à jamais irréductible pour le seul individu,–ou plutot, qui ne rejoindra qu'asymptotiquement le devenir du sujet, quel que soit le succès des synthèses dialectiques par quoi il doit résoudre en tant que je sa discordance d'avec sa propre réalité. (Lacan, *Ecrits, tome 1* 94)

> But the important point is that this form situates the agency known as the ego, prior to its social determination, in a fictional direction that will forever remain irreducible for any single individual or, rather, that will only asymptotically approach the subject's becoming, no matter how successful the dialectical syntheses by which he must resolve, as I, his discordance with his own reality. (Lacan, *Ecrits: The First Edition in English* 76)

Before its social determination, which marks the access of the ego to the symbolic order, the mirror stage traps the subject within the imaginary register without the possibility of escape, even after language acquisition and socialization. The imago is incorporated into the self and the self recognizes itself as both self and other in the sense that it is perceived in its exteriority. Therefore, the identity of the self is doomed to remain forever unstable, subjected to fragmenting forces emanating from the Real that precede (and persevere) through the ego formation. The ego is situated on a "line of fiction," the Lacanian name for the "line of flight" (a line of flight or *ligne de fuite* in French, i.e. "escape" and "leakage") that points to its image in the mirror and that is both a line of convergence and a horizon.[19] In the Lacanian system, the ego spoken/seen as an "I" separated from the other necessitates the preexistence of the subjective structure real/imaginary/symbolic. This structure in this sense does not depend on an other.

[19] This understanding of the imago directly results from an understanding of perspective when a three-dimensional object is projected on a plane surface. In this case the infant perceived his body as a flat image.

c) Oedipus and access to language is the third stage of identification even if one should be reminded that Lacan's account of subject formation does not follow a strictly chronological order. Lacan reformulates the Oedipus complex introduced by Freud, which designates the unconscious desire of the child to have sex with his mother. The father then appears as a rival, a symbol of what the child lacks to satisfy the mother–that is, the phallus. Freud resolves the Oedipus complex through identification with the parent of the opposite sex and integrates sexual difference in terms of the fear of castration (on the boy's side) and penis envy (on the girl's side). Lacan underscores how the resolutely symbolic character of the phallus (the phallus is not the penis) figures the interdiction of the Law and equates Oedipus with the symbolic structure that breaks the imaginary relationship between the ego-ideal and the mother. It signals the access of the child to language and the social sphere. Identification, from a psychoanalytic perspective, takes place in the family triangle: the subject positions itself in relation to the mother, to the father and in relation to its surrounding–and in Lacan's terms is always an imaginary attachment.

Identification as defined by continental philosophy as well as psychoanalysis fails to function when the black man enters the equation. Western thought presupposes a white European subject that can be called the imperial subject, in so far as he has been formed in a context of colonization and imperialism. As Diana Fuss puts it: "Sartre's deployment of a Self/Other dialectics fails to see how the Other who is master is firmly located in an economy of the Self-Same" (Fuss 145). Identification and recognition according to Hegel's and Sartre's dialectic is possible only in a world where the other is the same, that is, only if he is a priori accepted as a universal

subject. For the colonized individual, identification is first and foremost imposed by the other, and the colonized subject is always already overdetermined, before the dialectic or the synthesis could even take place. Fanon describes the violence of this external identification:

> "Dirty nigger!" Or simply, "Look, a Negro!"
>
> I came into the world imbued with the will to find a meaning in things, my spirit filled with the desire to attain to the source of the world, and then I found that I was an object in the midst of other objects. Sealed into that crushing objecthood, I turned beseechingly to others. Their attention was a liberation, running over my body suddenly abraded into nonbeing, endowing me once more with an agility that I had thought lost, and by taking me out of the world, restoring me to it. But just as I reached the other side, I stumbled, and the movements, the attitudes, the glances of the other fixed me there, in the sense in which a chemical solution is fixed by a dye. I was indignant; I demanded an explanation. Nothing happened. I burst apart. Now the fragments have been put together again by another self. (Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* 86)
>
> [« Sale nègre ! » ou simplement : « Tiens, un nègre ! »
>
> J'arrivais dans le monde, soucieux de faire lever un sens aux choses, mon âme pleine du désir d'être à l'origine du monde, et voici que je me découvrais objet au milieu d'autres objets. Enfermé dans cette objectivité écrasante, j'implorai autrui. Son regard libérateur, glissant

> sur mon corps devenu soudain nul d'aspérités, me rend une légèreté que je croyais perdue et, m'absentant du monde, me rend au monde. Mais là-bas, juste à contrepente, je bute, et l'autre, par gestes, attitudes, regards, me fixe, dans le sens où l'on fixe une préparation par un colorant. Je m'emportai, exigeai une explication... Rien n'y fit. J'explosai. Voici les menus morceaux par un autre moi réunis. (Fanon, *Peau Noire* 88)]

Identification by the other fixes the narrator, as "a chemical solution is fixed by a dye" (Fanon 82) in a representation that does not belong to him, and that reduces his identity to his skin color; however, this precipitation does not signal the advent of the ego, nor even its fragmentation. It provokes in a much more violent way the outburst of the self, its disintegration. His skin color solidifies, becomes a metonymy, the inscription on the very surface of the body of all the racist prejudices that had been established and spread by colonialism.

Identification happens through the look the White man projects onto the black man. Therefore, the other of the black man is not the black man but the White man. Fanon is here building on Sartre's philosophy, which is itself influenced by the Lacanian account of identification, according to which the gaze of the other, (as far as it transforms the other into an object) always alienates the subject. However, the superimposition of the black/white antagonism on the self/other opposition dislocates the terms of the identity dialectic. Through the dialectic of the double gaze, the white consciousness reaches the status of subject. The Sartrian "moi" is seen by the other as exterior and thus as object but because the other is also seen as object by the "moi", a

reciprocal dialectic of recognition takes place and the subject's objectivity is negated. On the contrary, the black man discovers in the gaze of the other his irreducible objecthood.

Moreover, when applied to the white man, the object in which the gaze transforms the subject–in the first stage of the dialectic–is without qualities: only his objectivity matters. Compare this absence of qualities with the way in which Fanon describes black objectivity:

> I cast an objective gaze over myself, discovered my blackness, my ethnic features; deafened by cannibalism, backwardness, fetishism, racial stigma, slave traders, and above all, yes, above all, *Y a bon Banania.* (Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* supra note 10, at 92)
>
> [Je promenai sur moi un regard objectif et découvrit ma noirceur, mes caractères ethniques,–et me défoncèrent le tympan l'anthropophagie, l'arriération mentale, le fétichisme, les tares raciales, les négriers et surtout : "y a bon banania."] (Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs* 90)

Through the repetition of racist clichés, the colonial ideology has imprinted on the black body a subtext that automatically comes to the white man's mind. He reads the color of his skin as if it were the metonymic sign revealing the true essence of this absolute Other.

Gaze and language in Fanon's view are means by which the white man identifies and by the same token objectifies the black man. The language in which the colonizer addresses the colonized is different from the one he would use to address his

peers. He modifies his language, as he would do in presence of a child or a pet, in order to be "understood;" he infuses his own idea of what the language of the black is by imitating what he heard: "Le faire parler petit nègre, c'est l'attacher à son image, l'engluer, l'emprisonner, victime éternelle d'une essence, d'un apparaître dont il n'est pas le responsable[20]" (Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs* 27). How could someone be responsible for not speaking the same way as the natives a language which is not their own? This question never comes to the colonizer's mind because he presupposes his language to be universal, the vehicle of reason, law, culture and justice.

According to Fanon, identification processes initiated by the colonizer's gaze and the colonizer's specific use of language lead to the black man's alienation, foreign to his own self, unable to acquire a stable identity in addition to being excluded from the social sphere. To counter this overdetermined identification, the Black Man does not have many options: disappearing, for as Fanon demonstrates, "Le Noir n'a pas de résistance ontologique aux yeux du Blanc" (Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs* 89)[21]; or welcoming the white identity as its own by negating its own self and imitating the other. During his first stay in France, Fanon, as Césaire before him, became conscious of his skin color and its signification for the white man. He also became conscious that the identity he assumed to be his own was an imposture, revealed by the ambiguity of the title *Black Skin, White Masks*. At first glance, the reader may think that Fanon's

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[20] "to make him talk pidgin is to fasten him to the effigy of him, to snare him, to imprison him, the eternal victim of an essence, of an *appearance* for which he is not responsible" (Fanon*, Black Skin* 35).

[21] The black man has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the white man… (Fanon, *Black Skin* 90)

goal is to get rid of the white mask in order to reveal the real identity of the black man, its ontological truth. If this will be the project of the Negritude movement, to find the African roots under a deculturation programmed by the colonizer, that is not what Fanon is aiming for. Under the white mask is found not the "real" identity of the black man but, on the contrary, an identity imprinted on the black skin, imposed by the history of slavery and colonialism.

If the colonized suffer from identitarian fragmentation, it is the result of the projection on their psyche of the geopolitical dichotomy that colonialism introduced. In order to declare a territory as their own, the colonizers had to negate the subjectivity of the people previously occupying it. Desubjectivation had to be part of the colonization process. Fanon has often been criticized for his binary view of a world with the colonizer on one side and the colonized on the other. Yet, his aim was always to overcome this binary. It is colonialism that cracked the world open and introduced the separation between an imperial space and a colonial one; It is colonialism that little by little rendered the two hermetic to one another. Fanon always sought a way out of this dichotomy for he did not believe that the constitution of the black man's subjectivity was only the negative dialectical movement toward a truly universal subject.[22] This is one of the reasons why, even though he acknowledged the importance of Césaire and the Negritude movement, Fanon always kept his distance.

[22] This is however Sartre's view; for him Negritude is the negative movement of the universal subject's dialectic: "Negritude appears as the weak stage of a dialectical progression: the theoretical and practical affirmation of white supremacy is the thesis . . . But this negative moment is not sufficient in itself and the Blacks who employ it well know it . . . Negritude is dedicated to its own destruction"(Sartre, *Black Orpheus* 59–60).

According to him, subjectivity and subjectivation processes are and always will be related to their socio-political environment.

Fanon's analyses reveal the limitations of the application of concepts constructed in the West, such as identification, when applied in a colonial context and remind us that psychic processes do not happen in a vacuum: identification can only be understood at the intersection between the psyche and the social for the subject is always situated within space and time. I am not referring to the universal abstract space and time of the oedipal family: the intersection between the social and the psychological is situated within history, within a specific geopolitical concept. Kelly Oliver goes further and argues that the construction of the psychoanalytic concept of identification has been framed by the colonial ideology in which Freud first elaborated his theory (Oliver, *Witnessing*; Oliver, *The Colonization of Psychic Space*). Other critics, such as Silverman and Fuss, go even further, saying that psychoanalysis, as a discourse, as a discipline, played a role in the colonial ideological apparatus developed in the nineteenth century. As a matter of fact, the subject of psychoanalysis is no other than the imperial subject, "universal" in the sense that he is without quality, caught in the abstract, outside of history, outside of the specific geopolitical context that formed it. On the contrary, the identity of the colonized subject, constituted as the absolute Other, is imposed on him by what Fanon called "the colonization of the mind."

From her reading of Fanon, Fuss retains the idea that "identification has a history–a colonial history" and gestures toward the necessity of contextualizing the concept of identification, that is situating its origin and development in "its historical genealogies, including colonial imperialism" (Fuss 141). Fuss' rereading of

identification signals that the concept itself is never outside or prior to politics. She goes even further in her analyses when she states, "the psychoanalytic formulation of identification can be seen to locate at the very level of the unconscious the imperialist act of assimilation that drives Europe's voracious colonialist appetite. Identification in other words, is itself an imperial process, a form of violent appropriation" (Fuss 145). Deleuze and Guattari came to the same conclusion in *Anti-Oedipus*, where they refer to Fanon as the one who opened their eyes on the dynamics of colonization at work in the capitalist mode of production.[23] To them, psychoanalysis itself is the "colonization of the mind" and Oedipus is "colonization pursued by other means" (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 190); According to the authors, Oedipus "is the interior colony, and … even here at home . . . it is our intimate colonial education" (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 170). Following Fanon's intuitions, Deleuze, Guattari, Fuss, and more recently Khanna, all insist on the necessity of contextualizing, provincializing, worlding psychoanalysis; that is, putting the development of the discipline in the context of colonial imperialism. By doing so, they denounce the way psychoanalysis abstracts the subject from its socio-historical context and geopolitical terrain and question the fact that the subject's position can be determined only in relation to familial coordinates (constituting the universal subject

[23] The parallels between Deleuze and Guattari's project and Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* are striking: both texts interrogate psychoanalysis' unquestioned pretense of universality and read in the exclusively "familialist" interpretation of the subject history a dangerous attempt to erase the socio-historical realities as part of the formation of the subject. Thus, they situate the discipline in the imperialist colonial context of its constitution. And finally, they both sought a way of freeing the repressed drives and desires captured by the colonial violence in Fanon's case, and by the capitalist apparatuses for Deleuze and Guattari.

as both imperial and colonized from inside) despite the fact that the nuclear bourgeois family is a very recent institution that itself has a history. At this point it becomes necessary to depart from the strictly psychoanalytical theory of subject formation and to reformulate the concept of identification as a process that is never politically neutral by emphasizing the impossibility of distinguishing between individual and social subject formation: it would be necessary to reevaluate the position of the subject, from abstract topology to concrete geopolitical context, from family history to the global history of imperialism and capitalist development. As Fuss puts it: "Identification is the point where the psychical/social distinction becomes impossibly confused and untenable" (Fuss 10).

Disidentification Strategies

To confront the paradox of colonial psychic structures in which whiteness is both the alterity and the identity by default of blackness, Caribbean people and postcolonial authors explore ways of transcending the paradox by deploying what I call *identitarian strategies of resistance.* These strategies prove themselves to be necessary for colonized subjects, who, as long as they are identified as colonized, cannot find their voice, produce their own aesthetics or attain political agency.[24] Accessing an alternative identity becomes possible only through disidentification, a concept developed by Judith Butler in *Bodies that Matter* and *Psychic Life of Power*

[24] For an account of the dynamics that prevent the colonized to express themselves in the context of colonial identification, see Gayatri Spivak's article, "Can the Subaltern Speak," mentioned in my first chapter.

and recast by José Esteban Muñoz in *Disidentification: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (where he applies the concept in specific cases of artistic performances). If Butler admits that identity categories can be called upon in political action, she nevertheless underscores that only disidentification can really constitute the point of departure toward a radical, non-exclusive democracy. This is because some form of exclusion always accompanies the constitution of identity: "Although the political discourses that mobilize identity categories tend to cultivate identifications in the service of a political goal, it may be that the persistence of disidentification is equally crucial to the rearticulation of democratic contestation" (Butler, *Bodies That Matter* xiii).

Disidentification is one possible strategy that contributes to destabilizing identity signifiers while initiating processes of resignification. To "be constituted" by an identity signifier is the equivalent of the urge to repeat or mimic the signifier whose signification is materialized by successive repetitions. Mimeticism or the repetition of the colonizer's identity is often portrayed as the specter against which postcolonial authors have to fight. Assimilationist processes characteristic of the French version of colonization incited colonized, such as the "Antillais," to mimic French identity to the point where they can believe that the signifier "French" is adequate to describe their identity[25]. Traveling to France annihilates the illusion and removes the mask. Under the masks another imposed identity is revealed (Black, Arab, etc.). For the colonized,

[25] The French imperial ideology of "assimilation" encouraged colonial subjects to identify as French as opposed to the subjects of the Commonwealth where indirect rule was the preferred mode of administration.

it is in between the two opposite meanings of identification that disidentification can take place: between the possibility of recognizing oneself as an autonomous subject and the projection of oneself to an ideal other.

In *Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*, Muñoz recasts the concept of disidentification to give it a broader but perhaps less radical meaning:

> Disidentification is about recycling and rethinking encoded meaning. The process of disidentification scrambles and reconstructs the encoded message of a cultural text in a fashion that both exposes the encoded message's universalizing and exclusionary machinations and recircuits its workings to account for, include, and empower minority identities and identifications. Thus, disidentification is a step further than cracking open the code of the majority; it proceeds to use this code as raw material for representing a disempowered politics or positionality that has been rendered unthinkable by the dominant culture. (Muñoz 31)

Disidentification is here a survival strategy used by minority subjects: in their usage of citation practices, they appropriate identity signifiers that belong to the dominant culture and transform them through their performative acts. By so doing, oppressed minority subjects find a way to oppose the normative discourses and practices that the public sphere (which is always the sphere of the majoritarian subjects) impose to produce a normative model of accepted subjectivity and citizenship.

As Fuss and Muñoz have made clear, any identity strategy starts with a process of disidentification. Re-identification then appears sometimes as necessary (for

political reasons, as in Fanon's theory) or inevitable (for the poets of the Negritude movement). Disidentification aims at the destruction of the colonial apparatus by creating aesthetical and/or political lines of flight. However, even if it is a way to displace identity borders, new apparatuses are produced, new exclusions and closures emerge. As opposed to the *créolistes* (Confiant, Chamoiseau, Bernabé), Glissant refuses to use the term "créolité" and was very cautious to maintain the signifier "creolization" open. "Creolization" proposes a Creole transformation process rather than a definite Creole identity.

In the disidentification's model that Muñoz proposed, the recycling of derogatory symbolic material allows for positive representations of alternative identities through performative acts. Without denying the possibility of resistance through the kind of disidentification that Muñoz proposes, I argue that seeking to follow the line of absolute or radical disidentification might be a more appropriate way of resistance in the contemporary historical context, that is in late globalized capitalist socio-economic circumstances. This new world order is characterized by a double movement: one of increased circulation of people and capital throughout the planet and one, antagonistic, of reinforced borders and accrued control over migratory flows. Despite the fact that the context is now postcolonial, in the sense that most former colonized countries have obtained their independence, the opposition between western subjects—protected by their belonging to a specific nation-state–and post-colonized subjects—whose subjectivity is *de facto* still differentiated—is still predominant on a geopolitical global dimension. While on the one hand hybridity, cultural multiplicity,

and hybrid identities are celebrated, anxieties about the preservation of national homogenous identities are increasingly being expressed.[26]

In *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari argue that resisting capitalism can no longer consist in interrupting or controlling the deterritorialized flux of the capitalist economy but, rather, in aiming for an absolute deterritorialization, which they understand as a horizon, rather than as a definite state. I intend to demonstrate that relative disidentification followed by alternative re-identifications has been a powerful way of resisting colonial identification processes from within the imaginary. These alternative identifications go along with relative deterritorialization and imaginary reterritorialization into a fantasmatic lost Africa, for instance, or in an imagined free Algeria where a new subject is about to emerge. On the other hand, an absolute disidentification is staged in Abdelkébir Khatibi, *Un été à Stockholm* and Dany Laferrière Laferrière, *Je suis un écrivain japonais*: it operates as a force of resistance against violent identification processes. This is a more radical disidentification, which questions the process itself without any attempt to redeem it. Absolute disidentification necessitates a wrenching out of any territory as the only way to free

[26] The debate over national identity has lately reached large proportions, notably since the election of Nicolas Sarkozy in 2007. Following his campaign's engagement he rehabilitated the concept of national identity in initiating in 2009 a national debate where French citizens would be given the opportunity to express "who they are." Another significant fact of this tension can be seen in the election, in 2014, to the "Académie Française" of Alain Finkielkraut, author of *L'identité malheureuse*, a book he wrote to deplore the threat that immigration is causing to the cultural identity of the "Français de souche" (a recent French expression introduced to distinguish "true" French citizens from the French citizens with an immigrant background), one year after the election to the same institution of Dany Laferrière, a defender, as I argue here, of radical disidentification.

desire forces from the socially oppressive/colonial order and to substitute to identification an alternative relationship to the other, to which I will provisionally refer to as "desire."

Becoming *Nègre*, Becoming Algerian.

Negritude offers a typical example of relative disidentification, which, in this case, is also a conscious counter-identification.[27] To produce this disidentification, Negritude's writers resort to the discursive tactic of insult reversal, by appropriating racist insults. While, at the time, the signifier "Nègre" was patently derogatory–it still is–it was also very commonly employed. Affirming one's identity by saying "je suis un nègre" (I am a Negro), cannot be understood directly as a positive self-identification. This speech act is first and foremost a critique of an imposed negative identification. Frantz Fanon himself, in a passage quoted earlier, narrates how humiliated he felt when he heard the address "nègre" applied to him for the first time. Though it constituted for him a realization, it was also a traumatic experience.

In Excitable Speech, Judith Butler explains that repetition has no value in itself. The act of repetition is twofold: repetition can involve a crystallization of meaning, until it congeals signification but it also encompasses, in the time-gap it opens between utterances, the possibility to create a change, to introduce difference:

[27] In psychoanalysis, "counter-identification" has two different meanings: one referring to a dysfunction in the relationship between analyst and patient where the analyst's ego identifies with the patient's ego; the other meaning designates a claimed attempt from the patient to deliberately construct their identity in opposition to their parents. I am interested here in the second meaning of the term with the difference that psychoanalysts tend to interpret this attitude as a negation of an unconscious identification.

> That no speech act has to perform injury as its effect means that no simple elaboration of speech acts will provide a standard by which the injuries of speech might be effectively adjudicated. Such a loosening between act and injury, however opens the possibility for a counter-speech, a kind of talking back, that would be foreclosed by the tightening of that link . . .[...] The interval between instances of utterance not only makes the repetition and resignification possible, but shows how words might, through time, become disjoined from their power to injure and recontextualized in more affirmative modes. (Butler, *Excitable Speech* 15)

The performative charge that the insult has accumulated through the historical process of repetition is reinvested in the use of the very words that caused the trauma: "Nègre", "Negro", "Negritude" proclaims the poet repeatedly until the potential difference is reversed. The repertoire of insult becomes for him a treasury of poetic resources, a reserve of linguistic energy. One can find in "Nous les gueux," a poem by Leon Gontran Damas, a representative example of this kind of linguistic reinvestment of the insult's libidinal energy:

> NOUS LES GUEUX
>
> Qu'attendons-nous
>
> Les gueux
>
> Les peu
>
> Les riens

Les chiens

Les maigres

Les nègres

Pour jouer aux fous

Pisser un coup

Tout à l'envie

Contre la vie

Qui nous est faite

À nous les gueux

À nous les peu

À nous les riens

À nous les chiens

À nous les maigres

À nous les nègres

(Damas 50–51)[28]

Mostly composed with pejorative nouns, the term "nègre" appears in its "proper" place, along with the poor, the dogs, the outcasts. Centuries of colonial repression

[28] We the wretched, we the worthless we the nothings, we the dogs, we the Skeletons, we the Negroes, what are we waiting for? What are we waiting for to play the fools, to piss on this life, stupid and beastly, that is imposed onto us.

created a sense of emergency in the oppressed subject. “What are we waiting for?” is the question that the poet asks. The impossibility of individual identification is transmuted in the projection of a collective subjectivity, a “we” where a will to revolt and the means to do it can be found. The oppressed must find from their place of nothingness the courage to found their collective subjectivity. In the first part of the poem, the “negroes” are subjects, grammatically and symbolically, subjects that turn against a life that has been made for them, without their consent, a life where they can only subsist as objects. As a matter of revolt, Damas incites his fellow companions in wretchedness to play the role that is expected from them: “play the fools,” act as animals and free their instinctual drives in “taking a piss.” The vocabulary is extremely familiar and limited to a few words, but the poetic condensation turned the repressed forces into a joyous rebellious energy.

For Caribbean authors that took part in the Negritude movement, identity affirmation goes along with a movement of deterritorialization - from the enclosed space of the island where they suffocate, the territory of the alienated negroes who follow their “white destiny” through mimicry and delusive fantasies - and a movement of reterritorialization into a phantasmal Africa embodying the site of origin, the lost homeland of the black people from the Caribbean. Each of the three main authors of the movement gives a personal take to the definition of Negritude. For Damas, it is essentially an aesthetic. Influenced by the Black Art Movement, the Harlem renaissance poetry, jazz, blues and oral African traditions, he underscores the importance of musicality, rhythm, and the orality of Negro expression. To him, Negritude is not as much an identity as a vital energy demanding to be expressed.

In *Discours sur la Négritude*, Césaire defines Negritude by what it is not. “La Négritude à mes yeux n'est pas une philosophie. La Négritude n'est pas une métaphysique. La Négritude n'est pas une prétentieuse conception de l'univers” (Césaire 82).[29] Negritude is defined less by its content than by an attitude. Césaire’s conceives it first and foremost as a cry of revolt against a “world culture system”, against “European reductionism,” a cry against all colonial alienating discourses. It is also, according to him, a quest for identity: it is important to stay focused, oriented toward identity [“maintenir le cap sur l'identité” (Césaire 84)]. To him, identity is a shelter against alienating forces, a way to stay anchored in the world. However, it does not mean that it is something fixed or given. It has to be constructed while keeping in mind that identity or the presence of the self to itself (as Sartre demonstrated) always escapes the self.[30] Identity is constructed through difference, in an effort to reappropriate the past, to rehabilitate common cultural values, to re-think history and to build the present and future of the black people.

Senghor, probably because he was born in Africa, is the only one of the Negritude poets to provide Negritude with a positive content that could be described as a philosophy or ontology of vital forces. In agreement with Sartre, who defines Negritude as an “affective attitude” toward the world, he insists on emotion as a source for Black expression and on the importance of rhythm. More broadly, he

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[29] “Négritude, in my eyes, is not a philosophy. Négritude is not a metaphysics. Négritude is not a pretentious conception of the universe.”

[30] “In the presence to oneself, on the contrary, it is the being that I am that is present to itself. But due to this fact, it always escapes me”(Sartre, *Notebooks for an Ethics* 156).

defines Negritude as "l'ensemble des valeurs culturelles de l'Afrique Noire"[31] (Senghor, *Liberté : Négritude et Humanisme* 8–9). His Negritude is more than a revolt; it is a way of inhabiting the world by occupying the alternative imaginary of Africa, made of tales and myths, kings and beautiful women, savannah landscapes and wilderness. Against accusations of reverted racism, Senghor answered through the dialectic of identity: "Il en est de l'indépendance comme de la Négritude. C'est d'abord une négation, je l'ai dit, plus précisément l'affirmation d'une négation. C'est le moment nécessaire d'un mouvement historique: le refus de l'Autre, le refus de l'assimiler, de se perdre dans l'Autre. Mais parce que ce mouvement est historique, il est du même coup dialectique. Le refus de l'Autre, c'est l'affirmation de soi." (Senghor, *rapport sur la doctrine et la propagande du parti* 25).[32]

Even though Fanon was at first enthusiastic about the nascent poetry of Negritude that Césaire inaugurated, he quickly distanced himself from the movement. Several reasons explain this position, the first being that he found it impossible to identify with Césaire's "Nègre." It is implicit in his work that he understands identification and identities as fictions and what is more, fictions that white people impose on the black man. *Black Skin, White Masks* can be read as the narrative of a self trying to constitute itself. The "I" in the text is open to transformation and mutations, to trying out different identities until he founds the one that can assure him

[31] "The sum of the cultural values of the black world."

[32] "As independence, Negritude is first a negation, I said it. More precisely the affirmation of a negation. It is the necessary moment of a historical moment: the refusal of the other, the refusal of assimilation, of losing oneself in the other. But because this movement is historical it is dialectical. Refusing the other is affirming one self."

recognition and subjectivity. But each time the "I" approaches the possibility of declaring an identity as his own, his self again explodes. It cannot sustain the omnipresent gaze of the other, the white universal man. Nor in his life, nor in fictions, nor in theory. Each time Fanon's ego disintegrates, each time he finds the strength to reassemble the fragments until he ends up weeping, "without responsibility, straddling Nothingness and Infinity," discouraged by the gap between his internal feelings of greatness and the total absence of recognition, but still refusing to embrace his blackness as some form of disability. This lyrical closure on the weeping "I" is ambivalent. It could be read as a sign of defeat. None of his attempts to constitute a strong, stable resistant sense of self were successful. It could also be the sign that the battle has to be led on another front. The internal battle cannot be won. Not before the whole social, geopolitical order has changed. Not before Algeria becomes a nation.

Albert Memmi in *The Impossible Life of Frantz Fanon* argues that the series of failures that Fanon experienced led him to deviate from the right path. For him, Fanon never recovered from his first misidentification: As a result of the politics of assimilation, "He believed himself French and White" (Memmi 10) and was never able to identify himself "authentically" as fully Black or "nègre." Fanon's identification with the Algerian people to him another misidentification for "one cannot shed his identity so easily. A Black man does not get rid of his Negritude by calling it a mirage: nor can anyone exchange his cultural, historical and social singularity for another, by a simple act of will. Not even in the service of a revolutionary ethic" (Memmi 28). Clearly Memmi and Fanon have a different

conception of identification and identity. Memmi's reasoning implies that there are true and false identifications and that after having realized his first mistake, Fanon should have embraced his true identity as a "Black West Indian." It was the only way to recover his true self and to return to his people. On the other hand, what Fanon retains from the exposure of his white identity as merely a mask is that identification is always imaginary, and identity is always a fiction. It was first a cause of despair, for his self was completely disintegrated. In the end however, he found out new ways of resisting: by adopting other identities, reconfiguring the imaginary, dismissing the geopolitical order's borders as they were and are defined by the West.

Arguing against Albert Memmi, I contend that Fanon's successive misidentifications, rather than true failures, are in fact a series of ordeals. Each one of them forced Fanon to deconstruct and reconstruct his previous identity. Rather than interrupting his trajectory, each identification test transformed him. Through these repetitive processes, his identity became fluid, lost its essence and acquired instead a direction. Fanon's personal and intellectual trajectory confirms the profoundly destabilizing character of identification, as it is described by Fuss:

> … at the very same time that identification sets into motion the complicated dynamic of recognition and misrecognition that brings a sense of identity into being, it also calls that identity into question. The astonishing capacity of identifications to reverse and disguise themselves, to multiply and contravene one another, to disappear and reappear years later renders identity profoundly unstable and perpetually open to radical change. (Fuss 2)

Algeria is the imaginary territory where Fanon grounds his decolonized identity, while the Algerian war is the site where the imaginary becomes virtual, that is where its actualization in the production of an alternative political reality becomes possible.

Despite Memmi's allegations, I maintain that it is in Algeria that Fanon discovered an alternative identity, not an essential, stable identity but an identity in becoming, an identity that he could put at work and that he was willing to embrace fully. Rather than an essence, common qualities or an origin, political agency defines Fanon's Algerian identification: "Becoming Algerian" means becoming part of a people who is fighting actively against the colonizer. In my view, Albert Memmi is mistaken when he sees Fanon's gesture as doomed to fail. In fact, the radical gesture of disidentification–or *détour* as Glissant calls it[33]–is as important as the re-identification. Far from being a betrayal at his people, it is the demonstration that identification can be an act of pure will, independent from one's origin, language or culture, as long as one is ready to expose the body's vulnerability in its defense.

> Ce que nous, Algériens, voulons, c'est découvrir l'homme derrière le colonisateur ; cet homme, à la fois ordonnateur et victime d'un système qui l'avait étouffé et réduit au silence. Quant à nous, nous avons depuis de longs mois réhabilité l'homme colonisé algérien. Nous avons

[33] For Glissant, Fanon "is the only one to have acted on his ideas, through his involvement in the Algerian struggle; this was so even if, after tragic and conclusive episodes of what one can rightly call his Algerian agony, the Martiniquan problem…remains wholly in its ambiguity. It is clear that in this case, to act on one's ideas does not mean to fight, to make demands, to give free rein to the language of defiance, but to take full responsibility for a complete break. The radical break is the extreme edge of the process of Detour." (Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse* 25)

> arraché l'homme algérien à l'oppression séculaire et implacable. Nous nous sommes mis debout et nous avançons maintenant. Qui peut nous réinstaller dans la servitude ? (Fanon, *Sociologie d'une révolution* 15)[34]

As opposed to the neurotic identity characteristic of the black as described in *Black Skins, White Masks*, this alternative identification represents a victorious gesture of reversal. In becoming Algerian, Fanon gets rid of his black mask and finds underneath a freestanding and proud man. The choice of Algeria is oriented toward a future, where all men will stand free, as opposed to Negritude's orientation toward a mythical African past. Fanon grounds his identity in a battlefield, in the present of the war, and in the vulnerability of his body. As an Algerian, Frantz Fanon occupies the real, which in this case resides in the violence and necessity of the colonial war.

When identification as conceived by psychoanalysis and continental philosophy failed the "black man," the Negritude poets and Fanon proposed alternative identifications. These identifications were attached to imaginary territories: in the first case, the lost territory of Africa and in the second, the projection of a new nation, the liberated Algeria. They were also attached to the possibility of restructuring the world anew: the horizon of decolonization as well as the development of Pan Africanism–the possibility of the constitution of a third bloc, independent from the communist and the capitalist blocs, carried the hopes of a new world order. The reconstitution of the black subject's ego was possible in the autonomization of black

[34] "What us, Algerians want, is to uncover the man behind the colonizer. This man is at once organizer and victim of a system that suffocated and silenced him. As for us, it has been long months since we have rehabilitated the Algerian man. We have wrested the Algerian man from age-long implacable oppression."

and decolonized communities and/or nation-states. However, the progressive decolonization of most of the former colonies did not bring the expected liberation from Western economic and cultural domination. Instead of a decolonized world where different peoples and nations would be able to interact as equal partners, the global capitalist (postcolonial) society that came into existence remained structured by more subtle forms of imperialism and neo-colonialism. Postcolonial authors such as Khatibi or Laferrière no longer imagine the possibility for the ex-colonized of developing as subjects separated from the West. This is also Glissant's position: colonialism brought together, for better or worse, different peoples, fashioned multicultural societies and transnational hybrid subjects. If these are the new world conditions and escaping them through alternative identifications and reterritorializations would be a delusion. Radical disidentification appears to be the only response corresponding to the late capitalist order. It can take different forms: refusing all identity categories, inhabiting a "third space," (Homi Bhabba) or embracing languages no longer attached to nation-states. These strategies blur the limits between the real, imaginary and, symbolic; desire (aimance for Khatibi, relation for Glissant) replaces identification as a way of relating to the other and the world. Desire here is not any more conceived as the defining lack constituting the subject of psychoanalysis. It is closer to the deleuzian notion of desire, as … production of the real itself. The authors I discuss in this section, Dany Laferrière and Abdélkébir Khatibi, both see their "francophone" categorization as a source of enlightening internal conflict. *Je suis un écrivain japonais* and *Un été à Stokholm* are both informed by this struggle and are, therein, both structured by disidentification strategies.

Existential Paradoxes of the Francophone Writer

The creation of the category "francophone writer" is quite recent. The term *francophonie* itself appeared in 1883 in *France, Algérie et colonies,* an essay written by the geographer Onésime Reclus, just after France lost Alsace-Lorraine's territory, as a consequence of its defeat in the Franco-Prussian War (July 1870-May 1871). Reclus, at the time, was concerned with France's capacity to compete internationally with other world economic powers, notably because of its weak demography. Francophonie is thus portrayed by the geographer as a solution for France to develop its influence and "rayonnement."[35] The whole idea of francophonie is based upon the belief that language makes a people: "Dès qu'une langue a "coagulé" un peuple, tous les éléments "raciaux" de ce peuple se subordonnent à cette langue. C'est dans ce sens qu'on a dit : la langue fait le peuple (*lingua gentem faciti*)[36]" (Reclus, *Un grand destin commence* 114–16). Reclus' model of civilization development is found in Roman imperialism which, he suggests, permitted the assimilation of barbaric people without recourse to violence: "Rome n'a pas réellement colonisé. . . Elle triompha des peuples

[35] The French expression "rayonnement" and "rayonnement culturel" is still very commonly used in political discourses and media and has been associated with francophonie since the nineteenth century. The term designates the general influence one nation exercises on others and more specifically the diffusion of its culture abroad. The French "rayonnement culturel" is an important political preoccupation and its development is integrated in the cultural politics traditionally promoted by the Ministry of Culture. The use of the term "rayonnement" is an inheritance from Louis XIV politics of representation, when the "Roi Soleil" became the patron of Arts and Letters.

[36] "As soon as a language "coagulate" a people, it subordinates all the racial elements. This is what it means to say: language makes the people."

en subtilisant leur âme, et ils ne s'en aperçurent point. Elle n'injuria pas leurs dieux, elle ne méprisa point leurs fétiches, elle n'entreprit rien sur leur conscience, elle empiéta peu sur leurs terres.[37]" (Reclus, *Lâchons l'Asie, prenons l'Afrique* 95). Even though Reclus states that the Roman Empire was stealing (*subtiliser*) the soul of the people it conquered, he interprets the imperialistic invasion as soft and peaceful mainly because the "barbaric" people did not even realize their subjugation. Their subjective identities were simply reconfigured to inhabit a new imperial order. Reclus sees French language, as Latin had been in the past, as the most powerful tool to operate such a substitution of souls. Through the generalization of French language in occupied colonies, the goal of a unified "universal" civilization where differences of race, culture, and identity would not matter anymore could be achieved. Because of this utopian ideal, Reclus has often been seen as a champion of progressive and liberal ideas, while he was in fact justifying colonial expansion with the classic argument of the "civilizing mission" (*mission civilisatrice)* of France. In other words, if, unlike Jules Ferry, Reclus does not have recourse to the idea of hierarchies between races, he transposes this idea in differences between civilizations, striving for ultimate unity by assimilation. In this context, the French language is viewed as the new universal

[37] Rome did not really colonize… She triumphed over peoples by stealing their souls and they did not notice. She did not insult their gods, she did not despise their fetishes, she did not undertake anything on their consciousness, she barely infringed on their land.

language, bearer of the rights of men and other Enlightenment universals in accordance to France's revolutionary inheritance.[38]

Since its appearance with Reclus, the concept of *francophonie* has explicitly been associated with the expansionist ideology of its time when the world was in the process of being "shared" between western Empires. One can argue that the category of "francophone writer" has been created, in the following decades, precisely to protect and establish the difference of the "French writer" whose authority was being threatened by writers of former colonies who also used French language and wanted to produce literature. In the French dictionary *Trésor de la Langue Française*, the definition of *francophonie* is not a polemical one; the term simply refers to the group of French-speaking people and particularly the set of French-speaking countries: "l'ensemble de ceux qui parlent Français, et plus particulièrement, l'ensemble des pays de langue française".[39] Yet francophonie is also a French-centered institution whose objectives are to promote French language and culture in former colonies, and whose only common point is precisely the presence on their national territory of numerous French speakers. The OIF (International Organization of *Francophonie*)[40] was created in 1970 precisely to serve this purpose. If from the start, *Francophonie* was part of an imperial ideology, it is obvious that it serves today as a postcolonial

[38] For an account of the role of Onésime Reclus in the origin of francophonie as a political concept, see: Pinhas Luc, *Aux origines du discours francophone*. (In *Communication et languages*. N°140, 2ème trimestre 2004. 69-82)

[39] http://atilf.atilf.fr/dendien/scripts/tlfiv5/advanced.exe?8;s=902446530

[40] See OIF official website: https://www.francophonie.org/20-mars-1970-naissance-de-la.html

institution suffering from the same ambivalent relationship most colonial empires have with their former colonized territories: lingering imperialist tendencies remain, "protecting" the French language and France's cultural *rayonnement* under a pretense of international aid and development.

In fact the francophone categorization is not always self-evident. The French would not call an author of France a francophone writer. Perhaps even more curiously, French language authors native to countries never colonized by France are rarely called francophone writers either. In the media, journalists tend to refer to them as "écrivains étrangers qui écrivent en Français" reserving the designation "auteurs francophones" to a specific category of writers comprised of those born in the French Caribbean Islands–officially French citizens?–and those in the former French colonies, mainly in Africa and North-Africa.[41]

Surprisingly, in common usage, the only common denominator of the expression "auteur francophone"-seems to be the skin color of these writers.[42] The case of Jonathan Little, a white American born author who recently received the Goncourt, demonstrates this point. For, how was it that an American-born author living in France and writing in French eligible to receive the nation's most prestigious literary award? Any ambiguity of Little's case was eventually resolved by his adoption of French nationality, at which point he became, in media nomenclature, a "Franco-

[41] Although Saint-John Perse, born in Pointe-à-Pître, Guadeloupe, is usually designed as a French poet writing French poetry.

[42] It has to be noted that the same common usage is prevalent in US academia where a specialist in Francophone literature is usually interested in literature written in specific geographic areas, such as Caribbean French islands, Haiti or African countries whether it be North Africa or West Africa.

American writer." The way scholars, the literary community, and the media apply the "francophone" appellation, and specifically the title of "francophone writer," reveals deep connections between language, racialized identities, and culture. Acting as a distinguishing signifier between white and dark-skinned authors, the phrase "francophone writer" reproduces colonial race relations and white civilizational hierarchy through category and language.

Dany Laferrière has always expressed reluctance toward being categorized as a francophone writer. Born in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, a country independent since 1804, he has been living in Quebec for thirty years. His literary models are American as much as or even more than French. He was published in Quebec before being published in France. Why identify Laferrière as a francophone writer? Especially when compared to Little's biography, we can see that the identifying marker becomes a way for French literary institutions to appropriate his work as part of the French *patrimoine* while at the same time relegating him to the margins of the "literary republic" as Pascale Casanova calls it (Casanova). He himself could not understand why some critics of his first novel *How to Make Love to a Negro Without Getting Tired?* reproached him for not being Haitian enough. When summoned to answer the question, "Are you a Haitian writer, a Caribbean writer or a francophone writer?"–a repetitive question, asked again and again, for it is assumed the public has a legitimate right to definitively know the author–Laferrière always skillfully dodges the question, answering, for instance, "I take on my reader's nationality" (Laferrière, *I Am a Japanese Writer* 14).

Althusserian theory exposes the repetition of this question–"What are you?"–as a mechanism of interpellation. According to Althusser, the process the state "hails" the subject as the subject submits itself to the state order by responding to the constituting recognition: "I shall then suggest that ideology 'acts' or 'functions' in such a way that it 'recruits' subjects among individual (it recruits them all) by that very precise operation which I have called *interpellation* or hailing, and which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace every day police (or other) hailing: 'hey, you there'" (Althusser 118). It is probably no accident that in Laferrière's novel the narrator is confronted by two policemen who humiliate and sexually harass him for being black and living in a poor neighborhood.

Dany Laferrière is certainly "hailed" as Black, as Haïtian and as a francophone writer but his project is to escape this interpellation. Categorizing Dany Laferrière as a Haitian writer reminds us of the French police interventions called "identity controls" ("contrôles d'identité"). In France a policeman is allowed to ask for any person's "identification papers" ("papiers d'identité") as long as he judges it necessary. These nationality checks might eventually lead to procedures of deportation if an immigrant is convicted of illegal stay. In practice, skin color is the only criteria on which the police can really assume that the person is an illegal immigrant. Dany Laferrière has been criticized for not being political in his writings, compared to Haitian writers who have denounced the authoritarian regimes in Haiti, for instance, but I would argue that his political engagement resides elsewhere, in his critique of identity and identification.

Khatibi's critical position regarding francophonie is more ambivalent than Laferrière's ironic detachment. In “Le nom et le pseudonyme,”(Khatibi, *La langue de l’autre* 37–43), he analyses his ambiguous relationship to French language, a language to which he had been, as he says, “historically destined.” His formulation emphasizes the contingency of the language or languages that one possesses. Speaking one language or another depends on one’s geographical situation as well as one’s historical context. Because Khatibi was born in Morocco during colonization, he learned to speak Arabic while simultaneously learning to write in French, a singular case of bilingualism. The cut between speech and writing characteristic of western metaphysics according to Derrida is reduplicated and complicated. Arabic for Khatibi will be associated with the maternal oral language while French will be his written language, but saying that is drawing a simplifying picture of the situation. When Khatibi says he was “destined” to French language, he means that he embraces a destiny: he did not choose to write in French–-at least not at the beginning–but he had assumed the responsibility of this mode of expression, and carved in it a hospitable space welcoming his “identity in difference.”

After recalling the composite status of the French language itself–not so different from a kind of Creole constituted by a Latin lexicon allied to a local idiomatic syntax–Khatibi explains that writing in French is not necessarily politically problematic. Rather, it is the idea that languages belong to nation-states and territories as well as political appropriations of the idea of francophonie and the category “francophones:”

> … "la francophonie" ou "la francographie" date et ne date pas de l'époque coloniale. C'est pourquoi la littérature dont nous portons le nom, et quelle que soit notre origine, citoyenneté ou nationalité, a été contrainte, par l'exercice et l'oeuvre en particulier poétique, de constituer *un territoire qui n'appartient à personne*, mais dont la politique s'empare comme d'une propriété privée, si bien que dans certaines séances publiques, on a l'impression si curieuse que les "francophones" sont une communauté d'otages. Mais de qui et de quoi ? (Khatibi, *Jacques Derrida, En effet* 52)[43]

For Khatibi, as for Derrida, one always writes in a foreign language; the monolingualism of the other, far from being the result of a natural order is always a political construction destined to establish symbolic hierarchies. Khatibi's strategy is to refuse confrontation, as he knows that binary oppositions only reinforce a nefarious dichotomy. He never opposes a maternal language (the language of origin) to a paternal one (the colonizer's language). Neither does he oppose the Islamic culture to the occidental one. Proponent of a "pensée autre" that valorizes differences in their irreducible multiplicity, his bilingualism and his double cultural inheritance is the occasion to complicate Derrida's notion of deconstruction. Khatibi reads Derrida's

[43] "Francophonie" or "francographie" date and does not date back from the colonial era. This is why the literature that name us independently from our origin, citizenship or nationality has been forced through practice and poetry in particular, to constitute a territory which does not belong to anyone, in such a way that in certain public sessions, we are under the curious impression that the "francophones" are a community of hostages."

philosophical critique in the same way Spivak does, as "a critique of European ethnocentrism in the constitution of the Other" (Spivak quoted in Morris 264). Spivak departs from Said's critique of Derrida's theory as strictly Eurocentric. Because the problem Derrida addresses–the problem of logocentrism–is specifically European, it makes sense to her that it constitutes–an internal critique of the foundation of a specific episteme. Similarly, the radical critique of Occident's system of thought that Derrida initiated is for Khatibi's intellectual elaboration a point of departure. Throughout his work, he develops the concept of "double critique," an intellectual method of reading in which the oriental tradition is scrutinized under the lenses of deconstruction while deconstruction is complicated by the perspective of bilingualism and multiculturalism.

In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida demonstrated that the western traditions of privileging speech over writing is deceitful in the sense that speech comes to existence–as a definable reality–only when thought in opposition to writing. In other words, for Derrida, the establishment of the difference between speech and writing is what comes first. The epistemological occidental model rests upon a system of signs that he calls *phonologism* that relies upon the matching of sounds and phonemes as well as a correspondence between signified and signifier. Arabic calligraphy and the Muslim "culture of the Book" provides Khatibi with a completely different system. Far from claiming a return to an authentic tradition of the Moroccan culture, Khatibi remains conscious that colonization had already and definitively caused a deep and irreversible transformation of the cultural substrate: there will be no going back, no return to a mythic essential and authentic origin. While Derrida posits the

establishment of difference, understood as dichotomy, as a seminal event in western thought's constitution and elaboration, with the consequence of the other's constitution as radically different, Khatibi's perspective–precisely the perspective of the other– inevitably undermines this dichotomy. When I say "the perspective of the other," I am not referring to the stable other as it is precisely constituted by the sovereign Western subject, by means of the stabilizing power of language. Khatibi's place of otherness is not the same as Levi's Strauss' "Nambikwara."[44] The Arabic subject cannot be conceived in a historical and cultural vacuum, as a subject so far preserved from the violence of the letter. Moreover, from the other side of the dichotomy, such binary oppositions do not stand so well. The complexity of contemporaneous Maghrebi cultures prevents Khatibi's from adopting an oppositional view of the differences between Orient and Occident. This complexity manifests itself especially in the multiple languages spoken in the area: multilingualism is the rule rather than the exception.

As David Fieni puts it "Khatibi split deconstruction into a 'double critique' that would allow him to take aim not only at western thought but also at Arab and Islamic metaphysics. Khatibi's doubling of poststructuralist critique redirected de-construction in a way that he would use to great effect in his important essays on the sedimentation of orientalist epistemologies and the need to decolonize knowledge and the institutional means of producing it" (Fieni 1002). As it were, Khatibi's double critique squares Derrida's deconstruction. The process of differentiation thus takes the

[44] See Derrida's commentary on Levi Strauss' "writing lesson," in *Of Grammatology*.

shape of a continuous and fluid movement rather than an oppositional force (1/Other) or even a dialectic where difference has eventually to be negated (1+Other=1): “une séparation, un acte de scission, une différence qui ne cesse de se doubler et de se dédoubler” (Khatibi, *Du Bilinguisme* 179). Eventually, identity as conceived by Khatibi could be translated into the formula 1+1=2. Through this re-conception of identity Khatibi provokes a fecund encounter between Occident and North-Africa without reducing their differences. Rather than privileging one or the other, he occupies in his writing this space of tension and interferences that allow for literary creativity as well as a resistance to the catachrestic tendency of language. French language, Khatibi shows us, is not as stable and delimited as the French Academy would want us to believe: “La langue française n'est pas la langue française: elle est plus ou moins toutes les langues internes et externes qui la font et la défont” (Khatibi, *Maghreb pluriel* 188). His writing displaces borders between languages, between French and Arabic, but also weakens the very borders that delimit French language. From *deconstruction* to *double critique* and from *differance* to *intersemiotic*, Khatibi squares Derrida’s theory, historicizes and locates the “derridean gap.” Eventually I want to say that the *differance* between Derrida and Khatibi might be situated in the distance that separates literature from theory. While theory generalizes and abstracts to produce functioning concepts, literature experiments with concepts through the specific experience of fictional characters. While Derrida affirms that all cultures are originally colonial, Khatibi assumes a complex identity forged at the crossroads of existing cultures and explores the opening of subjectivity that such a positionality allows beyond the trauma of its imposition. In the following section, I will read *Un été*

à Stokholm as the fictional space where Khatibi explores the ethical and creative potential of radical disidentification.

Lost in Translation: Occupying In-betweenness

Un été à Stockholm, published in 1990, is one of Khatibi's late texts, difficult according to Hassan Moustir, to identify with a Maghrebin author's novel: “Khatibi s'attelle dans ces textes à complexifier davantage la question de l'identité en la débarrassant de ses attributs fixes, à savoir la langue, la culture et le territoire propre” (Moustir 20). Taking Hassan Moustir's idea further, I would argue that the novel, whose writing was driven by what Khatibi calls “la passion d'éffacer les traces” institutes disidentification as a mean of blurring borders between different orders such as subjects and objects, real and imaginary, the masculine and the feminine in order to occupy this utopic space of international literature where encounters become possible, where differentiation always prevails over identification, where “aimance” is a new form of desire and relation to the other.

Gérard Namir, the narrator, travels to Stockholm to participate, as an interpreter, in a conference on the topic of Neutrality. During his stay, in addition of his translation work, he wanders in Stockholm and makes several improbable encounters: he seduces an air hostess, discuss with the project of a producer to make a film on Descartes’ travel and last days in Sweden. He also develops an unusual relationship with a strange couple. The plot is rather loose and the characters are characterized more by their poetic intensities than by their psychological features. The space-time referential is constantly shattered, provoking in the narrator a near constant

feeling of vertigo, whereas the readers themselves might experience some confusion in trying to follow the complex characters' choreography, which Khatibi traces, through what I call “cinematic writing.” This form of writing does not fix identities, places or reality. It follows movements and focuses on forces of magnetic attraction (“aimantation”), dynamics of apparitions/disappearances, while the decor changes constantly under lightning effects,

Through a series of disorientations, deterritorializations and linguistic ambivalences, Khatibi's novel explores the potential of radical disidentification by destabilizing strict delimitations between self and other, subject and object, real, imaginary and symbolic.

Who am I?

The incipit of Khatibi's novel welcomes (*accueille*) the reader in the middle of the air (*en plein ciel*), in medias res, on board of a plane heading toward Stockholm. At some point though, the enunciative voice pauses, interrupts the narrative and asks this (rhetorical?) question: “Mais que suis-je moi qui vous parle maintenant, pour vous conduire au cours de ce voyage initiatique sans me faire connaître ? Qui suis-je pour vous recevoir en plein ciel sans décliner mon identité, ma véritable identité?”[45] (Khatibi, *Un été à Stockholm* 12). The answer–as well as the narrator's identity–

[45] “But who am I, I who is talking to you now, to lead you through this initiatic travel without making myself known? Who am I to welcome you without stating my identity, my true identity.”

remains in suspension until the last sentences of the incipit when the event of identification finally happens, at the border, as it ought to be:

> D'une main, je présentai mon passeport au policier, et le retirai de l'autre. Il me regarda avec curiosité, ma profession l'ayant peut-être intrigué : Je suis traducteur, interprète en simultané. Je m'appelle Gérard Namir.[46] (Khatibi, *Un été à Stockholm* 19)

Through a single gesture similar of that of a prestidigitator, and through a clever narrative device, the narrator, makes his "véritable" (true) identity appear and right away disappear. Thus, the reader and the custom officer simultaneously access the narrator's "official" identity: we are presented with a name, "Gérard Namir," and a profession: "traducteur, interprète en simultané." However, these identity signifiers, far from stabilizing the narrator's identity, signal the character's defining ambivalence: The name, "Gérard Namir" refers to two different cultural traditions. While Gérard is a very common French first name, Namir sounds like a patronymic from Arabic tradition. The profession of Gérard Namir, "translator," is highly significant. In effect, "translation" for Khatibi is much more than a profession: it is an existential, creative, even spiritual practice: a way in and out of untranslability induced by the subjective experience of the bilingual split that resulted from French colonialization of Morocco. Gérard Namir is a "simultaneous interpreter", qualified to translate Swedish language into his (native?) tongue, French. He explains that his work consists in translating a

[46] "With one hand, I presented my passport and in the same movement pulled it back. He looked at me with curiosity, maybe intrigued by my profession: I am a translator, an interpreter. My name is Gerard Namir."

speech in “léger différé.” This expression precisely untranslatable in English, evokes the derridean differance for it means at once “with a slight delay” and “with a slight difference” While it literally refers to the fact that the operation of interpretation takes place with a short delay, between the speaker's utterance and the auditor's perception, the expression also conveys the internal paradox of every operation of translation. In transferring meaning from one language to the other, the translator necessarily transmits a message that differs and betrays, at best, slightly the original. Poetically, “léger” (light) might also refer to a necessary agility to move with grace (from one language to the other), similar to the air hostess’ choreography which fascinates Gérard.

Translator, interpreter, Gérard Namir, in his cabin of glass, is a presence-absence whose role is to facilitate the transports of linguistics signs from one idiom to another, from theory to fiction, from the author’s biography to the character’s story. “Professional traveler,” “professional foreigner,” “scribe,” he is defined less by a stable identity than by his capacity to go through borders with a “flexible mind” (une “souplesse d’esprit”), a kind of receptivity that allows him to be open to the changing forces when passing from one space to the other. Always caught in between, Gerard Namir’s identity, in between languages, borders and love-objects is always in mutation, always becoming other. In this regard, it is consistent with Khatibi's own experience and conception of identity:

> Ainsi l'identité ne se définit pas par une structure éternelle mais d'après notre propos, elle est régie par des relations dysimétriques entre le temps, l'espace et la culture structurant la vie d'un groupe, d'une ethnie,

> d'une communauté. Traduction du mouvement d'être et de sa flexibilité, de son adaptation aux événements, à sa propre énergie de renouvellement.[47] (Khatibi, *Penser le Maghreb* 83)

Khatibi criticizes here implicitly the model of psychoanalysis where the oedipal family provides the universal structure for subjectivity, abstracted from time and space. On the contrary, identity, for Khatibi, is a concept translating the "movement of being," the capacity to any living being to adjust to its specific circumstances and its own creative energy. It is the sum of dissymmetric relations or tensions between the concrete inscription of any living being in a specific time and place, in a specific culture, in specific social groups and its capacity of moving inside these structural elements. As for Deleuze and Guattari, there is no ontology, no essence of being, separable from time, space and movement.

This question of identity is also complicated by the fictional status of the text. Going back to the initial question–"Mais que suis-je moi qui vous parle maintenant, pour vous conduire au cours de ce voyage initiatique sans me faire connaître ?" (Khatibi, *Un été à Stockholm* 12)–we notice that it is first formulated as "que suis-je," and not "qui suis-je," a difference that invites us to reconsider the status of the "I" in the text. Is this "I" a subject, a person, a character? Or is it an object, a grammatical pronoun, an enunciative instance? This slippage from "qui" to "que" (a rhetorical

[47] "Thus, identity is not defined by an eternal structure but according to us, it is ruled by dissymmetrical relationships between the time, the space, and the culture that structure the life of a group, an ethnie, a community. Translation of the movement of being and its flexibility, its adaptability to events, to its own renewal energy."

device called "enallage"[48]) can be interpreted as a self-correction, as if the "I" who talks does not yet deserve the status of person perhaps because of his aforementioned lack of courtesy. Saying "I" is never as simple as it seems. The utterance of the first-person pronoun does not guarantee any sense of identity–identity here understood in its primary meaning of being identical to oneself. Khatibi refuses the simplistic theory of a reading contract as defined for example by Philippe Lejeune in *Le pacte autobiographique* where the critic distinguishes different types of narrative instances: the author, the narrator and the character. According to him an autobiography is defined by a "nominal identity" between the three. If the narrative is called roman, which is the case for *Un été* then, it is categorized as "autofiction." The reader must accepts this premise even if he/she knows that it is a fiction. (Lejeune) In Khatibi's novel however it would be complicated to delimit the different enunciative levels. The text strikes with doubted any identity that could be attributed to this "I." Rather "I," expresses Khatibi's suspicion as well as irony about the conclusion beforehand of a contract between reader and author. On the contrary, the text is defined, in an anti-programmatic way, as a play, open to chance and surprise, without the need to decipher univocal meanings:

> Jeu dont peu a peu nous connaitrons les péripéties sans recevoir encore de message indechiffré. Personne n'a decidé de la logique de cette histoire ni de sa juste combinaison. Rien ne nous est donné pour la

[48] An enallage is a rhetorical device consisting in the permutation of a grammatical form (case, tense, person, gender, number) to another one, generally grammatically incorrect.

défaire. Nous? Tout se passera sans contrat entre le lecteur et le narrateur dans la révélation du seul instant.[49] (Khatibi, *Un été à Stockholm* 10)

The narrative is characterized by what it lacks: without author (*personne*), interpretative key (*rien*), or reading contract (*sans contrat*). In other words, the subjective instance is abstracted, in a Mallarmean fashion, from the literary project, which stands by itself without author and which configuration is determined in letting chance decide. Other occurrences of this type of meta-discourse contribute to erase the borders between character, author, and narrator, thereby negating the usefulness of distinguishing between different narrative layers. A direct address to the reader destabilizes the status of the text itself: "Pourquoi ce récit et pas un autre ? Jugez vous-même, là ou vous êtes, assis ou couché–penché sur ces pages" (Khatibi, *Un été à Stockholm* 17).[50] Khatibi pretends to address, not the traditional fictional reader, but the "real" one, evoking its physical posture, "assis ou couché" in the "real" site where the reading happens. Similarly, the omnipresence of enallages signal an overlapping of the enunciative levels. More often than not, they are made explicit in the text while the possibility of a rational explication is absent or deferred: "J'attrapai quelques flocons de neige en buvant avec toi cette coupe. Toi? Nous? plus tard, plus tard" (Khatibi, *Un*

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[49] "Game, of which we will know the twists and turns, without receiving yet any undeciphered message. No one decided the logic of this story nor its just combination. Nothing is given to us to undo it. We? Everything will take place without contract between reader and narrator in the revelation of the instant."

[50] "Why this narrative and not another? Judge for yourself, right where you are, seating or lying–leaning over these pages"

été à Stockholm 18).[51] The "I" in the text is and will remained undefined, unidentified and unstable. Gérard Namir is not the "I" and the "I" is not the narrator nor the author of the text.

Rather than "narrator," or "author," a term that might be more appropriate to describe the site where the different enunciative instances converge is "host." If the air hostesses fascinate Gérard Namir, it might be because he identifies himself as a "*host of the air.*" In their regulated choreography, he sees an "art de vivre," as well as a model for his writing. The host welcoming the reader in the air, has certain rules to follow, the rules of hospitality: before welcoming the guest, the host has to identify himself, to "decline" his identity as it is said in French, that is, to enumerate his/her identifying signifiers. In Khatibi's words, it is necessary for the host to reveal his "authentic (véritable) identity." Of course, this formulation is also quite ironic in the textual context that precisely destabilizes all identity signifiers.

Movement, Disorientation and Vertigo

Right at the beginning of the novel, the plane, mobile site where the narrative starts, signals Khatibi's intention to privilege destabilizing forces. His attempt is to occupy, at least for the interval of the story, a space of in-betweenness, where identities are blurred while different identification forces are weakened by the reciprocal tension they create between one another. Throughout the novel, the narrator passes from one borderline space to another, occupies each of them for a fleeting

[51] "I caught a few snowflakes while drinking with you this coupe. Me? We? Later, later."

moment before continuing his wandering through the streets of Stockholm, the emblematic city itself situated between land and sea. After his flight lands, Gérard Namir goes through the border, occupies a hotel room, translates from the glass cabin of the interpreter while “territoire limite” is the chosen title for a chapter of the novel. In these liminal spaces, instability is what is fundamentally constitutive of the space-time continuum itself. The unbearable lightness of being appears in the capacity of the subject to inhabit, even for short intervals of time, spaces that are in between air and earth, sea and land, outside and inside and most important in between languages.

Space is subjected to the relative speed of the diverse objects that inhabit it. Khatibi's cinematic writing, attentive to movement, speed, rhythm and choreography reveals an essential mode of relation of beings in the world. The subjective perception of each characters and specifically the narrator, reveals the essential relativity that is also a relationality between things and beings. The horizon is not anymore a fixed line forever unreachable. Like the earth that moves away from the narrator's look when the plane take off, the horizon is a mobile line of flight.

This disorientation is also a disorientalization (orient désorienté). In *Orientalism,* Said defines orientation as a relative process where the previous accord on a conventional frame of reference has been erased. Because of this erasure, orientation becomes absolute: though it requires the cardinal directions (points cardinaux), pre-defined from a western perspective, it is conceived as a universal capacity and a necessity for all individuals in the world. Said sees in orientation the necessity for the Western subject to turn himself to the Orient, and in so doing, to

invent Orient as an absolute Other. Any orientation process implies, in this regard, an othering of space, time and subjectivities; This Othering processes, which can be called orientalizations, will, according to Said, confer the western subject with its stability, its oneness and its authority. The Western subject thus becomes characterized by opposite qualities attributes to the one's attached to the figure of the oriental. Orientalism is an epistemological object completely distinct from any relationship to a possible "real" Orient:

> Orientalism is a style of thought based upon ontological and epistemological distinction made between "the Orient" and (most of the time) "the Occident" the phenomenon of Orientalism as I study it here deals principally, not with a correspondence between Orientalism and Orient, but with the internal consistency of Orientalism and its ideas about the Orient . . . despite or beyond any correspondence, or lack thereof, with a "real" Orient. (Edward Said 1–3, 5)

In Khatibi's novel, the North/South axis is substituted by the East/West axis. Descartes travels to the North to find out the truth of his dreams, while Gérard Namir flees from a suffocating relationship to Sweden, the country of whiteness. The North/South axis can be read as a critical rewriting of a colonial travel narrative. Stockholm appears in its exotic light, defined by a set of essential qualities. The darkness of the Oriental lies in contrast to the whiteness of the skin and hair of the Swedish hostess; to his warm laziness (Said) corresponds the cold neutrality of the Sweden. The exotic experience is close to Segalen's vision of exoticism as a shock, destabilizing the subjectivity of the

viewer and the viewed, as well as a possibility of openness between subjects that are not enclosed in their identity and their belonging to a definite territory.

The narrator wanders and get lost; deterritorialized, destabilized and disoriented, he often experiences episodes of vertigo. Vertigo (in Latin "rotation, gyratory motion") designates a sensation where the subject feels as if everything around him/her was moving around. In other words, vertigo is the illusion of being at the center of a rotative line of force that sets into motion the immobile surrounding objects. When taking off, the narrator, in the illusion of his own immobility, observes the horizon moving away from him: "Par le hublot, j'observai la terre. Elle s'éloigna… Je fixai des yeux cet horizon, sa mobilité."[52] (Khatibi, *Un été à Stockholm*) Fixing a mobile horizon with one's eyes is a sure way to feel the dizziness of vertigo. But in Khatibi's novel, vertigo is not so much an indication that the narrator senses are misleading him than a revelation of the essential instability of beings and of the interchangeability of subject and object's positions. Khatibi's writing is tracing lines of flight that breach the closure of the subject and render him porous. Straight lines, as the line between the seats in the plane, are repudiated because they do not allow for time-travel. In the plane, the narrator experiences a form of "levitation" where neither him nor any other passenger is subjected to the laws of gravity.

For Khatibi, writing itself is a liminal space, in between languages, identities, and different levels of reality. It emerges from the text as a disorienting experiment, where one no longer knows who/what in this instance is saying "I" how to trace the

[52] Through the window, I was watching the earth. It went away… I stared at this horizon, at its mobility.

border between reality and dream, thought and narration. It is as if the "I" of the narrative had crossed the threshold of the Lacanian looking glass, as if its "identity" was suspended between the real and the imaginary. From the other side of the looking glass - the utopian deterritorialized site of literature - limits between these domains appear highly unstable and impossible to situate.

Later, the narrator mentions the memory of a film, whose similarities with *Vertigo,* the film directed by Alfred Hitchcock, are striking:

> Dans le [souvenir] de mon prenier film, du genre fantastique, une femme, emprisonnée se sauve. Du sommet d'une immense tour, elle saute dans le vide, comme si elle avait toujours sejourné dans le bleu du ciel.[53] (Khatibi, *Un été à Stockholm* 68)

Gérard Namir speaks about the film in an oblique way: as an image imprinted in his memory, a woman jumping out of a tower. The genre of the movie, "fantastique," the genre of ambivalence par excellence. According to Todorov, a fantastic text "must oblige the reader to consider the characters as a world of living persons and to hesitate between a natural and a supernatural explanation of the events described" (Todorov and Genette 33). In Hitchcock's movie, as a result of a traumatic experience, John Ferguson, the protagonist, starts to suffer from vertigo. As a result, he has more and more trouble to be certain that what he is witnessing is real or just an illusion of the senses. Madeleine, the object of his investigation who becomes the object of his

[53] "In the memory of my first movie, a science-fiction movie, a woman, imprisoned, escapes. From the height of a tower, she jumps, as if she had always dwelled in the blue of the sky."

desire, seems to always escape, but he wonders if it is because of his acrophobia, his incapacity to discriminate reality from delusion. His self-doubt prepared him to be caught in the illusion staged by Judy and Gavin Elster to kill Gavin's wife.

In the film, vertigo might be interpreted as the attraction for the Thing, desire in the Lacanian sense that can never be satisfied because its proper object constantly vanished. Madeleine embodies for Scottie the object of his desire, in other terms, the Thing. He is always following in her, trying to reach her and to prevent her from vanishing in the void. Despite his desperate attempts, she seems to remain beyond Scottie's reach. Moreover, she's never the one she appears to be. At the beginning, she is supposed to be possessed by her great grandmother to such an extent that his husband declares that he cannot recognize her anymore. Scottie, unable to reach her in any way, was doomed to be the witness of her fall to death from the top of the tower. Death unfortunately, does not put a term to his obsession: unable to mourn and to accept the disappearance of his object's desire, he keeps seeing Madeline's image in unidentified women he passes by in the streets. When he finally meets Judy, Madeline's real doppelganger, and when they start seeing each other, he becomes more and more agitated. He urges Judy to dress up as Madeleine to recreate the perfect imago of his lost object. When he finally understood the truth, that Judy and Madeleine had always been the same person, he is miraculously cured of his vertigo, as if he had been freed from desiring the unreachable thing. The film ends with dark irony: Judy, startled by a nun who abruptly stepped in the platform of the tower, falls—once again.

Khatibi also describes vertigo as an attraction for the Thing:

> Behind the forgetting of self and active reverie lies the attraction of the Thing. The Thing I am talking about is the contour that links us artistically to the world. Abruptly, the narrator experiences vertigo. But how to make this vertigo felt in a poem? (Khatibi quoted in Fieni 1013)

However, the *Thing* Khatibi is mentioning here seems to be quite different from the Lacanian *Thing*. In Lacan the Thing is the absent object that symbolizes castration. On the contrary for Khatibi, the Thing is what links us "artistically" to the world. What does he mean by artistically? I would interpret this statement as a revelation of the function of Art for Khatibi. Forgetting the self, in an act of disidentification, is the first step toward experiencing an ontological and aesthetic vertigo: a disorienting feeling which leads us closer to the Thing we are attracted to. Fragmentation is to be expressed paradoxically by syntax, the line of force along which words are embedded while transmitting the possibility of a link between beings in the world.

Aimance

Turning from identification, understood as an aggressive gesture that fixates the other, Khatibi privileges "hospitality" or "aimance" as alternative modes of relation:

> "Hospitalité" veut dire ici une écoute de l'autre en tant qu'autre. Lui prêter l'oreille pour l'accueillir dans sa singularité. Parole venant d'ailleurs et de loin, apprentissage initiatique, à ma propre prétention à

> l'universalité, qui que je sois, muni ou démuni de force, de stratégie et de puissance sur les autres.[54] (Khatibi, *Penser le Maghreb* 83)

With hospitality, Khatibi defines a relation to the other which goes beyond the opposition between the colonized and the colonizer, between the one and the other. Instead of defining the other in opposition to oneself the hospitable attitude consists in listening to, welcoming "a parole," something that makes the language of the other specific only to him/herself. Listening becomes prior to speech and this reversal inverts the Spivakian logic. The question is not to provide the means necessary for the subaltern to speak, but to agree on an ethic of listening where all are equals de facto independently from their power position. The act of listening necessitates a kind of attentive passivity where I accept to be penetrated and transformed by the other.

Whereas identification polarizes the relation between the one and the other, and is inevitably accompanied by sexual orientation and racial hierarchization, aimance (which is a portmanteau word formed by "aimant" (magnet) and amour (love)) substitutes an absolute, arbitrary, western orientation to an attraction toward one another, a moving and reciprocal orientation in which the horizon of desires is always changing.

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[54] "Hospitality" means listening to the other as other. Lending an ear to welcome his/her singularity. Words coming from far and from elsewhere, initiatic apprenticeship, to my own pretense to universality, whoever I may be, armed or not with strength, strategy and power on the others."

Japanese Deterritorialization

"C'est une guerre tenace contre le temps et l'espace. L'espace policier permet de t'identifier (Tu viens d'où, toi ?)"[55] (Laferrière, *Je suis un écrivain japonais* 27)

When *Comment faire l'amour avec un nègre sans se fatiguer* was first published, the story was perceived by many literary critics, to be not Haitian enough. To some of his fellow "compatriots," Dany Laferrière is believed to have betrayed his country's ideals and problems in order to embrace the easy life style of the American consumer. His novel was understood to signal political withdrawal and indifference to the tragic situation of his country of origin while it was still under the dictatorship of Jean-Claude Duvalier. At the same time it was a bestseller that established Dany Laferrière as a recognized writer. Indeed, nothing in the novel refers to Haiti: the narrative takes place in Montreal and the national identity of the characters is never mentioned. The only information that the reader obtains is that the two protagonists are black, Muslims and share an apartment in Montreal. Journalists and critics, intrigued by this unusual position regarding one's national identity, started to enquire (in a rather repetitive manner), a question still not fully answered: "So then, are you a Haitian Writer, a Caribbean writer or French language writer?" In an interview with Bernard Magnier, Laferrière came to this formula: "I am a Japanese writer," (Laferrière, *J'écris comme je vis* 9) which was chosen as the title of his next novel. By reading the text closely, I

[55] "It's a war between time and space. The police space allows to identify you (Where do you come from?)"

intend to uncover under the pun a playful attempt of absolute disidentification which, ultimately, questions the process of identification itself by blurring the borders between fiction and reality, truth and lies, imaginary and real. Through his writing Laferrière exposes the violence of identification processes as well as the arbitrariness of identity categories. His true originality resides in his capacity to always escape potential re-categorizations, re-territorializations, in a perpetual race against time and space.

It is an anecdote that constitutes the starting point of the novel: a writer - Laferrière's double - pressed by his editor to give him some information about his current project, gave away this title: “I am a Japanese writer.” The publisher is immediately won over. Such a title, by a black writer living in Montreal, seems to possess the right amount of provocation to induce curiosity, irritation or at least some kind of reactions. What the publisher and the narrator couldn't foresee, however, is the succession of disproportionate responses engendered by the title's announcement far before the narrator even started to write the first word of the novel. The story takes place, so to speak, in a space situated in between the title and the book, in the space of the “white page,” as conceptualized by Mallarmé, that is in Leo Bersani's words: “The page on which nothing is written [...], a less impressive testimony to the importance of certain forms of verbal failures in literature than all those pages on which *silence is written*, pages on which (as Beckett puts it), unable to speak, the speaker can't help but continue speaking, but in words that somehow contain the inability to find words, even the desire not to find them.” (Bersani 1). If the literary space of *I am a Japanese Writer* is the white page of the “real” novel that is never going to be written, the time

in which the story happens is framed by procrastination: procrastination is a psychological mind trick, a feeling all too familiar to writers (écrivains and écrivants alike), that suspends time indefinitely, before all beginnings. This space-time dimension is not a symbolic one. Maybe it is imaginary, but only in a dimension where imaginary and real are no longer in opposition. As I intend to demonstrate, the space-time continuum of the novel is not constructed against the police space but away from it. It is literally the space of disidentification.

Dany Laferrière often plays with identity signifiers, claiming ownership on the most unexpected ones. For instance, he sometimes identifies as an American writer, claiming that *Comment faire l'amour avec un nègre* is an American novel; the only difference being that French words are used. Laferrière provisionally reterritorializes his identity on the American continent for strategic reasons explained as such:

> Mon combat ne se faisait plus avec la France. J'avais réglé le cas de la France d'une manière inusitée, en lui faisant affronter un monstre plus fort que lui, l'Amérique. Comment ? Et bien, j'avais découvert par hasard que je vivais en Amérique, qu'Haïti était en Amérique et non en Europe. Pour moi, tout devenait alors simple : si la France, comme je le constatais (le cinéma, la littérature, la gastronomie même, puisque le hamburger est l'aliment préféré des jeunes Français, le sport aussi puisque les dieux du basket règnent aussi en France, etc.) se mettait à genoux devant l'Amérique, cette Amérique, alors pourquoi je baisserais la tête devant la France ? Pourquoi ne pas adorer le vrai dieu ? […] On se demande même comment la France s'y était prise pour m'enfoncer

> un tel bobard dans la tête ? Me faire croire que je n'étais pas en Amérique. Il faut, malgré tout, applaudir le magicien. *Le Barnum de l'identité.* Quel exceptionnel tour de passe-passe : faire croire à des millions de gens pendant au moins deux siècles qu'ils ne vivent pas à l'endroit où ils habitent. Chapeau ! (Dany Laferrière, "Ce livre est déjà écrit en anglais, seuls les mots sont en Français")[56]

With a considerable amount of humor, Laferrière exposes the colonial and postcolonial manipulation of Western nation-states consisting in mapping the world according to a fallacious geography on which it territorializes its subjects' identities. If Laferrière's claim is provocative - his gesture is for him a convenient and strategic identity move - it follows Glissant's designation of an "Other America," an America not limited to the United States but including Latin-America, the Caribbean and Canada. Despite his exile from Haiti, Laferrière can claim to occupy the same territory, were it the Continent (Canada) or its "advancing front" (Glissant), when he was in the Caribbean Island of Haiti.

Every single character in *I am a Japanese Writer* is convinced that as soon as someone says "I am", they are defining themselves, revealing their true identity and their authentic belonging. They all accept doubtlessly the performative status of the

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[56] "My fight was not with France anymore. I settled a score with France in an unusual manner, by confronting it with a stronger monster, America. How? Well, I discovered by chance that I lived in America, that Haiti was in America and not in Europe. To me, everything then became simple: if France, as I observed, was kneeling before America, this America, then why would I lower my head? Make me believe that I wasn't in America. In spite of everything, let us congratulate the magician. What an excellent trick: make millions of people believe for at least two centuries that they do not live where they live. Hats off!"

narrator's statement as if they never heard of writing conventions, narrative contract or never encountered figurative discourse. When the narrator tells his fishmonger: “I am a Japanese writer”, the latter asks him right away if he went through a change of nationality. Even the narrator's denial does not free the fishmonger from the spell of the speech act: he remains surprisingly unable to enter the realm of the figurative. His concerns are strictly applied on the level of “reality:” He asks: “En avez-vous le droit?” (Do you have the right?) and then tries to persuade his client to go to the Japanese embassy to investigate the legality of such enactments. Auto-identification appears as illegal or at best very suspect. Assuming a chosen identity is not allowed in a world where citizenship defines your rights as a human being. Identity is acquired through subjectivation processes which always come from the other and are validated by institutions.

Then the embassy delegates make their entrance. Despite being named after famous Japanese writers, they do not understand the narrator's project any better than the fishmonger. This sudden decision to write a book entitled “I am a Japanese writer” is to them deeply disturbing. They want to know about the author's “real” intentions. If they end up by reluctantly admitting that the narrator might not want to really turn himself into a Japanese writer, they remain bewildered by the fact that the narrator does not intend to go to Japan at all and that he does not even like fish. When he finally tells them that the book is not about Japan or Japanese culture but about himself, they become very suspicious. Japanese officials are also truly concerned about the cultural renown of their country.

If the narrator claims to be a Japanese writer, what could be the consequences for the reputation of the country? And what if the novel was bad or just mediocre? By choosing this title, the narrator is touching the sacred status of national identity. He is going to be (despite his will) a cultural ambassador of Japan. Throughout the novel, it is as if the narrator is constantly repeating "this is a novel" while nobody hears nor believes him. Laferrière's critique is to be found in this paradox: readers and critics generally do not accept the conventions of fiction writing. They always want to know more about the author's identity: his ethnic origin, his nationality, his personal story, etc. In so doing, they contribute to fix identities. Dany Laferrière cannot escape identification processes and he is perfectly conscious about this fact. Disidentification - as identification itself - is a never-ending process, always to be repeated. From one novel to another and from one interview to another he changes identifiers and starts the game all over again. Laferrière's usage of disidentification is radical in the sense that he seeks to "brouiller les pistes," to erase the borders, to escape the identifying violence of the "police space."

Laferrière's writing can be read as an attempt to sabotage language's performativity: the capacity of language to perform territorialization which, in the case of racist identification, takes place on the surface of the body itself. We can therefore affirm that Laferrière's usage of stereotypes is very different from the Negritude's writers. What is at stake here is not the reversal of the injury. Admittedly, racists stereotypes are all over the place in Laferrière's work. The narrator explains in *How to make love* that it constitutes for him a quarry from which to extract value (he is most probably referring to cash-value). He literally re-sells used racist stereotypes,

reconditioned in his irreverent novels and essays. However, as I intend to demonstrate, he is not only taking advantage of the system, but he also exposes its failures and incoherence. By Jameson or Baudrillard, Laferrière's attitude would be judged as complicit with the logic of late capitalism. However, if the reader - instead of making up his judgment on the basis on the title's cover alone - really enters the narrative and accepts the status of undecidability of Laferrière's ambiguous statements, s/he might find out that there is something more to be uncovered from the text than a self-interested playful attitude toward stereotypes.

The narrator pretends that Kurt Vonnegut Jr, another fellow writer, qualified Dany Laferrière as the fastest “titreur” of America: the pun underscores ironically Laferrière's talent. While most of Laferrière novel's titles give the impression to have been chosen by publishers with no or little qualm, it insists on the precision and accuracy of the title as it aims a definite target. When one speaks of literature, the consensus is to stay away from money matters. The value of the literature work is supposed to be purely aesthetic, non-commercializable and incommensurable. The commodification of the work of art is concurrently understood as a by-product of postmodernism. Aesthetic judgment must remain strictly separated from the reign of the market and exchange values. Thus, when Dany Laferrière explicitly addresses the economic success that he obtained from the sale of his books, it is a highly controversial gesture, in line with other artistic movements like Pop Art and figures such as Andy Warhol.

> J'ai donc lancé négligemment [mon titre] par-dessus la pile de manuscrits. Quoi? Je suis un écrivain japonais. Bref silence. Large

> sourire. Vendu! On signe le contrat: 10000 euros pour cinq petits mots.[57] (Laferrière, *Je suis un écrivain japonais* 14)

In the contemporary race against time, Literature, as opposed to the Visual Arts, has the disadvantage of requiring a relative slowing down hardly compatible with the rhythm of postmodern life. To put it simply, the activity of reading takes time. That is where the value of the title comes from: by condensing the content of the book into a few words, it makes the act of reading optional, and allows non-readers to evaluate texts without getting tired. A good title is like an accelerating machine, re-infusing speed into the slowness of literature while propelling the book as a commodity into the economic market and as a discussion topic into the literary world. A good title is ambivalent: it helps the book to circulate symbolically and economically, but might cancel the necessity of reading. The narrator expresses his ambivalence about Kurt Vonnegut's qualification:

> Une façon de dire que je ne suis bon qu'à ça et qu'avec moi nul besoin d'aller au-delà du titre. Après tout, c'est peut-être mieux qu'un mauvais titre qui vous empêche d'aller plus loin. On ne peut pas imaginer le nombre de bons livres qui circulent clandestinement à cause de mauvais titres. Dans les librairies, les rares commentaires que j'entends

[57] "So I casually sent [my title] over the heaps of manuscripts. What was it? *I am a Japanese Writer.* A brief silence. Then a wide smile. Sold! We sign the contract! Ten thousand euros for five little words" (Laferrière, *I am a Japanese Writer* 3).

> d'un livre, c'est à 90% à propos du titre. (Laferrière, *Je suis un écrivain japonais* 12)[58]

The narrator concludes philosophically that a good title might be better than a bad one, even if they both have the same effect: stopping the potential reader at the threshold of the book, the front cover.

Being conscious of the ambivalent status of a novel's title, Laferrière addresses the latter to the lust of non-readers and readers alike. The reader, who passes the threshold, finds himself/herself hooked, manipulated, caught red-handed in his/her own perversity. The titles are addressed to unsound readers wanting to know more about the true sexual life of a "Negro" (*Comment faire l'amour avec un nègre sans se fatiguer*) or who are attracted by the incongruous idea that a black writer can metamorphose himself into a Japanese one. Laferrière titles are in fact lures: they are always deceiving, approaching the topic they promise to treat only obliquely. In *Comment faire l'amour avec un nègre*, sex is as peripheral as identity questions are in *Je suis un écrivain japonais*. Instead, the stories obey an aesthetic collage composed of wanderings, Montrealian daily-life episodes, general observations, reading reports, thoughts about writing, etc. Reading Laferrière's books, as a result, is always a deceiving experience. As soon as you buy the book, you are guilty, at best of unhealthy curiosity. Notwithstanding an honest reading, meaning an open-mindedness

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[58] "It's like saying that's all I'm good at–with me, don't bother going past the title. I guess it's better than a bad title that keeps you from reading further. You can't imagine the number of good books that are read clandestinely because of their bad titles. In bookstores, of the rare comments I hear about a book, 90 percent are about the title" (Laferrière, *I am a Japanese Writer* 2).

that allows for a real encounter–within the literary territory–between reader and author might operate as a form of redemption.

Literary Outer Space

As a reader of Proust, Montaigne, Diderot but also Miller and Bukowski, Laferrière could be considered as part of what is nowadays called "World Literature:" in other words, he is a writer without borders. Literature represents for him another territory where identity is not exclusive of any other one, a communal homeland between real and imaginary:

> Je croyais fermement, à l'époque, que les écrivains formaient une race bannie qui passaient leur temps à errer à travers le monde en racontant des histoires dans toutes les langues (…) Pour moi, Mishima était mon voisin. Je rapatriais, sans y prendre cadre, tous les écrivains que je lisais à l'époque. (Laferrière, *Je suis un écrivain japonais* 29)[59]

Through a double movement, Laferrière reterritorializes his fellow writers, repatriates them in the space that belongs to them, where they can meet and discuss, dwell and create. Literature appears as an alternative territory, a parallel universe - not exactly a refuge, but a third, neutral space where the encounter between writers is possible:

> Et je le [Yukio Mishima] lisais pour quitter cette prison du réel. Mais je ne me réfugiais pas pourtant chez Mishima–la littérature n'a jamais été

[59] "I firmly believed that writers formed a banished race who spent its time wandering around the world telling stories in all the languages (…) To me, Mishima was my neighbor. I casually repatriated all the writers I read at the time."

> un refuge pour moi. Mishima, je suppose, n'écrivait pas non plus pour rester chez lui. On se rencontrait ailleurs, dans un endroit qui n'était ni tout à fait chez l'un, ni tout à fait chez l'autre. Dans cet espace qui est celui de l'imaginaire et du désir. (Laferrière, *Je suis un écrivain japonais* 28)[60]

Dany Laferrière calls the literary site "the space of imaginary and desire," and I argue that entering this space, as a reader, is accepting that the dimensions of time and space bend, that the real and the imaginary collapse, and that origin is an invention. It is accepting one's own disidentification, one's becoming reader, to try to reach out to a becoming writer. In this parallel universe everything seems ordinary - therefore real - until something happens such as the apparition and subsequent metamorphosis of Bjork, the Icelandic singer, into a Voodoo doll. The usual laws of physics though, present, know some variations: in there, one can be mobile and, at the same time, immobile, present and absent, dead and alive, here and there. In other words, time-travel is possible because it is experienced as duration (Bergson).

> Je connaissais un type qui pouvait faire descendre la lune dans une soucoupe blanche. C'est lui qui m'a appris à voyager dans le temps. C'est plus technique que magique. Je suis à la fois la fusée et le

[60] "And I read [Mishima] to quit the prison of the real. But I did not seek refuge in Mishima–literature was never a refuge for me. Neither did Mishima, I imagine, write to stay in his own house. We encountered each other elsewhere, in a space that wasn't either of our houses, a space that belonged to imagination and desire" (Laferrière, *I am a Japanese Writer* 13).

> voyageur. Un voyage non pas dans l'espace, mais dans le temps. Le temps est plus vaste que l'espace.
>
> (Laferrière, *Je suis un écrivain japonais* 190)[61]

Occupying the literary space is traveling through time: going through an experience close to "depersonalization" which, in psychiatry, refers to a self-awareness dysfunction where one becomes the spectator of his/her own actions and movements. This temporary depersonalization is described in the quotation above as becoming a hybrid being of space-rocket and traveler, in other words a body without organs. Occupying the literary space also means a desubjectivation of the "I." Caught between reality and fiction, this enunciative instance, a character in the story, borrows some of its characteristics of Dany Laferrière, the writer, born in Haiti, living in Montreal, author of fourteen books - if this is enough to identify the real Dany Laferrière. But the "I" also portrays itself as the ruling instance of the narrative progression who decides arbitrarily and suddenly to obey the "rules of the genre," (what rules, what genre?) by murdering one of his characters (and calling it a suicide). But later the "reality" of the event itself is contested, with the help of the historian Paul Veyne, serving here as an intellectual authority:

> D'un autre côté, j'ai des sérieux doutes que cette histoire s'est passée dans la réalité. Paul Veyne nous rappelle que : « les vérités étaient

[61] I knew a guy who could make the moon drop into a white saucer. He taught me how to travel across time. It's more technique than magic. I am both the vessel and the traveler. I travel, not in space, but time. Time is vaster than space. (Laferrière, *I am a Japanese Writer* 130).

> elles-mêmes des imaginations ». Pour lui ce qui est imaginaire peut devenir réalité. Ça peut arriver aussi que je sois saoul et j'aie amené une femme ici, et qu'elle se soit jetée par la fenêtre. Je me suis endormi après. Et le lendemain, avec les bribes d'images qui me remontent à la tête, j'ai brodé toute une histoire. [...] Ne suis-je pas en train de me monter une autre histoire à cause de la police ? M'a-t-elle accompagné ici ? Je ne sais pas. Ah, il y a une histoire. Le lendemain de mon malaise, j'ai piqué devant l'immeuble le journal du concierge, et c'est là que j'ai vu le corps d'une jeune fille sur le trottoir - sous ma fenêtre. En première page. [...] J'ai peut-être conclu trop précipitamment qu'elle était tombée de ma fenêtre. Parce qu'elle était étalée sous ma fenêtre. [...] D'abord, je ne suis pas dans la fiction. Ensuite, de quelle mort parle-t-on? (Laferrière, *Je suis un écrivain japonais* 145)[62]

These constant slippages between fiction's registers provoke an incertitude concerning the status of reality itself. It seems that Laferrière pushes the logic of the simulacrum to its limit, repeating in every possible way, “ceci est un roman,” but without obtaining any effect.

Laferrière's writing seems to push Baudrillard’s logic of the simulacrum to its limit: it stages a writer, its double, who is trying to write a book whose title is the same as Laferrière's book. The narrative follows, as close as possible, the everyday life of its main protagonist. The incipit, for instance, presents the narrator - who wants to buy

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salmon - who is engaged in a discussion with the fishmonger informing him of his intention of writing a new book. Later, he actually cooks and eats the piece of salmon (sharing with the reader the way he had prepared it).

The narrative in itself is mostly uneventful–except when the narrator concedes to "sacrifier aux lois du genre" (obey the rules of genre) by staging the death of one of the Japanese girls. It is legitimate to say that Laferrière conscientiously constructs what Roland Barthes called an "effet de réel" (effect of reality), where the term "effect" catches the ambiguity of realistic writing: it is more than drawing of an illusion, for it produces a real effect. His writing technique is close to Magritte's famous painting *Ceci n'est pas une pipe,* where reality and its representation collapse. Looking at this painting raises several questions for the spectator, such as "am I in the painting or in the real?", "to what extent am I looking at a representation of reality?" "what is the status of the object represented?". For the painter as for the novelist, what is at stake is to create a reality effect and to deconstruct it in the same movement, so that the status of representation itself is put into question, as well as the limits between reality and representation. According to Baudrillard, the growing presence of simulacra in our postmodern society threatens to make the real disappear. In "Simulacra and simulation" he distinguishes four successive phases of the image:

a) It is the reflection of a basic reality.

b) It masks and perverts a basic reality.

c) It masks the absence of a basic reality.

d) It bears no relation to any reality whatever: it is its own pure simulacrum.

Baudrillard warned his contemporaries readers against the risk of annihilating the real–a risk that has been initiated, according to him, by the growing presence of simulacra. He distinguishes different orders of the image, corresponding to his understanding of the meaning's difference between faking (feindre), dissimulating (dissimuler) and simulating (simuler): “feigning or dissimulating leaves the reality principle intact: the difference is always clear, it is only masked; whereas simulation threatens the difference between “true” and “false”, between “real” and “imaginary” (Baudrillard).

To illustrate his conception of the simulacrum, Baudrillard refers in his article to Borges' short story, *On exactitude of Science*:

> . . . In that Empire, the Art of Cartography attained such Perfection that the map of a single Province occupied the entirety of a City, and the map of the Empire, the entirety of a Province. In time, those Unconscionable Maps no longer satisfied, and the Cartographers Guilds struck a Map of the Empire whose size was that of the Empire, and which coincided point for point with it. The following Generations, who were not so fond of the Study of Cartography as their Forebears had been, saw that that vast Map was Useless, and not without some Pitilessness was it, that they delivered it up to the Inclemencies of Sun and Winters. In the Deserts of the West, still today, there are Tattered Ruins of that Map, inhabited by Animals and Beggars; in all the Land there is no other Relic of the Disciplines of Geography. (Borges)

What Baudrillard fails to see in his analysis of Borges' short story is the Empire's will to map the world in order to symbolically possess it, which is exactly what was at stake in the colonization process. He also expresses nostalgia for a time when the territory existed prior to the map, which is in my view a reductive understanding of the concept of territory. Baudrillard dismisses the potential in the simulacrum to reveal the power relations that define the order of reality. Reality is at least partly constructed, and interpreted through cognitive processes, diffused by language and narratives. Being nostalgic for a previous time when the real was real means forgetting that there is no such thing as a political neutral register of reality. Territories are real, but they are man-made, fruits of the imperial will to trace limits. Rousseau once made the same analysis when imagining Civil Society's birth: "Le premier, qui ayant enclos un terrain, s'avisa de dire: ceci est a moi et trouva des gens assez simples pour le croire, fut le vrai fondateur de la société civile." Tracing borders, uttering an efficient speech act, constitute for Rousseau the institution of property, the establishment of nation-states and the necessity of the social contract. As he justly points out, performativity is obtained through utterance as well as through listening.

In *Je suis un écrivain japonais*, the narrator is constantly moving, wandering, fleeing: trying to escape identifying forces embodied in almost every character he encounters: first the Japanese embassy's attaches, then the journalists and even the police. A journalist eventually reaches the narrator and tells him that she wants him to appear on television. She blatantly explains the goal of the interview: "On veut surtout vous voir... On sera les premiers à mettre un visage sur cet inconnu qui déchaîne les passions au Japon, et je pèse mes mots." (Laferrière, *Je suis un écrivain japonais* 173)

“To put a face” on this stranger is an attempt to reterritorialize his identity, a will to colonize the character. “We will be the first,” claimed the journalist as if exposing a face was similar to the discovery of an unexplored territory. Deleuze describes how facialization processes can reterritorialize floating signifiers: “The face is the Icon proper to the signifying regime, the reterritorialization internal to the system. The signifier reterritorializes on the face”. In this sense, putting a face on someone is equivalent to putting a mask on someone, a violent identification act. As opposed to the naked face before (or beyond) its grasping by the other's gaze, the mask is readable: it is the subject's identity made visible to the other in the symbolic regime of signification.

The Japanese girls operate in opposition to the territorializing forces of the narrator's identity pursuers. They are perceived as a group, as a collective identity rather than as a set of different individuals. They escape the narrator's gaze who cannot differentiate them, because of the rotative motion they create in their surrounding environment. It is impossible to *pin* them (“épingler”), as the collector would do with rare specimen of butterflies before classifying them according to strict categories. Laferrière refuses to exercise this kind of violence on his characters and renounces to singularize them. His gaze claims to be impersonal, as objective as the camera's eye, the only object that knows how to watch (“le seul objet qui sait regarder”). Desubjectivation is the only way to see, to renounce the perspective of the unified, organized and motor competent subject. Deleuze in *Cinema* II points out the role of the child in neorealist cinema as precisely allowing for such a perspective, to reveal the world anew, outside the laws of “sensory-motor schemata which are

automatic and pre- established. “According to him, from this viewpoint, “everyday life reveal[s] itself in a visual and sound nakedness, crudeness and brutality which make it unbearable, giving it the pace of a dream or a nightmare”(Deleuze, *Cinema 2* 3). Laferrière's writing is cinematic as well as cinematographic in trying to seize the movement without fixing it, imitating the art of the new wave filmmakers and creating a soft focus effect:

> Je passe un bon moment à chercher chez chacune d'elles un signe particulier. Elles n'arrêtent pas de tourner, m'empêchant ainsi de les épingler. C'est d'abord un groupe. On ne peut vraiment étudier un membre que quand il se détache un peu. Je les filme dans ma tête. Caméra légère à l'épaule. Un petit film en noir et blanc. Distant, discret, je filme de mon coin. Sans montage. N'hésitant pas à suppléer par mon imagination aux conversations que je suis trop loin pour entendre, ou aux émotions cachées. (Laferrière, *Je suis un écrivain japonais* 58)

Later, the narrator gives another version of his refusal to identify the group of Japanese girls. In the following quotation, the “I” is no longer a character in the story but the narrative instance of the author - the “I” that conducts the narrative and makes the decisions:

> C’est vrai que j’aurais pu singulariser chacune des filles par un détail particulier. Une couleur, un signe, je ne sais pas. Mais je filme comme je regarde un film, et je m’ennuie si on s’attarde trop à la description. Je préfère quand on fait vite, un peu brouillon, et qu’il me reste à la fin

> une saveur. Et m'étendre un peu sur certaines scènes plaisantes, ce qui pourrait oxygéner le petit film. Et comme toutes les Japonaises se ressemblent pour un Occidental, je me suis dit qu'on n'y verra que du feu. Ne pas trop se forcer. (Laferrière, *Je suis un écrivain japonais* 71)

Here, the refusal of singularization becomes a matter of taste, an aesthetic choice, a preference for the unfinished rough draft, the flawed copy, rather than for the exactness of a detailed realist description. Here is his first attempt at a portray of Midori:

> Vous ne connaissez pas Midori ? Des affiches d'elle dans les toilettes des bars. Difficile de savoir vraiment à quoi elle ressemble, car son visage sous l'eau devient légèrement déformé. Elle retient son souffle. Le photographe attendant la dernière seconde. Juste au moment où elle va exploser. Les yeux agrandis par un début de terreur. Les ailes roses du nez deviennent diaphanes. La gorge gonflée. Clic. Et le torse jaillit hors de l'eau. L'eau qui lui sort par la bouche, le nez, les yeux. (Laferrière, *Je suis un écrivain japonais* 36–37)

Rather than describing her face, her features or even the posters one can find in bar's bathrooms, Laferrière tries to seize an image of her, in motion, before the picture is taken. Similar to the time-frame of the novel, delimited by the author's procrastination, the instant Laferrière chooses is one of expectation, before the picture is taken, before the camera lens freezes the girl's image in eternal immobility. The resulting movement-image can be seen as a postmodern visual re-interpretation of Venus rising

from the sea: a juxtaposition of fragmented body parts (the eyes, the wings of the nose, the chest, the torso), a surfacing seized in motion, a portrayal where time is expressed in the fluidity of the water running out of Midori's mouth, nose and eyes: a retrieval of the myth before its meaning becomes frozen by successive repetitions. This form of facialization is in radical opposition to the desire of the journalist to "put a face" on the unknown writer. It is an absolute deterritorialization not only because it presents the face's features as partial objects but also because it expresses affective intensities crossing the surface of the face, alternatively forming and deforming it. Midori's appearance and identity remain unreachable because Laferrière is not interested in identities but in the affect dynamics at work in the Japanese girls' group.

Dany Laferrière's writing is tracing lines of flight escaping every encoding, written lines impossible to capture and reterritorialize. According to Deleuze and Guattari, a line of flight can be equated to the creative potential escaping the system in the constitutive way in which it emerges. Making the system leak means to pierce it and to prevent it to close, to withdraw into itself. Disidentification is a similar process: it seeks to open identity, to create holes in the smooth surface of it, to authorize oneself to auto-identify and to fight exclusions initiated by the majoritarian discourse.

Writing Desire

Laferrière's playfulness with identities and territories, his constant irony and ambivalence tend to expel the reader out of his/her comfort zone. One could be tempted to dismiss Laferrière's entire project as a hoax, as a complicit gesture with consumption society, or as provocation for the sake of provocation. Despite such

appearances, I argue that there is an earnest concern with Japan in Laferrière's novel. Let us go back to Laferrière's primary question, “interrogation fondamentale:”

> C’est quoi un écrivain japonais ? Est-ce quelqu’un qui vit et écrit au Japon ? Ou quelqu’un né au Japon qui écrit malgré tout (il y a des peuples qui sont heureux sans connaître l’écriture) ? Ou quelqu’un qui n’est pas né au Japon, ni ne connaît la langue mais qui décide de but en blanc de devenir un écrivain japonais. C’est mon cas. Je dois me le rentrer dans la tête : je suis un écrivain japonais. Du moment que je ne sois pas cet écrivain nu qui pénètre dans la forêt des phrases avec un simple couteau de cuisine. (Laferrière, *Je suis un écrivain japonais* 21–22)

The question induces a displacement of the debate around the identity of the francophone writer. In Laferrière's reformulation of the problem, being a Japanese writer means first of all to be an earnest writer, that is someone who does not use a kitchen knife to enter the density of sentences' forest, someone whose concern is with language, syntax and words, i.e. style. Style (defined by the TLF as an “Instrument métallique pointu servant à dessiner, inscrire, inciser quelque chose”) is the writer's means to cut through ordinary language, to operate a conversion from reality to desire.

Proust is possibly a model of this alchemic transformation that imagination operates and that writing transcribes. Turning our attention to Proust and his chapter “Noms de pays: le nom” in *Du côté de chez Swann*, might help us resolve the contradiction between the total facticity of Japan in the novel and its true importance for the author. The narrator of *In search of Lost Time* explains how his imagination is

able to recreate an atmosphere, a climate, lights, sounds and colors just by uttering city or country names, objects of his desire:

> Je n'eus besoin pour les faire renaître que de prononcer ces noms : Balbec, Venise, Florence, dans l'intérieur desquels avait fini par s'accumuler le désir que m'avait inspiré les lieux qu'ils désignaient ; même au printemps, trouver dans un livre le nom de Balbec suffisait à réveiller en moi le désir des tempêtes et du gothique normand ; même par un jour de tempête le nom de Florence ou de Venise me donnait le désir du soleil, des lys, du palais des doges et de Sainte-Marie-des-Fleurs. (Proust 312)

Proust is not concerned with subverting the clichés associated with these names. Nor is he to reveal an authenticity essentially attached to these places. On the contrary, by letting his imagination be penetrated by these clichés, he frees the energy of desire contained in emblematic places such as Venice and Firenze in the incantatory power of their names.

Japan acts in a similar way on Laferrière's imagination. Rather than delimiting the novel's geographical frame or constituting its main topic, Japan provides the narrative with a specific and subtle coloration, variable and changing in whim with the narrator's imaginary. The name "Japan" itself evokes a world of clichés and commonplaces, which are in turn welcomed or dismissed. The resonance of the name is also carrying a literary world–Bashô and Mishima are haunting the narrative–while giving the narrator access to an underground Quebec culture of night bars and punk singers. Bashô seems to invite the narrator to wander in Montreal without any real

purpose while focusing his attention on banal encounters, deserving to be addressed with a thoughtful economy of words. The choice of Japan in this sense may not be as random as it first appears. Becoming a Japanese writer is for Laferrière a way to pay tribute to writers he admires and from whom he learned to look at the world with a specific sensitivity between fiction and reality, words and images. The encounter between writers from different cultures takes place in a space that Laferrière identifies as the space of imaginary and desire:

> Et je le [Yukio Mishima] lisais pour quitter cette prison du réel. Mais je ne me réfugiais pas pourtant chez Mishima–la littérature n'a jamais été un refuge pour moi. Mishima, je suppose, n'écrivait pas non plus pour rester chez lui. On se rencontrait ailleurs, dans un endroit qui n'était ni tout à fait chez l'un, ni tout à fait chez l'autre. Dans cet espace qui est celui de l'imaginaire et du désir. (Laferrière, *Je suis un écrivain japonais* 28)

Reading Mishima is following a line of flight but it is also, Laferrière emphasizes, reaching a space without refuge.

I am a Japanese Writer along with most Laferrière's novels is eventually an exploration of desire dynamics: desire of the other, desire for the other, desire through the other. In *How to make love to a Negro* he had addressed the dynamics of interracial sexual desire always biased by the hierarchic symbolic social order: The white man is superior to the black man but men are superior to women. In this pre-established social hierarchy, what happens when a white woman desires a Black man? In *Vers le Sud*, he explored the power relationships between white occidental women

and Haitian escort boys in the context of sexual tourism. In other novels, such as *La chair du Maître* or the one we are here concerned with, he questions his own drives–or at least his protagonist's drives–and their consequences. The narrator accedes the imaginary Japanese territory through Midori, a fascinating character and presumably the first Japanese Star of Montreal. She performs in an underground trendy place, the "café Sarajevo," where she meets with her group of Japanese female friends. To the narrator, it does not matter in the least to find out if Midori is an authentic Japanese. He is more concerned with the affects dynamics she provokes around her each time she appears in a public place.

> Midori regarde par-dessus mon épaule. Je me retourne pour voir Eiko en train de se maquiller devant le miroir. Le long dos d'Eiko fait penser à un frais motif de bambou. Toute l'énergie de Midori se retouve aspirée par la nuque d'Eiko. Midori tente vainement de résister. J'ai surpris, dans le miroir, l'œil de Noriko qui observe Midori en train de l'observer. On pouvait tout lire sur le visage de Midori submergée par la dernière vague d'émotion. Midori, pourtant passée maître dans l'art de débusquer les secrets des autres, se retrouve démasquée.Visage nu. (Laferrière, *Je suis un écrivain japonais* 67)

The first time the narrator caught sight of Midori, she is executing an erotic performance, where one can recognize René Girard's postulate of mimetic desire at play. "L'homme désire toujours selon le désir de l'autre" (Girard 210). The performance stages two women seducing each other while a man observes their game with growing desire and jealousy. Far from being a mere object of desire though,

Midori exercises her power by controlling the affects she is provoking on the other. Desire in this configuration is not internal to a subject and directed toward an object. It is not a lack constitutive of a subject but a surplus emanating from and constituting the "subject" of desire as object of his/her own "object." The psychoanalytic logic is subverted by this specific subject-object relationship. Desire acts as a magnetic force and the gaze is no longer a mean of objectivation as in Fanon, it originates from the object.

It is as if she was able to transform the configuration of space-time so as to become everyone's center of attention as she subjects one to her magnetic fascination power. Midori is compared by the narrator to a sharp-edged object: "Midori est un objet plat aux contours si aiguisé qu'elle peut trancher un cou sans que la tête tombe avant quelques secondes (Laferrière, *Je suis un écrivain japonais* 37). The image of a "flat object" with "sharp contours" is striking. It summons the image of a sharp samurai saber–another cliché revisited here by Laferrière which also convokes the Freudian concept of desire conceived as death drive in relation to the threat of castration.

Before Midori's apparition, the narrator had already used the same image, this time applied to the word *Asie*:

> Je suivrai n'importe quelle fille qui se prénomme Asie–on dirait de la soie. Asie me fait penser aussi à une arme blanche. Un cou tranché si vite. Un collier de gouttelettes de sang. Une rapidité dans la mort qui rassure. Je pense à ce continent comme un explorateur du XIX^{ème}

> siècle. Je m'en fais une idée à partir de ma chambre. (Laferrière, *Je suis un écrivain japonais* 23)

In this quote the link between the proper name, the imagined territory and desire–conceived as death drive–is made explicit. As a nineteenth century explorer, the narrator orientalizes the other, without actually quitting his room. Rather than an anthropological account of the relationships the Japanese girls have with one another, the episodes around Midori are actually transposed from a previous novel, titled *Le goût des jeunes filles,* in which Laferrière describes in a similar way the relationships of desire and domination that take place in a Haitian girls' band. In *Je suis un écrivain japonais*, the Japanese girls are Japanese just because the narrator assures us they are. The link between eroticism and exoticism is another lure: Laferrière stages the same kind of seduction/voyeurism when he depicts Haitian girls. Here, the Other, the real other, is not the exotic other but the feminine one–here seen in its Proustian essence, "le goût des jeunes filles." Moreover, and this is not a contradiction, Laferrière ultimately uses the lure of the Japanese girls to send the reader back to his/her own desire. In Midori's group, each protagonist desires the desire of the other in a circular motion so that each one is doomed to dissatisfaction. In a similar way, the reader, placed in the voyeur position by the lure of the "Japanese" writer is sent back to his own desire of exoticism; a double exoticism: of Japan on one hand and of the image of the Haitian writer. By staging and subverting desire's logic, the narrator as well as the author himself keeps open the flux of deterritorialization. Desire is here the proper name of (dis)identification, always a line of fiction, always a drive that changes direction according to the context. And yet this desire is never out of place, rooted in

names and in traces: “I have a few girls’ names, a title, a city I know only too well, and another that I don’t know at all. I don’t need anything else to write a novel” (Laferrière, *I Am a Japanese Writer* 171). *Je suis un écrivain japonais* reveals how identities are framed by the desire of the other and how desire always exceeds identification processes. Eventually, the desire of the other is always imaginary: desire of fiction, desire of places, desire of identities.

Desire instead of identification, a New Relation to the Other

> “Far from presupposing a subject, desire cannot be attained except at the point where someone is deprived of the power to saying ‘I’. Far from directing itself toward an object, desire can only be reached at the point where someone no longer searches for or grasps an object any more than he grasps himself as subject.” (Deleuze and Parnet 89)

Identification as I have shown operates on the imaginary level. Adopting strategies of relative disidentification enabled the Negritude poets among others to resist from within the imaginary. To an imposed external identification, reproducing the geopolitical borders designed by western imperialism, the Negritude poets substituted a chosen one, territorialized on a re-imagined fantasmatic Africa. Through the recuperation of the signifier “Nègre,” they attempted to reconfigure the black man's subjectivity and autonomy, previously denied by the racist structure of colonialism. By acting purely on the level of the imaginary however they were not threatening the ideological apparatus of the West in which the universal subject plays

a crucial role. Their combat took place at a time when it was possible to imagine that a postcolonial order would replace the colonial one and that decolonized nations would secure the autonomy of decolonized subjects able to defend their rights on an equal footing with the former colonizers. On the other hand, Dany Laferrière and Abdelkébir Khatibi, by their pursuing of radical disidentification, access desubjectivation in which the universal claims of the West are disrupted.

Beyond the critical force of disidentification, a question remains: can we imagine a relationship to the other outside of identification? For Laferrière and Khatibi, desire or "aimance" appears to be the possible names of alternative relationships. Not desire as it is conceived in psychoanalytical terms as fundamental lack. But desire understood as production of the real, as a line of flight escaping every encoding and as a writing line impossible to capture and reterritorialize. Desire, or "aimance" as Khatibi calls it is where real and imaginary, reality and writing blur their borders. It is also the site where encounters are possible beyond the "terror of identification" (Maurice Blanchot).

CHAPTER 3

A THROW IN CIRCUMSTANCE:

ZONG!, THE (POST)COLONIAL EVENT AND THE POETIC REAL.

> The imperative was for me to move beyond representation.
>
> –M. NourbeSe Philip

In "Notanda," the last section of her long book poem *Zong!*, M. NourbeSe Philip reflects on the specificity of death at sea–a destiny shared by an unknown number of slaves. She asks:

> What is the word for bringing bodies back from water? From a "liquid grave?" Months later I do an internet search for a word or phrase for bringing someone back from underwater that has a precise meaning as the unearthing contained within the words exhume. I find words like resurrect and subaquatic but not "exaqua." Does this mean that unlike being interred, once you're underwater, there is no retrieval–that you can never be "exhumed" from water? The gravestone or tombstone marks the spot of interment, whether of ashes or the body. What marks the spot of subaquatic death? (Philip 201)

What is it that Philip wants to express with this word "exaqua" that does not exist in any language? What is Philip trying to accomplish? Does she want to exhume bodies from water? Extract memories from a silent archive? Retrieve bones from their

disintegration in the salt water of the Atlantic? Or is she reaching toward unheard cries, denied feelings, erased stories and/or uninscribed names? "Exaqua" might be the absent signifier of a vain attempt to recover the eventness of what happened aboard the slave ship Zong: an event that has been erased and dematerialized in the very process of its inscription. In her poem *Zong!,* Philip takes up this challenge hoping that she will bear witness to the "resurfacing of the drowned and the oppressed" (Philip 203).

Her project starts with the infamous story of the *Zong* massacre. In September 1781, the captain of the slave ship *Zong* made the decision to throw one hundred and fifty slaves overboard in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. He stated that he had no other choice for after the ship had been delayed there was not enough water left to sustain the crew and the rest of the slaves. However, he was thinking of profit: for only if the slaves' deaths were not from "natural causes," could the ship's owners file an insurance claim for the value of the lost "cargo." There is only one archival document that affords direct public access to the historical episode: the *Gregson & Gilbert* case provides a summarized account of the appellate trial. "What did, in fact, happen on the *Zong?* Can we, some two hundred years later, ever really know?" (Philip 196) asks M. NourbeSe Philip in the postface of *Zong!* Can we, or should we, know what happened onboard the *Zong*? What would it mean to know what happened on the *Zong*? What type of knowledge would that entail? Would a historical account of the facts provide access to the truth of the event? For Philip, it is important to leave this question open: she mistrusts the archive, the origin of any historical "truth," as much as she distrusts her very own language, a language that she inherited from the

colonizer. Can we ever "really" know? Philip situates her poem in this gap between knowing and not knowing in order to tell a story that cannot be told. This gap is also a wound, a silenced trauma that Philip's writing seeks to occupy. *Zong!* is not/cannot be a representation of a historical event; as untold by Philipp, it is rather a story about the erasure of the (post)colonial[63] event, a poem about the violence of language, and a deconstruction of the symbolic order defined by its "logic, rationality and predictability" (Philip 198), a symbolic order that allowed and then denied the murder of 150 human beings.

Philip refuses the linear order of the narrative as well as the correctness of English syntax: using the *Gregson&Gilbert* as a word store, she "murder[s] the text, cut[s] it into pieces," "white[s] out and black[s] out words" (Philip 193). She spreads the disarticulated words over the blank page, dismembers the sentences and smashes the language of logic and reason, the symbolic language of the law. This violence exerted on the text produces "a language of grunt and groan, of moan and stutter" (Philip 205), a dislocated syntax, an inarticulate complaint, through which the victims' affects resurface, through which their humanity is simultaneously denied and restored. Moving beyond representation and occupying the real is the only way for Philip to recover the eventness of the event. No symbolic language could express this kind of truth for, according to Philip, it is precisely the exclusion of subjects, affects, and humanity that allowed for the emergence of a symbolic language. This symbolic language substitutes legality for justice and logic for lives. "Signifiers" do not refer to

[63] I deliberately use a marginal spelling of the word for reasons that will become clear later in my argument around the temporality of the (post)colonial event.

any "signified" in the sense that the capitalist logic is ruled by the logic of the number, the circulation of currency, the reign of money, revered as the fetish of modernity. Because language possesses us more than we possess it, Philip leads the fight inside the language she works with which "is already preselected and limited by fashion, by cultural norms–by systems that shape us such as gender and race–by what's acceptable" (Philip 198). Perhaps what is worse is that language contains the symbolic structure itself: it is strictly delimited by "order, logic and rationality" (Philip 198).

What Marks the Spot of a Subaquatic Death?

Because there are no tombstones, no physical markers for the Africans dead at sea during the transatlantic passage, because there are no direct witnesses and because their stories have long been forgotten, Philip relies entirely on *Gregson&Gilbert*:

> The case is the tombstone, the one public marker of the murder of those Africans on board of the *Zong*, locating it in a specific space and time. It is a public monument marking their murder and their existence, their small histories that ended so tragically (Philip 194).

To tell (untell) the story that cannot–must–be told, she designed an experimental protocol with the intention of limiting her auctorial agency. The story, as she explained, would have to write itself. Philip "lock[ed] herself in the document" (Philip 191), in the impersonal rhetoric of eighteenth-century legal wording, promising herself to use only words extracted from the two pages of the *Gregson&Gilbert*. She vowed to occupy the silences of the document and to find in them the erased stories of the

Africans onboard: “I would lock myself in this text in the same way men, women and children were locked in the holds of the slave ship *Zong*” (Philip 191). However, after writing “Os,” the first section of *Zong!*, she felt the need to betray her own promise: the text, she realized, was too short, too “modest” and lacked information. Besides, she became aware that new words were calling out for existence, words from other languages, from Yoruba, Latin, and French. She found these absent words in breaking and assembling words’ syllables. After “Os,” she writes six other sections, respectively titled “Sal,” “Ventus,” “Ratio,” “Ferrum” and “Ebora.” These sections will constitute “the flesh” of the poem while “Os”[64] becomes the backbone of the work. And so goes the poetic journey: from “Os,” to “Ebora,” from a homage paid to the bones to a dialogue with the Yoruba “underwater spirits,” delivering the poetic expression from the empires’ languages and returning it to the one of the ancestors.

Though she played with the possibility of choosing words aleatory, she decided against it: the outcome is a composition where every poem fits a particular place in the poetic journey that *Zong!* constitutes. In what follows I want to explore the dynamic at work in *Zong!*, a dynamic that I read in a double movement: With “Os,” the backbone of the whole poem, *Zong!* starts as a destructive force: the colonizer’s language is disarticulated, and its logic annihilated. The words are cut, opened, scattered; the syntax is torn out, and only fragments remain. I interpret this first section as the necessary sacrifice of the symbolic.

[64] “Os” is the Latin term for bone.

In contrast, the second movement is productive. If Philip could gather the bones with the constraint she first imposed on herself by using only the case's words, she now is after the flesh of her (non)story. The words had to be broken open, cut in pieces for new words, and new languages to emerge: words that might have been uttered onboard in languages that were probably spoken or read by the cursed passengers (Arabic, Hebrew, Latin, Portuguese, Yoruba, Fon). Through these words, one can hear an echo of the Babelian enterprise that was the colonial trade: people from different origins, value systems, beliefs and modes of living brought and bound together, displaced and put to work, in the name of capital accumulation. One can only imagine the cacophony created by people trying to communicate or to express their complaints on board of the *Zong*, while all were coming from different places, socio-cultural backgrounds and speaking different languages. The people on board, crew, and slaves were brought together on and below deck while, at a distance, owners and speculators were calculating in advance the profit to be made out of their risky adventure. With the introduction of new words, proper names, new languages, the original poetic logic is disrupted. While Philip's *"*Os*"* was dealing with scarcity, lack, and silences, she now must withstand overflow, excess and cacophony.

Similarly, the reader now feels suffocated by the excess of words occupying more and more space on the blank page. However, through a patient, attentive reading that re-orders words, groups them into clusters of meaning, it is possible to recover fragments of narrative threads. To do that, though, one has to accept being caught in the haunting quality of repetition that reflects the circularity of the time frame. The tone turns toward the lyrical, and at Philip's own amazement, the voice that emerges

and progressively becomes dominant is the voice of a white man, a member of the crew, one of the sailors who took part in the jettisoning.

The poem inhabits a tension between two necessities: the necessity of not making sense so that the episode remains a pure scandal in history, and the irreducible impulse to find or create bits of meaning. "It is. Not was." The political project of *Zong!*, is subsumed in these four words: against a systematic erasure of selected past events and against a contemporary politics of memory that silences certain voices, Philip aims to restore the *eventness* of the *Zong* massacre–an eventness that has been denied, erased and repressed by its very inscription in the archive and history. Philip inhabits the temporal tension of the (post)colonial event so that an event that never *symbolically occurred* can be experienced in the (post)colonial present that it haunts. For Philip, if there is knowledge to be gained from this event, it is not a factual, historical, or even symbolic knowledge. What is to be gained through this poetic experimentation is access to the real, to an alternative, affective kind of knowledge.

In this chapter, I propose an investigation of the nature of the (post)colonial event and the possibility of its expression beyond representation. Because of the uncanny similarities between Mallarmé's famous poem *Un coup de dés n'abolira jamais le hasard* (*A Throw of the Dice will Never Abolish Chance*) and *Zong!*–and because Badiou has developed his concept of the Event[65] from the same poem–I propose a parallel and contextualized reading of the two poems in order to tackle the specificity of *Zong!* and the (post)colonial event. I argue that the (post)colonial event,

[65] In referring to Badiou's concept, I capitalize the word "Event" to clearly distinguish it from my use of the term.

of which the *Zong* incident can be thought of as a model, is in fact *structurally* a trauma event. Through a double movement of deconstruction/creation that lays bare the bones of the symbolic while restoring the affective dimension of the event, Philip's poem opens up the possibility of "an ethical relationship to the real" (Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* 42)

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Mallarmé, Badiou and the Event of Modernity

To my knowledge, Philip never explicitly refers to the work of Stéphane Mallarmé. Yet, the first time I opened *Zong!* the graphical similitudes between the two struck me. Instead of being orderly aligned, the words, scattered on the page, seem to draw figures and constellations. As a result, "the blanks . . . assume importance and are what is immediately most striking" (Mallarmé, *Collected Poems* 121); the white page becomes the material frame of a painting composed of word blocks in different fonts. The reader's eye wanders throughout the page trying to assemble fragments into clusters of meaning. No period, comma, nor any punctuation mark delineate meaningful unities of speech. The reader's gaze is free-floating at the surface of the page until it grabs a words' sequence and holds onto it as if it was a lifebuoy. From there, for those who were intrigued rather than discouraged by the disorienting layout, the work of patient decipherment starts. Never at any point, should the reader believe she might accomplish the true meaning of the poem, for the undecidability of meaning is the keystone of the whole structure.

It is not only the formal similitude that convinced me to propose a parallel reading: *Un coup de dés* deals with a peculiar situation. The setting is a seascape, in

the style of Turner's shipwrecks paintings:[66] a ship is on the verge of being swallowed in a coming tempest, its mast dangerously swaying back and forth. The master–the captain of the ship–has to make one last decision: to throw or not to throw the dice. Would throwing the dice under these specific circumstances finally abolish chance? Or would it rather be a vain and pathetic attempt to deny the circumstances of the catastrophe in the hope of accomplishing necessity? It is easy to see that the setting is eerily similar: the dramatic tension residing in both poems around the decision of a sea captain. What is even more surprising is that the themes developed in both cases poetically elaborate a philosophical and even quasi-metaphysical reflection on language.

Notwithstanding the formal and thematic resemblances, I could only assume that a fundamental discrepancy remained between the two poems. Philip's poem deals with a "real" historical event, in a situated time and place, whereas Mallarmé's voluntarily places his fictional event in the frozen time of eternal circumstances, in the "horlieu"[67] (outplace) of the poem. I argue that this is one of the reasons why

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[66] A possible explication for this resemblance is the possibility that Mallarmé was actually thinking of Turners' seascapes while writing *Un coup de dés*. Though I could not find direct evidence of his knowledge of A Slave's Ship and even though to my knowledge, Mallarmé does not refer to Turner in his writing, several biographical facts could confirm the hypothesis that he might have seen some of his work. Mallarmé brought back two photographic reproduction of Turner's painting from his first stay in London as a student. Moreover, three of his best friends–Monet, Whistler, and Debussy–were fervent admirers of Turner's painting and familiar with his work at the time they were regularly visiting and corresponding with Mallarmé.

[67] "This term refers back to a complex elaboration in Theory of the Subject, in which Badiou opposes the horlieu, a portmanteau word derived from hors+lieu, to the esplace, or "splace," another neologism of his own invention based on espace + place, that is, the space of assigned places" (Bosteels in Badiou 122).

Mallarmé's poem and Philip's belong to two different paradigms: *Un coup de dés* stages an event representative modernity while *Zong!* addresses the possibility of giving expression to the (post)colonial event. With this fundamental opposition in mind, I intend to tackle the radical difference between the two poems, a difference at once ontological, aesthetic and ethical. A difference that will incidentally address this apparently grotesque question: why in Philip's poem are slaves thrown instead of dice?

Un coup de dés, published in 1897, was revolutionary in more ways than one. The verses are not aligned in strophes: they are fragmented, and words are scattered all over the white page. This causes the materiality of the poem–the typography, the disposition of the words, the size of the letters–to participate fully in the process of meaning production. It has been said that Mallarmé's ambition was to draw on paper the pattern of thought itself. Instead of unfolding in a linear temporality actualized by a linear reading from left to right, and top to bottom, *Un coup de dés* spatializes time: the time of its event is readable in the simultaneity of the page's space, as it would be in a painting. In a way, it is as if time had frozen, as if, time had been interrupted by space for the circumstances of the poetic event to achieve eternity.

Interestingly enough, Alain Badiou (one of the contemporary leaders in thinking the event), in the nineteenth meditation of *Being and Event,* draws his concept of "Event" from a close reading of *Un coup de dés.* According to him, "the event in question in *A Cast of Dice* is . . . the production of an absolute symbol of the event": Mallarmé's poem presents the reader with the "pure Notion" of the Event by representing an "event whose content is the eventness of the event" (Badiou, *Being*

and Event 193). From his interpretation of *Un coup de dés*, Badiou infers three essential and interdependent characteristics of the Event. First, the Event is always aleatory and unexpected; it happens by chance outside the realm of any deliberate action. Second, the Event is undecidable and therefore does not produce any meaning: it resists processes of symbolization. Only *a posteriori*, by the declaration and the constitution of the subject, will it become meaningful and inscribed in the reconfigured symbolic. Third, the Event is reflexive in the sense that it can be recognized, named "Event" only retroactively. The declaration is thus an interpretation of disappearing traces: "A poem by Mallarmé always fixes the places of an aleatory event; an event to be interpreted on the basis of the traces it leaves behind" (Badiou 191). Fourth, the Event happens outside of time and space: the "evental site*"* like the Mallarmean ship is on the verge of the void, at the heart of a "situation" that the event itself shatters and threatens to dissolve. Badiou calls this site "horlieu." The paradigmatic historical models of the Event are Jesus Christ's resurrection and the French Revolution. In the former, Paul is the subject who declared the truth of the event (the resurrection) and initiated a new "universality" under the name of Christianism. The French Revolution, which inaugurates the epoch of political modernity and the advent of the universal subject, designs under a unique name a multiplicity of historical "traces and facts" (Badiou, *Being and Event* 180). This designation is the name of the Event.

At first, Badiou's model of the event seems particularly suited to characterize what happened during the sinister days of November 1781; each expression that refers to what happens signals the unease of choosing a unique name encompassing "the

event." Lord Mansfield characterizes it as a "very uncommon case," Buller calls it a "crime" but certainly not "murder." Solicitor Lee cannot help but use the expression "melancholy event" (Baucom 130) which, in spite of himself, lets some repressed affective charge slip away. As for Philip, she simply refused to name "the event" and chose instead to evoke it by a circumlocution: "a story that must be told" / "a story that cannot be told" (Philip 190), a refrain through whose repetition and variation appears all over "Notanda." As Philip makes clear, while it might be impossible to know what really happened, it is only through the interpretation of vanishing traces that some access to the stories might be granted. All these elements point to what is for Badiou the very nature of the event: its undecidability. Ian Baucom, following him, interprets the *Zong* massacre as a truth event: in *Specters of the Atlantic*, he proposes to read the murder, the insurance claim and the later repercussions as a model event that shed light on the internal contradictions of a modern capitalist system in formation. He considers the case not only central to "the political and cultural archives" but also "to the history of modern capital, ethics and time consciousness." In other words, Baucom explicitly makes the decision to count the multiple facts as one, to name it a "truth event," (Baucom 121) or, using a Kantian expression, a "signum rememorativum, demonstrativum, prognostikon." For Baucom, the *Zong* event is representative of the history of Atlantic trade and finance capital in the sense that it is a symptom of a structural dysfunction of the pro-slavery socio-economical system of the eighteenth century. It can also be read as a sign pointing to the flaws of our own global economy of transnational capital.

Baucom raised–but immediately dismissed–an objection to the use of Badiou's model. As a matter of fact, Badiou's Event is always positive. It signals a victory, a positive sociological change, a successful revolution that opens out hopes toward a more democratic, more just and more equitable society; it marks ethical progress toward the better. Baucom overcomes the deadlock by conflating Badiou and Benjamin's notion of the Event. For the later, he argues, the truth event is not necessarily righteous. In fact, it might emerge from the sudden realization by the victims of history that a "series of catastrophes (had) led to their current predicament" (121). Moreover, reading the Badiouan event through the filter of Žižek's interpretation[68] allows him to associate the "spectral quality" of the Derridean event that characterizes its uncanny and reiterative temporality, with the Badiouan quality of the *truth event* which, according to Žižek "reveals . . . how injustices are not marginal functioning but pertain to the very structure of the system which is, in its essence, as such "corrupt"" (Baucom 121). Baucom argues that the *Zong* event can be interpreted as a "typical countersign" at odds with the usual "typical signs[69]" in which "modernity finds itself demonstrated, recollected, and anticipated" (Baucom 117).

As far as my argument is concerned, I depart here from Baucom. I believe that Badiou's concept of the event cannot be a catastrophic event because, for it to be called "Event," it has to manifest a necessarily positive change in the course of history, a change that is constitutive of a new subjectivity. This presupposition

[68] See Ian Baucom's discussion in *Specters of the Atlantic* (Baucom 119).

[69] The "typical signs" are those towards which the Western intellectual tradition keeps turning back: the French Revolution and the Enlightenment principles.

grounds Badiou's entire philosophic-political system and cannot be dismissed in a brief note.[70] That is why Badiou's predominant model of the event is the French Revolution, and it is also because of that reason that Badiou ignores the traumatic dimension perceptible in the Mallarmean event as well as the linguistic drama that takes place in *Un coup de dés*. Badiou remains faithful to the ideal of progress and modernity and so finds himself in the impossibility of conceptualizing a real epistemological break. To think the *Zong* event, one would need to break free from the modern colonial episteme. In Badiou's system of thought, there is only one universal subject: the hero of modernity, the revolutionary subject in the light of which the murdered slaves risk once again to be dismissed. The emergence of the modern subject goes hand in hand with the exclusion of its other, as the *Zong* case clearly demonstrates.

In refusing to think through language and history, Badiou confirms his fidelity to the paradigm of modernity–for modernity can be characterized as the historical period in which the Western subject posits *him*self as universal and history as the result of *his* own making. For Badiou, there is but one Event: the event of modernity through which the universal, rational, subject was constituted. In what follows, I propose an alternative reading of Mallarmé that re-contextualizes the poem in his literary trajectory. I maintain that ignoring the Mallarmean signifier as well as the fact that Mallarmé's groundbreaking poem is first and foremost a reflection on language

[70] In a short note, "a brief word on the truth event," (Baucom 123) Baucom notes that "For Badiou, as for Kant, the truth event is consistently utopic" (id.) and indicates that Granville Sharp, Benjamin and himself defend another stance: that the truth of the event can be unveiled in a *catastrophic event* such as the *Zong* event.

and poetry where "l'acte d'écrire se scruta jusqu'en l'origine" (Mallarmé, *Oeuvres complètes* 645) necessarily leads to a misreading of his work. Undoubtedly, Mallarmé, as my own counter-reading will make clear, was a precursor of the so-called *linguistic turn* against which Badiou constructed his entire philosophy.

Mallarmé's Pure Symbolic

Mallarmé's poetic course can be described as a progressive march toward abstraction in the hope of eventually reaching the pure language that would enable him to write the absolute work. He proceeds by subtraction and erasure, suggesting the absence of an object rather than describing it, hollowing out the verse to the extreme, eventually removing the author from the text and the subject from the act. His poetry is one of objectivity without objects. In order for the pure work to exist, the poet becomes impersonal and "cède l'initiative aux mots" ("yields the initiative to words") (Mallarmé, *Oeuvres complètes* 366): the poem exists as such, "fait, étant." This progression is visible in the order his works were published in 1887. If the earliest poems, such as "Brise Marine," retained a Baudelairian influence, a desire to flee this world of banality and *ennui*, to reach an ideal "ailleurs," commensurate to the poet's aspirations, the later ones–the "sonnet en–yx," "Le Cygne," for instance–sometimes called the "maturity poems," elaborate a poetics of absence (absence of the object as well as the subject) reflective of the successive crises Mallarmé went through. When he composes "Igitur," or a *Un coup de dés*, Mallarmé is no longer a Symbolist in the Baudelairian sense. For Baudelaire, a symbol is an entry to a world of correspondences between matter and transcendence, sensation and spirituality. A

"symbol," in the Baudelairian sense is a material sign that points toward an ideal signifier. As such it manifests a vertical dimension (transcendence) present in Nature. The role of the poet is thus to decipher these symbols, to make them accessible to the common mortals.[71]

Mallarmé's new poetics, on the other hand, consecrates the disappearance of the sign in favor of the signifier, a signifier that does not refer to any exterior object but only points to other signifiers, so that language becomes autonomous and poetry auto-reflexive:

> L'oeuvre pure implique la disparition élocutoire du poëte (sic), qui cède l'initiative aux mots par le heurt de leur inégalité mobilisée; ils s'allument de reflets réciproques comme une virtuelle traînée de pierreries, remplaçant la respiration perceptible par l'ancien souffle lyrique ou la direction personnelle enthousiaste de la phrase.
> (Mallarmé, *Oeuvres complètes* 366)
>
> [The pure work implies the elocutionary disappearance of the poet, who instead yields the initiative to words, mobilized by the clash of their inequality; they light up from their reciprocal reflections, like a trail of fire on gems, taking the place of that palpable breath in the lyric inspiration of yore or the enthusiastic personal direction of speech.]

[71] See "Correspondance," Baudelaire: "La Nature est un temple où de vivants piliers/Laissent parfois sortir des paroles confuses/L'homme y passe à travers des forêts de symboles . . ." (Baudelaire 11).

In this sense, Mallarmé can be called *the poet of the pure symbolic*, where "symbolic" no longer only designates a spiritual aesthetic but also corresponds to Lacan's very logic of the signifier. Mallarmé's poem, known as "le Cygne"[72] is significant of what I call *the consecration of the signifier*:

> Will the virginal, strong and handsome today
>
> Tear for us with a drunken flap of his wing
>
> This hard forgotten lake which the transparent glacier
>
> Of flights unknown haunts under the frost!
>
> A swan of former times remembers that it is he
>
> Magnificent but who without hope gives himself up
>
> For not having sung of the region where he should have been
>
> When the boredom of sterile winter was resplendent.
>
> All his neck will shake off this white death-agony
>
> Inflicted by space on the bird which denies space
>
> But not the horror of the earth where his wings are caught.
>
> Phantom whom his pure brilliance assigns to this place,
>
> He becomes immobile in the cold dream of scorn

[72] The original poem is untitled.

Which the Swan puts on his useless exile.[73]

[Le vierge, le vivace et le bel aujourd'hui

Va-t-il nous déchirer avec un coup d'aile ivre

Ce lac dur oublié que hante sous le givre

Le transparent glacier des vols qui n'ont pas fui !

Un cygne d'autrefois se souvient que c'est lui

Magnifique mais qui sans espoir se deliver

Pour n'avoir pas chanté la région où vivre

Quand du stérile hiver a resplendi l'ennui.

Tout son col secouera cette blanche agonie

Par l'espace infligée à l'oiseau qui le nie,

Mais non l'horreur du sol où le plumage est pris.

Fantôme qu'à ce lieu son pur éclat assigne,

Il s'immobilise au songe froid de mépris

Que vêt parmi l'exil inutile le Cygne.]

The English translation only gives partial access to what is really at stake in this poem: the linguistic drama of the sign. In fact, “cygne” (swan) and “signe” (sign)

[73] Translated by Wallace Fowlie in *Mallarmé*, 1953 (Fowlie 91).

in French are homophones. Mallarmé's poem makes sense not only at the literal and metaphoric levels but also at the level of the signifier. The translation makes clear that the poem is about a swan who gets caught in the frozen soil because he did not sing–believe–in a better place to live an ideal life. It is easy to see that this drama is the one of the poet, threatened by the famous "white page anxiety," and the (im)possibility of meaning itself. Mallarmé, contrary to Baudelaire, lost his faith in a transcendental ideal: he no longer believes in a world of symbols, where signs point to truths that transcend materiality. [74] For him, the metaphor cancels itself: the subject disappears, and the referent vanishes. In short, Mallarmé's poetry celebrates, or rather *consecrates*[75], the pure signifier, finally and absolutely freed from the referent.

"Le cygne" (the swan/sign) for Mallarmé is not the poet anymore[76] but the linguistic sign itself, the absolute signifier which has lost all links with the signified. This new understanding of *symbolic language*[77] actually corresponds almost verbatim to Lacan's conceptualization of the signifier. This is particularly clear in Seminar III:

> Then there is the trace, the footprint in the sand, the sign about which Robinson Crusoe makes no mistake. Here sign and object separate. The trace, in its negative aspect, draws the natural sign to a limit at which it

[74] The Symbol needs two parts linked to each other.

[75] Mallarmé frequently uses in his prose and poetry the verb "consecrate" in reference to language, indicating his vision of the poem as a secular ritual.

[76] See Baudelaire, *Les Fleurs du mal*, "Le Cygne."

[77] Mallarmé's influence on Lacan is often undervalued. Mallarme's pre-theorization of language, structure, sign and symbol is a constant reference to French structuralists and poststructuralists.

> becomes evanescent. The distinction between sign and object is quite clear here since the trace is precisely what the object leaves behind once it has gone off somewhere else. Objectively there is no need for any subject to recognize a sign for it to be there–a trace exists even if there is nobody to look at it.
>
> When have we passed over into the order of the signifier? The signifier may extend over many of the elements within the domain of the sign. But, the signifier is a sign that doesn't refer to any object, not even to one in the form of a trace, even though the trace nevertheless heralds the signifier's essential feature. It, too, is the sign of an absence. But insofar as it forms part of language, the signifier is a sign which refers to another sign, which is as such structured to signify the absence of another sign, in other words, to be opposed to it in a couple. (Lacan, *The Psychoses* 166)

The boundaries of the Symbolic in Lacanian terms are delimited by the rejection out of its domain of the pure, real signifier, the Phallus, that points out not to the penis but the castration of the other. The castration of the other appears as the original event, an event without a cause, through which subjectivity is constituted. From this absence, this void, emerges the symbolic, in which meaning can be expressed through language. When Lacan claims that the symbol "manifests itself first of all as the murder of the thing," he is following Mallarmé's philosophic-linguistic considerations, for whom naming an object equates to summon its absence:

> Je dis: une fleur! et, hors de l'oubli où ma voix relègue aucun contour, quelque chose autre que les calices sus, musicalement se lève, idée même et suave, l'absente de tous bouquets. (Mallarmé, *Oeuvres complètes* 368)
>
> [I say: a flower! And, beyond the oblivion to which my voice banishes no contour, as something other than the familiar calyces, arises musically the fragrant idea itself, the absent flower of all bouquets.]

Mallarmé's poetics constantly evolves toward a poetics of *pure absence.*[78] The "sonnet en yx" for instance describes an empty room, "un salon vide" from which the subject is absent: "le Maître est allé puiser des pleurs au Styx." (The Master has gone to dip tears from the Styx–*Selected Poetry and Prose*, 48). At its center is a vanishing object, a *thing* named "ptyx:"[79] hapax in the French Language of an object that might not even exist. The ptyx is nothing more than "pure néant sonore" (pure sounding nothingness) as it is clear in the poem. To reach the point of abstraction and vanishing impression that *Un coup de dés* gives, Mallarmé went from an original text through a

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[78] Mallarmé is very explicit about his intention: "A quoi bon la merveille de transposer un fait de nature en sa presque disparition vibratoire selon le jeu de la parole, cependant, si ce n'est pour qu'en émane, sans la gêne d'un proche ou concret rappel, la notion pure" (Mallarmé, *Oeuvres complètes* 857).

[79] In need of a rhyme in–ix, Mallarmé seduced by the word "ptyx" hopes that it does not exist in any language. However, he asks his friend, Eugène Lefèbure, to check the "real" meaning of the word if indeed there is any: "[...] comme il se pourrait que [...] je fisse un sonnet, et que je n'ai que trois rimes en ix, concertez-vous pour m'envoyer le sens réel du mot ptyx, ou m'assurer qu'il n'existe dans aucune langue, ce que je préfé[re]rais de beaucoup afin de me donner le charme de le créer par la magie de la rime." Letter to Eugène Lefébure, 3 mai 1868. –In *Oeuvres complètes*, éd. by Bertrand Marchal, t. I. Paris: Gallimard, 2003, 728.

series of subtractions and erasures, a writing strategy that can be unveiled by the comparison between different versions of the same poem. Usually taking an anecdote, a "fait divers" or a contemporary fact as a point of departure for his poems, Mallarmé progressively cancels the referent until the words reflect each other, *ad infinitum*, in a vertiginous mirror effect.

"Or," the Erasure of History, and a "Linguistic Theory of Currency."

Barbara Johnson devoted a chapter of her book *A world of Difference* to a comparison between the prose poem "Or" in Divagations with an earlier prose text, interestingly titled "Fait divers," published in 1883 in the *National Observer*.[80] According to her, rather than merely erasing history, Mallarmé "situates its historical reference in the ellipses of its own exposition" (Johnson 66). She argues that, against common practice, Mallarmé's texts have to be read not as finished products following a writing trajectory that includes each state of one poem and traces a kind of "asymptote." Her project is to go against the grain of the critiques who situate Mallarmé's writing "at the limit rather than along the asymptote of his teleology" (Johnson 58). In other words, according to Johnson, Mallarmé's historical reference inscribes itself in the trace of its disappearance. Though Johnson's analysis of the poetic transformation of the event of the Panama Canal is persuasive, I doubt that most Mallarmé's contemporaries were able to identify the historical reference and, by the same token, its erasure. Moreover, I am not sure that it was a concern for the author. If

[80] See "Erasing Panama, Mallarmé and the text of History," in *A world of Difference*, 1987, pp. 57-67

Un coup de dés, as Barbara Johnson herself implies, could be a subsequent version of the poem "Or," then it becomes clear that Mallarmé is not interested in giving his readers access to the referent. Quite the contrary, I would argue that through progressively erasing any signs that could refer to reality, Mallarmé aims toward a poetics of the absolute.

Here stands my point of disagreement with Barbara Johnson: if Mallarmé's historical references can still be discovered, it is through the archival work of the literary critique, a work that was not expected from Mallarmé's readers: the poem aims to acquire a complete autonomy until it stands alone, "fait, étant." If the critiques almost systematically ignore the process of production of Mallarmé's poetry it is not merely because they are ignorant of this process: it has to do with their conception of literature and textuality, a conception they inherited from Mallarmé himself: the idea that the text exists independently from its author. To my knowledge Mallarmé is the first to have articulated this proposition, changing the paradigm of textuality (and literature by the same token) forever and inaugurating the history of textually oriented literary critique. I do not intend to say that Mallarmé's texts should not be analyzed contextually, both in history and in their writing trajectory. Quite the contrary. However, I maintain that Mallarmé would probably disagree with the idea that the task of the poet is to expose history through its erasure. It seems to contradict Mallarmé's intellectual trajectory which, as I mentioned above, departs from a disillusioned Baudelairian symbolist perspective and ends up envisioning of the "Oeuvre pure" (pure work of art). As Barbara Johnson herself elicits, Mallarmé's writing oscillates between two poles: the "referentially historical" and the "symbolically absolute," the

"vers de circonstance" (Mallarmé's occasional poetry) and his attempts to design the definitive work of art. Barbara Johnson's essay is particularly insightful in tying knots between what she calls the "real world" and Mallarmé's poems; between literary and capitalist economies; between history and its erasures. The fact remains that Mallarmé's poetic process is on the side of subtraction and erasure; formalization and abstraction. In other words, poetry for Mallarmé is about dematerializing the concrete and ultimately deceptive currency, "or," into its poetic "éclat" (glare), about the transfiguration of this vain divinity into a pure linguistic conjunction devoid of meaning, but reflective of the lies with *éclat.*

Barbara Johnson's historical contextualization goes even further: she proposes to read in Fernand de Lesseps (the historical character) the personification of the symbolist poet. She argues that his "universalizing imagination," "his reading of celestial signs," as well as his "skillful use of symbolic gestures as a persuasive device" are what qualifies him as a symbolic poet. Following my definition of the Mallarmean symbolic, I contend that what could qualify Lesseps *even more* as a Symbolist is his unshakable faith in modernity and in its grandiose ideas, his capacity to simply ignore the resistance of the real and his ability to exploit the irrationality of the financial system, and to speculate on the efficiency of its abstract virtuality. Moreover, Barbara Johnson suggests that Ferdinand de Lesseps might be one of the early models–stripped down from his individuality–of the Master who plays with chance and bets on the future in *Un coup de dés*. Who would have thought that the very abstract Mallarmean hero, the master, (le Maître) of the *Coup de dés* could have been modeled on one of the emblematic figures of the rise of capitalism of the time–

and its failure? And yet, the pieces of evidence are here. It should suffice to quote this passage in the first version of Mallarmé's text: "By the light of phantasmagorical sunsets when clouds alone are sinking (with whatever, unbeknownst to him, man probably has lent them of his dreams) a treasure liquefaction flows, spreads, gleams on the horizon" (Johnson 201). Once again, the possible evocation of Turner's painting is very troubling (see figure 1). It is as if Mallarmé's prose transfigured a financial scandal (the disappearance of a considerable amount of money) into a painting by Turner. Johnson notes the "intriguing" connections between the *Coup de dés* itself and the story of Lesseps' failure at Panama. The catastrophe at sea, the "vieillard," the calculus, the uneasy relation between chance and human intentions could all be read as a "universalization of Lesseps' story" (Johnson 63). This proposition undoubtedly casts a new interesting light on our interpretation of Mallarmé's poem as well as on its parallel reading with *Zong!*: if the model of the Act could actually be a financial operation, a "fraud" that led to a disaster, death of hundreds and ruin of thousands, then it would mean that Mallarmé's poetic of erasure consists in consciously obliterating modernity's historical facts. A strategy reminiscent of Hegel's silence on Haiti as denounced by Susan Buck-Mors.[81] Both cases demonstrate that the desired level of abstraction in modern thinking goes hand in hand with the obliteration of non-subjects, who in both cases correspond to the death of individuals from African descent.[82] While opposing a commercial usage of language, the Mallarmean logic of

[81] See *Hegel and Haiti* by Susan Buck-Mors (Buck-Morss).

[82] A considerable number of workers who participated to the construction of the Panama Canal–during which 25000 workers lost their lives–were recruited (first in the 1850s for the building of the railroad and in the 1880s for the canal itself) out of the

erasure and abstraction, is nevertheless embedded in the modern capitalist system which feeds itself from ideal abstractions as much as it does from real bodies.

Figure 1: Joseph Mallord William Turner, English, 1775-1851. Slave Ship (Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying, Typhoon Coming On). 1840. Artstor, library-artstor-org.proxy.library.cornell.

The Mallarmean Event: The Consecration of the Signifier

In his reading of Mallarmé, Badiou misses a critical aspect of the Mallarmean event. His mistakes originate from his attempt at a purely philosophical reading of Mallarmé. When he translates Mallarmé's poems into prose, Badiou misses part of the

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Caribbean West Indies, mainly Jamaica during the French stage. For a detailed history of the Panama Canal's construction and its deadly consequences, see Panama Fever by Matthew Parker, 2009 (Parker).

modern drama as Mallarmé presents it, a drama that is precisely situated in the very form of its expression: the separation of the reference from the referent, a separation which remains at the limit of language, forever impossible to express. Mallarmé, throughout his life, went through a series of crises. At one point, he thought he was able to conceive "pure nothingness," which of course provoked a period of profound anxiety and artistic powerlessness. Haunted by this intuition, he also acquired the conviction that it would have been impossible to ever express this truth. While further seeking perfection in the absoluteness of the poetic language, its purification into a purely "symbolic" language that refers to nothing else than itself, Mallarmé remained conscious of the impossibility of such an accomplishment. That is why his enterprise should be seen as ironic rather than triumphant. For Mallarmé, the model of the modern event is not the French Revolution in which Badiou sees the universal embodied in the particular. Instead, it might well have been a much less glorious event: the Panama failure, the first financial scandal of this breadth regarding the amount of money that vanished as well as the number of French political key figures implicated.

Mallarmé and Badiou's versions of the modern event are in fact conflicting. For the latter, it signals the triumphant advent of a new universal subject while for the earlier it is a failure: the impossibility to reach an absolute poetic form from where the subject and the referent would have vanished entirely. Nevertheless, Badiou rightly explains the processes through which this modern event is constituted: purification, negation, and subtraction. While Mallarmé remains conscious that it is a lie, a pure fiction, and that the circumstances cannot indeed be abolished, Badiou makes it the

center of truth. In other words, the modern event for Mallarmé opens up a crisis in representation while it ontologically secures the universality of the subject in Badiou's system.

The (post)colonial event: a trauma event

In fact, the (post)colonial event, of which the *Zong* massacre is a model, is a trauma event. It might seem paradoxical to elevate the singularity of the event up to the abstract and general category of the (post)colonial. It might even seem like a betrayal, and yet, it is precisely because of the impossibility to transcendentally make a symbol out of it that it is possible to think of it as the epitome of the (post)colonial event. As opposed to the modern event and its pretension to universality, the (post)colonial event is always specific, always historically and geographically situated; it always affects bodies and communities. However, because it must remain outside of the symbolic, it is unknowable and inarticulable. Though historically and geographically situated, the effects of the (post)colonial event are not locatable: it exists in the present as scars on the living bodies, as psychic wounds in the minds of the survivors' descendants. That is precisely what is communicated in the particular spelling of the term (post)colonial: the complex temporality of (post)colonial events. Since they were not understood as events at the time of their occurrence, we only have access to them through an archeological work of recovering and re-interpreting traces of historical silences. We deal with events that can only be experienced a posteriori, in a time-frame outside of the colonial episteme. That is precisely the goal of (post)colonial critic: re-interpreting, re-reading and re-articulating texts and

(non)events in order to establish a (post)colonial episteme, that is a structure of thought in which colonization is definitively understood as irrational and scandalous. Even though we might not yet belong to the (post)colonial episteme–our contemporary period could be better described as a continuation of the colonial times–we, as (post)colonial critics have to presuppose its possibility in order to project a potential future (à venir/to come). At the same time, (post)colonial events are not situated in the past: because of their traumatic character, they possess and haunt us. Trauma, as long as it is not worked through, is passed along generations. The modern repression that still puts pressure on the (post)colonial means that the effects of (post)colonial events are experienced in our very present. The (post)colonial event and the modern event are two sides of the same coin. Moreover, the traumatic nature of it affects–though in different ways–both the (post)modern subjects and the (post)colonial (non)subjects. Modernity has repressed its trauma events outside of the symbolic and has rendered them inarticulable. Representation in so far as it always obeys the laws of the symbolic would only be another form of repression and a form of authority imposed over the victims' absent perspective.

In psychoanalytic terms, the (post)colonial event could be interpreted as the repetition of the original traumatic event, the castration of the other, an event that must be evacuated from the psyche in order to preserve the integration of the subject in the modern social order and its march toward progress. The castration of the other signifies its rejection from the domain of the symbolic and its reappearance in the real. What is rejected as non-symbolizable is the violence of trauma. We are here talking about real violence exerted on human subjects whose humanity, for structural and

geopolitical reasons, is not recognized as such in the colonial paradigm whose language is part of the symbolic. The (post)colonial traumatic event reminds us that the logic of abstraction, symbolization, and separation of the modern episteme (visible in Mallarmé's poetry, in Lacan's theorization of the subject and in Badiou's conceptualization of the event) hides the real horror of trauma, violence, and death. As long as violence is exerted on subjects that are not recognized as subjects, it is not understood as scandalous or abhorrent. Thus, while the *Zong*'s episode is designed in the legal document as a regrettable "melancholy event," a mistake that could have been avoided, it never threatened the coherence of the modern (colonial) episteme.

Cathy Caruth defines trauma as "a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind" and argues that what characterizes the trauma event is the fact that "[it] is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it" (Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* 3). What makes the Zong event a trauma event? Certainly, the violence of the murder, the terrible circumstances in which it happened, the impossibility to make sense of it as opposed to the cold rationality its execution demanded would suffice to explain its traumatic dimension. And yet, if we follow Cathy Caruth, what fundamentally defines the Zong event as a trauma event is its erasure at the site of its inscription, a disavowed eventness readable in the silences of the legal document. When addressing (post)colonial events, it is not enough to say that trauma disrupts the structure of the symbolic. I would go as far as saying that the necessity of preserving the coherence of the symbolic, the fantasmatic projection of a symbolic closure as a goal of modernity is what actually constitutes the (post)colonial event as a trauma event: it relegates in the

inarticulable domain of the real cumbersome facts, non-subjectivities and the negative affects carried by colonial violence. This foreclosure is not an accident but a direct consequence of the acts that had been effected to initiate and realize the modern project. Epistemologically, trauma questions the very possibility of knowing and the idea of historical referentiality. "For a history to be a history of trauma means that it is referential precisely to the extent that it is not fully perceived as it occurs. Or to put it somewhat differently, that a history can be grasped only in the very inaccessibility of its occurrence" (Caruth, *Trauma* 8). As a result, it questions the possibility of representation, the possibility of articulating history and of integrating real and silenced events into a symbolic structure.

If Mallarmé was able to find a non-representative form to express the modern event adequately, M. NourbeSe Philip by her aesthetic *a priori* similarly found a way to expose the violence of the symbolic. Despite–or maybe because–of the similarities, *Zong!* can be said to be a *negative*–as in photography–of *Un coup de dés*. Where Mallarmé's logic is one of subtraction, the subtraction of any referent, Philip's trajectory inverses this logic. Mallarmé eventually (almost) achieves a pure symbolic language, without subject or object, reaches this "absolute language" that consecrates and laments in the same moment the disappearing of the referent. Philip, on the other hands, starts with another form of *pure symbolic language*: the language of the law. While she immerses herself in the language of the legal text, she also refuses to submit to the law of the symbolic, according to which, the murdered slaves were not subjects or even human beings and the Zong episode could never be acknowledged as an event.

With its first section, *Os*, *Zong!* starts as a deconstruction of English, a destruction of the language of modernity, a dissolution of the colonizer's law, which I interpret as a sacrifice of the symbolic. But *Zong!* is not only a destructive force: it also creates a new chaos-order that embraces the movement of the Real. The second section of the poem, in effect, consists of re-membering (literally putting together the scattered members (limbs) of the dead) erased bodies and voices by the dislocation and reconfiguration of the colonizer's language. The words of the document configure the missing bones.

Nonetheless, little by little, page after page, some "flesh" is added to the bare bones of the dead and the bare symbolic language of the law. Instead of a logic of subtraction, erasure, and denial, we notice a logic of addition, re-membering, and acknowledgment, a poetic in which Philip inhabits the space of trauma–a space that had been left empty and is now only perceptible in the silences of history. In other words, Philip occupies the very silences that Mallarmé strived to make visible; the void, that precisely according to Lacan maintains the coherence of the symbolic. Philip like Mallarmé digs the silences, makes them visible by the unusual page layout and the words rather than deployed linearly in a square arrangement are dispersed, as if by chance, on the blank surface. However, Philip's writing does not *authenticate* the silence: on the contrary, her writing is an experimental *de-authorization of language* in which each silence, each blank accuses the violence of a symbolic order complicit with a capitalist logic of the number that encouraged, allowed and justified the suffering and death of millions of human beings in slavery. A double movement characterizes her poem: a destruction of the symbolic (a deconstruction of the

language of the legal text) and a poetic recovering (re-creation) of the excluded real, the projection of a possible restoration through the acknowledgment of the affective force of trauma that hits both the victim and the persecutor. In what follows, I will explore this double movement.

Os: Exposing the Bones

In "Os," each poem tells and untells in a unique way what happened, repeating the narration of the traumatic event, works through its silencing. Here, Philip "murder[s]" and "mutilates the text, cut[s] it into pieces," "white[s] out and black[s] out words" (Philip 191–92). She dismembers sentences, smashes the language of logic and reason, destroys the symbolic language of the law. This violence exerted on the text produces "a language of grunt and groan, of moan and stutter" (Philip 205), a dislocated syntax, an inarticulate complaint, through which the victims' affects resurface, through which their humanity is simultaneously denied and restored.

Only in this section did Philip respect the constraint she initially imposed or herself to only use the words of the *Gregson & Gilbert*. Words, in *Os,* are rather scarce and the fragments of sentences are organized geometrically, mostly in columns. At first sight, this section appears the easiest to read: the empty spaces give the reader, in a manner of speaking, some air to breathe. At the same time, the poem is already suffocating. A look at the very first poem **#Zong1** (Philip 3–4) makes that clear: the elongated word "water," the graphic effect produced by the letters scattered throughout the page, already evoke some kind of moaning. These words, as if they were muffled echoes arising from the abyss, cannot be properly uttered, nor can they

be clearly heard. Composed of a few disarticulated words: water, one, day, want, of, the first poem does not leave any of these whole. Only vowels (o-a-e), consonants (w-d-t) and syllables (go-wa-ay-ey) remain, conjuring sounds that were hidden under the surface of the cold, rational language of the *Gregson&Gilbert*. But really, only silence is made visible since the sounds are not actual sounds uttered and heard onboard–there are no such records–only a graphic transposition, a written trace of ghostly moaning–woo/woo as if these spectral presences were summoned by the graphic spatialization of absent sounds. The fate of everyone on board is encompassed in this single word, "water," both the cause of death (the lack of) and the liquid tomb.

The Right Words

As a poet and lawyer, Philip understands what law and poetry have in common: "[They] both share an inexorable concern with language–the "right" use of the "right" words, phrases, or even marks of punctuation; precision is the goal shared by both" (Philip 191). Reading the legal text alongside Philip's poem is revealing: in the document, words caught in the juridical system of signification, assume–or should assume–a unique meaning that bears the force of law. **#Zong 11** (Philip 20) for instance, can be interpreted as an ironic reformulation of Justice Buller's sentence: "Suppose the law clear, that a loss happening by the negligence of the captain does not discharge the underwriters, yet upon this declaration, the defendant could not raise that point." It looks like a slip of the tongue, something that should be here. With these very same words, shuffled in a different order, the poem draws a figure, like a

diagram; a diagram at the heart of which there is only blank. The repetition of the imperative "suppose" invites the reader to make hypotheses.

One can read for instance: "Suppose the law is a crime." But also: "suppose the law is not a crime." If by habit, one starts to read the poem from top to bottom, one will soon be unsure of the next word to fix one's gaze upon. Grouping the words in one way or another will stem alternative meaning possibilities. It is as if Philip was suggesting, but at the same time could not suggest, that the law is and is not a crime. Supposing that the law, under which slavery is legal, could be a crime would be stating an unsayable truth whereas the alternative *is* historical truth. The jury and the reader are presented with a very similar task: they have to make a decision on how to interpret the same words. In one case the decision concerns profit and loss for the cargo's owner and the insurer. In the other it is about judging the law itself: could the law be responsible for murder and loss? The "loss," referring in the *Gregson* to the financial value lost in the process, now associated with "murder," evokes another meaning through which denied feelings of grief resurface. As Linda Hutcheon affirms, "There is no clearer evidence of the reign of the pure symbolic in the modern world and of the contradictions of the enlightenment ideals than in the confusion that occurs in the slave trade between subject and object, finance value and moral value, material and moral progress." *Zong!* exposes this confusion readable in the language of the law, in the very words retained by the archive. This confusion, as it is evident throughout the Gregson and Gilbert, persists despite the attempts at clarity and rigor, despite the precision with which words are chosen and understood by the people in charge of executing the law. The confusion induced by the status of the slave, the difficulty in

tracing a clear conceptual distinction between object and subject, is one that questions the nature of ontology itself.

Zong #21 (Philip 37–38)gets at the heart of the matter: composed only of the verb "to be" conjugated at different tenses, the modal verb "should" and the conjunction "or," Philip invites the reader on a meditation on being and its indeterminateness. The absent subject of the poem might be the only being that is not a being, the only subject that is a mere object. To be or not to be. From the perspective of the slave, it is first and foremost a legal issue. According to the law, the slave is a commodity, a re/movable asset. Literally, slaves are nothing other than a "fiction of law," they "should be" but "were not." What does being mean? Is there no relationship between the verb/noun and its meaning? How can beings not be? It seems that slaves' being can only exist through a *hauntology*. Their being manifests itself only in the paradoxical temporality of spectrality: dis/appearing in a past they never occupied while haunting in silence the present of the poem.

In the non-Euclidian space of the poem "seconds do not follow seconds in linear succession . . . [and the text] does not contain an account of something that might have occurred" (Blanchot, *Le Livre à venir* 28). M. NourbeSe Philip reinvests the melancholy denied during the trial so that it constitutes the time frame of the poem: "We're out of time/we're outside of time." These are fragments of sentences that might have been uttered on board; they express the slave's condition: embarked against his/her will as a commodity within the context of modernity albeit excluded from it as a subject, the slave is destined to be a collateral casualty of progress. Accordingly, the only time that matters is that which can be counted, measured; the

time that links causes to consequences. How many weeks did the voyage last? How many weeks was it supposed to last? How much time was necessary to reach Jamaica? Did it rain before or after the jettisoning of the slaves?–a question regarding the water supply that was essential for the survival of the crew and which had a direct bearing on the case. Purportedly, an exact calculation of time would have provided an answer to the crucial question of whether the murder was *necessary* in the first place.

"It is. Not was." The repetition of this *enallage*, a rhetorical figure that can be confused with a grammatical error, provokes a disruption of the logical order of syntax that narrates the past in a succession of events and a past event coheres in a present.[83] The device functions as a time-travel portal and allows for the expression of the event in its paradoxical temporality. Reading *Zong!* transports the reader to an alternate space-time continuum generated by the poem itself, where the eternal part of the event–or, as Maurice Blanchot puts it, "the part of the event that its accomplishment cannot realize"(Blanchot, *The Space of Literature* 155)–is made perceptible in its specificity; its silences may be heard, and the dead and the living brought together.

A Symbolic Sacrifice

Reading *Zong!* is navigating between sense and non-sense. Mallarmé and Philip's poems reflect on the nature of language and events, of events that happen in

[83] "In narrative texts, a substitution of the past tense by the present tense (praesens historicum) takes place, when the intended effect is a vivid representation (enargeia). Not merely a solecism or a grammatical mistake, enallage is employed with functional intentionality, which gives it the status of a rhetorical figure" (Heinrich F. Plett, "Enallage," Encyclopedia of Rhetoric, edited by Thomas O. Sloane. Oxford Univ. Press, 2002)

language, on the possibility of anything happening in/out language. In Mallarmé's *Un coup de dés*, chance was absolute and the act vain. In Philip's *Zong!*, chance "circumstances" are an excuse, and the act is/was/should be a crime. The symbolic language of the law is found guilty, complicit with a capitalist logic of the number that encouraged, allowed and justified the suffering and death of millions of human beings in slavery. The first section "Os" laid bare the bones of the logic structure of the symbolic and in so doing exposed the violence and the deaths that were claimed for its constitution.

After "Os," the *Zong!*'s journey continues: Philip's poetic commitment is not only on the side of disarticulation and destruction, it is also an attempt at re-membrance, at putting the limbs back together. And little by little, page after page, in the second movement, some "flesh" is added to the bare bones of the dead and the bare symbolic language of the law. Rather than the symbolic logic of subtraction, erasure, and denial, (the logic of the law), Phillips opts for a logic of addition and re-membering. Her experimental "de-authorization of language" opens up a poetics of the real through which she inhabits the empty space of trauma. If Mallarmé's poetics made silence visible, then Philip yearns to make them talk. While in "Os" Philip was dealing with scarcity, lack, and silences, in the following sections, she withstands overflow, excess and cacophony. The readers experience another sort of suffocation, and their discomfort increases: words are multiplying as if they had acquired a life of their own, disseminating like seeds engendering their own growth. They progressively eat away any blank, empty space to the point where in "Ebora"–the last section of the poem–words are superimposed upon each other rendering the text literally unreadable.

From this chaotic arrangement of words, fragmented stories emerge and follow several narrative threads, regularly interrupted by Yoruba incantations ("the oba sobs"). The stories are caught in the haunting quality of traumatic temporality: past and present, truth and lie, dead and living are inextricably entangled. And yet, a singular voice progressively becomes dominant in the poem: the voice of a white man, one of the crew members who participated in the jettisoning of the slaves. Persistent readers, against all the odds, get a sense of the confusion and contradictory feelings this man experienced in the middle of a terrifying journey. In the disarray of the situation reflected in the tumultuous order of the words, one can conjecture some reference to his physical needs, his suffering, his spiritual longing, his lust as well as his growing guilt.

According to Cathy Caruth trauma opens up an ethical relation to the real. The possibility of this "ethical relation to the real" that trauma opens up is perhaps the most surprising lesson of *Zong!*. Something that Philip herself did not expect, a relation that demands to go beyond the binary sides of history, between colonizer and colonized, perpetrator and victim. This is not to excuse crimes or relativize the murder. However, in this specific case, understanding that the loss of the perpetrator is also real might be necessary. I do not want to generalize for all trauma cases, and I know this is a very complicated question. However, this is what the reading of *Zong!* seems to propose. Occupying the silences of trauma led Philip to "listen to the voice of the other" because she felt compelled, in her words, "to acknowledge the existence of those Europeans on board the *Zong*, those who like many Africans sickened and died, as well as those who were involved in the murder of the Africans, and thus in the

murder of their own souls" (Philip 203). Without this acknowledgment, the poem would still be caught in the logic of denial and erasure. The second movement follows one sailor's stream of consciousness and his internal conflict of value oscillating between a Christian moral still largely enforced and the impulses of greed and murder encouraged by the logic of profit and conquest during this age of nascent capitalism. In the end, the white sailor puts an end to his life and throws himself in the water: "he fa lls to thewe / ight & wa it in *Zong* / ater i ca ll his na / me & f / all too" (Philip 172). Apparently, it was impossible for him to bear the contradictions of his value system–defined by Christianity and rationality–with what he had done and seen. I interpret Philip's deliberate choice of symbolically murdering the white sailor precisely as a "symbolic murder," a sacrifice whose violence is contained in language. A symbolic sacrifice that responds to the real sacrifice of millions of Africans in the name of modernity, capitalism, and progress; in the name of the constitution of a symbolic order that justified the exploitation, de-humanization, and murder of the ones who did not have the right to be.

Conclusion: Occupying Trauma, the Tidal Movement of the Real

> Our entrance to the past is through memory–either oral or written. And water. In this case salt water. Sea water. And, as the ocean appears to be the same yet is constantly in motion, affected by tidal movements, so too this memory appears stationary, yet is shifting away. Repetition

> drives the event and the memory simultaneously, becomes a haunting (Philip 208).

For Philip, the *Zong* case report is an "archival monument" from which the living memories have been extracted, a "gravestone" that must be "shatter[ed]" to free the voices of the dead slaves and the affects they carry. I want to say that *Zong!* on the other hand is a liquid grave, a grave that reconnects with the liquid element in which the Africans died and in which their bodies have been dissolved–a grave that moves with the flow of the waves, back and forth, from depth to surface. Zong! the poem, Zong! the song and Zong! the ritual follows the haunting movement of an erased past that always start anew. In other words, *Zong!* espouses the tidal movement of the real proving that the real is not a site that you can occupy but a flow that you can resist or embrace. The logic of the poetic real resurrects the dead, materializes dissolved lives, listens to the other's voice. It is a logic at once destructive and creative. Finally, the main question I remain with is this one: how to read *Zong!* without drowning, by staying at the surface but not at the shore?

In simultaneously exposing and healing the wounds, *Zong!*, the poem, the chant, the wake, retrieves the previously denied, erased and repressed affective dimension of the event which is precisely its eternal part. To retrieve the event's affects, Philip had to resist an urgent call for meaning. She had to stand outside of the symbolic, to murder with language any redemptive signification, and to give voice, for the first time, to the real, as it has been encountered in the traumatic re-memberance of the event. Her attempt is an open letter to the readers, to accept listening to trauma and traveling with her, in a perilous voyage, to the heart of the real

CHAPTER 4

OPACITY, LITERATURE AND THE REAL

This chapter concludes my inquiry into unrepresentability and its political signification for postcolonial authors by tackling the distinction at the core of my investigation between transparency and opacity. It also proposes an ethics of reading by reinscribing the reader into the process of meaning production or its refusal: it is the reader responsibility to overcome the difficulty of certain texts and to stay with the discomfort they provoke. Occupying the real is not a pleasant experience. However, accepting to stay and dwell in this place of discomfort can teach us to recognize the effects and affects of colonialism and break the cycle of denial and repression.

> Il est certains esprits dont les sombres pensées
> Sont d'un nuage épais toujours embarrassées ;
> Le jour de la raison ne le saurait percer.
> Avant donc que d'écrire, apprenez à penser.
> Selon que notre idée est plus ou moins obscure,
> L'expression la suit, ou moins nette, ou plus pure.
> Ce que l'on conçoit bien s'énonce clairement,
> Et les mots pour le dire arrivent aisément.[84]

[84] Some darker souls, infused with blackened thoughts / Beneath the dullest, darkest clouds must walk / Where Reason's light has never yet shone through. / So think before you write; know what you do. / Ideas are more, or less, obscure, and each / Requires words that fit them, match their reach. / Ideas completely mastered fall in line, / The poet never needs to force a rhyme (Boileau, *Selected Poems* 26).

(Boileau, *Art Poétique*, 1674)

Within the transparent, classical language of Boileau lays the fate of a nation. Words and concepts, articulation and thought, breath and alexandrine rhythm seamlessly work in harmony to express an ideal of clarity that is also an ideal of rationality. If words come easily, it is because they closely fit the symbolic in which rationality, language, and subjectivity (identity) work together to form a unity. Unfortunately, this unity is continuously threatened by dark forces, be they the unconscious, marginal non-subjects, or the real itself. In fact, the identity, the mere existence of the Francophone writer threatens a certain purity, clarity of the French language, and the universal values this language is supposed to carry. All the authors of my corpus are very aware of this fact. Khatibi, for instance, declares: "On disait, on dit toujours que *la clarté de la langue française est une vertu nationale*. Illisible celui qui brouille le principe d'identité de la nation. Or j'étais colonisé par cette nation" (Khatibi, *La langue de l'autre* 30).[85]

According to Khatibi, Francophone writers are necessarily unreadable. This unreadability is due to an impossibility for them to follow the rule of language clarity elevated in the national unconscious to a "national virtue." The simple fact of writing in French without being a rightful citizen of the nation troubles its identity principle. Historically, French identity has indeed been strongly associated with the French language. The unity of the nation has been thought and secured through the

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[85] "Clarity of the French language was, and still is, considered a national virtue. He who troubles the nation's identity principle is unreadable. Yet I was colonized by this nation."

institutionalization of French as the only official language as far as 1549 with the Ordinance of Villers-Cotterêts (French: Ordonnance de Villers-Cotterêts), way before the actual borders of the nation were in place. Later, French language, theorized by colonialists such as Paul Leroy-Beaulieu or Onésime Reclus (the inventor of the term "francophonie"), will also acquire another mission: it will become one of the most potent tools of French imperialist expansion.

In this chapter, I claim that grasping the importance of the notion of *language clarity* in relation to French identification–called "national virtue" by Khatibi–is necessary to fully understand all the implications that Glissant's specific usage of the concept of "opacity" encompasses. One of the most debated concepts in Glissant's work, its fortune now goes way beyond the field of Francophone/Caribbean/Postcolonial Studies. In his work and, as I intend to demonstrate in the literary work of most postcolonial authors, aesthetics and politics cannot be thought apart. It is precisely in the impossibility of separating both components that the force of this concept resides: if we are to take Glissant's philosophy seriously, we need to stress the centrality of opacity in his project, in his literary works as much as in his theoretical essays, and seek to elucidate a possible articulation between aesthetics and politics. It is not an easy task, mainly because Glissant never explicitly expressed this articulation. When in 1969, he declared with the force of a political slogan: "I claim the right to opacity for everyone,"[86] it created

[86] "Je réclame pour tous le droit à l'opacité." (Glissant, *Introduction à une poétique du divers* 71). Glissant, in a conversation with Manthia Diawara recalls that he claimed the right to opacity as far as in 1969: "It's because reality has caught up to and imposed what I've been saying for twenty or thirty years now amid general

more confusion than agreement. The peculiar formulation seems to convert an aesthetic concept into a rallying cry. What could Glissant's gesture possibly mean? The debate persists. If, as Chris Bongie argues in *Friends and Enemies*, there is a case to be made about "drawing a line" between poetics and politics, it is also a fact that Glissant's claim blurs this line. "Opacity," I argue, is precisely the site where aesthetics and politics converge. It is true, as I will demonstrate in this chapter, in Glissant's work as well as for the postcolonial authors of my corpus who experiment with form as a means of resisting modes of representation inherited from colonialism.

Why is "opacity" the concept that Glissant chose as the main strategy of resistance against western epistemological violence? Glissant, as Neal Allar demonstrated, first encountered "opacity" through reading French poetry. Saint-John Perse, Segalen, Mallarmé are known as opaque writers. It is for them an aesthetic choice, a literary strategy that they develop for different reasons. If Allar is right, it is then first and foremost as an aesthetic concept that Glissant acceded to opacity. Before Allar's argument, this fact had been overlooked by most critiques. Anxious to elucidate the philosophical implications of this claim, they mainly insisted on its epistemological feature. Allar summarizes: "A person exercises the right to opacity by refusing to conform to rationalist modes of understanding; he or she resists any epistemology that would "construct the Other as an *object* of knowledge" (Allar 3).

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incomprehension. Forty years ago, in Mexico, in a conference with Octavio Paz at the National Autonomous University of Mexico, I demanded the right to opacity. There's a basic injustice in the worldwide spread of the transparency and projection of Western thought. Why must we evaluate people on the scale of transparency of the ideas proposed by the West?" (Glissant and Diawara 14).

I am not saying that the previous analyses are incorrect. They might, however, be incomplete. Allar is probably the first to situate the importance of simultaneously thinking the aesthetic and the epistemological aspect of this notion. While my argument is taking the same direction, I want to reinforce Allar's thesis by examining a possible articulation between the aesthetic and the political. In order to do that, I maintain that it is necessary to contextualize Glissant's thought in the French intellectual history by which he is nourished and against which he develops his counter-philosophy. The first question to ask is what is this concept–obviously oppositional–supposed to counter? "Transparency" and "clarity" are obvious candidates. Thinking of the intellectual history behind these notions will show that Glissant is not the one who arbitrarily elevated an aesthetic concept to the rank of a political claim. Instead, as I will demonstrate, he proposes a strategy to counter "transparency" and "clarity," two aesthetic concepts that ended up encompassing epistemological systems of representation and that helped to build a coherent ideological framework justifying French imperialist and colonialist prerogatives.

However, the articulation of the aesthetic, epistemological and political content of this concept has yet to be fully established. This means going against the grain of recent critiques of postcolonial theory for authors, such as Peter Hallward and Chris Bongie, who recently insisted on the necessity of separating the fields of literature and politics. They argued that because literature is often the primary object of its investigation, Postcolonial theory had failed to propose any real political analysis or, even less, any practical solutions. Peter Hallward, in *Absolutely Postcolonial*, started a heated debate: his main argument was that despite its claims of celebrating diversity

and difference, most of the postcolonial discourse was, in fact, univocal, privileging the singular over the specific. According to him, rather than exploring division and conflict, "the postcolonial is generally associated with a more consensual, more harmonious domain of multiple identities, traveling theory, migration, diaspora, cultural synthesis, and mutation" (Hallward xiv). Because it had forgotten the violent and exploitative relationship between the colonizer and the colonized, and because it turned away from recognizing the necessity of nation-states, borders, and identification, postcolonial discourse lost its critical political potential. For Hallward, Glissant, "one of the most prolific champions of postcolonial discourse" (Hallward 61), is the epitome of such a shift from the specific to the singular, a shift inscribed in his own intellectual trajectory that "echoes the postcolonial trend as a whole" (Hallward 65). If Glissant in *Discours Antillais* was interested in the fate of Martinique as a nation, after *Poétique de la Relation*, he embraces a "post-territorial agenda" that Hallward reads as a manifestation of his Deleuzian allegiance. Others have called attention to this shift and coined it Glissant's "aesthetic turn." No more interested in socio-politics, the later Glissant is said to have promoted vague and abstract, purely aesthetic concepts. For Hallward, this is symptomatic of an even bigger trend: "the predominant tendency of cultural studies in general and postcolonial criticism in particular" (Hallward xix) to prescribe a "political agenda" for art and literature. To counter the dissolution of political ambition, Hallward advocates for "the reaffirmation of the nation-state" (Hallward xx) and the consolidation of the borders between the literary, or even culture in general and the political fields: "we need […] to make and preserve a sharp conceptual *break between culture and politics*"

(Hallward xix).

To build his case, Hallward draws a cursory picture of the history of European/western[87] literature, with a particular focus on French authors, and argues that Glissant's work is logically inscribed in this literary history. He borrows Bourdieu's definition of the literary field "as essentially characterized by its productive *autonomy*"(Hallward 15). Initiated by Flaubert and Baudelaire the literary field appears when "literature cuts its links with political and economic power, and establishes its own values in terms which transcend all such worldly interests" (Hallward 15). The autonomization of the field is achieved with Mallarmé when writing becomes "impersonal," "independent," and "absolute." Following Blanchot, Hallward affirms that to write is "to undergo a radical detachment, to become *absolutely* alone, impersonal, isolated with an immediate atemporality" (Hallward 17). The conclusion logically follows: postcolonial criticism took a wrong turn in trying to link the literary to the political. Since postcolonial authors are the descendants of the modernists, it does not make sense to expect them to express any real concerns for the world nor for us to look to them for help in engaging with politically urgent issues. Hallward's condemnation of the postcolonial field is irrevocable. Literary critics ought not to trespass their domain of competency, which consists in evaluating literature as literature: "it is time to recognize that the evaluation of literature is essentially

[87] Hallward uses Bourdieu's concept of the "literary field" and affirms that Glissant, among other authors analyzed in his book, belongs without doubt to this autonomous "literary field." My argument is that postcolonial works, even in the Bourdieusian logic, do not belong to the modern "literary field" if only for the fact that their conditions of production were very different from the French modernists invoked by Hallward.

indifferent to politics as such" (Hallward xx).

Hallward exposes here a modernist conception of literature, invented in the nineteenth century and proclaimed in the West to be the only real "literature." I contend that postcolonial authors such as Khatibi, Frankétienne, Philip, work with and against modernism. They obviously are influenced by modernist authors and use modernist writing techniques. However, I maintain that there is a radical difference between these writers and modernists, particularly the French authors Hallward refers to in his brief summary of the history of *western* literature. The opacity of their writing, Khatibi's untranslatability, Frankétienne's schizophrenic writing or Philip's disruptive language do not reflect the writing intransitivity, the purity of language or the literary absolute that an author like Mallarmé seeks to attain. There is a change of paradigm initiated by these non-western literatures that Hallward fails to account for. I believe it resides in a certain opacity that ultimately guarantees the appurtenance of these writings to "literature" while also modifying its western modernist signification. This opacity proposes a new mode of relation between language and reality and by the same token reconfigures the opposition between the symbolic and the real. "Opacity" for Glissant is linked to "Relation," a term in which the cumulative meanings of its derivatives "relier" (to link), "relater" (to relate), "relativiser" (to relativize) should be emphasized as well as the project of creating a community expressed in the first-person plural "nous." With this complexity in mind, it is difficult to think of Glissant as a loyal follower of the French modernists. It seems to me that his insistence on this notion of *Relation* offers an alternative view on writing, one that would not be "impersonal," "independent," and "absolute."

For Glissant Relation and opacity cannot exist without each other:

> Nous réclamons le droit à l'opacité. Par quoi notre tension pour tout dru exister rejoint le drame planétaire de la Relation: l'élan des peuples néantisés qui opposent aujourd'hui à l'universel de la transparence, imposé par l'Occident, une multiplicité sourde du Divers. (Glissant, *Le Discours antillais* 14)
>
> [We demand the right to obscurity. Through which our anxiety to have a full existence becomes part of the universal drama of cultural transformation: the creativity of marginalized peoples who today confront the ideal of transparent universality, imposed by the West, with secretive and multiple manifestations of Diversity. (Glissant, *Carribean Discourse* 2)]

Opacity is conceived as an ethical way to relate to the other–and the world–that eliminates the impulse to assimilate, negate or understand (com-prendre) the other and instead consent to the diversity and multiplicity of the real. As Jean-Louis Joubert affirms, "La mise en relation… suppose donc de consentir à l'opacité, c'est-à-dire que le monde existe dans les saveurs de la complexité du multiple" (Joubert 43).[88] If transparency was the epistemology of conquest, colonialism, and expansionism, opacity, on the contrary, is the necessary condition of relation.

In Glissant's work, "transparency" is linked to an epistemological violence

[88] "Putting in relation… supposes consenting to opacity, that is that the world exists in the flavors of the complexity of the multiple."

intrinsic to what he calls the "Western project." Glissant retains the etymological sense of project (pro-jactare) which implies the idea of a pre-established finality as well as a logic of discovery, conquest, and domination. A double ambition sustains this project: the intellectual pursuit of knowledge that is its justification and the violent impetus to appropriate, possess and dominate the world. Transparency is the basis of this double movement:

> This same transparency, in Western History, predicts that there is a general Truth of Mankind and maintains that what approaches it most closely is projecting action (action projetante), whereby the world is realized at the same time that it is caught in the act of its foundation. (Glissant, *Poetics of Relation* 62)

The universal subject of history (the western man) founded and realized "the world" by discovering it, conquering it and assigning it a direction (vectorization). The world exists to be known, and others exist to be understood which equate in the colonial process of being annihilated or assimilated. Herein, the West imposed to the world "the universal of transparency" promoted by the "false clarity of universal models."

Specters of Descartes

While it has not been widely noticed, Descartes might be an important, if indirect, interlocutor in Glissant's work. Alexandre Leupin's book *Edouard Glissant, Philosophe* opened the field to reading Glissant with European philosophy. As its subtitle *Héraclite et Hegel dans le Tout-Monde* indicates, it focuses on two opposite

influences in Glissant's thought: Heraclitus and Hegel. Reading Glissant comprehensively, Leupin had done extensive work in order to demonstrate the rigor and coherence of Glisssant's thought, qualities that might not appear to superficial readers precisely because of the non-systematicity and "erratic" approach that is privileged throughout the work. As Leupin himself argues, tracing Glissant's influences is not an easy task: Glissant rarely cites names nor explicitly quotes authors who inform his thought. This is a conscious choice on Glissant's part for reasons that I cannot explore fully here. If Hegel is one of the constant references with and against which Glissant expands his thought, I want to argue here that Glissant's philosophy (or one could say his "anti-method") starts as a response to Descartes' *Discourse on Method* and to a certain French Cartesianism pertaining to domains as varied as literature, philosophy, or politics.

As established by Romuald Fonkua,[89] Jean Wahl had a decisive influence on Glissant's work and thought. Director of Glissant's "Diplôme d'études supérieures," Jean Wahl was an influential French philosopher who introduced Hegel's philosophy in France even before Kojève. In 1920, he published his thesis on Descartes and the idea of "instant." Fonkua analyses specifically how Glissant builds on Wahl's specific interpretation of the Cartesian "cogito" and its relationship with the notion of "instant." My goal here is different. Rather than carefully tracing a precise philosophical influence in the details of Glissant's reasoning, I propose to show how some of Glissant's main interrelated concepts of opacity, relation, *errance*, can be seen

[89] See Fonkua's article "Jean Wahl et Edouard Glissant: philosophie, raison et poésie," 2005, http://www.edouardglissant.fr/fonkoua.pdf.

as opposing a philosophical method of investigation that privileges reason, clarity, and distinction. If we consider Glissant's constant effort to confront and criticize western thought in order to subvert its reductive epistemology, the importance of Descartes as a major interlocutor would not come as a surprise. Known as the "father of modern western philosophy," Descartes is traditionally seen as the instigator of the epistemological break through which human reason became the center of all knowledge and judgment. There are some obvious philosophical points of dissension between the two authors, and re-reading Descartes's *Discourse on Method* will clarify this hypothesis. However, Glissant's contestation is also broader: it tackles the West seen as a unifying project, imposing, through territorial conquest and colonialism among other means, its totalitarian thought of an abstract and generalizing universalism as the only and absolute truth. I want to address how this opposition counters the omnipresent influence that Descartes–or rather, what the figure of Descartes and the current of thought named "Cartesianism" represent–exerted and continues to exert on French thought and western philosophy in general. Considered a precursor of the enlightenment movement and modernity, Descartes can be linked to a specific French national identification while at the same time embodying western rationalism in its entirety.

Descartes' *Discourse on Method* establishes the principles of a new, modern way of thinking. His goal is stated early on: it consists in finding the *right* way to conduct one's reason. According to Descartes, "le bon sens est la chose du monde la

mieux partagée" (Descartes, *Discours de la méthode* 2).[90] Rationality is shared by everyone, but the ways in which one uses this common sense are diverse "nous conduisons nos pensées par *diverses* voies" (Descartes, *Discours de la méthode* 2).[91] This is the reason why people have different opinions and cannot seem to agree on crucial issues such as metaphysics or morality. If Descartes can find a right, unique way of thinking, a method (*methodos* literally means in Greek a path, a way to follow), then truth becomes reachable to anyone. Descartes' desire to find this unique way is emphasized by his use of the extended metaphor of "le chemin," which means way but also the path. In the last sentence of the first paragraph, his project is confirmed with a metaphorical statement that sounds like a proverb: "...ceux qui ne marchent que fort lentement peuvent avancer beaucoup davantage, s'ils suivent toujours le droit chemin, que ne font ceux qui courent, et qui s'en éloignent" (Descartes, *Discours de la méthode* 2).[92] The *Discourse* will open the right path to anyone wise enough not to get away from it.

Descartes initiates the *Discourse* by recounting how he decided to put an end to wandering through diverse modes of knowledge. His method necessitates a retreat to a place where he could be "as solitary and as retired as in the midst of the most remote deserts" (Descartes, *A Discourse on Method* 25), to a shelter that could protect

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[90] "Good sense is, of all things among men, the most equally distributed" (Descartes, *A discourse on method* 3).

[91] "We conduct our thoughts along different ways" (Descartes, *A Discourse* 3).

[92] "… those who travel very slowly may yet make far greater progress, provided they keep always to the straight road, than those who, while they run, forsake it" (Descartes, *A Discourse* 3).

him against the diversity of the world. Indeed, Descartes claims to have dismissed most of what he learned in his studies and renounced most sciences prevalent at the time. His resolution to definitely quit the study of letters (of literature in the broadest possible sense) and the study of what he calls "the book of the world" are two sides of the same coin: "Mais je croyais avoir déjà donné assez de temps aux langues, et même aussi à la lecture des livres anciens, et à leurs histoires, et à leurs fables. Car c'est quasi le même de converser avec ceux des autres siècles, que de voyager" (Descartes, *Discours de la méthode* 6). [93] Traveling in time by reading the books of the ancients is the same as traveling through space: one always encounters a multiplicity of tales, fables, habits, and customs within which it is tough to distinguish truth from falsehood. In contrast, the space-time of *the Discourse* is here and now: the goal is not to become estranged with one's place (one's country) and one's time. Descartes dismisses the study of languages, sciences, letters, and travel for a single reason: they expose the subject to a "diversity" of opinions, leading his/her judgment to "err," and to commit inevitable errors. Descartes' will to think the world anew resorts to an ideal of tabula rasa in which the subject is placed in complete isolation. It is from this vacuum, this literal "desert," that the Cartesian "ego" emerges, a harbinger of the universal western subject: a subject capable of thinking according to categories and logical order, to make clear distinctions, a subject that will be able to achieve complete mastery over nature. Absolute truth–there is no other form of truth for Descartes–is the

[93] "But I believed that I had already given sufficient time to languages, and likewise to the reading of the writings of the ancients, to their histories and fables. For to hold converse with those of other ages and to travel, are almost the same thing." (Descartes, *A Discourse*, 6).

reward at the end of the journey and it is available to all, providing one follows his steps and does not deviate from the right path of reason.

Quite the reverse, Glissant privileges "une pensée de l'errance," "du détour, "de la trace." In *Poétique de la Relation*, he suggests that "errance" should be the starting point: "C'est par là qu'il faut commencer" (Glissant, *Poétique de la Relation* 23).[94]

> Contrairement au nomadisme en flèche (découverte ou conquête), contrairement à la situation d'exil, l'errance donne avec la négation de tout pôle ou de toute métropole, qu'ils soient liés ou non à l'action conquérante d'un voyageur. Nous avons assez répété que ce que celui-ci exportait en premier lieu, c'est sa langue. Aussi, les langues de l'Occident étaient-elles réputées véhiculaires et tenaient-elles souvent lieu de métropoles. Par opposition, le dit de la Relation est multilingue. Par-delà les impositions des puissances économiques et des pressions culturelles, il s'oppose en droit au totalitarisme des visées monolingues. (Glissant, *Poétique de la Relation* 31)
>
> [In contrast to arrowlike nomadism (discovery or conquest), in contrast to the situation of exile, errantry gives-on-with the negation of every pole and every metropolis, whether connected or not to a conqueror's voyaging act. We have repeatedly mentioned that the first thing exported by the conqueror was his language. Moreover, the great

[94] "We must begin with that." (Glissant, *Poetics of Relation* 11)

> Western languages were supposedly vehicular languages, which often took the place of an actual metropolis. Relation, in contrast, is spoken multilingually. Going beyond the impositions of economic forces and cultural pressures, Relation rightfully opposes the totalitarism of any monolingual intent. (Glissant, *Poetics of Relation* 19)]

Against all "pensées de système" (systematic thoughts) that thrive to establish absolute truths, he draws the contours of a "philosophy of Relation," one that relates, links and relativizes. The subject cannot be conceived in isolation, the "I" makes way to an indefinite "nous" of a community to be found/founded, but this community inhabits the world, is linked to a specific place and brings the individuals together in their singularity, in their opacity. Being (l'être) can be apprehended only in relation, in being (l'étant), rather than in itself, in relation to others rather than isolated. "Je pense, donc je suis" is radically opposed to Glissant's view of the world: the logical order of articulation of this exit from radical doubt is misleading. It is an order foreign to the chaotic order of the real articulated by a subject isolated from the world and others. Descartes' experiment is artificial, it reduces all the complexity of worldly experiences by subtraction and reduction, whereas Glissant wants to be open to the totality of the world by embracing addition and accumulation. Descartes claims his *cogito* from the emptiness of a desert and the French translation "Je pense donc je suis" articulates thinking and being while giving, to the French pronoun "je," the responsibility of thinking the world anew and its status as subject. Against this foundational "je," Glissant proposes a "nous;" a "nous" that comes into existence from inhabiting a specific place that is in the world; a "nous" that creates community by telling tales in

its own particular language but also "dans la présence des langues du monde" (Glissant, *Introduction à une Poétique du Divers* 112).[95] The "parole" of this community to come is not discourse; it does not tell absolute truths in a clear and distinct language. Rather, this opaque "parole" expresses the "dru" and the "inextricable" of lived experiences; it reflects the opacity of the world through the density of its words. In this context, the mission of the poet is to reveal in the opacity of the real the density of a present that is not the pure instant of the Cartesian intuition. The Glissantian present encompasses traces of erased histories, obliterated truths and forgotten lived experiences. The poet's role is to hear in the inarticulate cry of the madmen and madwomen the tragedy of a people. It is to expose the "obscure thread" of communities,' in the tales where their silence is told, to reveal the emergence of a "nous" that will build community in the inextricable concert of divergent voices. The space-time of the relation is not an endless desert; it is an archipelagic landscape in which time has accumulated. Meditating on this landscape opens a "prophetic vision of the past"(Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse* xxxv), a philosophy of relation that is also a poetics.

Glissant, against Descartes, takes Montaigne's side, the side that opens the door to the diversity of the world, to relativism and learning in context. In *Poetics of Relation*, he observes, "Montaigne's relativism is forgotten, shoved through a trapdoor and stifled for more than three centuries" (Glissant, *Poetics of Relation* 133).[96] The

[95] "in the presence of all the languages of the world."

[96] "Oublié, passé à la trappe, étouffé pour plus de trois siècles, le relativisme de Montaigne" (Glissant, *Poétique* 147).

parenthesis of three hundred years that Glissant signals is one initiated by Descartes, pursued by the enlightenment philosophers and (hopefully?) closed with Einstein's theory of relativity. It is the parenthesis of positivism, the parenthesis of the reign of reason and I would say, the parenthesis of modernity itself. In this way, Glissant's claim for opacity responds to the dazzling clarity of oppressive rationality that dominated the world for more than three centuries, but it is also an expression of hope that we can now enter the new paradigm of Relation. In this new perspective, truth can no longer be thought as absolute and universal.

> The thought of opacity distracts me from absolute truths whose guardian I might believe myself to be. Far from cornering me within futility and inactivity, by making me sensitive to the limits of every method, it relativizes every possibility of every action within me. Whether this consists of spreading overarching general ideas or hanging on to the concrete, the law of facts, the precision of details, or sacrificing some apparently less important thing in the name of efficacy, the thought of opacity saves me from unequivocal courses and irreversible choices. (Glissant, *Poetics of Relation* 192)
>
> [La pensée de l'opacité me distrait des vérités absolues, dont je croirais être le dépositaire. Loin de me rencogner dans l'inutile et l'inactif, elle relativise en moi les possibles de toute action, en me faisant sensible aux limites de toute méthode. S'agit-il de déployer l'arc des idées générales ? S'agit-il de s'en tenir tenacement au concret, à la loi du fait, à la précision du détail ? S'agit-il de sacrifier ce qui semble moins

> important, au nom de l'efficace ? La pensée de l'opacité me garde des voies univoques et des choix irréversibles. (Glissant, *Poétique* 206)]

Glissant's philosophy is an anti-method. If, in his claim for opacity, Glissant's counter-discourse exceeds a strict critique of the philosophy of Descartes, it nevertheless opposes an ideal of clarity and transparency inherited from the reception of his *Discourse*. In what follows, I will show the importance that these notions acquire through time in relation to a French national identity and how colonial discourses appropriate this slippage from an epistemology to an aesthetic of clarity in order to justify France's colonialism and imperial expansion.

From an Epistemology of Clarity to an Aesthetics of Clarity

In opposing an aesthetics of clarity, Glissant initiates the process of undermining an episteme of transparency whose fortune in France essentially found its origin in the philosophical event of the publication of *Discourse on Method* by René Descartes in 1636. It is unquestionable that clarity is at the heart of Descartes' philosophical method: according to François Xavier de Peretti, if the notion was already circulating at the beginning of the seventeenth century, it was nevertheless Descartes who conferred to clarity its decisive function as a fundamental condition of truth. In the *Principles* (par. 45), he writes:

> I call a perception 'clear' when it is present and accessible to the attentive mind—just as we say that we see something clearly when it is present to the eye's gaze and stimulates it with a sufficient degree of

> strength and accessibility. I call a perception 'distinct' if, as well as being clear, it is so sharply separated from all other perceptions that it contains within itself only what is clear. (Descartes in Ariew and Watkins 89)

Probably drawn from his work on dioptric, Descartes' clear perception is not one of the senses: “Accordingly, if there is any certainty to be had, the only remaining alternative is that it occurs in the clear perceptions of the intellect and nowhere else” (Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings* 104). Still, this kind of intellectual perception is analogous to visual perception and distinction, the other necessary condition of an idea's truth. Distinction, however, is not a different criterion since it is in fact simply the extension of clarity:

> La clarté se présente comme le concept le plus fondamental de la méthode cartésienne puisqu’en ultime instance tout s’y ramène : c’est dans l’expérience de l’évidence certaine, qui abolit toute possibilité de douter, que se connaît la vérité, autrement dit dans l’intuition de nos idées claires et distinctes, qui sont précisément distinctes en ce qu’elles sont éminemment claires. (Peretti 2)
>
> [Clarity appears to be the most fundamental concept of the Cartesian method, since everything ultimately returns to it: truth is known through the experience of self-evident fact, abolishing any possibility of doubt, in other words through the intuition of our clear and distinct ideas, which are distinct precisely because they are eminently clear.]

How did this epistemology of clarity convert into an aesthetic? This is the question asked by Peretti. Following the analyses of Emile Krantz, he situates this slippage in Boileau's "Art Poétique" published in 1674, just thirty-three years after *the Discourse*. While mainly influenced by Horace's precepts, Boileau's Poetic Art has been read as an attempt to translate Descartes' rationalism into an aesthetic manifesto, a manifesto that rigorously–and clearly–exposes the ideals of the French classical literary aesthetic. The slippage from an epistemology of clarity (related to rationality) to a classical aesthetic (related to language transparency) could be effected through Boileau's radicalization of the platonic association between beauty, truth and the good. In effect, for Boileau, "Tout doit tendre au bon sens. Rien n'est beau que le vrai: le vrai seul est aimable" (Boileau, *Epîtres* 43).[97]

Descartes' Linguistic Event

While Descartes was mainly a scientist, he did not become famous for his contribution to physics or astronomy. For the western world, Descartes is the quintessence of the philosopher: known for the invention of a philosophical method that follows the principles of Geometry. However, in France, Descartes' fame might, even more, be due to the simple fact that he chose to write *the Discourse* in French rather than in Latin. Aware that this was not the norm at the time, Descartes defends his usage of the French language:

[97] "Nothing is beautiful but the true: the true alone is agreeable" (Boileau-Despréaux, Oeuvres 112).

> Et si j'écris en français qui est la langue de mon pays, plutôt qu'en latin, qui est celle de mes précepteurs, c'est à cause que j'espère que ceux qui ne se servent que de leur raison naturelle toute pure jugeront mieux de mes opinions que ceux qui joignent le bon sens avec l'étude, lesquels seuls je souhaite pour mes juges, ils ne seront point, je m'assure, si partiaux pour le latin, qu'ils refusent d'entendre mes raisons pour ce que je les explique en langue vulgaire. (Descartes, *Discours de la méthode* 77)
>
> And if I write in French, which is the language of my country, in preference to Latin, which is that of my preceptors, it is because I expect that those who make use of their unprejudiced natural reason will be better judges of my opinions than those who give heed to the writings of the ancients only; and as for those who unite good sense with habits of study, whom alone I desire for judges, they will not, I feel assured, be so partial to Latin as to refuse to listen to my reasonings merely because I expound them in the vulgar tongue. (Descartes, *A Discourse on Method* 61)

For Derrida, the decision of writing in French constitutes a turning point: "C'est donc en français, dans la langue de son pays, que Descartes écrit et qu'il l'écrit en français" (Derrida, *Du droit à la philosophie* 288).[98] Writing "J'écris en Français qui est la

[98] "It is thus in French, in the language of his country, that Descartes writes, and he writes that he writes in French." (Derrida, *Eyes of the University* 4)

langue de mon pays" is an "event" whose present, Derrida affirms, is not only grammatical. It constitutes a rupture and indicates a revolutionary act. For the people of France, the *Discourse* is not only a philosophical event: in fact, its philosophical impact merges with a linguistic project, the modern vision of reducing language's equivocality. It was precisely the objective of the "Ordinance Villers-Cotterêt." As opposed to the Latin language, deemed obscure and imprecise, French is posited as an ideal language that could altogether eliminate the need for interpretation. Hence, the law would be clear and the legal decrees undisputable. In many respects, reducing language equivocality by using French instead of Latin was first a legal concern. This is what the Ordinance literally expresses *and* institutes:

> Et afin qu'il n'y ait cause de douter sur l'intelligence desdits arrêts, nous voulons et ordonnons qu'ils soient faits et écrits si clairement, qu'il n'y ait ni puisse avoir aucune ambiguité ou incertitude ne lieu à demander interprétation. (Art. 110, Ordonnance Villers-Cotterêt, 1539)
>
> [And in order that there may be no cause for doubt over the meaning of the said decrees. We will and order that they be composed and written so clearly that there be not nor can be any ambiguity or uncertainty, nor grounds for requiring interpretation thereof.]

With Descartes, the legal project becomes a philosophical one: French is now the language in which truth, beyond doubts and errors, can be (and is) effectively expressed. If the "linguistic event" is revolutionary in the sense that it institutes a rupture–it is one of the first texts of this nature written in French–, it is also

conservative. It is inscribed in a broader "politics of language," a politics that is ultimately territorial for it was designed and executed to secure the national borders as well as to promote its imperial expansion. In the same chapter, Derrida quotes Louis XII's extraordinary advisor, Claude de Seyssel who in 1509 for the first time claims and invents the expression "Licterature en françois." The project is clearly imperialistic: following the model of the Romans, it appears that to secure and perpetuate a successful empire, one must "enrich" and "exalt" the imperial language. As I will show later, the same argument was summoned to support the legitimacy of colonialism by nineteenth-century colonial theorists such as Leroy-Beaulieu and Reclus, the originator of the term "francophonie." Maybe more troubling, recent discourses by the Académie Française and the institution of *Francophonie* still rely on similar rhetoric. The myth of the superiority of the French language–sustained by its purported clarity, logic, and universality–is still nowadays promoted by the institutions.

Inventor of a philosophical method, Descartes is also the inventor of a language, "une langue claire," which performs what it demonstrates. Product of the politico-linguistic circumstances of its time, the *Discourse* is additionally the guarantee that French is indeed capable, even more so than Latin, of dealing with arts and sciences. French becomes the methodic language, in which the "natural light of reason" illuminates its philosophical project and allows the constitution of a universal subject.

The value of clarity, as Derrida stresses in italic in his text, in addition to being juridical, administrative, political, is also, and "simultaneously," thanks to Descartes,

philosophical:

> La valeur de clarté et de distinction dans l'intelligence des mots, dans la saisie des significations, sera simultanément valeur juridique, administrative, policière et donc politique, et philosophique. (Derrida, *Du droit à la philosophie* 297)
>
> The value of clarity and distinctness in the understanding of words, in grasping significations, will at the same time be a juridical, administrative, police (and therefore political) *and philosophical* value. (Derrida, *Eyes of the University* 11)

Indeed, clarity must be understood in its epistemological dimension: it becomes the primary condition for any quest for truth while it also demonstrates the adeptness of the Cartesian method.

To complete the picture, I would add "*and literary,"* even if the Cartesian clarity acquired this value much later—through the reception and re-evaluation of his work in the nineteenth century. I implied earlier that Boileau's *Poetic Art* might have been at the origin of the slippage from an epistemology of clarity to an aesthetic of clarity. It would be more accurate to say that this slippage occurred in the nineteenth century with Descartes' inclusion in the corpus of national literature, right at the time when the term "literature" acquired its modern signification. Descartes from the scientist, geometrician, and optician of the seventeenth century, from the philosopher of the eighteenths century, became in the nineteenth century "a literary writer," "un auteur" precisely when the notion of "Littérature française" understood as "national

literature" was invented. Three influential essays develop this idea: "Descartes et son influence sur la littérature française," by Désiré Nisard published in 1843; *Essai sur l'esthétique de Descartes*, published by Emile Krantz in 1864 and finally, '"L'influence de la philosophie cartésienne sur la littérature française," by Gustave Lanson in 1896.

For Désiré Nisard, it is less Descartes as an "author of a philosophy more or less contested" than as a "writer who exerted on the literature of his time a decisive influence[99]" who interests him. Nisard praises Descartes for the "admirable clarity" of his language–associated with its "precision" and its "generality"–that establishes Descartes' "authority" (his status as literary author as well as his legitimate "domination" over Montaigne, and on French literature as a whole). Descartes language is "natural" and transparent, without density, for his words are "only the necessary signs of things."[100] Therefore it is the more apt to express truth since reason is privileged as the "universal, impersonal" and "absolute" human faculty.

Emile Krantz confirmed the aestheticization and "litteraturization" of this notion of clarity by reading Boileau's poetic art as the translation of Cartesianism into an aesthetic manifesto. Krantz' article addresses a shortcoming in the previous understanding of Descartes: while he did not propose an aesthetics per se, his artistic influence on his contemporary is undeniable. According to him, the ideal conceived in

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[99] "Je juge moins Descartes comme auteur d'une philosophie plus ou moins contestée, que comme écrivain ayant exercé sur la littérature de son siècle une influence decisive" (*Revue des deux mondes* 886).

[100] "un langage approprié, naturel, où les mots ne fussent que les signes nécessaires des choses" (*Revue des deux mondes* 865).

the classical period directly reflects the principles of Cartesian metaphysics. The strict classical rules are direct extractions from the method that Boileau's poetic Art successfully translated from metaphysics to aesthetics, from the domain of truth to the domain of beauty. If the classical ideal is to express the universal essence of things, clarity is its instrument, its "criterium." Beauty, Truth, and Reason are one and the same. For Art to be rational, clarity has to be privileged while troubling opacities are rejected.

> Il y a une évidence de la beauté comme il y en a une de la vérité. Certaines obscurités, pathétiques et troublantes, doivent être exclues de l'art comme elles le sont de la philosophie, afin que le caractère de l'une et de l'autre soit la sérénité rationnelle. (Krantz 366)
>
> [There is something self-evident about beauty as much as about truth. Some obscurities, pathetic and troubling, should be left out of art–as they are of philosophy–so that the characteristic of the one and the other be rational serenity.]

More cautious than Krantz, Lanson refuses to attribute a Cartesian influence to the whole literature of the classical period. He establishes precise criteria to evaluate Descartes' influence on the most representative authors. His conclusion however indicates some confusion: how to be sure if Descartes influenced massively French thought and literature or if Cartesianism "was simply a profound and permanent disposition of the French Spirit." In this case, Cartesianism might well be another name of the "French spirit" (Lanson 549). According to the nineteenth century critical

tradition (from Taine to Lanson), "(tradition d'importance cruciale puisqu'elle est constitutive de l'histoire littéraire moderne), "l'esprit classique" (rationnel, abstrait et classificateur) est à l'origine de la Révolution, de l'esprit scientifique moderne, et des normes littéraires de la "clarté française"" (Darmon and Force 270)[101]. "Cartesian spirit" is associated with the "French spirit," and both depend on France's "Literary genius." To the enlightenment philosophers, Descartes substituted to an illegitimate "authority" understood as the arbitrary power exerted by controlling institutions, such as the king, the government and the church, the legitimate and natural authority of universal reason. By the same token, he established his literary authority (over Montaigne) and the authority of French language (over those who do not speak it). After the French Revolution, the "déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen," this "French," "Cartesian" or "Classique" spirit (or whatever we want to call it), is truly universal. In a sort of circular logic, nineteenth literary critiques consider that the "classical spirit" is at the origin of the Revolution, the modern rational and scientific thought and responsible for the establishment of specific literary norms celebrated as the "French clarity".[102] To summarize, using the title of André Glucksmann's book, published in 1987 for the 350th anniversary of the publication of the Discourse, from the end of the eighteenth century to nowadays, "Descartes, c'est la France"

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[101] "(a crucial tradition since it is constitutive of modern literary history), "the classical spirit" (rational, abstract and classifying) is responsible for the Revolution, for the modern scientific spirit, and for the literary norms of French clarity."

[102] See "La langue claire de Descartes" by Bruno Clément (Clément).

(Glucksmann).[103]

What is Opaque is not French: Colonialism and the Dark Side of Language Purity

Clarity is so French that the expression, "Ce qui n'est pas clair, n'est pas français," has become proverbial. It originates from Rivarol's *Discourse on the universality of French Language* that won the 1784's Berlin competition (Rivarol). Rivarol's *Discourse* supplied colonialists with their main arguments in favor of the French language superiority (based on its intrinsic qualities of order and clarity) and definitely associated French language with universality. However, Rivarol's original vision was one of a language dominating Europe pacifically rather than one imposing its domination over the world through imperial military conquest (as opposed to the belligerent Latin).[104]

When looking at the chronology, it appears that French colonial expansion occurred in parallel with the institutionalization of French language. 1635: just before the publication of Descartes' Discourse, first minister Cardinal Richelieu oversaw the

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[103] For an account of the historical evolution by periods of the relationships between France and Descartes, see also Azouvi, *Descartes et la France* (Azouvi).

[104] Guilhem Armand notes the ambiguity of an editorial hook used for a recent republication of Rivarol's *Discourse*: the addition of the subtitle: "La francophonie au XVIIIème siècle." He explains: "Faire remonter la francophonie à Rivarol reviendrait alors à souligner, dès sa naissance, la fragilité de ce concept oscillant entre la reconnaissance d'une particularité–culturelle, linguistique–et un idéal d'universalité–morale ? philosophique ? politique ?–entre partage et domination, entre identité nationale et impérialisme. La rivalité sous-jacente avec les autres nations européennes et, en particulier la Grande Bretagne, nourrit une réflexion pacifiste et universaliste qui en deviendrait quasi aporétique sans tout le talent rhétorique de Rivarol." (Armand)

creation of the prestigious and long-standing institution par excellence, the French Academy ("Académie Française"). According to its "status et règlements," the main objective of this new institution was "to labor with all the care and diligence possible, to give exact rules to our language, to render it pure, eloquent and capable of treating the arts and sciences."[105] The same year, only one month later, in February 1635, Richelieu signed the patent letters authorizing the "Compagnie des Iles d'Amérique" to organize the first colonial settlements in Guadeloupe and Martinique. To ensure the success of the enterprise, slavery was immediately introduced in the recent colonial settlements. As Jean-Louis Cornille remarks: "La traite serait contemporaine du *Discours de la Méthode*. C'est en même temps que se formulent : 'je pense donc je suis' et sa totale négation" (Cornille 171). [106]

At the end of the nineteenth century, when France's colonial ambitions and successes are at their heights, French language is at once the cement of the French Republic "une et indivisible" and the most "pacific" powerful instrument of colonialism, "the tool and symbol of assimilation" (Hiddleston). Jules Ferry, promoter of the free, compulsory, and laic national French education that he established in 1882

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[105] Centuries later, in 1995, Maurice Druon, then Perpetual Secretary of the same *Académie Française*, confirms in its preliminary note its mission, almost reiterating word for word the original status: "Car c'est la mission, elle, qui est inchangée depuis l'origine: donner des règles certaines à notre langue, la tenir en pureté, lui garder toujours capacité de traiter avec exactitude tous arts et toutes sciences, et assurer ainsi les caractères qui lui confèrent l'universalité." Paradoxically, it is the purity of the French language that gives it at once its national and its universal character. France is this particular nation whose spirit's vocation is to be universal.

[106] "Slave trade would be contemporaneous with *The Discourse of the Method*. 'I think therefore I am' and its total negation are stated at the same time."

also played a major part in the colonial extension of the French empire. French was then designated as the exclusive language of instruction in an effort to eradicate regional languages. Reinforcement of the national cohesion as well as territorial expansion of the nation were pillars of the republican ideology and they couldn't succeed without strong linguistic policies. As Colonial theorist Paul Leroy Beaulieu claims, "C'est par sa langue qu'un peuple imprime son cachet à une terre et à une race."[107] (467) Onésime Reclus gave the name of francophonie to this "pacific" tool of conquest in which the French Language found its proper vocation: the assimilation of other peoples and cultures.

Modernity and Clarity

Most French literary critiques and theorists of the twentieth century (Barthes, Foucault, Vaillant, Starobinski, etc.) present the history of French literature as structured by a central opposition between modernity and classicism. The break, usually situated around 1830's, separates two historical periods corresponding to opposite writing styles and different conceptions of the concept of "literature." The classical period corresponds approximately to the reign of Louis XIV, the dominant style is associated with clarity and sobriety; the language is perceived as transparent, simple medium to communicate ideas and words are the signs of things. It is in Foucault's terms "the age of representation." Modernity on the other hand inaugurates a time of crises at different level: political instability, social (rise of the bourgeoisie), industrialization. It also inaugurates a crisis of representation, crisis that is

[107] "It is through its language that a people imprints its mark on a land and on a race."

foundational of our modern conception of "literature." Alain Vaillant synthesizes this "historical hypothesis" as follows:

> …lorsque la littérature cesse d'être essentiellement considérée comme la mise en forme esthétique d'un *discours*, c'est-à-dire d'une parole virtuellement adressée à un destinataire–selon le triple modèle de la rhétorique antique, du dialogisme policé d'Ancien Régime et de l'éloquence révolutionnaire–, pour être définie comme *texte*, texte donné à lire à un public indifférencié, par le biais des nouvelles structures de diffusion de l'imprimé public (périodique et non périodique), qui s'arrogent alors la fonction médiatrice traditionnellement dévolue à la communication littéraire. (Vaillant)
>
> [… when Literature ceases to be considered as the aesthetic formatting of a discourse, that is to say of a speech virtually addressed to an addressee–according to the threefold model of antique rhetoric, Ancient Regime's policed dialogism and revolutionary eloquence–, to be defined as *text*, a text read by an undifferenciated public, through the new diffusion structures of public print (periodic and non periodic,) claiming the role of mediator traditionally allotted to literary communication.]

Style becomes more opaque, language gains density and words become things. Here we find a similar tableau to the one Hallward presented: it is with modernity that literature becomes literature. This opposition also justifies Sartre's position in rejecting

poetry, or any form of indeterminateness, from the domain of "Littérature engagée." Because it has to communicate political ideas explicitly, "littérature engagée" needs to stay away from the poets' opacity that he associates with a "littérature bourgeoise." When the message is privileged, language must be transparent. This binary points to two opposite utopias: a transparent language through which ideas are clearly communicated versus an autonomous literature without exteriority where the sign only reflects itself. Postcolonial authors are expected to be politically involved, "engagés," but are they expected to produce literature? When Jameson claims that all third world texts can be read as "national allegories," he proposed to read these texts as transparent. In this context, claiming the right to opacity is simply claiming the right to literature. It is also reiterating the obvious: the real is not directly accessible through language. In other words, language is not transparent, and words have a density that forbids direct apprehension. There is always an excess of signification. The ideal of modernity of unveiling nature mysteries is out of reach. However, with the fall of this ideal, another utopia is born. "Le texte littéraire est par fonction et contradictoirement producteur d'opacité (…) Le texte va de la transparence rêvée à l'opacité produite par les mots" (Glissant, *Poétique de la relation* 209).[108] However, Glissant's opacity is not "dégagée:" on the contrary it is caught in the real.

Innocent Writing and Colonial Violence

Camus' *L'étranger* has long been–still is–at the center of controversies.

[108] "The literary text plays the contradictory role of a producer of opacity. (…) The text passes from a dreamed-of transparency to the opacity produced in words." (Glissant, *Poetic of Relation* 115)

Postcolonial readings of his work have interrogated the plot of his most famous novel, often one of the first to be read by French language Learners because of the supposed simplicity of Camus' style of writing. The story is well known, and indeed simple. Sartre summarizes it in just one sentence: "Meursault buries his mother, takes a mistress, and commits a crime" (Sartre in Camus 10).[109] The three acts are juxtaposed rather than articulated in the sentence: it is a succession of events without any significant order; one does not bear more importance than another. Their significance is equal because it is null: they do not refer or symbolize any other dimension than this factual reality where things happen without apparent reason. So, it is for no apparent reason, other than the sun in his eyes, that Meursault shoots and kills an "Arab" on a public beach. Meursault ends up being sentenced to death but rather than the murder it seems to be his general attitude toward life that condemns him for the jury and mainly the fact that he did not express any sadness nor other expected circumstantial emotion at his mother's funeral. In short, he is convicted for not having cried for the loss of his mother. From a broader perspective, it can be argued that Meursault is seen as guilty by the jury because it cannot make sense of his actions in the world. Meursault does not play the game by the rules. His passivity, his absence of emotions and reactions, his unusual sense of morality are not readable to others. Though his consciousness is "truly transparent" to the reader, affirms Sartre, his behavior remains opaque to those who surround him or cross his path. In the end, while Meursault is effectively sentenced to death, the question of his innocence remains debatable. Does Camus'

[109] "Meursault enterre sa mère, prend une maîtresse, commet un crime" (Sartre 127)

novel expose the pure innocence of his protagonist while denouncing the society that condemns him? Another question follows: to whom does Meursault appear innocent? Is he the archetype of "the innocent" as Sartre would have it?

Sartre's analysis of *l'Etranger*, published right after Camus' novel was released is indeed unambiguous: Meursault is innocent in all the senses of the term.

> … l'homme absurde, jeté dans ce monde, révolté, irresponsable, n'a « rien à justifier ». Il est innocent. Innocent comme ces primitifs dont parle S. Maugham, avant l'arrivée du pasteur qui leur enseigne le Bien et le Mal, le permis et le défendu : pour lui tout est permis. Innocent comme le prince Muichkine qui « vit dans un perpétuel présent, nuancé de sourires et d'indifférence ». Un innocent dans tous les sens du terme un « Idiot » aussi, si vous voulez. (Sartre 125)
>
> [(…) thrown into this world, the absurd man, rebellious and irresponsible, has "nothing to justify." He is *innocent,* innocent as Somerset Maugham's savages before the arrival of the clergyman who teaches them Good and Evil, what is lawful and what is forbidden. For this man, *everything* is lawful. He is as innocent as Prince Mishkin, who "lives in an everlasting present, lightly tinged with smiles and indifference." Innocent in every sense of the word, he, too, is, if you like, an "Idiot." (Sartre in Camus 6)]

The innocent, by Sartre's' definition, does not give any explanation, he doesn't justify himself for there is no rationality behind his action. What is at stake then in the novel

is not to prove or even ask if Meursault is innocent or guilty. Rather the story is unfolding to expose the innocence of someone who is guilty. Innocent absolutely, guilty because of petty circumstances without any particular meaning. Guilty, because, he is the only one to live the truth of the absurd while everyone else is caught in the web of lies that the servants of the social order (the administrators of the French colony) try to keep in place by invoking the law. Meursault embodies the ontological innocence of the absurd hero and his existential lived experiences. For Sartre:

> His hero was neither good nor bad, neither moral nor immoral. These categories "do not apply to him. He belongs to a very particular species for which the author reserves the word "absurd." …Camus is simply presenting something and is not concerned with a justification of what is fundamentally unjustifiable (…) (Sartre, "Camus's the Outsider")
>
> [Son héros n'est ni bon ni méchant, ni moral ni immoral. Ces catégories ne lui conviennent pas : il fait partie d'une espèce très singulière à laquelle l'auteur réserve le nom d'absurde … M. Camus propose seulement et ne s'inquiète pas de justifier ce qui est, par principe, injustifiable. (Sartre, 122-125)]

Here is the paradox of this modern form of transparent writing, or the "transparency of Meursault's breathless account"[110] as Sartre calls it: it is the opposite of Descartes' transparency. There is no adequacy between rationality and reality, and yet words

[110] "A travers le récit essoufflé de Meursault, j'aperçois en transparence une prose poétique plus large qui le sous-tend" (Sartre, 127)

truly represent reality. The transparent writing is now proof that it is not possible to make sense of one's experience because language and rationality can no longer make sense of the real. In other words, thinking no longer secures a meaningful relationship between the subject and the world:

> We have, on the one hand, the amorphous, everyday flow of reality as it is experienced, and, on the other, the edifying reconstruction of this reality by speech and human reason. The reader, brought face to face with simple reality, must find it again, without being able to recognize it in its rational transposition. This is the source of the feeling of the absurd, that is, of our inability to *think,* with our words and concepts, what happens in the world. (Sartre in Camus 10)
>
> De là sa construction habile : d'une part le flux quotidien et amorphe de la réalité vécue, d'autre part la recomposition édifiante de cette réalité par la raison humaine et le discours. Il s'agit que le lecteur, ayant été mis d'abord en présence de la réalité pure, la retrouve sans la reconnaitre dans sa transposition rationnelle. De là naitra le sentiment de l'absurde, c'est-à-dire de l'impuissance où nous sommes de penser avec nos concepts, avec nos mots, les évènements du monde. (Sartre, 125)

And of course, Meursault's innocence is "our" innocence, "our inability to think, with our words and concepts, what happens in the world." Meursault is the universal western subject now incapable of making sense of the real.

Interestingly, it is also in *l'Etranger* that Barthes identifies a modern–maybe the last–manifestation of the transparent language of the classical period:

> L'art classique ne pouvait se sentir comme un langage, il était langage, c'est-à-dire transparence, circulation sans dépôt, concours idéal d'un Esprit universel et d'un signe décoratif sans épaisseur et sans responsabilité; la clôture de ce langage était sociale et non de nature (Barthes, *Le degré zéro* 10).

He calls it "écriture blanche" or "neutre," or "écriture du silence," "a style of absence that is also an absence of style." According to him, Camus' novel *l'Etranger* epitomizes this literary mode of writing. As opposed to the classical language, purely instrumental in the sense that it is "at the service of a triumphant ideology," this new neutral mode of writing proceeds from an "effort de dégagement du langage littéraire" and manifests the writer's "new situation," his new way of relating to the world. Here is how he analyses this new form of writing in the *Degré zéro*:

> Dans ce même effort du dégagement du langage littéraire, voici une autre solution: créer une écriture blanche, libérée de toute servitude à un ordre marqué du langage… la nouvelle écriture neutre se place au milieu de ces cris et de ces jugements, sans participer à aucun d'eux. Elle est faite précisément de leur absence; mais cette absence est totale, elle n'implique aucun refuge, aucun secret; on ne peut donc dire que c'est une écriture impassible; c'est plutôt une écriture innocente. Cette

parole transparente, inaugurée par *l'Etranger* de Camus, accomplit un style de l'absence qui est presque une absence idéale de style; l'écriture se réduit alors à une sorte de mode négatif dans lequel les caractères sociaux ou mythiques d'un langage s'abolissent au profit d'un état neutre et inerte de la forme ; la pensée garde ainsi toute sa responsabilité, sans se recouvrir d'un engagement accessoire de la forme dans une Histoire qui ne lui appartient pas. L'écriture neutre retrouve réellement la condition première de l'art classique : l'instrumentalité. Mais cette fois, l'instrument formel n'est plus au service d'une idéologie triomphante ; il est le mode d'une situation nouvelle de l'écrivain, il est la façon d'exister d'un silence ; *il perd volontairement tout recours à l'élégance et à l'ornementation*, car ces deux dimensions introduiraient à nouveau dans l'écriture, le Temps, c'est-à-dire une puissance dérivante, porteuse d'Histoire…" (Barthes 55–56)[111]

[In this same attempt towards disengaging literary language, here is another solution : to create a colourless writing, freed from all bondage to a pre-ordained state of language…The new neutral writing takes its place in the midst of all those ejaculations and judgments, without becoming involved in any of them; it consists precisely in their absence. But this absence is complete, it implies no refuge, no secret;

[111] Italics in the original.

> one cannot therefore say that it is an impassive mode of writing; rather, that it is innocent. The aim here is to go beyond Literature by entrusting one's fate to a sort of basic speech, equally far from living languages and from literary language proper. This transparent form of speech, initiated by Camus's *Outsider*, achieves a style of absence which is almost an ideal absence of style; writing is then reduced to a sort of negative mood in which the social or mythical characters of a language are abolished in favour of a neutral and inert state of form; thus thought remains wholly responsible, without being overlaid by a secondary commitment of form to a History not its own. (…) neutral writing in fact rediscovers the primary condition of classical art : instrumentality. But this time, form as an instrument is no longer at the service of a triumphant ideology; it is the mode of a new situation of the writer, the way a certain silence has of existing; it deliberately forgoes any elegance or ornament, for these two dimensions would reintroduce Time into writing, and this is a derivative power which sustains History. (Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero* 76-78)]

In Sartre's reading, Meursault's "breathless account" was transparent; the consciousness of the stranger was transparent. In Barthes, it is Camus' writing, his "parole" itself that becomes transparent. In the same way that Michelangelo's slaves free themselves from the bounds and weight of matter, the transparent writing of Camus, freed from the marked, oppressive order of language disengages its subject from History and from any form of transcendental, moral judgment. Camus' neutral

writing places itself in between “cries and judgments” but does not take part in them: it breaks free from the sound and furor of colonial history, quite literally. This explains how Barthes by an elegant and unexpected hypallage can characterize the writing itself as “innocent.” What does it mean for writing to be innocent? It is not an impassive writing that would mask or protect repressed feelings and emotions. On the contrary it exposes the universal feeling of the absurd that this new subject of existentialism experiences in the world.

Is the stranger innocent because Camus’ writing is transparent? It seems to be what Barthes’s reading suggests. Then, another question comes to mind: has Camus designed this ideal aesthetic of transparency to render innocent French colonialism? If Meursault’s “étrangèreté” is shared by everyone (or by “us”), if it is the condition of the absurd man, if the Arab is not a subject or even a character with a name, if the sun in Meursault’s eyes was the only reason for the murder… then, the violence of colonialism does not matter. It does not matter that Meursault was a foreigner living on the territory of a colonized country. It does not matter that Camus had to leave Algeria and settle in France, a foreign country to him. It does not matter that he did not take sides in the most violent colonial war France led on his colonies. Meursault is innocent, French is transparent, and Camus can be absolved. Light, this “éclaboussement soudain de la lumière,” is the only motive for a crime that is not the one for which Meursault is finally condemned: a dazzling that blinds Meursault's thinking and pushes him to kill “the Arab.” It seems that enlightenment and colonialism can work together after all. But what does light obscure? What is hidden in the transparent style of l'*Etranger*? What is obfuscated by the transparence itself? It

should now be obvious: the violence of colonialism, the historical context, the entitlement–when one is a French citizen–to kill an "Arab" for no reason, here is what lies under this transparent writing, here is what is silenced. In Camus' transparent language, it is the murder–or should I say the sacrifice?–needed for the universal hero of existentialism to rise that is at once concealed and exposed. Glissant was not fooled:

> This was true of texts by Albert Camus given to foreign students in France during the 1960s-a revealing instance of fundamental misinterpretation since Camus's work only gave the appearance of being clear and straightforward. Language learning, whose central axiom was clarity, skipped right over the situational crisis that events in Algeria had formed in Camus and the echoes of this in the tight, feverish, and restrained structure of the style he had adopted to both confide and withdraw at the same time. (Glissant, *Poetics of Relation* 116)

Camus' writing is not as impassible as it sounds to be: it indeed reveals a secret paradoxically buried at the surface of the text, the inner conflict in the colonizer's mind with a situation he has no control over and he is both the victim and the culprit. For Glissant, this is the reason why Camus adopted this "tight, feverish, and restrained structure:" to "both confide and withdraw at the same time." There might be no better example of how the colonial unconscious manifests itself despite the intention of the author in the very form of a style and how reading "transparency" and "clarity" of the literary as disengaged from politics and history can be very misleading.

However, to Glissant, Camus is not guilty of presenting the reader with lies

about the Algerian "situational crisis." He is not guilty of having skipped right over this situation. He is not guilty of the silence he stages in the novel. Quite the contrary: like Faulkner, Camus is one of the only colonial writers to have exposed in their novels the truth of the situation. The Other, the Arabs in Camus, as it has been demonstrated by Hazzedine Haddour (Haddour), are indeed silent, impassible beings, whose consciousness cannot be penetrated. Indeed, the Arabs in Camus as the negroes in Faulkner remain opaque. However, at the same time, this opacity translates better than any other form of representation the tension that exists between the colonizer and the Arab. Reading Camus' writing as transparent and innocent is the real offense for the opacity of postcolonial literature goes beyond the choice of writing in a clear, transparent language, and the choice of writing difficult texts. It resides in the tension between the form and the real it expresses. This is where an ethics of reading enters play. It is the reader's responsibility to see beyond, to overcome the difficulty of the opaque text and learn from the writing trajectory. It is also the responsibility of the reader to read beneath the apparent clarity of colonial and postcolonial texts, literary or not, the unexpressed real that appears at the surface of the text.

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