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*Caribbean  
Discourse*

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SELECTED ESSAYS

By Edouard Glissant

Translated and with an Introduction by  
J. Michael Dash

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To describe is to transform.

Then Chaka shouted to them: "You murder me in the  
hope of taking my place after my death; you are mis-  
taken, that is not to be, for Oum'loungou (the white  
man) is on the move and he will be the one to domi-  
nate you, and you will become his subjects."

Thomas Mofolo

*Chaka, Bantou Epic*

Between Europe and America I see only specks of dust.  
Attributed to Charles de Gaulle

on a visit to Martinique

But the most powerful language is the one in which all  
is said without a word being uttered.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau

*Essay on the Origin of Language*

Acoma fall down, everybody say the wood rotten.  
*Martinican proverb*

A black man is a century.

*Martinican saying*

An enormous task, to make an inventory of reality. We  
amass facts, we make our comments, but in every writ-  
ten line, in every proposition offered, we have an im-  
pression of inadequacy.

Frantz Fanon

*Black Skin, White Masks*

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## Introductions

### *From a "dead-end" situation*

Martinique is not a Polynesian island. This is, however, the belief of so many people who, given its reputation, would love to go there for pleasure. I know someone, who has always been dedicated to the Caribbean cause, who has always assert that West Indians (he meant French-speaking West Indians) have achieved the ultimate in subhumanity. A Martinican political figure imagined as a bitter joke that in the year 2100, tourists would be invited by satellite advertisement to visit this island and gain firsthand knowledge of "what a colony was like in past centuries." This bitter laughter disguises a widespread anxiety: an inability to escape the present impasse. Rather than fulminate against these assertions, it is worthwhile to examine what made their formulation possible. Let us place them alongside the following episode. This was obligingly said to a French psychiatrist who voiced his concern about the ravages of mental disorder in Martinique, by a prefect who was no less French: "That is not important. The essential thing is that material poverty has *visibly* diminished. You no longer see malnourished children on the roadside. The problems you now raise are almost irrelevant."

These anecdotes, which seem loosely linked with reality, nevertheless circumscribe the object of my study. It was a matter of tracking down every manifestation of the multiple processes, the confusion of indicators that have ultimately

woven for a people, which had at its disposal so many trained officials and individuals, the web of nothingness in which it is ensnared today.

An "intellectual" effort, with its repetitive thrusts (repetition has a rhythm), its contradictory moments, its necessary imperfections, its demands for formulation (even a schematic one), very often obscured by its very purpose. For the attempt to approach a reality so often hidden from view cannot be organized in terms of a series of clarifications. 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,<sup>1</sup> with secretive and multiple manifestations of Diversity. Such a process is spectacular everywhere in the world where murders, shameless acts of genocide, tactics of terror, try to crush the precious resistance of various peoples. It is imperceptible when we are dealing with communities condemned as such to painless oblivion.

The discourse of such communities (those shadowy threads of meaning where their silence is voiced) must be studied if we wish to gain a profound insight into the drama of creolization taking place on a global scale. Even if we consider this silence and this emptiness as meaningless in the face of the terrible and definitive muteness of those peoples physically undermined and overwhelmed by famine and disease, terror and devastation—which well-heeled countries accommodate so easily.

(Yes. The anxious serenity of our existence, through so many obscure channels linked to the trembling world. In our detached stillness, something somewhere breaks free from someone's suffering or hurt and comes to rest in us. The salt of death on exhausted men, wandering across a desert that is certainly not freedom. The devastation of entire peoples. Those

1. The West is not in the West. It is a project, not a place.

who are sold. Children blinded by their incomprehensible agony. Victims of torture who see death lingering in the distance. The smell of oil on dusty skins. The growing layers of mud. We are at the outer edge and remain silent.

But all this commotion burns silently in our minds. The bloodstained swirl of the planet stuns us without our realizing it. We guess that in the world a number of people in the same state of trepidation might be suffering from this common condition.

In this way each discourse implies concurrence. It does not matter that our raw materials are not exhausted here, that the multinationals do not exploit us brutally, that pollution is still slight, that our people are not gunned down at every turn, and that we cannot imagine the terrible methods used here and there for profit and death—nevertheless, we are part of the disorientation of the world. A morbid unreason and a stubborn urgency make us part of a global process. The same H bomb is for everyone.

The discourse of various peoples brings a certain pace and rhythm to this stabbing pulsebeat. Creolization is, first, the unknown awareness of the creolized. Unreason can be stubborn and urgency morbid. We are shown for example the advantage of large groupings; and I still believe in the future of small countries. In such communities, the process of creolization is expressed in moments of identifiable irrationality, is structured in comprehensive attempts at liberation. An analysis of this discourse points to that which, in the immense devastation of the world, emerges gradually in barely perceptible traces and allows us to carry on. The issue we consider here does not provide us with the arms to fight an economic war, a total war, in which all peoples are involved today. But each critical approach to the kind of contact existing between peoples and cultures makes us suspect that one day men will perhaps call a halt, staggered by the singular wisdom of creolization that will be a part of them—and that they will then recognize our hesitant clairvoyance.)

*From this discourse on a discourse*

Our intention in this work was to *pull together all levels of experience*. This piling-up is the most suitable technique for exposing a reality that is itself being scattered. Its evolution is like a repetition of a few obsessions that *take root*, tied to realities that *keep slipping away*. The intellectual journey is destined to have a geographical itinerary, through which the "intention" within the Discourse explores its space and into which it is woven.

The Caribbean, the Other America. Banging away incessantly at the main ideas will perhaps lead to exposing the space they occupy in us. Repetition of these ideas does not clarify their expression; on the contrary, it perhaps leads to obscurity. We need those stubborn shadows where repetition leads to perpetual concealment, which is our form of resistance.

The summary of a journey, the account of an expedition into the universe of the Americas, this multiple discourse carries the stamp of an oral exposé, thus making a link with one of its most promising agonies. When the oral is confronted with the written, secret accumulated hurts suddenly find expression; the individual finds a way out of the confined circle. He makes contact, beyond every lived humiliation, a collective meaning, a universal poetics, in which each voice is important, in which each lived moment *finds an explanation*.

(Thus, Caribbean discourse cannot be readily seized. But does not the world, in its exploded oneness, demand that each person be drawn to the recognized inscrutability of the other? This is one aspect of our inscrutability).

To risk the Earth, dare to explore its forbidden or misunderstood impulses. Establish in so doing our own dwelling place. The history of all peoples is the ultimate point of our imaginative unconscious.

*From a presentation distant in space and time*

From the persistent myth of the paradise islands to the deceptive appearance of overseas departments, it seemed that the French West Indies were destined to be always in an unstable relationship with their own reality. It is as if these countries were condemned to never make contact with their true nature, since they were paralyzed by being scattered geographically and also by one of the most pernicious forms of colonization: the one by means of which a community becomes *assimilated*.

Indeed, there are numerous opportunities that were lost by the French West Indians themselves. The cruel truth is that Guadeloupe and Martinique have undergone a long succession of periods of repression, following countless revolts since the eighteenth century more or less, and the result on each occasion has been a more visible abandonment of the *collective spirit*, of the common will that alone allows a people to survive as a people.

So, the geographical layout. It would seem that this scattering of islands in the Caribbean sea, which in effect constituted a natural barrier to penetration (although it could be established that the Arawaks and the Caribs ploughed through this sea before the arrival of Columbus), should no longer be of significance in a world opened by modern means of communication. But in fact colonization has divided into English, French, Dutch, Spanish territories a region where the majority of the population is African: making strangers out of people who are not. The thrust of negritude among Caribbean intellectuals was a response perhaps to the need, by relating to a common origin, to rediscover unity (equilibrium) beyond dispersion.

While the structures of economic domination were being developed between the metropole and its colony, a double conviction was reinforced in the French Caribbean: first that these countries cannot survive by themselves; then that their inhabitants are French in actual fact, in contrast to the other

colonized peoples who remain African or Indochinese. The French Caribbean then provides officers and subofficers for the colonization of Africa, where they are considered as whites and, alas, behave in that manner. French policy deliberately favors the emergence of a group of lower-level officials, from which a pseudoelite is formed, and who are persuaded that they are part of the Great Motherland. The big planters (who are called *békés* by us) will eventually learn that this system is their best form of protection. Forever unwilling to involve themselves in the national development of Martinique, they will become the commission agents of the new system, with substantial profits and a real inability to make economic decisions. The entry of the French Caribbean islands in the sterile zone of a tertiary economy was inevitable.

What was missing was a national base that would have made possible a concerted resistance against depersonalization. So we saw, in Martinique and in Guadeloupe, a people of African descent for whom the word *African* or the word *Negro* generally represented an insult. While the Caribbean masses danced the *laghia*, so obviously inherited from the Africans, Caribbean judges sentenced in Africa those whom they were helping to colonize. When a people collectively denies its mission, the result can only be disequilibrium and arrogance.

But all peoples one day come of age. If French Caribbean people have not inherited an atavistic culture, they are not thereby condemned to an inexorable deculturation. On the contrary. The tendency to synthesis can only be an advantage, in a world destined to synthesis and to the "contact of civilizations." The essential point here is that Caribbean people should not entrust to others the job of defining their culture. And that this tendency to synthesis does not fall into the kind of humanism where idiots get trapped.

Until the war of liberation waged by Toussaint Louverture, the peoples of Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Saint-Domingue (which then became Haiti) struggled together in solidarity. This applied as much to the colonizers as to the slaves in revolt and the freedmen (generally mulattoes); movement,

sometimes limited, is not necessarily less permanent. Solidarity as well. Such was the case for Delgrès, of Martinican origin, who fell with his Guadeloupean companions at Fort Matouba in Guadeloupe, and whose example was so dear to the heart of Dessalines, Toussaint's lieutenant.

Haiti free but cut off from the world (international assistance did not exist, nor did the socialist countries, nor the countries of the Third World, nor the United Nations) the process of exchange that could have created the Caribbean dried up. Slave revolts, crushed in the small islands, are reduced to a succession of jacqueries without support or the possibility of entrenchment and expansion; without expression or consequence. After the "liberation" of 1848, the struggle for freedom gives way in the French Caribbean to the demand for citizenship. The colonizers launch their creations in the political arena. The middle class, greedy for honors and respectability, willingly adapts to this game that guarantees posts and titles. The game culminates in the law of departmentalization in 1946, which constitutes in this matter the summit of achievement. French Caribbean people are thus encouraged to deny themselves as a collectivity, in order to achieve an illusory individual equality. Assimilation made balkanization complete.

The alarmed observer then realizes that unbelievable cowardice is a characteristic of the French Caribbean elite. Imitation is the rule (imitation of the French model), and any departure is considered a crime. This is the period of the literature of island exoticism in which a whining sentimentality prevailed. Also originating from this period, without the slightest doubt, is the feeling "You are not really so black" (or "You are like us, not like the Negroes") that our elite have so often had thrown in their face and, let us be frank, have legitimized. (There has been progress in this. In 1979, it is permissible to say explicitly in Martinican French: "Deep down, you are no more Caribbean than I am," which signifies the ultimate weakening of the elite.)

Each time this people rose up against its fate there has re-

sulted an implacable repression, each time followed by a thinning out and further entrapment. There is a long list of missed opportunities. The reason for this is that the elite have never been able to propose (as would have been their function) the possibility of resistance for the masses who were struggling in specific conditions (the smallness of the islands, isolation, cultural ambiguity) against the denial of their existence. In this regard, political mimicry that has led these countries astray (you find there exactly the same parties as in France, and they appear or disappear according to the fluctuations of internal French politics) was an inspired creation of the colonial structure.

Today the French Caribbean individual does not deny the African part of himself; he does not have, in reaction, to go to the extreme of celebrating it exclusively. He must *recognize* it. He understands that from all this history (even if we lived it like a nonhistory) *another reality* has come about. He is no longer forced to reject strategically the European elements in his composition, although they continue to be a source of alienation, since he knows that he can choose between them. He can see that alienation first and foremost resides in the impossibility of choice, in the arbitrary imposition of values, and, perhaps, in the concept of value itself. He can conceive that synthesis is not a process of bastardization as he used to be told, but a productive activity through which each element is enriched. He has *become* Caribbean.

The notion of Caribbean unity is a form of cultural self-discovery. It fixes us in the truth of our existence, it forms part of the struggle for self-liberation. It is a concept that cannot be managed for us by others: Caribbean unity cannot be guided by remote control.

*From tracks left yesterday and today, mixed together*

This people, as you know, was deported from Africa to these islands for servile labor on the land. "Liberated" in 1848, they found themselves fettered in two ways: because of the impossibility of producing by and for themselves and because of the resulting impotence in *collectively* asserting their true selves. Consequently, Martinicans lead an agitated existence, violently and irrevocably severed from the motherland of Africa and painfully, inevitably, and improbably cut off from the dreamland of France.

Off the coast of Senegal, Gorée, the island before the open sea, the first step towards madness.

Then the sea, never seen from the depths of the ship's hold, punctuated by drowned bodies that sowed in its depths explosive seeds of absence.

The factory where you disembark, more patched together than rags, more sterile than a razed field. The choice of pillage.

Elections where your stomach hurts endlessly. An economy of frustration. The cave where your dependency becomes bloated.

Vaval, giant of the carnival, instinctively paraded: high above us. We burn him in this sea.

Béhanzin, "African King," mirror of exiles, through whom we denied ourselves. He continues to wander among our fellowmen.

The crab-filled swamps, the flatness of the plantations, the factories overgrown with grass: the land contracts, and the cactus, and the sold-out sands.

The machete, more twisted than knotted entrails.

*From the landscape*

Because it is a concentrated whole that offers an intelligible dimension. At the same time, the threshold of heat blocked by rain; deeper yet, those fissures that become visible when the landscape unfolds.

In the north of the country, the knotted mass of somber greens which the roads still do not penetrate. The maroons found refuge there. What you can oppose to the facts of history. The night in full daylight and the filtered shadows. The root of the vine and its violet flower. The dense network of ferns. The primordial mud, impenetrable and primal. Under the acomas that disappear from view, the stuffy, erect mahogany trees supported by blue beaches on a human scale. The North and the mountains are one. There were dumped those peoples from India who were part of the nineteenth-century trade (making the process of creolization complete) and whom we call Coolies, in Guadeloupe, Malabars. Today, the flat fields of pineapple cut arid grooves in this aloof and remote world. Yet this prickly flatness is dominated by the shadow of the great forests. The strikers of the Lorrain district, coolies and blacks, all Martinican, were trapped there in 1976: *they turned over with their machetes the field of leaves soaked in blood.*

In the Center, the literal undulations of the cane fields. The mountains are subdued and become hills. Ruins of factories lurk there as a witness to the old order of the plantations. Where the setting sun yawns, marking the difference between the northern mountains and the central plains, the ruins of the Dubuc Great House (Château Dubuc) where the slaves disembarked (an echo of the island of Gorée they left behind) and where slave prisons still lie hidden underground. What we call the Plain, into which the Lézarde River emptied and from which the crabs have disappeared. The delta has been chewed up by make-believe enterprises, by an airstrip. Falling away before us, tiers of banana trees, a curtain of dense green foam

between us and the land. On the walls of a house in Lamentin star-shaped bullet holes still remain from which year we no longer know when three striking cane workers were slaughtered by the police.

Finally the South, with its scattering of goats. The agitation of the beaches, forgetful of all who climbed the coconut trees, once trying to reach out to Toussaint Louverture in the land of Haiti. The salt of the sea claimed them. The whites of their eyes are in the glare of our sun. We come to a halt, not certain what slows us down at that spot with a strange uneasiness. These beaches are up for grabs. The tourists say they own them. They are the ultimate frontier, visible evidence of our past wanderings and our present distress.

So history is spread out beneath this surface, from the mountains to the sea, from north to south, from the forest to the beaches. Maroon resistance and denial, entrenchment and endurance, the world beyond and dream.

(Our landscape is its own monument: its meaning can only be traced on the underside. It is all history.)

*From the lack of speech and from Creole*

When the experience of reading, then access to "knowledge," is granted to a fraction of a community with an oral tradition (and this is done by an elitist system of education), the resulting dislocation is limited in its effect. One part of this elite is "wild" about its brand new knowledge; the rest of the community retains for some time, and alongside this delirium, its sanity.

If this "learning" spreads, without being related to an autonomous process of acquiring appropriate techniques, the disequilibrium of the elite becomes the norm that itself be-



comes "widespread," through which the entire subjugated community consents passively to surrender itself, its potential development, its real culture.

And if such an operation is conducted against a community whose oral language bears the secret, unlikely, and elusive stamp of the written one (this is the case, as we shall see, with the Creole language in Martinique), dispossession is likely to be terminal. A close scrutiny of this dispossession is one way of fighting against collective self-destruction.

This project is even more necessary because in Martinique (a country where illusion has constantly been stronger than reality) we are led in our journey by the once-again-visible mirages of social and economic progress. It would seem that the discourse on discourse (the reexamination of self) has come too late and that as a community we have lost the meaning of our own voice.

Also, how ridiculous it is to describe in books, to approach through the written word, that which just evaporates all around us.

Would an awakening to orality and the explosion of Creole satisfy the deficiency? Is the revolution that would nurture them still possible? Is the land which will *understand* them still there around us?

## *The Known, the Uncertain*

### DISPOSSESSION

#### *Landmarks*

The chronological illusion

It is possible to reduce our chronology to a basic skeleton of "facts," in any combination. For instance:

1502	"Discovery" of Martinique by Columbus.
1635	Occupation by the first French colonizers.
	Beginning of the extermination of the Caribs.
1685	Beginning of the African slave trade.
1763	Proclamation of the <i>Code Noir</i> .
	Louis XV surrenders Canada to the English and retains Guadeloupe, Martinique, and St. Dominique (Haiti).
1789-97	Occupation of Martinique by the British.
1848	Abolition of slavery.
1902	Eruption of Mt. Pelée. Destruction of St. Pierre.
1946	Departmentalization.
1975	Doctrine of "economic" assimilation.

Once this chronological table has been set up and completed, the whole history of Martinique remains to be unraveled. The whole Caribbean history of Martinique remains to be discovered.

## Reversion and Diversion

## I

There is a difference between the transplanting (by exile or dispersion) of a people who continue to survive elsewhere and the transfer (by the slave trade) of a population to another place where they change into something different, into a new set of possibilities. It is in this metamorphosis that we must try to detect one of the best kept secrets of creolization. Through it we can see that the mingling of experiences is at work, there for us to know and producing the process of being. We abandon the idea of fixed being. One of the most terrible implications of the ethnographic approach is the insistence on fixing the object of scrutiny in static time, thereby removing the tangled nature of lived experience and promoting the idea of uncontaminated survival. This is how those generalized projections of a series of events that obscure the network of real links become established.<sup>1</sup> The history of a transplanted population, but one which elsewhere becomes another people, allows us to resist generalization and the limitations it imposes. Relationship (at the same time link and linked, act and speech) is emphasized over what in appearance could be conceived as a governing principle, the so-called universal "controlling force."

The nature of the slave trade forces the population subjected to it to question in several ways any attempt at universal generalization. Western thought, although studying it as a historical phenomenon, persists in remaining silent about the potential of the slave trade for the process of creolization.

First of all, because to have to change to an unprecedented degree forces the transplanted population to desecrate, to view critically (with a kind of derision or approximation),

1. Naturally, generalization has allowed the establishment of systematic scientific laws, within which it is not irrelevant to observe Western science has been confined, in the realm of the objective and the "remote."

what, in the old order of things, was a permanent, ritualized truth of its existence. A population that undergoes transformation in a distant place is tempted to abandon pure collective faith. Then, because the method of transformation (domination by the Other) sometimes favors the practice of approximation or the tendency to derision, it introduces into the new relationship the insidious promise of being remade in the Other's image, the illusion of successful mimesis. Because of which a single universal impulse prevails in an inconsequential way. Finally, because domination (favored by dispersion and transplantation) produces the worst kind of change, which is that it provides, on its own, models of resistance to the stranglehold it has imposed, thus short-circuiting resistance while making it possible. With the consequence that meaningless know-how will encourage the illusion of universal transcendence. A relocated people struggles against all of this.

I feel that what makes this difference between a people that survives elsewhere, *that maintains its original nature*, and a population that is transformed elsewhere *into another people* (without, however, succumbing to the reductive pressures of the Other) and that thus enters the constantly shifting and variable process of creolization (of relationship, of relativity), is that the latter has not brought with it, not collectively continued, the methods of existence and survival, both material and spiritual, which it practiced before being uprooted. These methods leave only dim traces or survive in the form of spontaneous impulses. This is what distinguishes, besides the persecution of one and the enslavement of the other, the Jewish Diaspora from the African slave trade. And, if only because the relocated population does not find itself, at the point of arrival and of taking root, in conditions that would favor the invention or "free" adoption of new and appropriate techniques, this population enters for a more or less long period of time a stagnant and often intangible zone of general irresponsibility. This is probably what would distinguish in general (and not individual by individual) the Martinican from an-

other example of relocation, the Brazilian. Such a disposition is even more significant because violent use of technology (the growing disparity between the levels of manipulation and control of reality) is becoming a primordial factor in human relations worldwide. Two of the most unfounded attitudes in this situation may be to overestimate the importance of technical support as the substratum of all human activity and, at the other extreme, to reduce all technical systems to the level of an alien or degrading ideology. Technical impotence drives the colonized to these extreme positions. Whatever we think of such options, we feel that the word *technical* must be understood in the sense of an organized method used by a group to deal with its surroundings. The slave trade, which partly provided the population of the Americas, discriminated among the new arrivals; technical innocence has favored in the francophone Lesser Antilles more than anywhere else in the black diaspora, a fascination with imitation and the tendency to approximation (that is, in fact, to the denigration of original values).

Therein lie not only distress and loss but also the opportunity to assert a considerable set of possibilities. For instance, the possibility of dealing with "values" no longer in absolute terms but as active agents of synthesis. (The abandonment of pure original values allows for an unprecedented potential for contact.) Also the possibility of criticizing more naturally a conception of universal anonymity and of banishing this illusion to the body of beliefs of the imitative elite.

## II

The first impulse of a transplanted population which is not sure of maintaining the old order of values in the transplanted locale is that of reversion. Reversion is the obsession with a single origin: one must not alter the absolute state of being. To revert is to consecrate permanence, to negate contact. Reversion will be recommended by those who favor single origins. (However, the return of the Palestinians to their country is not a strategic maneuver; it is an immediate struggle. Expulsion

and return are totally contemporary. This is not a compensatory impulse but vital urgency.) White Americans thought they had in the last century gotten rid of the problem of the blacks by financing the return of blacks to Africa and by the creation of the state of Liberia. Strange barbarism. Even if one is satisfied or happy that a part of the black population of the United States had by this means escaped the terrible fate of the slaves and the new freedmen, one cannot fail to recognize the level of frustration implied by such a process in the scenario for creolization. The primary characteristic of the latter, the contemporary manifestation of contact between peoples, is indeed the even obscure awareness that these peoples have of it. Previous contacts were not accompanied in the same way by a consciousness of this consciousness. In the contemporary situation a population that would activate the impulse towards return without having become a people would be destined to face bitter memories of *possibilities* forever lost (for example, the emancipation of blacks in the *United States itself*). The flight of the Jews out of the land of Egypt was collective; they had maintained their Judaism, they had not been transformed into *anything else*. What to make of the fate of those who return to Africa, helped and encouraged by the calculating philanthropy of their masters, but *who are no longer African*? The fulfilment of this impulse *at this point* (it is already too late for it) is not satisfactory. It is possible that the state formed in this way (a convenient palliative) would not become a nation. Might one hazard a guess, on the other hand, that the existence of the nation-state of Israel may ultimately *dry up* Judaism, by exhausting progressively the impulse towards return (the demand for true origins)?<sup>2</sup>

2. The analysis of any global discourse inevitably reveals the systematic development of well-known situations (proof for all to see), as for instance on the map of significant situations in the relations between one people and another.

A transplanted population that becomes a people (Haiti), that blends into another people (Peru), that becomes part of a multiple whole (Brazil), that maintains its identity without being able to be "fulfilled" (North America),

As we have seen, however, populations transplanted by the slave trade were not capable of maintaining for any length of time the impulse to revert. This impulse will decline, therefore, as the memory of the ancestral country fades. Wherever in the Americas technical know-how is maintained or renewed for a relocated population, whether oppressed or dominant, the impulse to revert will recede little by little with the need to come to terms with the new land. Where that coming to terms is not only difficult but made *inconceivable* (the population having become a people, but a powerless one) the obsession with imitation will appear. This obsession does not generate itself. Without saying that it is not natural (it is a kind of violence), one can establish that it is futile. Not only is imitation itself not workable but real obsession with it is intolerable. The mimetic impulse is a kind of insidious violence. A people that submits to it takes some time to realize its consequences collectively and critically, but is immediately afflicted by the resulting trauma. In Martinique, where the relocated population has evolved into a people, without, however, coming effectively to terms with the new land, the community has tried to exorcise the impossibility of return by what I call the practice of diversion.

that is a people wedged in an impossible situation (Martinique), that returns partially to its place of origin (Liberia), that maintains its identity while participating reluctantly in the emergence of a people (East Indians in the Caribbean).

A dispersed people that generates on its own the impulse to return (Israel), that is expelled from its land (Palestine), whose expulsion is "inter-nal" (South African blacks).

A people that reconquers its land (Algeria), that disappears through genocide (Armenians), that is in distress (Melanesians), that is made artificial (Micronesians).

The infinite variety of "independent" African states (where official frontiers separate genuine ethnic groups), the convulsions of minorities in Europe (Bretons or Catalans, Corsicans or Ukrainians). The slow death of the aborigines of Australia.

People with a millenarian tradition and conquering ways (the British), with a universalizing will (the French), victims of separatism (Ireland), of emigration (Sicily), of division (Cyprus), of artificial wealth (Arab countries).

## III

Diversion is not a systematic refusal to *see*. No, it is not a kind of self-inflicted blindness nor a conscious strategy of flight in the face of reality. Rather, we would say that it is formed, like a habit, from an interweaving of negative forces that go unchallenged. Diversion is not possible when a nation is already formed, that is each time that a general sense of responsibility—even when exploited for the profit of part of the group—has resolved, in a provisional but autonomous way, internal or class conflicts. There is no diversion when the community

People who quickly abandoned their "expansion" or maintained it only in a halfhearted way (Scandinavians; Italy), who have been invaded in their own land (Poland, Central Europe). Migrants themselves (Algerians, Portuguese, Caribbean people in France and England).

Conquered or exterminated peoples (American Indians), those who are neutralized (Andean Indians), who are pursued and massacred (Indians in the Amazon). The hunted down and drifting people (Tziganes or Gypsies). Immigrant populations who constitute the dominant group (the United States), who retain their identity within the larger group (Quebec), who maintain their position by force (South African whites).

Organized and widely scattered emigrants (Syrians, Lebanese, Chinese). Periodic migrants, resulting from the very contact between cultures (missionaries, the Peace Corps; their French equivalent, the *coopérants*), and whose impact is real.

Nations divided by language or religion (the Irish people, the Belgian or Lebanese nationals), that is, by economic confrontation between groups. Stable federations (Switzerland).

Endemic instabilities (people of the Indo-Chinese peninsula).

Old civilizations transformed through acculturation with the West (China, Japan, India). Those which are maintained through insularity (Madagascar).

Composite people but "cut off" (Australians) and even more resistant to other peoples.

Scattered peoples, condemned to "adaptation" (Lapps, Polynesians).

These graphic models are complicated by the tangle of superimposed ideologies, by language conflicts, by religious wars, by economic confrontations, by technical revolutions. The permutations of cultural contact change more quickly than any one theory could account for. No theory of cultural contact is conducive to generalization. Its operation is further intensified by the emergence of minorities that identify themselves as such and of which the most influential is undoubtedly the feminist movement.

confronts an enemy recognized as such. Diversion is the ultimate resort of a population whose domination by an Other is concealed: it then must search *elsewhere* for the principle of domination, which is not evident in the country itself: because the system of domination (which is not only exploitation, which is not only misery, which is not only underdevelopment, but actually the complete eradication of an economic entity) is not directly tangible. Diversion is the parallaxic displacement of this strategy.

Its deception is not therefore systematic, just as the *other world* that is frequented can indeed be on the "inside." It is an "attitude of collective release" (Marcuse).

The Creole language is the first area of diversion, and only in Haiti has it managed to escape this peculiar outcome. I must admit that the controversy over the origin and the composition of the language (Is it a language? Is it a deformation of French Speech? etc.) bores me; I am no doubt wrong to feel this way. For me what is most apparent in the dynamics of Creole is the continuous process of undermining its innate capacity for transcending its French origins. Michel Benamou advanced the hypothesis (repeated in Martinique in an article by M. Roland Suvélor) of a systematic process of derision: the slave takes possession of the language imposed by his master, a simplified language, adopted to the demands of his labor (a black pidgin) and makes this simplification even more extreme. You wish to reduce me to a childish babble, I will make this babble systematic, we shall see if you can make sense of it. Creole would then become a language that, in its structures and its dynamics, would have fundamentally incorporated the derisive nature of its formation. It is the self-made man among all pidgins, the king of all "patois," who crowned himself. Linguists have noticed that traditional Creole syntax spontaneously imitates the speech of the child (the use of repetition, for example, *pretty pretty baby for very pretty child*). Taken to this extreme, the systematic use of childish speech is not naive. I can identify in it—at the level of the structures that the language creates for itself (and perhaps it is a little

unusual to treat a language as a voluntary creation that generates itself)—what black Americans are supposed to have adopted as a linguistic *reaction* each time they were in the presence of whites: lisping, slurring, jibberish. Camouflage. That is the context that facilitates diversion. The Creole language was constituted around this strategy of trickery. Today, no black American needs to resort to such a scenario: I suppose that few whites would fall for it; in the same way the Creole language in Martinique has gone beyond the process of being structured by the need for camouflage. But it has been marked by it. It slips from pun to pun, from assonance to assonance, from misunderstanding to ambiguity, etc. This is perhaps why witticisms, with their careful and calculated element of surprise, are rare in this language, and always rather crude. The climax of Creole speech does not release an appreciative smile, but the laughter of participation. It is by its nature unobtrusive, thus demonstrating its link with a persistent practice among storytellers almost everywhere: poetic toasters, *griots*, etc. Haitian Creole quickly evolved beyond the trickster strategy, for the simple historical reason that it became very early the productive and responsible language of the Haitian people.

I have found in *La vie des mots* by Arsène Darmesteter, a work of "linguistic philosophy" devoted to the evolution of meanings of words in the French language and in some aspects "pre-Saussurean," the following observation: "One can still find actual examples of the influence of popular humor as it deforms words whose meanings are fixed and recognized in certain expressions. One discovers with surprise words of learned origin, having in scientific language their full and complete significance, that are reduced in popular usage to ridiculous or degrading functions. . . . A crude irony seems to take pleasure in degrading these misunderstood words and to inflict the vengeance of popular ignorance on the language of the educated."<sup>3</sup> The author's surprise became horror in the

3. 1886: second edition published in Paris by Dalloz, 1010

face of the same practices found in the *joal* speech of the Québécois, in which the process of systematic derision can be seen at work at the very heart of a language (French) to which they nevertheless lay claim. It is not surprising that *joal* should have symbolized a period of Québécois resistance to domination by anglophone Canada, nor for that matter that this symbol tended to disappear as such when Quebec could envisage itself as a nation and participate in the process of nation-building.

The strategy of diversion *can therefore lead somewhere* when the obstacle for which the detour was made tends to develop into concrete "possibilities."<sup>4</sup>

I think that religious syncretism is also a possible product of the tactic of diversion. There is something excessive in the element of spectacle in this syncretism, whether in Brazilian rituals, in Vodou, or in the rites practiced in the Martinican countryside. The difference once again is that what was a trickster strategy became elsewhere (in Brazil, in Haiti) a popular belief with a "positive" potential, whereas it continues here (in Martinique) as a "negative" relic, which therefore constantly needs to revert to the strategy of diversion in order to function. The nature of popular belief in Martinique is that it still functions as if *the Other is listening*.<sup>5</sup>

We can find quite logically one of the most dramatic manifestations of the need for the strategy of diversion in a threatened community in the migration of French Caribbean people

4. In this work, *positive* or *positiveness* is taken to mean that which activates a process in a way that is continuous or discontinuous, "economical" or non "economical," with the thrust of a collective will, whether impulsive or deliberate. Consequently, the negative (or negativity) is not a stage in the dialectical process, but the loss, the absence that prevents a natural collectivity (that is, whose conditions for existing are given) from becoming an actual collectivity (that is, whose capacity to exist becomes stronger and more explicit).

5. See, in this regard, comments on the discourse of M. Evarard Saffrin, who founded in Lamentin, Martinique, the Dogma of Ham movement: section 74 of the Paris edition of *Le discours antillais* (Seuil, 1981), p. 381.

to France (which has often been described as an officially sanctioned slave trade in reverse) and in the psychic trauma that it has unleashed. It is very often only in France that migrant French Caribbean people discover they are *different*, become aware of their Caribbeanness; an awareness that is all the more disturbing and unliveable, since the individual so possessed by the feeling of identity cannot, however, manage to return to his origins (there he will find that the situation is intolerable, his colleagues irresponsible; they will find him too *assimilé*, too European in his ways, etc.), and he will have to *migrate again*. An extraordinary experience of the process of diversion. Here is a fine example of the concealment, in Martinique itself, of alienation: one must look for it *elsewhere* in order to be aware of it. Then the individual enters the anguished world, not of the unfortunate psyche, but really that of psychic torture.

(There is, of course, the glorious return of those who went "West" [towards the East] and tried to take root anew. This is not the desperate arrival of the past, after being snatched from the African homeland and the Middle Passage. It is, this time, as if one discovered finally the true land where roots can be reestablished. They say that Martinique is the land of ghosts. It cannot, however, represent return but only diversion.) To be unable therefore to manage to live in one's country, that is where the hurt is deepest.

Diversion *leads nowhere* when the original trickster strategy does not encounter any real potential for development.

(We cannot underestimate the universal malaise that drives Europeans, dissatisfied with their world, toward those "warm lands" that are deserted by unemployment as well as subjected to intolerable pressures of survival, to seek in the *Other's World* a temporary respite.)

Ultimately, Caribbean intellectuals have exploited this need for a trickster strategy *to find another place*: that is, in these circumstances, to link a possible solution of the insoluble to the resolution other peoples have achieved. The first and perhaps the most spectacular form of this tactic of diversion is the

Jamaican Marcus Garvey's African dream, conceived in the first "phase" that drove him in the United States to identify with the plight of black Americans. The universal identification with black suffering in the Caribbean ideology (or the politics) of negritude also represents another manifestation of redirected energy resulting from diversion. The historical need for the creolized peoples of the small islands of the French Caribbean to lay claim to the "African element" of their past, which was for so long scorned, repressed, denied by the prevalent ideology, is sufficient in itself to justify the negritude movement in the Caribbean. This assertion of universal identification is, however, very quickly surpassed, so much so that Césaire's negritude poetry will come into contact with the liberation movement among African peoples and his *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land* will soon be more popular in Senegal than in Martinique. A peculiar fate. Therein lies the diversion: an ideal evolution, contact from above. We realize that, if M. Césaire is the best known Martinican at home, his works are, however, less used there than in Africa. The same fate awaited the Trinidadian Padmore, who inspired in Ghana the man who seized independence, Kwame Nkrumah. But Padmore never returned to his native land, he who was the spiritual father of Nkrumah's Pan-Africanism. These forms of diversion are then also camouflaged or sublimated variations of the return to Africa. The most obvious difference between the African and Caribbean versions of negritude is that the African one proceeds from the multiple reality of ancestral yet threatened cultures, while the Caribbean version precedes the free intervention of new cultures whose expression is subverted by the disorder of colonialism. An intense attempt at generalization was necessary for the two formulations to find common ground: this liberal generalization made it understood that negritude did not take into account particular circumstances. Conceived as a fundamental inspiration for the emancipation of Africa, it never actually played a part as such in the historic episodes of this liberation. On the contrary, it was rejected as such, first in the context of anglophone Africa

(which rejected its generalizing nature), then by the radical fringes of the African struggle (perhaps under the influence of revolutionary ideologies).<sup>6</sup>

The most important example of the effect of diversion is the case of Frantz Fanon. A grand and intoxicating diversion. I once met a South American poet who never left behind the Spanish translation of *The Wretched of the Earth*. Any American student is amazed to learn that you come from the same country as Fanon. It so happens that years go by without his name (not to mention his work) being mentioned by the media, whether political or cultural, revolutionary or leftist, of Martinique. An avenue in Fort-de-France is named after him. That is about it.

It is difficult for a French Caribbean individual to be the brother, the friend, or quite simply the associate or fellow countryman of Fanon. Because, of all the French Caribbean intellectuals, he 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 Martinican problem (for which, in the circumstances, he was not responsible, but which he would no doubt have confronted if he had lived) retains its complete ambiguity. It is clear that in this case to act on one's ideas does not only 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 diversion.

The poetic word of Césaire, the political act of Fanon, led us *somewhere*, authorizing by diversion the necessary return to the point where our problems lay in wait for us. This point

6. I have observed, each time there is a debate at an international forum on the question of negritude, that at least half of the African intellectuals present would attack this theory, regularly defended by the French representatives, undoubtedly because they find in it the ambiguous generosity of the "generalizing theories" they so like to defend. Thus, Césaire's *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*, whose thrust is Caribbean, is closer to the Africans than is the theory of negritude, which is by nature more general.

is described in *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land* as well as in *Black Skin, White Masks*: by that I mean that neither Césaire nor Fanon are abstract thinkers. However the works that followed negritude and the revolutionary theory of *Wretched of the Earth* are universal. They follow the historical curve of the decline of decolonization in the world. They illustrate and establish the landscape of a zone shared elsewhere. We must return to the point from which we started. Diversion is not a useful ploy unless it is nourished by reversion: not a return to the longing for origins, to some immutable state of Being, but a return to the point of entanglement, from which we were forcefully turned away; that is where we must ultimately put to work the forces of creolization, or perish.<sup>7</sup>

#### *In the Beginning*

The document that we shall examine is well known by those who are interested in the history of Martinique. It is the proclamation made on 31 March 1848 by the delegate of the Republic of France to the slaves who were agricultural laborers in Martinique. France had been proclaimed a republic, and

7. For us Martinicans, this place already is the Caribbean: but we do not know it. At least, in a collective way. The practice of diversion can be measured in terms of this existence-without-knowing. Herein lies one of the objectives of our discourse: reconnect in a profound way with ourselves, so that the strategy of diversion would no longer be maintained as a tactic indispensable to existence but would be channeled into a form of self-expression.

The tangential movement from Diversion becomes, at the level of self-expression, the conquest of the unspoken or the unspeakable (that is of the two main forms of repression), starting with the moment when the strategy of diversion, no longer imposed on reality, survives in the subtleties of understanding, analysis, and creation. Our growing emergence in the Caribbean brings this process to light and authorizes it.

naturally there followed a disintegration of the colonial order. The matter of the abolition of slavery arises, Schoelcher begins work on it, but the events in Paris have a delayed repercussion in Martinique. There is mass agitation among the slaves; it is clear that the planters are increasing strategies to oppose the decree that is being drafted. It is necessary therefore to soothe the widespread agitation, to ensure or maintain public order, to establish the most favorable conditions for transition. Such is the aim of this proclamation.

Its repulsive, hypocritical, sanctimonious, and basically proslavery posture has been pointed out (for example by M. Aimé Césaire, in his introduction to the *Oeuvres* (Works) of Victor Schoelcher<sup>1</sup>). I feel we have never considered this text in its entirety, never clarified its implications or its consequences. It is certainly not a text that *created* the historical events that followed; it is nothing but their prefiguration expressed in a public form. But it is certain that therein lies the expression, for once in written form, of a political will whose strategic orientation will be increasingly difficult to evaluate. That is already a reason to take an interest in such a document.

There is another, more disturbing one. It is that herein can be found the thinly veiled declaration of our alienation, the outline of what the Martinican people will have to undergo, the prefiguration of what the colonizer will try to make of us, and what in part (at least for what we call our elite) we have become. Considered in this light, the document is a pivotal text that reveals clearly what is hidden behind "emancipation" of the slaves: with in this case, the added mockery that it constitutes one of our first historical proclamations, supplied by the other and to that extent more insidiously powerful.

*Glad Tidings!* This will be the principle of our political and collective existence. Herein lies the first formulation of the Other Land.

The steamer. To get there more quickly. The transatlantic

1. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1954.



whatever you feel about religious alienation or fanaticism, you cannot ignore the energy, the fraternal organizations, the activity in poor districts (more or less outside of the traditional scope of political activity) of the churches introduced into Martinique—Adventists, Protestants, Jehovah's Witnesses, etc.—even if you fear the fire-and-brimstone, escapist message of these sects and even if you know that the establishment of most of these churches is financed initially from the United States.<sup>4</sup>

The encouragement of delegation, of representation without power.

The folksingers "serenading" the prefect, in the luxury hotels or on passing ships.

The uninterrupted flow of visitors: ministers, delegations, commissions of inquiry, chairmen, executives, union secretaries, political leaders (to each his own), ad infinitum.

"I cannot stay any longer, I must return to Paris to act on what I managed to see and learn here. But I will not abandon you. In my own capacity I will continue to work for you" (minister's speech).

The expansive pronouncement: tomorrow things will be better.

The understanding black.

The grateful black.

The amiable black. The visitors marvel.

Nearly all the examples of derision are present embryonically in this text.

Today these are the strategic places of alienation: the town hall, the Social Security office, school administration offices, the school, public assistance, parking garages, supermarkets, associations, political and administrative meetings, sports arenas, credit organizations. As can be seen, there is social

4. Some American universities, for example, the University of Indiana (Bloomington), have created courses in Creole language in which future missionaries to Haiti and the other francophone Caribbean islands enroll.

progress. The plantation greathouse and the foreman's cabin are replaced by boards, offices, agencies.

To put the final touch to the quality of "historical document" in M. Husson's text, the poster was displayed in a *bilingual* form. In French on the left and in Creole on the right. Yes. A bilingual proclamation. How not to be amazed? Something "fundamental," like the treaty dividing the Carolingian empire. And if one can imagine that the Creole text was read aloud to the inhabitants of Martinique, who were no more literate in that language than in French, then imagine as well some civil servant commissioned to do the Creole "translation," cursing this extra, absolutely absurd task, and setting to work on this crazy black pidgin that will later fill us with wonder. M. Husson's text once again is an inspired refiguration. It fixes such an undoubtedly feeble transcription of Creole speech that one is led to believe that this speech is simply a low form of patois. That is the ultimate historical effect of the document, which makes this perfect deformation of form the crowning achievement of the will to dislocate *in the most profound way*.

This proclamation ought to have been studied in Martinican schools, criticized by political parties, analyzed by cultural authorities. This text from the "past" is disturbingly contemporary. We can only tear ourselves away from derision by staring directly into it.<sup>5</sup>

### Dispossession

#### I

No community would tolerate the notion of "dispossession," and that is a discouraging point with which to begin a scru-

5. On 15 July 1848, the general commissioner to French Guiana, M. André-Aimé Pariset, makes a similar proclamation. His text uses the same

tiny of the real. But not to do so is becoming dangerous, when dispossession is camouflaged and no one is aware of its corrosive presence.<sup>1</sup>

It all begins naturally with the first African snatched from the Gold Coast. Our new world was the trader's ocean. The land on the other side (our land) thus became for us an intolerable experience. But the traded population became a people on this land. Then came the real dispossession, with the first saucapan or the first plowshare, paid for by a planter with spices, with indigo, or with tobacco. In this barter the country went astray.

The Martinican planter, unlike his counterpart in the plantation of Louisiana or the Northeast of Brazil, cannot claim for himself any of the means of production that would favor his independence from the commercial system whose local "representative" he is.

He is dependent on the slave ship for supplies of ebony flesh. He is not the one who fixes the price or the quantities supplied. He does not have liquid cash (the principle of the barter is based on the value of a pound of sugar), he does not own a merchant fleet, he does not affect the fluctuations of the market for colonial products in the distribution zone. What is left for him? Plunder. No possibility of accumulation, reserves, technology. He exploits on a day-to-day basis.

The wars of independence in the New World (United States,

arguments, but in a much more "serious" tone, more bureaucratic and less "emotional," more "ideological." He was a career civil servant. He did not have the decisive brevity, the genius for denision, the affected miming of M. Husson.

1. The best example is the work of lucid French militants who, solidly rooted in the Caribbean, psychiatrists, psychologists, and educators, prove to you, while waiting to publish their findings in highly regarded professional journals, that you have a defeatist attitude to the Caribbean cause, or that your reflections are purely formal. Fraternal colonization is as disruptive as the paternalist kind. The mimetic trap is everywhere.

Mexico, Cuba, Brazil, Latin America) erupted in those places where the planters could escape the barter economy, by control of a currency, a fleet, a market. The war of independence in Haiti is in another category: the concentration of African peoples, the longstanding tradition of *marronnage*, the power of Voodoo beliefs, population density, are here decisive factors. These enabling conditions were absent in Guadeloupe and Martinique.

The barter system is reinforced by the mechanism of state monopolies, from the time of Colbert onward. Which means that the Martinican economy (production and consumption) in its fullest range is totally absorbed into the French economy, without any alternative. The organization of the plantation system will provide the opportunity for a mild reaction, quickly suppressed by the policy of French beet-sugar producers ever since the middle of the nineteenth century. The barter economy will change subtly into pseudoproduction (pseudo, because it is nonautonomous) then into false production; finally it will be transformed into a system of exchange (exchange of public credit for private benefit in the area of tertiary production).

When these facts are brought to light, you are accused of some kind of sympathy for the *béké* cause. M. Jack Corzani, in his *Histoire de la littérature antillaise* (History of French Caribbean literature), suggests therefore that I would tend to favor a "sympathetic approach" to them. (A scene from the novel *Le quatrième siècle* (The fourth century), between an unorthodox planter and a runaway slave, gave rise to this ambiguity. And it is true that, given this novel's perspective, the two characters are marginalized in relation to the day-to-day evolution of the country. The overall meaning of this scene is, however, that it is not enough to marginalize oneself in order to cause change.) This is a terrible mistake. What I wish to show is, first, that the *békés* were never seen by the mass of slaves, who then became agricultural workers, as *the real enemy*: had it been so, from such a confrontation between these two social groups would have resulted an independent will

that would have founded, in whatever way, the nation of Martinique. The colonizers were clever enough to conceal the true and total domination (invisible) under the no less real (and visible) exploitation by the *békés*. The principle of departmentalization in 1946 is precisely that incorporation into the French nation will guarantee protection against *béké* exploitation. But the *békés*, now impotent, will be, as is expected, salvaged and promoted by the system to the non-dangerous, nonproductive zone of the tertiary sector, which promises bountiful benefits but prevents the emergence of the nation. Furthermore, never has a policy of production been developed or carried out by this exploitative sector. Ultimately, no responsibility has been taken by them for technical improvement. Which creates a number of inadequacies.

The "economic" status of Martinique will be fixed according to this progression: *barter—pseudoproduction—exchange*.

Technical stagnation, resulting from the impossibility of long-term forecasting, here overlaps with the degeneration (on the popular level) of techniques of survival. It is true that basic techniques for the processing of sugar cane have changed little over the past two centuries. This technical entropy, reinforced by the dispossession of the lower strata, produces a paralysis of cultural creativity. Technical automatism, mental automatism.

The habit of collective nonresponsibility in economic production is encouraged by decisions made by the central authority that, while really preventing the appearance of production of a national nature, encourages through subventions and intermittent aid the maintenance of what I call pseudoproduction.

Three effects follow naturally:

1. *The lack of solidarity between sectors of the economy.* Under the pressure of equalization created by an external administration, indifference is the natural reaction of a

Fort-de-France civil servant or a fisherman from St.-Luce to the crisis in banana production in Lorraine or to the bankruptcy of small cane farmers. Solidarities cannot exist at this level. There is no Martinican economy in the real sense.

2. *The futility of sectoral planning.* Periodically supplied for the sole purpose of proving that there is desire for change, the real effect of planning by economic sector is to maintain the equilibrium of a structure that is not expected to be productive. To maintain equilibrium, is, in fact, not to develop. Sectoral plans are by nature twopronged. Bring profits to the tertiary sector, inject noncreative "aid" into the system of pseudoproduction.
  3. *The weakness of resistance from different sectors.* These sectors are all the more easy to dominate because they can almost never activate a dynamic reaction within the whole of Martinican society.<sup>2</sup> It is striking to note that following the period 1939–45, in which Martinicans were unanimous in confronting a situation of characteristic aggression, in which Martinicans had to invent among themselves a complete system of self-defense, the solidarity of the people was tremendous; even if we must lament the fact that this solidarity was used as a force to "wrest free" the policy of assimilation in 1946 towards which everything (the logic of our nonhistory, the self-
2. A typical example of this can be seen in the serious conflicts that opposed (1977–79) the dockworkers of Fort-de-France to the small-scale banana farmers. Each time the dockworkers are on strike against their employers, the small farmers demonstrate, sometimes under police protection, against this strike that threatens their interests. No one is aware that the Draconian conditions (for fruit quality) imposed on the farmers and the conditions inflicted on the dockworkers stem from *the same policy*, whose inner workings need to be dismantled. The system (its police, authorities) appears within the country's economic activities as an important arbiter between sectorized and disunited zones. (Here one can consider the significance of the word *solidarity*: no new beginning is possible as long as individual problems are not considered in the context of the whole.)

interest of the middle classes, the objectives of reemergent French capitalism) was disturbingly pushing our country.

Martinican economists have been regularly caught in the trap of this learned and camouflaged notion of sectors. All their analyses of profitability, for instance, come up against the same obstacle, that of the Martinican input, which no one really knows how to consider.

At present the original principle of barter that created the system of exploitation has yielded to the principle of transfer that is at the center of the system of exchange. It is a matter of the same dispossession in a different form. Between the two, real productivity developed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with the plantation system: it never developed into an organized collective activity. The very notion of production (as a group effort) was consequently lost from view. We therefore did not move directly from the nonautonomous production of the past to the negated productivity of today; we knew that intermediary phase that I describe thus: a malproductivity.

If we therefore had to summarize in a schematic form, once more, the process of dispossession, we would do it perhaps according to the table illustrating the process of dispossession.

At each of the turning points in such a process, we can see the system become hesitant. First of all, when the passage from primitive colonialism to the plantation system makes precarious a centrifugal exploitation (it is Richlieu who leaves the big planters in charge of their productive processes) and a centripetal one (it is Colbert who equalizes all of that under the standard of central financing). Then, when there is rivalry between planters and beet-sugar farmers: continental sugar or tropical sugar? The question will be decided in favor of the former. Then, when pseudoproduction changes to a system of exchange (in the years 1960–70), the last moment of hesitation: to continue a predatory system in a production process for which, after the victory of the beet-sugar farmers, there is no longer any justification, or to equalize the whole in a total conversion to the tertiary sector that will make Martinique

## The Process of Dispossession

<i>Economic Principle</i>	<i>Type of Production</i>	<i>Currency</i>	<i>Social Characteristics</i>
barter (1st phase)	unorganized predatory economy (fragmented production)	the pound of sugar as currency	hesitation between "centrifugal" and "centripetal" growth
barter (2d phase)	predatory economy; plantation system (mono-production)	"local" currency dependent on "national" currency	massive contribution to the French economy
pseudo-production	pseudoeconomy; declining production artificially maintained (malproduction)	"local" currency absorbed by "national" currency	victory of French beet-sugar farmers
exchange	negated economy; intermittent attempts to rehabilitate (non-production)	disappearance of "local" currency	assimilation; change of public funds for private benefit and reexport

into a consumer colony? Naturally, it is the second option that will prevail, and it is not unjustified to draw a parallel between this victory and that of the ideas of Giscard d'Estaing in France.

These hesitations do not originate among Martinicans (*béké* planters, the middle class, or agricultural workers), but from French capitalists. They depend on an economic evolution and a balance of forces *in France itself*, and that is where the solutions are drawn up. We feel only their repercussions where

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pseudo-production	pseudoeconomy; declining production artificially maintained (malproduction)	"local" currency absorbed by "national" currency	victory of French beet-sugar farmers
exchange	negated economy; intermittent attempts to rehabilitate (non-production)	disappearance of "local" currency	assimilation; exchange of public funds for private benefit and reexport

into a consumer colony? Naturally, it is the second option that will prevail, and it is not unjustified to draw a parallel between this victory and that of the ideas of Giscard d'Estaing in France.

These hesitations do not originate among Martinicans (*béké* planters, the middle class, or agricultural workers), but from French capitalists. They depend on an economic evolution and a balance of forces *in France itself*, and that is where the solutions are drawn in. We feel only about their

we are, and in particular the political fallout, the logic of whose operation in Martinique is not clearly seen without the preceding analysis. It is in this process that the principle of overdetermination can be located, the source of which remains constantly "invisible" in the country itself.

## II

The consequences in the economic "system" are established from the outset—Martinican history has seen only a few adjustments to this order of things:

1. The total absence of direct or self-generated investment.
2. The fear of surplus, linked to the inability to control an external market or to organize an internal one.<sup>3</sup>
3. The absence of accumulated capital, technical capacity, creative projects.
4. The habit of not producing, a consequence of the need to satisfy predatory impulses. The resulting repercussions will be influential in their turn:
  - a. A corresponding absence of accumulation in collective cultural acquisition.
  - b. The pulverization of the cultural domain tied to the plantation system.
  - c. The absence of an independent creativity for resolving the conflicts between social strata.
  - d. The appearance of the repeated pattern of revolt, then stagnation, without any idea of how to break free.

These forms of dispossession culminate, then, in the present system. French merchant capitalism found it unthinkable to continue to subsidize, for the simple purpose of social stability, an economy that was destined to be unprofitable. Especially since no section of the population seems capable of posing a sustained threat to this stability. The last hesitation has then been taken care of. The investment in public funds of

3. M. Gilbert Bazabas, a Martinican economist, has pointed to this obsessive inadequacy, related to productive and distributive fragmentation.

a small part of the surplus realized in France and worldwide by the French capitalist economy allows the creation in Martinique of an extended social stratum of those who sell services (functionaries), to which is added a migrant group of technicians in the tertiary sector coming from France, the development of passive consumerism (the finished products imported into Martinique being exchanged "directly" for services), the realization of significant private gain in this tertiary sector. Public subventions will therefore be less and less concerned with the production of finished goods (except to favor "transfer" to the tertiary sector) and more and more with the infrastructure and commercial equipment (roads, buildings, port, airport, consumer services, distribution circuits, credit organizations, etc.) and security (army, police force).

These equalizing subventions, this hypertrophy in the tertiary sector, produce a higher standard of living at the production level, and consequently inflict isolation on what remains of the productive social strata and confirm the isolation of sectors of productivity (sectorization). The result of this is, on the collective level, artificial social strata whose dynamic is neutralized *from the outside* and an institutionalizing of hollow entities: a nonfunctional elitism; on the individual level, the development of a dependent mentality, what can be called "the dependence of grey matter" in the "assimilated" sector of Martinican society. The process of total dislocation (the destruction of all productive capacity) aggravates the impulse towards imitation, imposes in an irresistible way an identification with the proposed model of existence (the French one), of reflection, and unleashes an irrational reluctance to question this model, whose "transmission" appears as the only guarantee of "social status."

## III

It is perhaps not a spectacular thing for mankind to trace this process of dispossession. But its analysis usefully clarifies the inner workings, the hidden forms, of cultural contact, the contact that makes it possible. A few of us reckon (in Martinique)

que) that no other community, perhaps, in the world is as alienated as our own, as threatened with extinction. The pressure to imitate is, perhaps, the most extreme form of violence that anyone can inflict on a people; even more so when it assumes the agreement (and even, the pleasure) of the mimetic society. This dialectic, in fact, suppresses this form of violence under the guise of pleasure. This form of suppression is important to track down.<sup>4</sup> The reductive power of imitation is even more terrible in that part of the world that is called, so symbolically, Micronesia. I have noted and summarized with horror, in the study of M. J.-P. Dumas, the obvious instances where the situation of these Pacific islands under American domination and that of the French islands in the Caribbean overlap<sup>5</sup>:

4. The present provides us with the example of an equally violence: that of the fierce reaction, in Iran, against imitation. For the ayatollahs Islam means anti-West. (But is not Islam, a cultural phenomenon from the Mediterranean, a part of the West? Like Judeo-Christian thought, it admits to a creator. I argued this position to the amused surprise of the Algerian novelist Rachid Boudjedra.) The extreme reaction against imitation originates within the same impulse that imposed the rape of imitation. On the contrary, the most secure protection against self-destructive imitation is the process of creolization. (In this sense, and contrary to the official ideology with which Martinicans are bombarded every day, cultural cross-fertilization and imitation are *diametrically opposed*.) It is not irrelevant to note that violent reactions against imitation were intensified where an important reserve of economic resources made them possible. Total economic dislocation is the first condition of the growth of imitativeness. The surest method of combating the latter for a people is to regain the complete control of its system of production. One cannot begin cross-fertilization (to become relative, to reject origins) unless one is not lost in pseudoproduction. That is the vicious circle in which we are caught. Because seizing control of a system of production does not solve class oppression within the system. Because the complete control of an economy takes one away from the cross-cultural process (of relativity). These are the underlying contradictions of the nationalist position.

These contradictions are swept away when economic *intensity* moves to resolve them. They are aggravated when dispossession has crushed the consensus of the community.

5. Published in *Les Temps Modernes*, no. 383 (1978). M. Jean-Pierre

The recorded history of Micronesia is the history of its colonization. — The government control is in the Department of the Interior in Washington. — There is an increasingly important part played by Micronesians in positions of responsibility within the administration. One of the features of Micronesia is an excessive bureaucracy. — The money comes entirely from the United States. — The Micronesian Congress has a considerable power of recommendation. — The American High Commissioner has the power of veto over all the laws passed by this Congress. — Washington is especially interested in the overall size of the budget and is careful that it is not exceeded. — It is the executive, in Micronesia, that has the final authority. — The American administration is not without ambiguities or contradictions. — The role of Micronesia in American military strategy. — The Micronesians first proposed the status of free association with the United States. They can only invoke the status of independence as a last resort. — A large number of Micronesians have expressed their fear of independence. — This attitude can be explained by the amount of American aid that artificially sustains the economy of the "Territory." — The islands compete with each other, each one waiting for the lion's share of the aid. — Micronesia is wealth without development. — Anything can be grown in these islands. — It is more common to buy tuna fish than fresh fish. — It is extremely difficult to find local bananas, local vegetables, citrus fruit, alcohol from coconuts; on the

problem: preservation of language, persistence of traditions, intensity of popular resistance, psychic dislocation and forms of mental trauma, etc. The article is an objective presentation of facts; a "cultural" study could have forced to the surface interpretations on which the author does not venture

other hand, it is easy to find in the four supermarkets of the town of Saipan frozen vegetables, grapefruit and oranges from California, beer, Coca-Cola, whisky, etc. — Massive external aid maintains underdevelopment. — It has played a role in the certain enrichment of the population, but in the equally real impoverishment of the "Territory." — The salaries are on the average twice as high in the public sector (administration) as in the private sector. — Whence the lack of interest among Micronesians in the business of real production, and their dependence in this regard on American consumption patterns. — This inflow of public-sector money has had the effect, on a limited work force, of suppressing all activity in the traditional productive sector. — Why continue to work hard in agriculture and fishing if one can easily obtain money in the public sector? — The Micronesian children no longer wish to eat breadfruit nor even local chicken but Kentucky Fried Chicken. — Salaries are used to purchase imported consumer goods. — The population has become accustomed to living above their means and unwilling to adjust downward. The price paid is evidently dependence. — Investment is essentially directed toward infrastructure. — The American investment budget is totally devoted to nonproductive investment. — The private sector invests with the help of Japanese money in the sector that turns the quickest profit: tourism. — Saturation point has been reached, and the big hotels are empty more often than full. — In short, external aid has had the following effects: providing high salaries in the nonproductive sector; getting the population accustomed to a high level of gratuitous spending on social services (education, health); making the state the only employer in the country; orienting investments toward infrastruc-

ture, to the detriment of productive investments. — In short, we are dealing with a consumer society with no real production. If the essence of underdevelopment is dependence, Micronesia is a completely dependent country, even more insidiously so since it is accompanied by a relatively high standard of living. — The desired result has been successfully obtained: the populations concerned cannot, whether they like it or not, do without the American presence for money, goods, culture, education, health. Domination is complete. — The local American administration, no worse than any other, cares more about managing, educating, than developing. — It is no longer a matter of nineteenth century colonization with its pure and simple exploitation of the country, but of something more subtle. But the "Micronesian experiment" shows that there can be no real "development" within dependence. — Neocolonialism can indeed exist with: a considerable democracy, an important amount of money poured into the country, and a real promotion of the native peoples. — Dependence is the product of a system and not of isolated individuals. — The value of Micronesia for the United States is not economic but strategic. — The potential of the ocean that surrounds these islands can be great in terms of maritime and mining resources. — But are the Micronesians themselves against dependence? Nothing is less certain. — It seems that no one wants to return to a *coconut economy*. — In a referendum: "Do you wish to be independent and face the consequences?" it is unlikely that the majority of Micronesians will vote "yes." — So?

The reductive force of imitation is deeply rooted. One could not hope to discover the "dynamics" of the situation in Maritimique without going *there* to investigate. A visible difference



between the Micronesian and the Caribbean situations is that the French system has produced an abstract and refined conception of this new form of colonialism: the urgency to persuade, to extract consent from the subjugated people, to subtly scorn (whereas the Anglo-Saxon visibly scorns) is both the symbolic and the major hidden reality of such a policy, which could have been applied only to small countries.<sup>6</sup>

C O M P L E M E N T A R Y N O T E  
on the "stripped migrant" and technical awareness

I persist, in spite of sarcasm and hesitation, in exploring the full implications related to the diverse experiences of migrants in the Caribbean and Latin America. The enslaved African is the "stripped migrant." He could not bring his tools, the images of his gods, his daily implements, nor could he send news to his neighbors, or hope to bring his family over, or reconstitute his former family in the place of deportation. Naturally, the ancestral spirit had not left him; he had not lost the meaning of a former experience. But he will have to fight for centuries in order to recognize its legitimacy. The other migrant, also stripped to essentials, retained all of that; but he

6. M. Aimé Césaire comes to this conclusion (in the euphoria, admittedly, of 1948) in his introduction to the (Selected Works) *Oeuvres choisies* of Victor Schoelcher: "He brought political freedom to blacks in the French Caribbean . . . created a startling contradiction that cannot but explode the old order of things: *that which makes the modern colonized man at the same time a full citizen and a complete proletarian*. From this time on, on the edge of the Caribbean sea as well, the motor of History is about to roar into life."

It is difficult today to identify with these declarations.

Because we know that here political freedom has been only a constant lure. That the Martinican is neither a full citizen (he is not from the city) nor a complete proletarian (but a "dispersed" proletarian). That History is that which has been opposed unrelentingly to the converging histories of the Caribbean, and that since the "liberation" of 1848 what has indeed increased is the snoring of the sleep of assimilation, interrupted by tragic explosions of popular impulses, never enough to resolve the dilemma.

will be—Italian or Spanish from Latin America, Lebanese or Chinese confined to the tertiary sector—incapable of transforming into a *technical discourse* the technical methods that he kept as part of his heritage. This privilege will be reserved in the "new world" for the WASP descendants of those who came on the *Mayflower*. The only other technological "entity," that of Aztec or Mayan peoples, will be swept away by the conquest. Over the entire American continent, whatever the degree of technical evolution of the people, Western technological systems prevail and their control is restricted to the dominant classes of the United States and Canada. The question is whether one should urgently consider a true integration, beyond piecemeal technical progress, of the "spirit" of this technology; or, if necessary, be prepared from now on to adapt this spirit to the emergent cultures of the Caribbean and Latin America. Without which domination will flourish. A concerted effort of this kind can combat, in small communities helplessly given over to the colonizing force of assimilation, total dependence (what I can then call technical ignorance) created from the combination of two factors: the lack of an endogenous technology (conceived as a collective approach to experience and action) and the necessary adoption of technical progress, imported from elsewhere.

L a n d

I remember the lingering fragrances that lay thick in my childhood world. I feel that then all the surrounding land was rich with these perfumes that never left you: the ethereal smell of magnolias, the essence of tuberoses, the discreet stubbornness of dahlias, the dreamy penetration of gladioli. All these flowers have disappeared, or almost. There barely remains along the roads, as far as smells go, the sudden sugary blanket of hog plums in whose wake you can get lost, or, in some places along the Route de la Trace, the delicate smell of wild lilies

beckon. The land has lost its smells. Like almost everywhere else in the world.

The flowers that grow today are cultivated for export. Sculptured, spotless, striking in precision and quality. But they are heavy also, full, lasting. You can keep them for two weeks in a vase. Arum or anthurium, bunches of which adorn our airport. The porcelain rose, which is so durable. The heliconia, its amazing shaft multiplying infinitely. The King of Kings, or the red ginger lily, whose very heart is festooned with dark red. These flowers delight us. But they have no fragrance. They are nothing but shape and color.

I am struck by the fate of flowers. The shapeless yielding to the shapely. As if the land had rejected its "essence" to concentrate everything in appearance. It can be seen but not smelt. Also these thoughts on flowers are not a matter of lamenting a vanished idyll in the past. But it is true that the fragile and fragrant flower demanded in the past daily care from the community that acted on its own. The flower without fragrance endures today, is maintained in form only. Perhaps that is the emblem of our wait? We dream of what we will cultivate in the future, and we wonder vaguely what the new hybrid that is already being prepared for us will look like, since in any case we will not rediscover them as they were, the magnolias of former times.

### *Sardonic Interludes*

The question of the selection of bananas (the legitimate and inflexible demand of French importers for high quality fruit leaving Martinique) tempts us to make reference to the over-ripe pears and the half-rotten grapes that Martinican consumers are prepared to buy (which is their lookout) on the shelves of Fort-de-France shops.

\* \* \*

Not a single visitor who does not assure you that he has succumbed to the beauty of the land and the charm of the inhabitants. Martinicans are charming by profession.

\* \* \*

Betting on cockfights, canoe or boat races, soccer matches, drag races of cars or motorbikes improvised at night on the five kilometers of "highway," or from commune to commune (with stakes that amount to a million old francs): the traditional circuit of underdevelopment.

\* \* \*

In beautiful rounded white letters on a clean blackboard at the reopening of school: *it is forbidden to speak Creole in class or on the playground.*

\* \* \*

### HISTORY SIGNS ON

The former opening montage that signed on the television news broadcast of ORTF-Martinique (1970) could be seen as both an abridged history and an analysis of structures. It presented us with, in the amazing shorthand possible in montage, the Arc de Triomphe attached in all kinds of ways (boat, train, and airplane) to a field of pineapples, to a cane cutter (who wiped the sweat from his brow and raised his head, no doubt to see the said airplane go by), to a young Martinican woman,

*Natural Poetics, Forced Poetics*

I define as a free or natural poetics any collective yearning for expression that is not opposed to itself either at the level of what it wishes to express or at the level of the language that it puts into practice.

(I call self-expression a shared attitude, in a given community, of confidence or mistrust in the language or languages it uses.)

I define forced or constrained poetics as any collective desire for expression that, when it manifests itself, is negated at the same time because of the *deficiency* that stifles it, not at the level of desire, which never ceases, but at the level of expression, which is never realized.

*Natural poetics*: Even if the destiny of a community should be a miserable one, or its existence threatened, these poetics are the direct result of activity within the social body. The most daring or the most artificial experiences, the most radical questioning of self-expression, extend, reform, clash with a given poetics. This is because there is no incompatibility here between desire and expression. The most violent challenge to an established order can emerge from a natural poetics, when there is a continuity between the challenged order and the disorder that negates it.

*Forced poetics*: The issue is not one of attempts at articulation (composite and "voluntary"), through which we test our capacity for self-expression. Forced poetics exist where a need for expression confronts an inability to achieve expression. It can happen that this confrontation is fixed in an opposition between the content to be expressed and the language suggested or imposed.

This is the case in the French Lesser Antilles where the mother tongue, Creole, and the official language, French, produce in the Caribbean mind an unsuspected source of anguish.

A French Caribbean individual who does not experience some inhibition in handling French, since our consciousness is

haunted by the deep feeling of being different, would be like someone who swims motionless in the air without suspecting that he could with the same motion move in the water and perhaps discover the unknown. He must cut across one language in order to attain a form of expression that is perhaps not part of the internal logic of this language. A forced poetics is created from the awareness of the opposition between a language that one uses and a form of expression that one needs.

At the same time, Creole, which could have led to a natural poetics (because in it language and expression would correspond perfectly) is being exhausted. It is becoming more French in its daily use; it is becoming vulgarized in the transition from spoken to written. Creole has, however, always resisted this dual deformation. Forced poetics is the result of these deformations and this resistance.

Forced poetics therefore does not generally occur in a traditional culture, even if the latter is threatened. In any traditional culture, that is where the language, the means of expression, and what I call here the form of expression (the collective attitude toward the language used) coincide and reveal no deep *deficiency*, there is no need to resort to this ploy, to this counterpoetics, which I will try to analyze in relation to our Creole language and our use of the French language.

Forced poetics or counterpoetics is instituted by a community whose self-expression does not emerge spontaneously, or result from the autonomous activity of the social body. Self-expression, a casualty of this lack of autonomy, is itself marked by a kind of impotence, a sense of futility. This phenomenon is exacerbated because the communities to which I refer are always primarily oral. The transition from oral to written, until now considered in the context of Western civilization as an inevitable evolution, is still cause for concern. Creole, a not-yet-standardized language, reveals this problem in and through its traditional creativity. That is why I will try to discuss first of all the fundamental situation of Creole: that is, the basis of its orality.

*The Situation of the Spoken*

1. The written requires nonmovement: the body does not move with the flow of what is said. The body must remain still; therefore the hand wielding the pen (or using the typewriter) does not reflect the movement of the body, but is linked to (an appendage of) the page.

The oral, on the other hand, is inseparable from the movement of the body. There the spoken is inscribed not only in the posture of the body that makes it possible (squatting for a palaver for instance, or the rhythmic tapping of feet in a circle when we keep time to music), but also in the almost semaphoric signals through which the body implies or emphasizes what is said.<sup>1</sup> Utterance depends on posture, and perhaps is limited by it.

That which is expressed as a general hypothesis can now perhaps be reinforced by specific illustration. For instance, the alienated body of the slave, in the time of slavery, is in fact deprived, in an attempt at complete dis-possession, of speech. Self-expression is not only forbidden, but impossible to envisage. Even in his reproductive function, the slave is not in control of himself. He reproduces, but it is for the master. All pleasure is silent:

1. I have always been fascinated by the well-known Italian story, probably invented by the French, of the notice posted in a bus: "Do not speak to the driver. He needs his hands for driving." The motionless body in the act of writing, moreover, favors a neurotic "internalization." The orality that accompanies the "rules of writing" is that of *speaking well* (in seventeenth-century French) which is fixed in a reductive monolingualism. Stendhal says about Italy in the nineteenth century (*De l'amour*, Chapter 49) that there one speaks rarely in order to "speak well"; and also that "Venetian, Neapolitan, Genoese, Piedmontese are almost totally different languages and only spoken by people for whom the printed word can exist only in a common language, the one spoken in Rome." Let us add, by contrast, that such a strategy would not be possible today for Creole. One could not simply designate, for example, to opt unanimously for the Haitian transcriptive model (probably the most elaborate one). The freedom to write is necessary for the Creole language, above and beyond the variations in dialect.

that is, thwarted, deformed, denied. In such a situation, expression is cautious, reticent, whispered, spun thread by thread in the dark.

When the body is freed (when day comes) it follows the explosive scream. Caribbean speech is always excited, it ignores silence, softness, sentiment. The body follows suit. It does not know pause, rest, smooth continuity. It is jerked along.

To move from the oral to the written is to immobilize the body, to take control (to possess it). The creature deprived of his body cannot attain the immobility where writing takes shape. He keeps moving; it can only scream. In this silent world, voice and body pursue desperately an impossible fulfilment.

Perhaps we will soon enter the world of the nonwritten, where the transition from oral to written, if it takes place, will no longer be seen as promotion or transcendence. For now, speech and body are shaped, in their orality, by the same obsession with past privation. The word in the Caribbean will only survive as such, in a written form, if this earlier loss finds expression.

2. From the outset (that is, from the moment Creole is forged as a medium of communication between slave and master), the spoken imposes on the slave its particular syntax. For Caribbean man, the word is first and foremost sound. Noise is essential to speech. Din is discourse. This must be understood.

It seems that meaning and pitch went together for the uprooted individual, in the unrelenting silence of the world of slavery. It was the intensity of the sound that dictated meaning: the pitch of the sound conferred significance. Ideas were bracketed. One person could make himself understood through the subtle associations of sound, in which the master, so capable of managing "basic Creole" in other situations, got hopelessly lost. Creole spoken by the *békés* was never shouted out loud. Since

speech was forbidden, slaves camouflaged the word under the provocative intensity of the scream. No one could translate the meaning of what seemed to be nothing but a shout. It was taken to be nothing but the call of a wild animal.<sup>2</sup> This is how the dispossessed man organized his speech by weaving it into the apparently meaningless texture of extreme noise.

There developed from that point a specialized system of significant insignificance. Creole organizes speech as a blast of sound.

I do not know if this phenomenon is common in threatened languages, dying dialects, languages that suffer from nonproductivity. But it is a constant feature of the popular use of Martinican Creole. Not only in the delivery of folktales and songs, but even and often in daily speech. A requirement is thus introduced into spoken Creole: speed. Not so much speed as a jumbled rush. Perhaps the continuous stream of language that makes speech into one impenetrable block of sound. If it is pitch that confers meaning on a word, rushed and fused sounds shape the meaning of speech. Here again, the use is specific: the *béké* masters, who know Creole even better than the mulattoes, cannot, however, manage this "unstructured" use of language.

In the pace of Creole speech, one can locate the embryonic rhythm of the drum. It is not the semantic structure of the sentence that helps to punctuate it but the breathing of the speaker that dictates the rhythm: a perfect poetic concept and practice.

So the meaning of a sentence is sometimes hidden in the accelerated nonsense created by scrambled sounds. But this nonsense does convey real meaning to which the master's ear cannot have access. Creole is originally a kind of conspiracy that concealed itself by its public and open ex-

2. The Creole language will call for a noise, a disorder; thus aggravating the ambiguity.

pression. For example, even if Creole is whispered (for whispering is the shout modified to suit the dark), it is rarely murmured. The whisper is determined by external circumstances; the murmur is a *decision* by the speaker. The murmur allows access to a *confidential* meaning, not to this form of nonsense that could conceal and reveal at the same time a *hidden* meaning.

But if Creole has at its origin this kind of conspiracy to conceal meaning, it should be realized that this initiatic purpose would progressively disappear. Besides, it has to disappear so that the expression of this conspiracy should emerge as an openly accessible language. A language does not require initiation but apprenticeship: it must be accessible to all. All languages created for a secret purpose make the practice of a regular syntax irrelevant and replace it by a "substitute" syntax. So, to attain the status of a language, speech must rid itself of the secretiveness of its "substitute" syntax and open itself to the norms of an adequate stable syntax. In traditional societies this transition is a slow and measured one, from a secret code to a medium open to everyone, even the "outsider." So speech slowly becomes language. No forced poetics is involved, since this new language with its stable syntax is also a form of expression, its syntax agreed to.

The dilemma of Martinican Creole is that the stage of secret code has been passed, but language (as a new opening) has not been attained. The secretiveness of the community is no longer functional, the stage of an open community has not been reached.

3. As in any popular oral literature, the traditional Creole text, folktales or songs, is striking in the graphic nature of its images. This is what learned people refer to when they speak of concrete languages subordinate to conceptual languages. By that they mean that there should be a radical transition to the conceptual level, which should be attained once having left (gone beyond) the inherent sensuality of the image.

Now imagery, in what we call expressions of popular wisdom, is deceptive, that is, it can be seen as first and foremost the indication of a conscious strategy. All languages that depend on images (so-called concrete languages) indicate that they have implicitly conceptualized the idea and quietly refused to explain it. Imagery in a language defined as concrete is the deliberate (although collectively unconscious) residue of a certain linguistic potential at a given time. In a process as complete, complex, perfected as its conceptual origins, imaginative expression is secreted in the obscure world of the group unconscious. The original idea is reputed to have been conceived by a god or a particular spirit, in the twilight about which Hegel, for example, speaks.

But the Creole language, in addition, is marked by French—that is, the obsession with the written—as an *internal* transcendence. In the historical circumstances that gave rise to Creole, we can locate a forced poetics that is both an awareness of the restrictive presence of French as a linguistic background and the deliberate attempt to reject French, that is, a conceptual system from which expression can be derived. Thus, imagery, that is, the “concrete” and all its metaphorical associations, is not, in the Creole language, an ordinary feature. It is a deliberate ploy. It is not an implicit slyness but a deliberate craftiness. There is something pathetic in the imaginative ploys of popular Creole maxims. Like a hallmark that imposes limitation.

One could imagine—this is, moreover, a movement that is emerging almost everywhere—a kind of revenge by oral languages over written ones, in the context of a global civilization of the nonwritten. Writing seems linked to the transcendental notion of the individual, which today is threatened by and giving way to a cross-cultural process. In such a context will perhaps appear global systems using imaginative strategies, not conceptual structures, languages that dazzle or shimmer instead of simply

“reflecting.” Whatever we think of such an eventuality, we must examine from this point on what conditions Creole must satisfy in order to have a place in this new order.

4. Creole was in the islands the language of the plantation system, which was responsible for the cultivation of sugar cane. The system has disappeared, but in Martinique it has not been replaced by another system of production; it degenerated into a circuit of exchange. Martinique is a land in which products manufactured elsewhere are consumed. It is therefore destined to become increasingly a land you pass through. In such a land, whose present organization ensures that nothing will be produced there again, the structure of the mother tongue, deprived of a dynamic hinterland, cannot be reinforced. Creole cannot become the language of shopping malls, nor of luxury hotels. Cane, bananas, pineapples are the last vestiges of the Creole world. With them this language will disappear, if it does not become functional in some other way.

Just as it stopped being a secret code without managing to become the norm and develop as an “open” language, the Creole language slowly stops using the ploy of imagery through which it actively functioned in the world of the plantations, without managing to evolve a more conceptual structure. That reveals a condition of stagnation that makes Creole into a profoundly threatened language.

The role of Creole in the world of the plantations was that of defiance. One could, based on this, define its new mode of structured evolution as “negative” or “reactive,” different from the “natural” structural evolution of traditional languages. In this, the Creole language appears to be organically linked to the cross-cultural phenomenon worldwide. It is literally the result of contact between different cultures and did not preexist this contact. It is not a language of a single origin, it is a cross-cultural language.

As long as the system of production in the plantations, despite its unfairness to most of the population, was main-

tained as an "autonomous" activity, it allowed for a level of symbolic activity, as if to hold the group together, through which the *influential* group, that of the slaves, then the agricultural workers, imposed its form of expression: in their speech, belief, and custom, which are different from the writing, religion, law that are imposed by a *dominant* class.

The Creole folktale is the symbolic strategy through which, in the world of the plantations, the mass of Martinicans developed a forced poetics (which we will also call a counter-poetics) in which were manifested both an inability to liberate oneself totally and an insistence on attempting to do so.

If the plantation system had been replaced by another system of production, it is probable that the Creole language would have been "structured" at an earlier time, that it would have passed "naturally" from secret code to conventional syntax, and perhaps from the diversion of imagery to a conceptual fluency.

Instead of this, we see in Martinique, even today, that one of the extreme consequences of social irresponsibility is this form of verbal delirium that I call habitual, in order to distinguish it from pathological delirium, and which reveals that here no "natural" transition has managed to extend the language into a historical dimension. Verbal delirium as the outer edge of speech is one of the most frequent products of the counterpoetics practiced by Creole. Improvisations, drumbeats, acceleration, dense repetitions, slurred syllables, meaning the opposite of what is said, allegory and hidden meanings—there are in the forms of this customary verbal delirium an intense concentration of all the phases of the history of this dramatic language. We can also state, based on our observation of the destructively non-functional situation of Creole, that this language, in its day-to-day application, becomes increasingly a language of neurosis. Screamed speech becomes knotted into contorted speech, into the language of

frustration. We can also ask ourselves whether the strategy of delirium has not contributed to maintaining Creole, in spite of the conditions that do not favor its continued existence. We know that delirious speech can be a survival technique.

But it is in the folktale itself, that echo of the plantation, that we can sense the pathetic lucidity of the Creole speaker. An analysis of the folktale reveals the extent to which the *inadequacies* with which the community is afflicted (absence of a hinterland, loss of technical responsibility, isolation from the Caribbean region, etc.) are fixed in terms of popular imagery. What is remarkable is that this process is always elliptical, quick, camouflaged by delirium. That is what we shall see in the folktale. The latter really emanates from a forced poetics: it is a tense discourse that, woven around the inadequacies that afflict it, is committed, in order to deny more defiantly the criteria for transcendence into writing, to constantly refusing to perfect its expression. The Creole folktale includes the ritual of participation but carefully excludes the potential for consecration. It fixes expression in the realm of the decisively aggressive.

#### *Creole and Landscape*

1. I do not propose to examine the Creole folktale as a signifying system, nor to isolate its component structures. Synthesis of animal symbolism (African and European), survivals of transplanted tales, keen observation of the master's world by the slave, rejection of the work ethic, cycle of fear, hunger, and misery, containing hope that is invariably unfulfilled; much work has been done on the Creole folktale. My intention is more modest in its attempt to link it to its context.

What is striking is the emphatic emptiness of the landscape in the Creole folktale; in it landscape is reduced to symbolic space and becomes a pattern of succeeding spaces through which one journeys; the forest and its

darkness, the savannah and its daylight, the hill and its fatigue. Really, places you pass through. The importance of walking is amazing. "I walked so much," the tale more or less says, "that I was exhausted and I ended up heel first." The route is reversible. There is, naturally, vegetation along these routes; animals mark the way. But it is important to realize that if the place is indicated, *it is never described*. The description of the landscape is not a feature of the folktale. Neither the joy nor the pleasure of describing are evident in it. This is because the landscape of the folktale is not meant to be inhabited. A place you pass through, it is not yet a country.

2. So this land is never possessed: it is never the subject of the most fundamental protest. There are two dominant characters in the Creole folktales: the King (symbolic of the European it has been said, or is it the *béké?*) and Brer Tiger (symbolic of the *béké* colonizer or simply the black foreman?); the latter, always ridiculed, is often outwitted by the character who is in control, Brer Rabbit (symbolic of the cleverness of the people).<sup>3</sup> But the right to the possession of land by the dominant figures is never questioned. The symbolism of the folktale never goes so far as to eradicate the colonial right to ownership, its moral never involves a final appeal to the suppression of this right. I do not see resignation in this, but a clear instance of the extreme strategy that I mentioned: the pathetic ob-

3. We must note that this symbolism is in itself ambiguous. The King, God, the Lion. Where, in fact, is the colonizer? Where is the administrator? Rabbit is the popular ideal, but he is hard on the poor; perhaps he is "mulatto," etc. The proposed ideal is from the outset shaped by a negation of popular "values." One can only escape by ceasing to be oneself, while trying to remain so. The character of Brer Rabbit is therefore *also* the projection of this individual ingenuity that is sanctioned by a collective absence. ("Bastardizing of the race. Here is the major phenomenon. Individual solutions replace collective ones. Solutions based on craftiness replace solutions based on force." [Aimé Césaire and René Ménil, "Introduction au folklore martiniquais," *Tropiques*, no. 4 (January 1942): 10.]

session, in these themes—in a word, the inflexible maneuver—through which the Creole folktale indicates that it has *verified* the nature of the system and its structure.

In such a context, man (the animal who symbolizes him) has with things and trees, creatures and people, nothing like a sustained relationship. The extreme "breathlessness" of the Creole folktale leaves no room for quiet rest. No time to gaze at things. The relationship with one's surroundings is always dramatic and suspicious. The tale is breathless, but it is because it has chosen not to *waste* time. Just as it does not describe, it hardly concerns itself with appreciating the world. There are no soothing shadows or moments of sweet languor. You must run without stopping, from a past order that is rejected to an absurd present. The land that has been suffered is not yet the land that is offered, made accessible. National consciousness is budding in the tale, but it does not burst into bloom.

Another recurring feature is the criterion for assessing the "benefits" that man here recognizes as his own. Where it is a matter of the pleasure of living, or the joy of possessing, the Creole tale recognizes only two conditions, absence or excess. A pathetic lucidity. The benefits are ridiculously small or excessive. Excessive in quantity, when the tale makes up its list of food, for instance; excessive in quality when the tale works out the complicated nature of what is valuable or worth possessing. A "castle" is quickly described (ostentatious, luxurious, comfortable, prestigious) then it is said in one breath, and without any warning, that it has two hundred and ten toilets. Such extravagance is absurd, for "true wealth" is absent from the closed world of the plantation. Excess and absence complement each other in accentuating the same impossible ideal. The tale thus established its decor in an unreal world, either too much or nothing, which exceeds the real country and yet is a precise indication of its structure.

We also observe that there is in the tale no reference to daily techniques of work or creation. Here, the tool is ex-



perenced as "remote." The tool, normally man's instrument for dealing with nature, is an impossible reality. Thus, equipment and machinery that are featured in the tale are always associated with an owner whose prestige—that is, who is above the rest—is implicit. It is a matter of "the truck of M. This" or the "sugar mill of M. That." The tool is the other's property; technology remains alien. Man does not (cannot) undertake the transformation of his landscape. He does not even have the luxury of celebrating its beauty, which perhaps seems to him to be a mocking one.

#### Convergence

1. Where then to locate the will to "endure"? What is the effect of such a "forced" poetics or counterpoetics, which does not spring to life from a fertile past, but, on the contrary, builds its "wall of sticks" against fated destruction, negation, confinement?
  - a. This counterpoetics therefore ensures the synthesis of culturally diverse, sometimes distinct, elements.
  - b. At least a part of these elements does not predate the process of synthesis, which makes their combination all the more necessary but all the more threatened.
  - c. This characteristic contains all the force (energy, drama) of such a forced poetics.
  - d. This forced poetics will become worn out if it does not develop into a natural, free, open, cross-cultural poetics.

The thrust behind this counterpoetics is therefore primarily locked into a defensive strategy—that is, into an unconscious body of knowledge through which the popular consciousness asserts both its rootlessness and its density. We must, however, move from this unconscious awareness to a conscious knowledge of self.

Here we need perhaps some concluding observations, relating to the link between this situation and what is called today ethnopoetics.

2. First of all, from the perspective of the conflict between Creole and French, in which one has thus far evolved at the expense of the other, we can state that the only possible strategy is to make them *opaque* to each other. To develop everywhere, in defiance of a universalizing and reductive humanism, the theory of specifically opaque structures. In the world of cross-cultural relationship, which takes over from the homogeneity of the single culture, to accept this opacity—that is, the irreducible density of the other—is to truly accomplish, through diversity, a human objective. Humanity is perhaps not the "image of man" but today the evergrowing network of recognized opaque structures.

Second, poetics could not be separated from the functional nature of language. It will not be enough to struggle to write or speak Creole in order to save this language. It will be necessary to transform the conditions of production and release thereby the potential for total, technical control by the Martinican of his country, so that the language may truly develop. In other words, all ethnopoetics, at one time or another must face up to the political situation.

Finally, the previous discussion adequately demonstrates that, if certain communities, oppressed by the historical weight of dominant ideologies, aim at converting their utterance into a scream, thereby rediscovering the innocence of a primitive community, for us it will be a question of transforming a scream (which we once uttered) into a speech that grows from it, thus discovering the expression, perhaps in an intellectual way, of a finally liberated poetics. I think that ethnopoetics can reconcile these very different procedures.

Counterpoetics carried out by Martinicans (in works written in French, the use of the Creole language, the refuge of verbal delirium) therefore records simultaneously both a need for collective expression and a present inability to attain true expression. This contradiction will

probably disappear when the Martinican community is able to really speak for itself: that is, choose for itself. Ethnopoetics belongs to the future.

### Cross-Cultural Poetics

The epic of the Zulu Emperor Chaka, as related by Thomas Mofolo,<sup>1</sup> seems to me to exemplify an African poetics. Evidence of parallels with Western epic forms is not lacking: depiction of a tyrannical tendency (ambition), involvement of the Zulu community in the hero's tragedy, the rise and fall of the hero. You could not consider the magical aspect (origin of the warrior, importance of medicine men, practices and rites) as a particularly African theme. All epics that relate how peoples advance make this appeal to divine intervention. The oral form is not peculiar either; after all, Homer's poems were meant to be sung, recited, or danced.

There are two specific features that make *Chaka* particularly interesting. It is an epic that, while enacting the "universal" themes of passion and man's destiny, is not concerned with the *origin* of a people or its early history. Such an epic does not include a creation myth. On the contrary, it is related to a much more dangerous moment in the experience of the people concerned, that of its forthcoming contact with conquerors coming from the North. One is struck by the similarity between the experiences of these great, fugitive African rulers, who created from a village or tribe huge empires and all ended up in prison, exile, or dependent. (Their experience is repeated as caricature in the ambitions of these pseudo-conquerors who appeared as a postcolonial phenomenon, former subordinates or officers in colonial armies, who cause so much ridicule or indignation in the West, which created them and gave them authority.) All the great African conquerors of

1. Thomas Mofolo, *Chaka* (London and Nairobi: Heinemann, 1981).

the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were haunted in this way by the approach of the white man. It is to the latter that Chaka refers when he is assassinated by those close to him. It seems that his life, his actions, and his work are the ultimate barrier with which he tries to prevent their intrusion, and only he understands. African poets will also be haunted by this fate, and their poems will chronicle these experiences. We in Martinique were touched by this obsession when the King of Dahomey, Béhanzin, was deported here. The epic of these conquered heroes, which was also that of their peoples or tribes, sometimes of their beliefs, is not meant, when recounted, to reassure a community of its legitimacy in the world. They are not creation epics, great "books" about genesis, like the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, the Old Testament, the sagas, and the chansons de geste. They are the memories of cultural contact, which are put together collectively by a people before being dispersed by colonization. There is no evidence therefore of that "naive consciousness" that Hegel defines as the popular phase of the epic, but a strangled awareness that will remain an underlying element in the life of African peoples during the entire period of colonization.<sup>2</sup>

(In my reading of transcriptions of African epics [those of the Segou Empire among the Bambaras, for example, compiled and translated by African researchers and Lilyan Kesteloot], I am aware of a certain "suspension" of the narrative: as if, while composing his discourse, the poet seems to be *waiting for something* that he knows he cannot stop. The succession of kings does not give rise to [nor is it based on] a theory of legitimacy. The epic is disruptive. History comes to an abrupt end. Memory becomes secretive, it must be forced to the surface. The white man ultimately intrudes and forces it into the open. The secret fire of the communal palaver is dispersed in

2. A popular series brings back to life today these historical figures from Africa. Almost each volume insists on this encounter between the African chiefs and the inevitable colonizer, who appears as the very embodiment of their destiny. (In the series *Les Grandes Figures Africaines*.)

pertinent. He is on one side; the subject of his story is on the other side.

"The Novel of the Americas"

I will attempt to bring to light a few of the themes common to the concerns of those whom we classify here as American writers. Using my own work and my own preoccupations as points of reference, I will try to state the assumptions around which I feel the work of writers in the Americas instinctively revolves.

Certainly, one essential obsession that I characterize in these terms: a tortured sense of time.

I think that the haunting nature of the past (it is a point that has been widely raised) is one of the essential points of reference in the works produced in the Americas. What "happens," indeed, is that it is apparently a question of shedding light on a chronology that has become obscure, when it is not completely effaced for all kinds of reasons, especially colonial ones. The American novelist, whatever the cultural zone he belongs to, is not at all in search of a lost time, but finds himself struggling in the confusion of time. And, from Faulkner to Carpentier, we are faced with apparent snatches of time that have been sucked into banked up or swirling forces.

We have seen that the poetics of the American continent, which I characterize as being a search for temporal duration, is opposed in particular to European poetics, which are characterized by the inspiration or the sudden burst of a single moment. It seems that, when dealing with the anxiety of time, American writers are prey to a kind of future remembering. By that I mean that it is almost certain that we are writers in an embryonic phase and our public is yet to come. Also, that this exploded, suffered time is linked to "transferred" space. I have in mind African space as much as Breton space, the "memory" of which has become stamped on the spatial reality

that we all live. To confront time is, therefore, for us to deny its linear structure. All chronology is too immediately obvious, and in the works of the American novelist we must struggle against time in order to reconstitute the past, even when it concerns those parts of the Americas where historical memory has not been obliterated. It follows that, caught in the swirl of time, the American novelist dramatizes it in order to deny it better or to reconstruct it; I will describe us, as far as this is concerned, as those who shatter the stone of time. We do not see it stretch into our past (calmly carry us into the future) but implode in us in clumps, transported in fields of oblivion where we must, with difficulty and pain, put it all back together if we wish to make contact with ourselves and express ourselves.

For us, the inescapable *shaping force* in our production of literature is what I would call the language of landscape. We can say that the European literary imagination is moulded spatially around the spring and the meadow. Ernst Robert Curtius has proposed this in *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*.

In European literature an intimate relationship with landscape is primarily established. From this has evolved a stylistic convention that has for a long time focused on meticulous detail, exposition "in sequence," highlighting harmony (exceptions or extensions constitute reactions to this rule). Space in the American novel, on the contrary (but not so much in the physical sense), seems to me open, exploded, rent.

There is something violent in this American sense of literary space. In it the prevailing force is not that of the spring and the meadow, but rather that of the wind that blows and casts shadows like a great tree. This is why realism—that is, the logical and rational attitude toward the visible world—more than anywhere else would in our case betray the true meaning of things. As one says that a painter at work sees the light on his subject change with the movement of the sun, so it seems to me, as far as I am concerned, that my landscape changes in me; it is probable that it changes with me.

I could not say like Valéry: "Beautiful sky, true sky, look at me as I change." The landscape has its language. What is it in our world? Certainly not the immobility of Being, juxtaposed to a relative notion of what I could become, and confronted with an absolute truth that I could reach out for. The very words and letters of the American novel are entangled in the strands, in the mobile structures of one's own landscape. And the language of my landscape is primarily that of the forest, which unceasingly bursts with life. I do not practice the economy of the meadow, I do not share the serenity of the spring.

But what we have in common is *the irruption into modernity*.

We do not have a literary tradition that has slowly matured: ours was a brutal emergence that I think is an advantage and not a failing. The finished surface of a culture exasperates me if it is not based on the slow weathering of time. If the glossy surface of a culture is not the result of tradition or sustained action, it becomes empty and parochial. (That is the weakness of our intellectuals.) We do not have the time, we are everywhere driven by the daring adventure of modernity. Parochialism is reassuring to one who has not found his center in himself, and to my mind we must construct our metropolises in ourselves. The irruption into modernity, the violent departure from tradition, from literary "continuity," seems to me a specific feature of the American writer when he wishes to give meaning to the reality of his environment.

Therefore, we share the same form of expression. And I will forever oppose the notion of language to that of self-expression.<sup>1</sup>

1. "Ah ah, said the countess in Portuguese and to herself, for she spoke these two languages . . .": this passage from a story told in France fascinates me because of its meaningful ambiguity (its obscurity). There is an inner language that surpasses any acquired language (the interior monologue *cannot become external speech*. It has meaning only in obscurity: that of Benjy, at the beginning of the novel *The Sound and the Fury*).

I think that, beyond the languages used, there is a form of expression specific to the American novel<sup>2</sup> that is at the same time the product of a reaction of confidence in words, of a kind of complicity with the word, of a functional conception of time (consequently, of syntactical time), and ultimately of a tortured relationship between writing and orality.

One of the effects derived from my own literary activity is concerned with precisely this interest: I am from a country in which the transition is being made from a traditional oral literature, under constraint, to a written nontraditional literature, also equally constrained. My language attempts to take shape at the edge of writing and speech; to indicate this transition—which is certainly quite difficult in any approach to literature. I am not talking about either the written or the oral in the sense that one observes a novelist reproducing everyday speech, using a style at the "zero degree of writing." I am referring to a synthesis, synthesis of written syntax and spoken rhythms, of "acquired" writing and oral "reflex," of the solitude of writing and the solidarity of the collective voice—a synthesis that I find interesting to attempt.

The fact is that we are in the midst of a struggle of peoples. Perhaps this would then be our first "axis."

The issue (experienced in the specific struggles that take place more or less everywhere along the chain of the Americas) is the appearance of a new man, whom I would define, with reference to his "realization" in literature, as a man who is able to live the relative after having suffered the absolute. When I say *relative*, I mean the Diverse, the obscure need to

2. I realize that I am now referring to the novel of the "Other America" (the Caribbean and South America) and not so much to that which is fixed (by word and gesture) in the urban, industrial world of the north of the United States. I also tend to relate Faulkner's work (the furthest from northern America as far as his ideas are concerned) to this group, in defiance of reality, and I need to clarify this. Such a clarification was attempted when I spoke of the *desire for history* in literature and the tragic return, which Faulkner has in common with us.

accept the other's difference; and when I say *absolute* I refer to the dramatic endeavor to impose a truth on the Other. I feel that the man from the Other America "merges" with this new man, who lives the relative; and that the struggles of peoples who try to survive in the American continent bear witness to this new creation.

The expression of class struggle has sometimes been "deadened" through the existence of zones of nothingness so extreme that even the perspective of a class struggle has appeared utopian or farfetched (Peruvian Indians, tribes of the Amazon). In other places, depersonalization has been so systematic that the very survival of an autochthonous culture can be questioned (Martinique). The "novel of the Americas" uses an allegorical mode that ranges from blatant symbolism (the peasant novels of South America, or, for example, *Gouuerners de la rosée* [*Masters of the dew*] by J. Roumain) to heavy descriptive machinery (Gallegos or Asturias) to the more complex works that combine an exploration of alienation with the attempt to define an appropriate language (García Márquez). What is perhaps missing is the perspective of those zones of culture that are more threatened (by total dispossession as in the case of the Quechuas of Peru, by slow depersonalization as in the case of Martinicans), therefore more "exemplary," in which the experience of the Diverse is played out at an unknown pace that is comfortably or desperately tragic.

I am summing up what I have discussed too briefly—it is interesting to avoid sustained expositions and to try to propose points of discussion—while formulating a concept one may suspect of being designed to please. (Whom? I do not know.)

I wish to speak of the question of lived modernity, which I will not simply add to, but which I will link directly to the notion of a matured modernity. By this I am opposing, not a kind of "primitivism" to a kind of "intellectualism," but two ways of dealing with changes in contemporary reality. *Matured* here means "developed over extended historical space"; *lived* means "that which is abruptly imposed." When I witness

from a little distance the very interesting work being done on a theoretical level in the West, it seems to me that two reactions are formed: I experience at the same time a feeling of the ridiculous and a feeling of the extreme importance of these ideas. For instance, on the subject of the destabilizing of the text and "its" author.

The text is destabilized (in the matured modernist theories of the West) to the extent that it is demythified, that one tries to define the system that generates it. The author is demythified to the extent that he is made into, let us say, the site where these generative systems manifest themselves, and not the autonomous creative genius he thought he was. If I say that it seems ridiculous to me, it is because (in our lived modernity) these issues have no bearing on us. We need to develop a poetics of the "subject," if only because we have been too long "objectified" or rather "objected to." And if I say that this seems important to me, it is because these queries relate to our deepest preoccupations: The text must for us (in our lived experience) be destabilized, because it must belong to a shared reality, and it is perhaps at this point that we actually relate to these ideas that have emerged elsewhere. The author must be demythified, certainly, because he must be integrated into a common resolve. The collective "We" becomes the site of the generative system, and the true subject. Our critique of the act and the idea of literary creation is not derived from a "reaction" to theories which are proposed to us, but from a burning need for *modification*.

I am suggesting that it is relevant to our discussion to try to show—if possible (and I do not think in any case that I have demonstrated it)—that "American" literature is the product of a system of modernity that is sudden and not sustained or "evolved." For instance, was not the tragedy of those American writers of the "lost generation" that they continued in literature the European (or "Bostonian") dream of Henry James? The United States thus combined two kinds of alienation in a great number of its reactions: that of wanting to continue politely a European tradition to which the United States

felt itself to be the ultimate heir; and that of wanting to dominate the world savagely in the name of this ultimate legacy. Faulkner's roots in the *Deep South* free him from the dream of becoming European. This is his true modernity as opposed to Fitzgerald, for example, or Hemingway, in spite of the "modern" themes of the latter. The idea, however, is that this modernity, lived to the fullest in "new worlds," overlaps with the preoccupations of matured "modernity" in other zones of culture and thought. Therefore, I think that this problematic relationship is a strong force in our literatures. (The problematic is a larger manifestation of the "lived" reality.) And, in my capacity as an American writer, I think that any dogmatic conception of literary creation (as the highest point of an evolved system) would be opposed to this force.<sup>3</sup>

#### Montreal

The *poetics* of landscape, which is the source of creative energy, is not to be directly confused with the *physical nature* of the country. Landscape retains the memory of time past. Its space is open or closed to its meaning.

Against the monolingual imperialism inherited from the West, we propose to get rid of the equation: "One people, one language." A people can also signify the dramatic lack of fulfillment of a language. The threatened potential of the landscape.

3. Western critics would certainly agree that we should remain at the level of the lived and the instinctive (we would be instinctive creators) and would sing our praises as long as they could so reserve for themselves the dimension of thought (they would be the look that organizes and appreciates). We are pushed, for instance, towards "intuitive art," which can only have meaning in the context of a civilization that has developed a tradition of "highly finished art." Congratulating M. Césaire on a speech that he gave at a conference held in Fort-de-France in 1979, a journalist from the Héraut

I am from a community that has been reduced to its folklore; to whom all productions except the folkloric kind are forbidden. Literature cannot "function" as a simple return to oral sources of folklore.

But we feel, we writers of this America that is the Caribbean, that we put together simultaneously reflexes in our expression that come from an oral culture (the oral means of accounting for reality) and from syntactic reflexes "inherited" from the language in which we write.

We have not lived a "continuous" history, a transition from the oral to the written, through accretions and transformations. We are faced with an impossible task.

One of my Trinidadian friends recounts that his parents would talk in Creole when they did not want the children to overhear their conversation. Today this friend is unable to understand our language. A similar situation exists almost everywhere in the world, among migrants as much as among those who experience internal exile. Local dialects disappear under pressure from the *lingua franca*. "Diversity is losing ground" (V. Segalen). But it matters little that here or there in the Caribbean the oral language has lost ground. We all share the same experience in the confrontation of written and oral cultures.

\_\_\_\_\_ group declared his pride in having as a compatriot this "Frenchman from the Caribbean," in being charmed by his "incantatory flourishes," by the impeccable form of his speech, after which he revealed that none of the ideas of the speaker were worth retaining, even if the latter is more Latin and Cartesian than he thinks, and no more Caribbean than a former journalist from *Le Figaro*.

\_\_\_\_\_ *On the notion of modernity*. It is a vexed question. Is not every era "modern" in relation to the preceding one? It seems that at least one of the components of "our" modernity is the spread of the awareness we have of it. The awareness of our awareness (the double, the second degree) is our source of strength and our torment.