

Blue Land

Olivier Marboeuf



Places:

An ultramarine blue space, blue smoke, white tear gas, the red of fruits thrown onto a stage, a seminar, an art centre, a dwelling, it depends.
The environs are not described. Just a night, filled with fire.

The characters:

The Voices of Solitude, the woman rock, a liquid storyteller, Phantom Matter.
Alternately or at the same time.
A chorus is in charge of the soundtrack: imitation of explosions, beat box, cries of fear and pleasure, counterfeit poetry.

Oh!

Where begins
Where to begin?
That's the question
That's the vain
question
It's the blue
vein
that vibrates
under the surface of black skin

Who's talking?
From what underwater
and lost country
Ocean

will you return me
The bone
and the eye,
The mouth
And the sound

[Performance]

He repeats the same thing
modulating the tone
and pitch of his voice,
over a scrim of overseas blue
with precious gems
in his mouth.
A ceramic pineapple
balanced on his head.
Smile my treasure!
It's an artistic performance
It's fun.
It's cool.
A mauve light
and slide projections of sea shells.
Shitty Caribbean, cobbled together
for the loving eyes of the West.
To pay the rent on a lousy room
in a European capital;

he consents
and watches himself on Instagram,
and watches his life
a brief, empty, ephemeral story
he consents.

A life in the prison of an eye
which isn't his.

He consents.

And to think: "what I want is to come"
and finding it beautiful
and finding it clever.

And one day he'll find that everything is old.
Already.]

It's not the vein

No
the vain question
It's not
coquetry
either.

Where to begin
Where in space do you plant your eyes

Where in time

do you breathe?
fresh air

What air?

Where to carve out a space?

On the frozen surface
of the ocean
a woman
thrown overboard

at least that's what we think

we recognize
despite the absence
of a face
thrown overboard

a long time ago

a very long time

rises up
shows her chest
covered with worms and mollusks.
Mouth open
to the sky

beard of foam,
a living island
fossil
and vegetal
she pierced
the dark
blue
abyss
of death.

There she is more alive
amid the remains
of a boat
that floats
in the eye of sharks

An island
de-speaks
purulent
in a tangle
of lichens
in the circle
of slimy rocks

she de-speaks.

Journal of the New World.
The landscape is desolate
Nothing of the tropical beauties
We were promised
The hand of a princess is planted in the muck
and waves an obscene welcome.
Eyes of many colors are inlaid
in fossils
Natural treasure of delicious ugliness
No word can name
This disgusting spectacle
That slithers on the darkened surface
of the ocean
Glaucous monster
And Blue
In the middle of this morass
A larva wails and twists
Giant dart
That serves as pillory for all sorts of Jesus
who pass this way.
We've forgotten day and night
lighted as we are

by the ceaseless eruptions on this island
that no map signals.
Everywhere on its surface mouths open and howl
Sugar crystals gush from these chasms
terrifying mines
where no one dares place a hand.
A thought came to me this morning:
The only treasure is death
Which never stops arriving here
Or rather returning
In the most beautiful way
From what we thought
Was life
Sadness has won us over
We've called this fatal encounter
Melancholy
But instantly the island spat back this name
With the remains of a flag held by a hand
Eaten back to the bone by the island's black sand
And Acid Blue
Octopus Blue
Blue that clouds the surface of a mussel
Blue reflected in the eye of a shell
There's no more time
the air is yellowed by sulfur
spewed out by the island
which dies and lives again.
We no longer know where to go
What we see each day
Delights us and possesses us
Some eat fruits
Gathered in the mangrove
To stave off starvation
Others drink the water
Whitened by chloredecone
We are terribly restless
And feverish
Yesterday, we danced for more than ten hours
On a bed of sargasso
Danced to exhaustion
I can't say if we were happy
Before this faceless creature
This unrecognizable
Horror
And yet so familiar.]

She can see again

She speaks
and de-speaks
Shaking the bodies
of those who watch her.
Filling eyes and
thoughts
with smoldering
images

Ash

Fly!

over the ocean

Fly!
in the fiery wind

Fly!

in the purple mouth
of the storm

Ash
of a one-armed fugitive
burned by the French
in the colony
marked by the dreadful name

Saint-Domingue

which is written
over the name

Ayiti

This is how we say

property of sugar
and death
of France

Ash

Fly!

And plant
in the mud
of this other island
Living
Faceless

and without a name

Plant
your piece of burned flesh

your coal of revolt
that explodes
with the seeds
without a country
in the dance of worms

Boom!

Who hears this cry?
Who thinks they hear it
the cry of this old woman
with a werewolf's voice?

The chorus

Makandal is alive!

She sees again
She speaks
and de-speaks.
The history begins again
starting from death this time.

[Fossil archive. Raise up your statues, affix your plaques, pour out men on horseback with African metal, distribute busts of the resistant Delgrès in towns, in Guadeloupe, plant gardens in the name of Solitude and plant statues of rebel slaves, here and there, plant in Paris, and don't forget to topple a slave seller in Bristol on his head, it doesn't cost anything and it's always a pleasure, to drown him in the port with all his secrets. Irony and diversion. And then when calm returns, plant instead a Black woman with a fist raised, even for a moment, as if she's pretending. A Black woman will do the trick, with her fist raised, it's better, it's cool.]

**The chorus repeats a stanza
from Derek Walcott's poem
“The Sea is History”**

Where are your monuments, your battles, martyrs?

*Where is your tribal memory? Sirs,
in this grey vault. The sea. The sea
has locked them up. The sea is History.*

Let them do it. They have to do something.
But don't forget to break Schoelcher's arm in Cayenne,
the one that points at the Middle Passage to show the
future,
breaks irony and breaks diversion, make the proud
abolitionist of Martinique topple over onto his teeth and
don't put anything back up, wait, don't plant anything.
Wait and welcome the explosion and the smoke that
ceaselessly changes form and direction.
Those are our monuments,
the voice that recedes or rises up from the floor
grey blue
fossil blue
of the ocean, in the cave, in the landscape
concrete blue
of tower blocks,
accordioned sheet metal roofs of shabby allotments, the
silhouette that cuts through the night on a mini-moto,
and the scar inside a mouth that glows red
blue red
of the bad gaze that defies the police
and the gaze that writhes in the chaabi of factories,
the cut hand
and the hand
Cobalt blue
Mine blue
Charcoal blue
Green blue
and blue red
Talbot Blue
Algerian Blue
Blue 83
which is another Blue 61
Blue Seine
Blue 82
Caribbean Blue
the beloved neck and the neck broken in a haze of sweat,
infinite football where time no longer exists
Marius Trésor
arms crossed
Jesus!
In Sevilla.
Go Blues!

there they are, our monuments
living-dead.
Living.
Living blue.]

Oh!

In what period
and at what distance

You think that it begins

you think someone sees
something

that doesn't need to be
the start.

I leave you the start
the origin,

man
I'll let you recount your *life*
woman

I leave you
your little property to you, you, you
I leave you History
and its diversions

You have all the means
of production
to tell it
and to have it told
your History
again

and again

to fill our eyes
and our hands
with your grandeur
and your whining.

Now

I see
other worlds
with the new
and putrid eye
of the dead woman

in decomposition

who is my liquid
continent.

And that
you can't imitate it
because you can't imitate life
under death
in the worlds of death
the life of death
which is life
which is breath
from which
you hear me
speak to you.

Boom!

Oh!
I don't lower my eyes
however
I don't lower arms
cut off
and breath
the same
Beneath the capitalist sky
inlaid with precious
gems
mineral knowledge
speech treasure
words
extracted from the depths of the mine
of the throat
immediately circulate in veins
circulate
supple and
fluid
repeat repeat repeat
and acquire value
in armpits
and thighs
and brown torsos
Take!
We have nothing to hide
We have no words
I swear
We have nothing

that isn't our own

and that we could hide

We have nothing but dirty hands
where nothing lingers

Take!

All the white guys

can be Black women

queer

now

And the white women

too

It's easy

and it's cool

You can serve yourself

You just

tap

on available matter

Take!

in the gold

of sweat

lick tears on the surface of eyes

Audre Lorde

My dear!

Octavia Butler,

My heart!

Hortense Spillers

Oh!

bell

hooks!

my little kitten

Meow!

Meow!

Voilà!

You want it, you have it!

Everyone wants it

Everyone wants

to be a Black woman

and if possible

queer

and brilliant

and shiny

and fluid.

Endless matter

amicable
and

available

Oh!

Saidiya!

in the mauve

mauve light

But without

this hell

and this eye

without the immense

wasteland that haunts

the head

painted in monochrome orange-Blue

of night

on the National highway

head lost

at the ends of the world

a map-less

periphery

in the shadow of a door

Rodney,
did you fall asleep
there?

on the edge of the expressway,
Weird guy!

Adama,
did you put your handsome profile
on backwards,
big guy?

on the tarmac, why?

In order to say what,
to do what?

Catch your breath.

Catch it!

Do it!

What accident did you get yourself into, Théo?
What did you get into?

Who squeezes, who knocks
at the door
of your nerves?

No one wants to be
this pile of criminal bones,
I'm telling you
everyone wants,
but not that

stop bothering us
Everyone wants to be bothered
but not that

wake up from your delirium
wake up!
No one wants to see
your life
spread out
in this stroboscopic
and liquid
light
no one wants to see
your life.

Who painted your eye
that scintillating blue?
What would you call it?
Overseas blue?
Cobalt?
Royal?
Limoges
porcelain blue
or Toulouse?

Who moved your mouth
in the French landscape?
Who squeezed your dangerous
muscles
who smashed
the dangerous door
of your dangerous breath?

Catch
Catch
If you want it,
you have it.

**The chorus sings
an anonymous, ageless
song of the people**
"We have a duty of melancholy"

Oh!
Pile of breathless
bones
tossed in the morning
a lighter blue air presently
almost sky
watercolour
of the West
Plastic bag blue

Blue that shoots
White
shoots at
Red

Bang!
And dies.

Everyone wants
but
No one wants you.

There
you
in this ocean
Marine blue
Petroleum blue
Atlantic blue
At the bottom of abysses

There where there is no sky
Where there are never eyes,
our monuments
are lying.

There!
Sculptures
or fossils
it depends
mouth against the floor
of the world.

Conques dub
Beat box
Poorly spoken infra-basses
de-speaking waves
trembling.

Here we are

Boom!

**A collection of explosions
invades the mouths of the chorus,
a night blue story
landscape of sounds
Delgrès kills himself
with his three hundred companions
the Danglemont plantation house
explodes and rains down noisily
at the base of La Soufrière
mouths clattering
whistling between teeth
which is also
the History of the *banlieues*
which is the History of the Seine
and thus the History of Algeria
and thus the History of iron
of railroad switch points
and thus the History of wastelands
and thus the History of dirty faces
of Mali and the Ivory Coast
of Tunisia
But we won't know it until the end,
all this noise,
this smoke and roar
it's a story
about what must explode
to open up a space
and breathe.
The chorus throws rotten
pomegranates on the stage.
All of this noise serves as intermission
Then things continue
with renewed vigour.**

Boom!

I am not
your little sugar archive

My story is
hidden
behind the noise
and behind
the images,
in the decor,
my story is
hidden
and my breath
is
hidden.

[Film outline: It's not the story of a Black cowboy, so free that he kills anyone who gets on his path, anyone who wants to prevent him from having and coming – *what I want is to come* – it's not the dazzling life of a Black armed cowboy who lives out the fantasy that was implanted inside him, the fantasy of becoming a man, in this way, of becoming a man through violence and possession, thereby leaving that crawling matter with dark eyes that burns its hands gathering cotton, unable, unlike him, to come, unable to revolt as he can, not to be free, but to enjoy this right to violence and this right to death, which is in the Constitution, the right to destroy all obstacles and to possess, the right to break down all resistance, the right to reduce all enemies into this primary matter of death. History of the *unchained* hero, not of the mass *in chains*, that swarming and frightened pile on which the always too hot head of the master lies down. Remains, decor, waste. There is what serves no purpose to the story and there is the hero, who is spectacle, who is murder and who is thus, History. The hero and the sea. For the sea is History and *we are locked up in this grey blue vault*. What survives this History we will call hallucination. Have you seen it? Have you heard it? We call it monument, we call it delirious archive.

Have you seen it?
Have you heard it?
Whose road is this?
It's our road!
Whose road is this?
It's our road!
Whose street is this?
It's our street!
This street?
Our street!
Whose wound is this?
It's our wound!
Whose breath is this?
It's our breath!
This breath?
Our breath!
Survive and breathe,
this is the rebellion
and collective History
of the *black matter*
and of its life in the decor
of films
and the landscape
of films

where the hero kills
to come
as the master tells him
to come
better perhaps
even more implacable
to become this man
entirely free
to give
death
to shoot bullets
that pierce
resistance
to what he wants
to what he believes he wants
because he's free to kill
And he's free
to come.

There's no other History
Except maybe there
in what remains
and the decor
in the trash
and smoking
rubble
of the crime scene
which is the scene
of endless
orgasm
there is
a surviving
eye
there is
the beginning of a place.]

**The air has a pale blue tint
The trails of tear gas bombs
trace arcs
that rebound on the ground.**

Forget then
the origin

the beginning
and the idea of the beginning

and seek rather
the critical moment

the primitive scene
that then repeats.

In echoes
that are less and less powerful
less and less visible

but still hover

the ghost
of the primitive scene

which is perfect
which is terrible and perfect
terribly perfect.

The plantation.

Oh!
That's where we'll begin

like Malcom Ferdinand
but for other reasons.

[Personal diary. One day I participated in a fascist seminar – it was the first time. I didn't know it at first, I wasn't sure when I read the invitation if I understood exactly what the people who invited me were trying to say, but in the end, it was a seminar about the possibility of racism and the possibility of fascism, in Belgium, in art, despite the embarrassed air, that's what it was about: fascism, white Europe, contemporary art, future and melancholy. I exhibited a diagram that represented the visual economy of the plantation: a history of the eye, of the men and women who lived within it, under the empire of a gaze, a history of the visible, a history of the invisible, of what is thrown into the shadows and of what survives in shadow, of those who are the light, of those who imitate them. At another seminar, somewhere else, I showed the diagram. And at the end of the panel I was participating in, a white woman stood up. She didn't come toward me. She gathered into her arms one of the female participants, a Black academic, onstage, in front of everyone, in the empire of her gaze. In her arms. She hugged her very tight

against her chest, the way you hug a friend, a parent – Mum! She clung to her with all her strength, so as not to sink. Maybe she was afraid of sinking. And what she found was a Black woman, the hull of a ship in freezing water, a bit of hull or a rock. And barely had this same black rock finished speaking – on the same panel where I showed the plantation diagram, the emotional and invisible violence of the master’s house – than this smiling white woman came onstage with all her distress to hug her close, as if to tell her, it’s okay, as if to tell her, it’s okay kitten, come give me some of your warmth, just after the slide projection of the diagram which shows the plan for an emotional extraction zone, the plantation, where violence in the fields and at the pillory dazzles the person who does not see what this violence is a diversion for, what it prevents us from seeing of the heat and shade of the master’s house (here’s something Saidiya Hartman wants to see and that maybe Malcolm X misses: the cost paid by those who rub shoulders with the masters and owe them attention, sexual services and spectacle; the economy of this attention, of this care, this availability, a debt.) And so just after the diagram, there’s the scene with woman who wraps herself around black flesh, as if she was hugging her beloved nanny, somewhere in the history of shadow, in a place with no witness, but that becomes a performance now. And just after the diagram again, but somewhere else this time around, back at the fascist seminar, the white director of a museum shakes my hand and says, we’re all Maroons, we are the Maroons, all of this is right, all of this is terribly right, the plantation and all that, thank you, thank you, it’s incredibly right, the luminous scene that chases the ecology of shadow, the delicate hand that emerges from the matter of the ship’s hold to divert and escape, that’s the art world we hold so dear, except for one thing, it’s us, we the Maroons. But this time in the fascist seminar, he doesn’t take me into his arms, it’s not the place for it, it’s not the right moment, but mostly, mostly he knows I’m not going to save him, that I’m not a Black woman who saves the white directors of Belgian museums who are Maroons, that I can’t do, I’m not that rock, I’m not a piece of the hull of a huge cruise ship, a floating city, a European city that smashes into an iceberg, that’s beyond my strength and so I watch him let go of my hand and sink deep into the dark waters of this fascist seminar. He disappears.]

**The chorus
(in an ocean sound à la Turner):
Splash!**

The plantation in the Caribbean

that's where we'll start

for we have to start somewhere

far from staring eyes
at the peripheries of the Empire
there where everything is more intense and naked
a primitive scene

intense and naked
terribly perfect
And it's there that we see
clearly
all the collections
all the delicate
motifs
of violence
exposed without fear
and without
shame
But it isn't
the only story
in the performance
Unsustainable
and its dazzling
diversions
It isn't
the only story
of the shooting
that delights the eye of the Black cowboy
which is the eye
of another
with his body attached to it
And it isn't the only
ghost scene
of this moment of orgasm
a lynching
burned wood
coal hung from a tree
strange fruit
*ripe to burst*¹
It isn't
the only story
of a police officer who gets lost
and falls asleep

¹ *Ripe to burst (Mûr à crever)* is a novel by the haitian poet Frankétienne, published in 2014 by Archipelago Books

on a pile,
a dark mineral
a shining mountain of petroleum
hard
and resistant
until it falls in
on itself
and becomes a lifeless
thing
by accident
in the exercise of his functions
of death
and performance.

It is not just
and it is not only.

It's also the story
of what happens in the familiar and warm
shadow
of the home
the kitchen,
the bedroom
the cold cellar
the sanctuary
my dear
my sweet

Everyone wants to be
a Black woman,
but

Oh!

in the half-light of the plantation house

where hands
are available
and comb
blond hair endlessly

where lips

are available and without a word

where buttocks,

are available

and also the pierced eye

into which dramas

are poured

the immense vulnerability
of masters
and the impossible comfort

which never has enough
hands

my dear

that's our house

our home
that's how

our world is

and there is no other world

We must care for it

and understand it
and accept it

in all its light

and in all its darkness

Very dark blue

What would you say?

Black with bluish reflections

Like the feathers

around the eye

of a bird.

Come!

You'll make me a promise
Don't ever go away again

Never

Stay here so I can feel you
Give me
your cool hands

to wipe my fever

You'll be my twin sister

And we'll found a sky
of sorority
in the fading afternoon

behind the hills

Why don't you love me

with a true love?

Like me, I love you
Why that idiotic smile?

These lifeless arms
and that nod of the head
And that stupid slowness

with which you drag
your stupid feet

when I call you?

Why am I so tired and weary
of you refusing me?

Don't you want to do
what I ask?

Don't you want to be
my collective work
my speaking installation
my collaboration?

[And repeat the same thing
modulating the tone
and pitch of your voice,
against a scrim of overseas blue
with precious gems
in your mouth.

A ceramic pineapple
balanced on your head
Smile, my sugar
my treasure!
It's very beautiful.
Don't move.
A mauve light
and slide projections of seashells.
Stifling landscape of these damned islands
where we've come aground
you
and me
my sister.
Go sleep on your shabby pallet
in a dream of Europe,
but first, consent to this life,
brief, empty, ephemeral,
Consent.
To live in my friendly gaze
and to watch me come.
Everything is old now.
The palm trees are covered
with the ashes
of an explosion.
Up there at the base of La Soufrière,
the rebels have exploded
the Danglement plantation house.
It's the end.
Boom!]

But we are
a family.
Aren't we a family?

A big family
loving and just?

There's nothing to see outside but ashes
floating over this paradise
ugly and grey.

There's no reason
we're leaving
the master's house
There's no reason

No
that we leave the scene

I can tell you
we won't leave it
because we are
the arch.

What would you do outside
where burned-alive apes now scream?
in a forest of uprooted trees

There is nothing

There has never
been anything
but hallucinations
There is no other world

For we are the arch

and we are the Maroons.

[A reading note. Please make donations, obligations, cooptation, small privileges, preferences, concurring desire, [these interactions] are the means to make racial supremacy bearable and to generate it. In my view they indicate the dimension of symbolic violence when it substitutes itself for physical brutality, as the place where subjection is fabricated in a hidden manner, in the routinization of domination. Christine Chivallon, *L'esclavage, du souvenir à la mémoire: Contribution à une anthropologie de la Caraïbe* (Editions Karthala, 2012)]

And that is what we must learn
to see with a new eye
green and brown
beyond diversions
the whirlwind of ashes

and invent gestures
so we won't become

the last captures
of what disappears
and must
disappear.

Splash!

You won't go
far
it's not worth it
Over here
Over there
Not far
There's no other world
There's only this world
Leave the plantation
a moment
outside
is not
another world
but learn to breathe
to taste the air
and listen
to those who speak softly
a monument of whispers
and low masses.

It's here where our voices intermingle
with other sounds,
Creaks
and cries

We must learn
to breathe
inside of all this

and outside of this familiar
eye that calls

Who calls you?

That is a language
for a place
that is not yet there
for there is no other world

and yet we must breathe
right next to this world
as it is

Our skin comes off
Stay calm
smile at your enemies
show your teeth
and slide softly towards the outside,
fill your blood
with fear
fill your lungs
with fire

It's the place that comes

and we speak loudly
now

we de-speak it

It is the unsure
fragile

place
that comes

Amid the decomposition

something

rises and stands up
something escapes too

let escape
what needs to escape

it will return
when it finds its moment
and its music
when it finds
its dance

Nothing consents
in this place.

Forget the origin
and desire for a home
a palace
for false heat
and what tires you and bends you

What I want is to come.

Uproot your desire
for these old stories
Stay calm
and smile at your enemies
undo the anger
which is desire for power

desire of kings of queens
desire for children
kings and queens
save the other anger
which is bloody
monument
and don't set yourself either
immediately
to braiding

as you've always had to braid
endlessly
before

because you were afraid
of not being part

everyone wants to be, but

Don't offer your hands anymore
forget that you're being called

Who is calling you?

Take back your desire
and your eyes

and let come

what rises

a form
that no one decides on
rises up presently
with no master
by the mere
swarming presence
of worms
in the blue black matter
of the living
and the dead

it is our language

the beginning of our language
which begins everywhere
and which always begins
somewhere

in particular
in the shadow
of that which was not
seen
of that which was not
said

our monuments
which never cease to grow
now
now collapsing
have neither face
nor horse
under the orange grey
sky
where float the ashes
of those
who wanted to live
and breathe

Boom!

there is a place
the beginnings of a celebration
without spectacle
in the clacking of our bones
in the gurgling of our empty stomachs

there is a place.

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