Towards a de-speaking cinema[1]
(A caribbean hypothesis)

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A hallucination

Nocturnal flight. Cold feet in the humus and roots smoothed over by the thousands of footsteps that have caressed the once rough surface. He leaves behind him the lights of a dwelling to move into the unknown obscurity of a forest. Forever. He thinks, "I'm leaving forever." He sees, he believes he sees. But he's no longer sure of anything. Perhaps an arm, a hip, maybe a hand, a silhouette of leaves, or a twisted tree that runs. He doesn't know where he's going, he doesn't know what he's throwing himself towards. He has no words. He runs, feels, cries out. He is delirious and frightened. Something inside him is dying. He must lose his words. And he must find words, with a world that is there, before his eyes. He lets himself go. He licks his sweat, swims in his saliva and the oil of his muscles, strikes the skin of his stomach with broken tibia bones. His head is full of the sound of insects climbing up the optic nerve and sliding towards the moist surface of the eye. He no longer knows how to cry. Others are there like him, lost, haggard. Like him, they have left, they have removed themselves, untied, divested, stripped themselves of a life of repeating the gestures of death. Now, there is a new time. Now they do not know where to go or how to inhabit this time and this world with all that is there, intensely there. They do not know if there is a place where they could lay down their heads, a cool place where hands would lightly touch them cover them with mud, leaves, smoke. They cannot see each other, cannot manage to see each other. Their teeth clack and they tap on their calves. They see each other now by means of all the dull noises a body is capable of making. They discover all of their eyes, open to the surface of the skin, and taste all of their orifices. They reach with these eyes into the emptiness until they feel each other, for they cannot do it alone, alone they cannot raise up these first images of a cinema for the self. They touch each other now via the moistness of all their eyes, which are also hands, hips, buttocks, and necks. Huge drops of sweat in which a human could stand upright serve as magnifying glasses through which the infinite details of a night-blue vegetation can be seen. With no declaration, before the first words, they dance a swarm of hallucinations that rise up and cross through them. Caribbean. It could begin somewhere else. It begins everywhere in the peripheries of the visible world. On a European beach in the green dawn of the Mediterranean, where the living-dead smoke a first cigarette without reprieve, in a far-flung suburb where black breath and sweat slide off the hands of the police, at the edge of a mine, open-faced to the sky, in a forest in flames where columns of minuscule beings flee towards nowhere and dive back into a dreamtime [2] that the delicate eye of drones cannot see. They share a cinema of bare life [3], they hallucinate another life [4].

De-speaking Cinema

And so it is born, *De-speaking cinema (le cinéma déparlant)*. No need for any instruments other than bodies to produce the first images, furtive and modest, at the limit of the visible. Images that arise from *an outer country (un pays en dehors)*[5], outside of cinema – or at least what is called "cinema" in the loving eye of the West. It is a delirium. Imagine that something escapes from these scenes of representation, scenes that are powerful, rich, and well-armed; scenes that have created our desires, concentrated means, and produced a multitude of markets where all sorts of existences rush in and all sorts of values accumulate, both financial and symbolic. Here, then, is a scene, a court[6] from which it is difficult to refuse invitations without the risk of being condemned to one of these *Black lives (vies noires)*[7], resource-less and voiceless.

Imagine a de-speaking cinema: wandering towards an unknown place, a place that isn't *already* there, that isn't *yet* there. Imagine a cinema like a performance of preparation, a speculative gesture to welcome what comes or could come from the outside of these visible worlds, worlds that are cleared (*habitués*)[8] by and for a particular eye. Invent a form of hospitality for whatever face-less thing that might emerge. Like capoeira, the combat dance of the Brazilian slave communities, imagine a de-speaking cinema that forms bodies for the struggles to come, imagine the rehearsal of a community. It's truly a fragile but nonetheless real alternative to the fatalist discourse, even if it is sometimes joyful, on the part of subalterns who see no other alternative than to perform new exotic products on dominant scenes. De-speaking cinema is a re-appropriation of desire and imagination. For if sharing new knowledge and new points of view is necessary, conceiving of new scenes for displaying them must be imagined too. This, rather than continuing to transport resources and fresh flesh from the furthest countries, the most secret and invisible forms of life brought to the dazzling heart of the court, which hadn't dared ask for so much to perfect its new posture of openness. From a few weak signals emanating from the margins of *the world as it is,* from a few stories and legends imprinted on retinas and muscles, brusquely pulled from the archives in the uproar of a nocturnal assembly, de-speaking cinema is born, it is born everywhere. Here are a few Caribbean hypotheses.

To speak and to de-speak

For a long time I've thought we should speak. That to emancipate ourselves, we had to speak, by one means or another. Somewhere. At the right moment, to break the silence, the masquerade. And my entire experience as an author and oral performer/storyteller [9], an editor of comics, then a curator, and finally a producer of artists' films had been a much-repeated practice of exploring my interest in visual art forms that "spoke"[10] Because to form an artistic perspective from certain peripheries of the Empire, the spoken word, seemed to me the best medium. Speech would allow minority bodies to escape from their *becoming-images* ("devenir images"), captured, exposed, displayed, and exhausted on the orgiastic scenes of the White Body of Reference[11]. Speech proposed an act of resistance to the pursuit by other means, sometimes deliciously amicable[12], of an economy of availability and its transformation of certain existences into the fungible matter of capitalism – occasionally with their consent, which I will come back to when I tell the story of Jen Reid and her statue in Bristol. What I saw in this subaltern speaking body was a being that emancipated itself from a story that was not its own and decided to speak to represent itself. In the context of the Black lives of the Americas and in particular in the case of the Caribbean, I thought that a situated voice should appear from the depths of the object and the landscape in which it had found refuge – during the transformation of its existence into a movable property, a primary matter that would eventually manage to escape. This presence that lived beside the world must one day speak and say something that had never been heard before.

However, and this is one of the objects of this essay, I progressively turned my attention to a cinema where "it" spoke, understanding that it was necessary to widen the spectrum of the speaking image to forms of matter, environments, that spoke from assemblies and alliances between existences and phenomena placed at the margins of the scene of dominant human representations[13]. And "it had to speak" to escape specifically from certain narrative displays such as documentary cinema and a certain artist's cinema with political aspirations that positioned itself in the continuation of visual anthropology. It had to speak differently and from another place than the place where subordinate

speech had been assigned to be spoken - in other words, a place from which it could not escape. A scene that was both in the service of the comfort of certain people and under the power of certain laws. A scene of life that was also a scene of death.

Drawing from many residual traces of refusal to consent to stand in these toxic sites of the visual arts, I have assembled some principles of de-speaking cinema from a Caribbean perspective. Let me be clear, the point is not to talk about the situation of Caribbean cinema *as it is* - which remains largely supported and perhaps also curtailed, at least in the Francophone space, by institutional financial tools that in my view limit its forms even more than its subjects. I propose to observe, in the history of one region in the world, a few residual traces of other regimes of representation that form a potential cinema from a series of hallucinations and their resultant echoes. But as I mentioned earlier, this could begin elsewhere, anywhere where lives must invent themselves and, in so doing, allow, just for a moment, for the apparition, the rising up, the emergence of a place that does not yet exist.

Scenes of injustice

> *It's also possible to see in the shambles of denunciations and denials that submerged the trial, the existence of resistance tactics, perhaps barely mastered at the outset but followed by the unexpected effect of disorder created where no one and everyone is congregated together, innocent and guilty. Looking closely, it will be easier to accuse those who escape, as well as to lose track of the members of the tribunal in a series of colliding names, without it ever being possible to know who did what. These contradictory back-and-forths, drowning the message of clear declarations, up to and including for today's reader, function as a shield over truths that will never be revealed.*
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> Christine Chivallon, on the subject of the trial of the Insurgents of 1870 in Martinique, in *L'esclavage, du souvenir à la mémoire. Contribution à une anthropologie de la Caraïbe* [*Slavery, from Souvenir to Memory: A Contribution to an Anthropology of the Caribbean*] (Karthala, 2012)

Lucas Roxo: What is your definition of speaking?
Maken's: Taking a risk. For me, one of the biggest punchlines is that of the cops: "everything you say can be held against you."

Clichy-sous-bois / Montfermeil, Summer 2020

In this brief exchange, the journalist Lucas Roxo's question to Maken's, the young rapper from Clichy-Montfermeil (in the outskirts of Paris), clearly aims to force him to bear witness to a path of emancipation via speech[14]. A sort of takeover, a *surge of power* [15] that for Maken's seems immediately trapped in a scene of injustice. A scene that doesn't need a framework. It sticks to the skin and travels around with a person, it's breathed in through the nose, stings the throat, and infiltrates the intimacy of clothing.

It's a toxic gas, a police climate that criminalizes lives, an unbreathable air in which Black lives must find a way to breathe, in silence. Because their breath is under surveillance, their existence is conditional. Any speech therefore participates in a scene of confession. Speaking is no longer a way to be heard, to (re)present oneself; speaking is exposing oneself to risk. And Maken's knows it. It's this scene that appears to him before any other, a self-evident fact. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's famous question, "Can the subaltern speak?" [16], is displaced. We wonder if subalterns *cannot not* speak. The question is perhaps not just who speaks and for whom they speak – to benefit who, in the name of whom? – but on what scene is it possible to speak without running the risk of this speech serving as incriminating evidence in a perennially open legal file, or as a value to be extracted for the benefit of others.

This new question plunges into crisis certain programmes of representation – notably, and this interests us here, the supposed ethics of documentary practices which propose to give voice to and offer an image of subalterns. It also opposes, in the field of contemporary art, certain invitations in the form of injunctions addressed to minorities, demanding that they present themselves at the scene of alliances as the only possible place for a future in which desires and agendas will be synchronized, as if by magic. In sum, it has become unthinkable "not to...". And it is this impossible unavailability that makes alliances difficult, if not suspicious, as soon as it is no longer possible to talk about the path to be taken towards this place of gathering and we are forced, on the contrary, to adhere in lockstep to a rather fuzzy *Poetics of Relation* [17].

The art critic Pedro Morais wrote the following in a brief article about the 2018 Berlin Biennale, which was curated by a racialized team assembled around Gabi Ngcobo under the title *We don't need another hero*: "This biennale can be at war, but it sometimes lacks the imagination to create new identities and see other possible futures." [18] Thus the forms of emancipation of Black lives are supplied here with an agenda that was not written by them. And any war will therefore be useless, unless it renews the art and culture market in one way or another, thereby creating new conditions of continuity – of survival even – for certain places and their economies. *We don't need another hero* – nor another heroine – could also be understood as *the right to not be* – to not be the solution to a dying capitalism, to not be its new desirable bodies and inexhaustible resources, to not be the future – by a serene performance of refusal. Because what seems to be taking the name of "future" here more closely resembles new decorations for the same old places, the same ways of being. Because what seems to be taking the name of "future" here more closely resembles new decorations for the same old places, the same ways of being. Consequently, it's very difficult to understand what Morais calls *other possible futures* – other futures for whom? But we know that the future is placed under the sign of urgency, and even impatience, as soon as it becomes a question of going beyond a situation of discomfort such as the one that could end up creating minority bodies where they remain unsatisfied by a joyous Creolization and peaceful scenes of alliances – which, we will see later in this text, are often scenes of respectability which simultaneously associate the criminalization of some individuals and the narcissistic capture of others. And so, ridding ourselves of heroic necessities in art as in the militant sphere could well be a way to counter the separations these politics of respectability insert into minority worlds – by enthroning new heroes and turning any dissension, any detour, into a definitive separation, an irredeemable separatism. We simply need to accept that outside of the illusory world of statues and the bright lights of celebrations, there exist fragile means of existence and struggle that require neither renunciation nor consent. As we'll see with the attempt to assemble the scattered traces of a cinema of Black lives, it doesn't

seem possible to fund new contemporary scenes of critique at a time of catastrophe, taking as a departure point a humanity that is suddenly, magically, unified – which doesn't at all mean that we must renounce a future place of encounter and alliance. We must realize that the fantasy of the humanity in question would then be fabricated, despite all serious consideration of human separation(s) produced by Modernity. And especially what these separations have generated as specific relations of particular humans with non-human forms of existence[19]. Therefore, we don't know if we can speak of a particular future of Black lives or if it is possible that these lives will have access to something that is not immediately available to everyone else, something these Black lives could cultivate for themselves so as not to arrive empty-handed at the scenes of alliances to come. In any case, at no time has it been considered that these Black lives could orient themselves towards any other place than the site of yet another desirable mutation of capitalism and that this other place could compose a detour leading to scenes that would be deferred in space and time. We are defending Black lives here, not as new products, but as presences which necessitate a profound reconfiguration of the scene of representation, by projecting their desire towards other places to come and by refusing to exhaust themselves in an attempt to make *the world as it is* (that is to say, unbreathable) into a liveable place. And so, for these lives that have no place, that are in flight, that have experimented with other ways of being with their environment, there is no question of returning to a plantation that may have changed its appearance or that may need minority bodies to perfect a superficial mutation. The flight from scenes of representation is therefore not an abandonment or a renunciation but the beginning of a process of reparations that must lead to other places, which require a decentralization, a displacement, to create a common space desirable for all. And I must repeat here that everyone will have to invent their own path, with its own idiosyncratic detours, to arrive at this scene, everyone will have to create their own cinema.

As the philosopher Norman Ajari writes "a paternalist ethics is recognizable by the fact that the value it accords to itself is not measured by its real effects – in other words the pointless suffering and injustices that it will have allowed to be appeased or prevented – but only by the degree of self-satisfaction it creates." [20] It is clearly in the name of this paternalist ethics, which could also be called an *ethics of privilege*, that supposed scenes of justice and emancipation are deployed – ones where subalterns are invited to convene, speak, exist. It is at these scenes that the politics of respectability are applied – scenes where the Republic is always good and the formerly colonized puff out their chests to receive the honours of a full humanity because there will certainly be no other humanity outside of this scene, which is articulated around a White Body of Reference, and its demanding agenda. Any other place – silent or garrulous – will be branded with the grammar of wild communitarianism.

These scenes of injustice, where speech is confession, force subalterns to imagine a performance that produces firstly a site of enunciation. Even before a single word resonates, this particular performance must create a space in which to say it, to perform it. A provisional container. An eel crate [21]. The subaltern body, a body without rest, because it's never in *its own* place, nor in the process of accumulating the fruits of its labour – transports its own decor; a crush of materials, images and languages, landscapes invaginated through errancy and flight. In this way the subaltern flees a form of primitive availability, that of the object/body/image property, both fungible and interchangeable, alternately convoked, exposed and hidden. They then move on to another availability, that of radical contingency with the worlds that surround them – in other words, perhaps towards a form of non-discernment, of camouflage and alliance with and in non-human

forms rather than a projection of self towards a scene of emancipation imagined by others. Thus, we could say that they are the theatre of conflicting landscapes, of tensions between interlaced decors. If, like the rapper Maken's, they feel the artificiality and danger of the proposed scene of emancipation, they also have the capacity to install another decor. They will speak, but not when someone asks them to, where someone asks them to, or how someone asks them to. They are going to speak "beyond the law of speech" in a monstrous language, full of loud noises and shocks. They will speak at the same time as others do, in the cacophony of a collective body. They will roam in bands with others there where one shouldn't go. I imagine also a de-speaking cinema emanating from the untimely presence of delirious storytellers with their endless logorrhoeas, refusing to exonerate themselves on the scene of injustice – in other words, refusing to offer an admissible or respectable image or confession. Because as we will see, this cinema is made up of an ensemble of gaps. All presences flee towards the margins, embed themselves in peripheral landscapes. This is a cinema of dispersion by flight, but also a cinema of excess, cacophony, and explosion. For it removes itself from the centre of the scene as much as it atomizes the centre itself, by making it impracticable, inaudible, untranslatable.

On the dispersion of (the) place

Made from the assemblage of bodies that are attentive and porous to their environment, bodies that have interiorized landscapes, matters, and compositions as well as scenes of violence, the place of Black lives is an aggregate space with diverse forms of life and social tumults, a place of hallucination and political ecology, a place haunted by histories.

Drawing on this first series of remarks, it seems difficult to me to speak of minority political cinema – or of a *cinema of Black lives* – without confronting the difficulty of representing certain bodies and forms of life which have long been dispossessed, not only of the possibility to produce their own mode of appearance, beyond a life in the world of death, the collections of objects and resources, but also of their own paths and agendas for a return-detour towards a *living commons* (*un vivant commun*). It's clear they can no longer return to a self-proclaimed Humanity, having existed as wild and unworthy materials at the heart of the Nature of the Moderns, in which capitalism stripped (and continues to extract) their riches. I would say that they return towards and by a populated and sonorous[22] scene where perhaps they will not be recognized and where they do not ask to be recognized.[23] Can these presences advance towards this desirable place for alliances as criminal lives – or produced as if they were criminal – or rather as lives that refuse to prove that they are *not* criminal, as outlaw lives, as the Dark Hour is struck and the Indigenous Instant comes? After people have spoken for them, after they have been installed on the scene of the visible, which would apparently be the only desirable scene for the living and the condition of justice, the subalterns are now pressured by their *friends* to say what they want, to announce what they are. They must show themselves, explain themselves. But in what language can they do this? With what images? Is it possible not to (re)present themselves in the scene of confessions?

In order to examine performances that are capable of freeing themselves from these toxic invitations, we must understand that slave and indigenous lives[24], like all sorts of subaltern human lives, are balanced on the complementary capacities of concealment and masquerade. In other words, practices of opacity which associate withdrawal and the grotesque, silence and noise, *not doing* and *overdoing* – positions that are never synchronous

with what is expected, asked for, recognized. Unacceptable positions. Trying to trace a path towards a de-speaking cinema means inventing a mode of non-representation by excess, of dissimulation through the powers of speech that drown out confession and make it completely *useless* [25]. It is by this means that the cinema that interests me tries to escape from the economy of extractive categories of contemporary art – and in particular its tactics of capture and reproduction, its fetishistic culture, its taste for collections of objects like mythic heroes. De-speaking cinema will also upset documentary cinema by noisily refusing certain mechanisms of the politics of representation. It reveals the flight of the witness, a revolt yelled out off-camera.

To conclude this first speculative journey exploring the strengths and risks of speech, I would like to return to the quote from the geographer Christine Chivallon, cited at the beginning of this section. She relates the delicate re-composition of the voices of insurgents in South Martinique during their trial in Fort-de-France, which began in the spring of 1871. This involved a process of assemblage in the dark, drawing on archives of a most fragmented nature, the state having conserved only a few bits of these testimonials and explicitly exposing them so as to defend the newly re-established order of the colonial Republic a few months after the social conflagration of the island against the white privileges that persisted after the abolition of slavery in 1848. The sequence described by Chivallon adds to the register of improvisations at scenes of injustice that persist one hundred and fifty years later and that spread all to the way to the lips of the rapper Maken's, as well as oiling the muscles of the Martiniquan youths who will topple the statue of a glorious abolitionist.

If we must be present at the trial – literally and metaphorically – and it seems quite difficult to avoid the scene of confession, it still remains possible to oppose an excess, an overflowing of language, whether through a Creole logorrhoea in the case of the Martiniquan insurgents[26] or that of a battered French, shot through with other idioms and manners of expression of certain rap songs[27].In both cases, the bodies that present themselves in this way in the ambient uproar don't refuse the fatal production of their criminality on a stage that is fundamentally unfavourable to them, but they overload it with noisy confessions.

Like the scene of speech, the scene of visual representation is a minefield. To appear there is to take a risk and we will see in the contemporary scenes that follow that the image of Black lives is convoked and then used as an available resource, *at hand*. Again, we will try to experiment with a few scattered traces, performances of refusal, to examine apparitions that make up the animated world of Black lives, *its* cinema.

Noise and disorder in the world of statues.

On 22 May 2020 in the communes of Fort-de-France and Schœlcher in Martinique, protesters topple two statues of Victor Schœlcher, a journalist and politician to whom we owe the signature, on 27 April 1848, of the definitive decree announcing the abolition of slavery in the French Antilles. A few days later, two young activists claim authorship of the act. In a video posted online, they affirm: "We, young Martiniquans, have had enough of being surrounded by symbols that are insulting to us." [28] Three days later, on 25 May 2020, the African American George Floyd is killed during his arrest in Minneapolis, suffocating under the knee of a white police officer, Derek Chauvin. The assassination is filmed[29]. These images of his death provoke a wave of indignation all across the country. They are soon transformed into a global movement for social justice.

This renewal of the Black Lives Matter movement spreads[30]. From the United States, it grows in a few days to fill the streets of multiple countries. Police violence and racist state necropolitics are denounced and, in a rather new manner for demonstrations on this scale, their colonial roots are too. The murder in Minneapolis eludes the category of miscellaneous news items. In a brutal manner it finds its place in History and not only for the racialized communities that have grown used to living under the dark skies of mourning[31]. Even the royal blue screen – political sky of French universalism which so many times has proven its remarkable resistance to the rustling murmurs of the world – finds itself scraped by the dirty fingernails of those who sought a bit of air to breathe[32]. The wrinkled azure of the flag which nevertheless triggers yet again a series of hysterical lessons offered by conservative commentators, a panic that confirms that there is clearly something rotten in these tired kingdoms and that for the "extremists of mediocrity" [33] it is forbidden to scratch at the purulent arrangements of French History.

Here the statue of a racist hero is splattered with paint, there the bronze body of a colonizer is vandalized[34]. Everywhere slave owners fall noisily from their pedestals. The great (hi)story lies upside down. The mouths of national narrators leave a few teeth on the ground. On 7 June 2020 in the United Kingdom, a crowd pulls down the statue of the rich slave-trader Edward Colston, emblematic figure of the city of Bristol. Then comes the turn of militant Belgians, who attack in Brussels and then in Anvers, pulling down effigies of Leopold II, notoriously responsible for a genocide in the Congo. On 24 June, in France, in front of the National Assembly, a statue of Colbert, who initiated the Black Code, is covered with red paint and the inscription "State Negrophobia." The list is long. We could add, to make a provisional conclusion, another significant "toppling," even though this one is quite distinct. A few days earlier, on 12 June, five people penetrate the Quai Branly-Jacques Chirac Museum in Paris and pull down from its pedestal a Bari funerary figure from the 19th century, which came from a tribe based between Chad and the Sudan. This is not another idol of the beloved National History that falls, but an act of protest concerning the presence of this artifact in a French museum and, consequently, the constitution of an inalienable state patrimony for which theft is unquestionably one of its methods of acquisition. In sum, it's a mess in the world of statues.

In the short chronology of these revolts of unexpected capillarity, the fall of the two statues of Schœlcher in Martinique occupy a distinct place. They occur three days before the precarious breath of George Floyd finally ceases a first time, and then millions of times in a video that is as viral as it is unbearable, leading us to no longer know what should be shown or *blurred* concerning the victim or the executioner. The empty and decided gaze of the police officer Derek Chauvin – and in wider shots, the apathy of his colleagues – are as glacial as Floyd's eye as he implores for help and then expires. Chauvin leaves no doubt about the abjection he projects towards the man he decides to execute. And in this way Floyd exits humanity two times. The topplings of the statues in Martinique have their own genealogy, their own agenda. They can be linked to protest movements that had been agitating life on the French island since the winter of 2019 in particular[35]. Employing actions of occupation and blocking, the protesters reveal a toxic environment inherited from the colonial economic order. The fall of the Schœlcher statues are therefore not echoes of the American tremor, one of many aftershocks set in motion by the primitive Minneapolis police scene. They tell another story and are part of struggles situated in a particular climate. Because pulling down the statue of the abolitionist Victor Schœlcher in Martinique is not quite the same gesture as the one that sends the statue of the slave trader Edward Colston into the port of Bristol. What the

Martiniquan activists reproach Schœlcher for is not his having directly profited from slavery. It's not the abolitionist as statue that is the problem, but rather the multitude he hides. Therefore, by pulling down his effigy the militants are rather attacking *schœlcherism*, as an enterprise of *the dispossession of emancipation itself*, the collection of stories and commemorations consolidated over the years whereby slaves' struggles for liberty were obfuscated by the generous hand of French State. The militants are liberating a narrative space, they atomize and scatter the majority history which conceals the ongoing existence of economic strategies and the continuation of privileges behind the moral idea of abolition in statuesque form. Pulling down a statue in this context is thus not a negation of History or an ignorant act as certain people have claimed. It is rather an occasion to enrich the registers of knowledge and to open a space for collective re-composition, with the condition, perhaps, of resisting the temptation to replace one effigy by another, one fixation by another, one centre by another. It remains possible to occupy the vacancy of a pedestal, to inhabit the phantom of History in another way, to populate it with hallucination, *to invent a cinema.*

But before moving on, let's get back to Bristol and the henceforth naked pedestal of Colston's statue, where on 15 July the artist Marc Quinn decides to install a new sculpture of his own. A hyper-realist bronze work, it immortalizes Jen Reid, fist in the air, a young Black protester from Black Lives Matter who had been photographed a few weeks earlier in the same pose. The piece, *A Surge of Power*, unilaterally decides on the fate of History and even on the form that reparations will take: a new statue, that of a young Black woman made by a white artist from London. The process is violent in many regards. By capturing the image of a Black woman, Quinn instrumentalizes it for his own projections, ignoring the lapse of time necessary for a re-composition of collective thought regarding the now toppled statue and the ghost of Colston – also ignoring the fact that this vacant space could engage people in the delicate process of exploration of the invisible part of this heritage in the very infrastructure of the city, of the country; in sum, how the statue functions as a system. It seems pointless to tarry on what could be considered the strategic operation of an artist. And I prefer to welcome this detestably frivolous and innocent gesture[36] as a useful motif that informs us about the tensions and stakes concerning subaltern representations and representations of subalterns.

Even if it is part of a private initiative, Quinn's project is in closer relation to the erection of the Schœlcher statues by France a few thousand miles away than it is with the fall of the shameful effigy of the Bristol slave trader. For the rapidity of the realization of this work – a little over a month after the toppling of Colston's statue – reminds us that for the supporters of a devouring economy of visibility, it is impossible to live with and to feel emptiness. And the artist's gesture, filling his personal agenda with the attributes of social justice, is first and foremost a predatory reflex whereby he occupies a space, extracting and capitalizing on an available resource. Because this is truly the heart of our subject, Quinn seizes on the Black struggle for emancipation as available matter, infinitely malleable, and without anyone asking him for anything, he offers an image of this struggle that occupies the terrain by overloading it with visibility and ownership. He installs himself by proxy at the centre of the scene because the only desirable place is the one for heroes and heroines. He invites a Black woman to come without delay and occupy *a place of jubilation* rather than *a scene of justice.* Time loses its depth, the struggle that emerges is already petrified and with it all its potentials and possible movements. By displacing an event from a scene of minority representation – Reid's spontaneous first gesture at the heart of an anti-racist demonstration – and repositioning it in another scene where a statue is going to be erected and will capture a value, just as quickly be

transported to a museum, Quinn obstructs the paths towards other practices of reparation and critique. He prevents other stories and conflicts or, and we'll look at this a bit further on, the possibility of a non-(re)presentation, an unavailability, a non-performance, a refusal, an absence as form of production of the descendants of slaves at the place left empty by yesterday's master. The ability to arrive and so swiftly occupy space suddenly made available with such resources (both material and visual) is a result of white privilege – the very privilege the slave trader Colston was reproached for when he decided on the liberty or absence of liberty of other human beings, as well as their presentation/exhibition at a market, or their disappearance into a ship's hold, into a cotton field, or into the obscurity of a dwelling. For Quinn, everything is available – ready to hand – and all histories can thus be pronounced and represented from the perspective of his particular liberty, which is completely unhindered, from his eye, his Body of Reference, which can use the bodies of others as the resources and the terms in his artistic vocabulary. However, it is true that Reid raises her fist at a moment, and in a world, where images are produced rather than traces. She raises her fist with a certain consciousness of creating an image, and Quinn sees this image and makes it his own. The notion of collaboration later brandished by the artist is reduced here to a form of consent. Reid agrees to the cessation of her rights to the image – which becomes an owned image. She renounces *her* image and falls into the narcissistic and loving trap set by Quinn. She becomes *his* sculpture. Reid's consent here is necessary, it's the key to Quinn's masquerade, she consents to appearing in a certain scene of representation. The result, however, is fatal. As Charlotte Jansen commented : "Sadly, despite the statue being removed by Bristol City Council less than 24 hours after it appeared (it is being held by a museum ready for Quinn to collect) Quinn is now at the centre of this narrative. His name and his work overshadows the experience of Jen Reid, the black woman who attended the protest, and what that was intended to represent. It was she who was involved in the movement, and who performed the real act of defiance and power."[37]

Jen Reid's situation is neither unique nor isolated. It is obviously difficult to criticize her personally for this "collaboration" – and that is the genius of Quinn's gesture, however coarse it may be. Because what the Reid/Quinn statue represents and celebrates is not a minority social phenomenon, but a strategy that is becoming banal: the camouflage operation of White power. This statue is not what it pretends to celebrate, Black emancipation, but rather a form where the Black body is put in the service of a project to destroy the emerging critique of certain privileges. Quinn needs this body to succeed in this counter-attack as much as he needs the statue of Colston to serve as racist scarecrow, functioning as his *bad White*. He needs it to work as a diversionary tactic to prevent us from seeing what is really happening. To turn our gaze away from the space where his transactions occur.

But the critique that consists in demanding that it be a Black artist who produces such a work in the place of Quinn's is not more satisfactory, even if it has the merit of reminding us of a market that exists beyond this hypocritical discourse of social justice. In sum, if value can be extracted, some would declare that it must then benefit a Black person, potentially less privileged than Quinn. This is understandable, but the idea contributes again to consolidating the legitimacy of certain forms and scenes of representation. The speculative exercise of a de-speaking cinema and its performances proposes another path and engages us with this difficult question: can we refuse to occupy the scene now freed by the ghost of Colston? Can Jen Reid – and all of her doubles – escape from the narcissistic desire of a heroic image so as to present herself

furtively on the deeply coveted stage of alliance as a loud and criminal life that disturbs the ceremony – at exactly the moment when she raises her fist *before* her statue exists? Thereby indicating that something is happening, must be happening, somewhere else. Could we replace with rumours and fleeting visions the petrified image invented by Quinn, who in this instance is only realizing the desire of an entire system in which nothing escapes from its economy? Can we in some way get back to Jen Reid? Can we get back to a non-captive image, a story, a hallucination? Is it possible to get back to a useless and valueless body, which suddenly begins to speak and move?

In his book, *A Decolonial Ecology: Thinking of Ecology from the Caribbean World* [38], the researcher Malcom Ferdinand calls for the presences locked in a ship's hold to come up at last on deck, onto the deck of the world, and create a future in common. But this raises the question of the pre-existence of this deck – and to a certain extent, its contingency with the history of the hold. This deck is the deck of *this* hold, its ceiling. Just as the pedestal where Reid raises her fist has its own hold, its underground history, which Reid's gesture does not change. Even if Ferdinand imagines the border-less deck of a Ship-World, in my opinion we must undo the scene of the ship's deck because some people must remove themselves from scenes of horror in the hold, for which no shiny deck or golden pedestal could ever be a place of reparations. By producing his statue, Quinn in fact refuses the real work, the work of reparation which requires he remove himself from the centre and divest himself of his privileges. The act of making reparations cannot be limited to exchanging roles for a brief moment, nor to returning objects or lives which were pulled up and arranged in such a way that they are no longer recognizable. To make reparations, we must leave towards other scenes, with our objects and histories, find paths to go *from* a deck or *from* a hold. This may require that subalterns refuse a certain *rise in humanity* [39] – a rising up on the ship's deck – in favour of simply drifting towards another relational situation of humans among themselves and also with other presences in the world, drifting toward a place without a master.

But what has cinema got to do with all this? Perhaps it can change its statute or substance by being capable of revealing what escapes from it and making the film a witness of a movement towards that which it cannot represent. No longer a ship's deck where the world congregates and presents itself and where those who have been locked up in the hold are brought up for a vulgar *eel dance*, but a tissue of fugitive images that serves as an uncertain place.

The two tableaux that follow take place in Haiti. Although they are not part of a system – which would never be the method of a de-speaking cinema – they give us a taste of possible representations, without centres, without statues. And yet these tableaux dramatize two heroic figures that people have tried to make statues of, and thereby freeze them in time and instrumentalize their biographies for political purposes[40] : the Maroon rebel slave, François Mackandal, and the chief governor of the island of Saint-Domingue, Toussaint Louverture, both precursors to and actors in the Revolution which gave birth to the first Black Republic in History, that of Haiti in 1804. Here we prefer to let them escape from the pantheon, to let them come down from their pedestals so they can regain their quality of errant ghosts. In this way they become essential actors in the cinema we're seeking, where a film is no different from a legend peddled by feverish spirits.

Considering the flight of matters of colonial theatre

Let's make a detour by way of the cool, shady knolls of the Caribbean, until we slip into the atmosphere of another scene where it seems that justice is being rendered through contact with the burning skin of the man I would like to turn into one of the historic and mythic figures of our cinema of Black lives. On 20 January 1758, the colonial administration of the island of Saint-Domingue assembles a crowd in the public square of Cape Français, today known as Cape Haitian. Free Blacks and slaves are there at the very front, since the powers that be want them to attend this unique performance. An exceptional fugitive, François Mackandal, is to be burned alive at the stake. Elusive for eighteen years, the charismatic leader of the Maroons sowed troubles and terror in the island's precious sugar cane fields and pillaged its cattle. The man who is held responsible for the death of nearly six thousand colonists has finally been captured and is here, tied to a stake in a fire that will grill him before the eyes of both those who fear him and those who secretly admire him. This staging of justice in action organized by the colonial powers is not just a simple execution. The hopes and beliefs that hover around this famous one-armed man who is said to be immortal must also be liquidated. Therefore, if Mackandal succeeded for a time in unifying various centres of Maroon freedom struggles that were dispersed across the island – by sharing techniques and knowledge rather than creating an army – and if the precarious assembly has caused the colonial presence and its infrastructure unprecedented losses, it is something else entirely that this ritual by fire is trying to destroy in the public square on this day. And this something else could be called Mackandal's *becoming-environment ("*devenir-environnement*").* For in addition to the feats of arms the famous rebel slave is known for, it is his powers of metamorphosis that have forged his legend. Didn't he transform himself into a bird here, didn't he escape there in the body of an insect, in the fibre of a leaf that floated off in the wind? Wasn't it him who, in the skin of a nocturnal animal, made an intrusion on the plantation, waking his future partisans and encouraging them? He is soon everywhere and in everything, in rain, thunder, and earthquakes. So much so that in the end people confuse him with the island of Saint-Domingue itself. He is reproached not just for his crimes, but also for this radical ability to exist with/in other forms of life, other powers, and to find a new incarnation in them as well as letting them enter into him. This is why Mackandal is a hero unlike any other as soon as we stop considering his metamorphoses as powers – over so-called Nature – and see them rather as alliances and availabilities with the wild environment that surrounds the small world of the colonists. And so, when on this January day the French decide they will burn him *like a pig*, it is not only the execution of a criminal life but also, and perhaps especially, an entire, possible world that must burn with him. And this execution scene follows two narrative paths that are radically different, one of which is an occurrence of a de-speaking cinema. In the eyes of French History, Mackandal fought back and managed to escape from the fire. He was then caught again and burned at the stake. But popular legend, which would ultimately become more influential than the authorities' version of events[41],sees Mackandal transforming himself into a fly, zooming up over the scene of his execution and crying out to the crowd, "I'll be back!" Whether or not he burned, whether he flew off as a fly or an ardent and revolutionary bit of ash, it all comes back to the same thing. Mackandal disappeared in a *becoming-multitude-and-environment* ("devenir multitude et environnement").

He thus escapes from heroism the way he escapes from those who want to make him fall by reducing his epic arc to a vulgar brigand's life. His ability to weave together

savoir-faire and struggle was equalled only by his propensity to disappear into the countryside. For me, his metamorphoses are precious traces of a Caribbean cinema and a flight from scenes of injustice – the plantation initially and then the punitive ritual of the fire – to sow trouble that will return at the time of the Haitian revolution, which began thirty-three years later in the darkness of a forest. A revolution that was not accompanied by written forms and manifestos of revolutionary dream, but that I like to imagine as an echo of hallucinatory scenes from the past, one of the most powerful of them being this death-transformation of the one-armed rebel.

Mackandal's end annuls any pertinence between the living and the dead because the rebel circulates unhindered between the two worlds. Nothing can ever really disappear any more in this transaction from one matter to another. Mackandal is like Delia, the indecipherable character of the novel *Masters of the Dew*, by the Haitian author Jacques Roumain, a figure of *these people of the dust*, as J. Michael Dash calls them – common people always eager for the revolution to come, marching at the limit and the edges of the living, zombified existences that always rise up from the ruins of the most recent cataclysm . . . Black lives, but completely elusive lives.[42]

Through the power of popular storytelling – by an act of precarious cinema – Mackandal escapes from the performance people want to make of his death. He removes himself again, his matter becomes unavailable, it is exfiltrated from the scene of representation of the colonial world. Another scene, in the form of an hallucination, is deployed in place of his burned body. The image of the Maroon resists. The image must always be recalled, welcomed, reinterpreted, it must be reincarnated in a particular situation, a particular body. The image travels, it does not want to die, and so *it walks with time* [43]. It is a trace that remains, whereas Quinn's statue, which was briefly enthroned in Bristol, replaced and radically erased the trace left by the gesture of Jen Reid, which the new statue affirms it represents. Quinn exhausts all interpretations, his statue prevents the dispersion of meaning. It convokes and concentrates, it kills what is escaping.

Something opens, something is born, something escapes

If the shadow of Mackandal is also felt over The Living and The Dead Ensemble's film *Ouvertures* (2020)[44], it is Toussaint Louverture who is the heart of this work in which his ghost comes back to haunt present day Port-au-Prince. In my preliminary attempt to move towards a de-speaking cinema, *Ouvertures* is the first filmic object that captures my attention – because for me, at least at first, I needed to show that the occurrence of this particular type of cinema could assume different forms of performance (than films) and that it was necessary to emphasize certain conditions that allowed these forms to exist or, on the contrary, that tried to limit their power by deploying them on scenes of representation without a vanishing point. I think *Ouvertures* offers other perspectives, certainly because the film is a form of speculative narration involving a place that does not yet exist and that is born of a particular sort of chemistry: the liquefaction of the statue of the hero transformed into an assembly that is errant, liquid, then gaseous, delirious.[45] A change of state that could be considered as a return to the living, towards living history. In my view, it is similar to the fall of the effigies of Schœlcher in Martinique, which permitted the liberation of a cinema of Caribbean voices. The other important point is perhaps that *Ouvertures* also takes on the task of allowing us to feel what it cannot represent and that, on the contrary, the film offers itself as a place from which we can imagine. An adventure begins there, something opens up and escapes.

Toussaint Louverture, who led a large part of the revolutionary combats of the former French colony Saint-Domingue (1791–1804), was exiled to Fort de Joux in France in 1802 by Napoleon, who feared the growing influence of the former slave who had become a formidable war strategist. Though Napoleon had named him governor of the precious sugar-producing island, he condemned Louverture to the cold of a prison in the Jura mountains, where the rebel died in 1803. This did not prevent the revolutionary process moving forward under the leadership of Jean-Jacques Dessalines, who gave the movement an even more radical turn that what Louverture had envisioned – Louverture who remains an ambiguous figure, caught between his slave origins and his fascination with France. He is the troubled and tortured hero of the play *M. Toussaint*, first written in 1959, then revisited for the stage in 1977, by the Martiniquan author Edouard Glissant.

The plot of the film *Ouvertures* is this: a young Haitian theatre company tries to stage Glissant's text in their local Creole, at the heart of the tumult that is modern-day Haiti. But the play soon becomes the pretext for allowing voices to be heard, voices speaking of the hopes and conflicts of young Haitian men and women, caught in the parallel rays of a revolutionary history celebrated in the Caribbean as much as it is hidden by Western Modernity and of a present that teeters on the edge of a catastrophe whose colonial roots dig deep. Speech here serves as a double exercise in excavation, of both revolutionary history and precolonial history, with its accrued knowledge and imagination, what the thinker Malcom Ferdinand calls the intrusion of Ayiti[46] when he writes that "the Caribbean island of Haiti is still portrayed as this monstrous figure of modernity, relegated to an outer world ("*un en-dehors du monde"*). However, it also reveals the hidden side of the modern world that environmentalism has abusively covered over. Recognizing the intrusion of Ayiti means recognizing that the Mother-Earth, ecosystems, biodiversity and natural resources carry traces of the colonizations, slaveries, and misogynist dominations of the world."[47] In the same way that Ferdinand proposes a Caribbean situation as starting point to portray the global climate crisis of today, *Ouvertures* uses the Haitian context as the beginning of a narrative project and an aesthetic that refuses to assume a documentary form. The film is developed and worked on by an assembly of people and progressively no one is any longer the subject of it. It finds a new materiality, the mineral scene of the statuary becomes liquid and then a wave, which spreads into different milieus. The film *de-speaks* (*déparle*) and it rants. It experiments with a politics of the image that takes the form of a slow collective hallucination and proposes to fill the scene with words that never become confession. *Ouvertures* doesn't orient itself towards any conclusive form, but extends itself out to its edges and limits: speech gives way to silence, bodies are diluted into the landscape, the scene leaves the city in favour of the *outer country* (*pays-en-dehors*). The film leaves. This particular form of narrative that he ties to principles of Glissantian opacity caused the film critic Michael Sicinski to write this after seeing *Ouvertures* at the New York Film Festival in October 2020: "What is impressive about *Ouvertures* is the extent to which I, as a viewer, learned so much from what I did not understand, not only about the particulars of Haitian history, but about how to watch the film in the first place. Viewers more well-versed in the film's historical references and folkloric discourses will of course have many more access points than I did, which is precisely the point. The title, a pun on Louverture's name, also points to the Ensemble's aesthetic. *Ouvertures* is a continuing set of introductions – the film keeps reinventing itself – and it is also an opening, an offer." [48] By becoming a space that is perpetually negotiated, where people are constantly in negotiation, the film decides on nothing but presents a conversational form where nothing is revealed, nothing is resolved, and where all regimes of existence are treated in an equivalent way. This forms a reality augmented by dreams and delirious rants, hallucinations, and cacophonies. As Sicinski seems to say, there is nothing to

understand – nothing ready to hand to take away – nothing to hold on to but a collection of scenes, images, and sounds that disperse. There is nothing to learn other than a way towards a *trembling thinking of world*, as Glissant himself might say. In this sense the film doesn't just adapt a fragment of the Martiniquan thinker's theatrical work, it also literally tests his philosophy of relation in the form of a cinema that envisions, beyond contingencies existing between only humans, an assembly in transition towards a world that is entirely entangled.

To prefer not to…, to de-speak

The departure point for a de-speaking cinema is a gesture of refusal. Something escapes in silence or, on the contrary, enters into the scene noisily, sowing trouble, blurring meaning, tearing up what was serving as performance and disintegrating the police scene of confessions. It seemed important to me throughout this first attempt, which will call forth others, to sketch out the contours of this refusal in order to remove it from any negative vision and, on the contrary, to affirm speculative potentiality and expectations. This is particularly important at a time when those who are considered to be separating themselves – from the Republican body – are put to death. All we are doing is imagining other possible paths, while it is clear that the beautiful spectacle of minority bodies in the great institutions of art has a long future before it. So why is there something sad, sad and predictable, something *déjà-vu*, on this new page of History? De-speaking cinema moves forward, spear-heading this sadness, like the shining tooth of a Maroon far off in a dark forest. Like the feeble signal of an existence. The imagination of de-speaking cinema tries to get us to feel other places-to-come, which offer a critique of scenes of majority representation as much as the "new" minority scenes imagined by the dominant institutions of culture in the form of the politics of consent. Scenes of consent which cannot be confused with situations of emancipation since they form the new camouflage, the new skin of a same Body, and the strategies for the pursuit of its privileges. De-speaking cinema is clearly searching for practices of the performance of flight from the viewpoint of this eye and this Body. This flight first affects the logic of alliance by postponing agendas and places. It also critiques the principles of representation of the documentary field through a centripetal movement towards the margins of the film or by the cacophonous production of undecipherable scenes.

In the manner of the militant Martiniquans who toppled the statues of Schœlcher, this cinema attacks not only representation but also the scenes where it occurs. It is not only interested in those who are solicited to be represented but also in their capacity to represent themselves, and by these same individuals' capacity and need to produce sites of enunciation.

Finally, by using the scene of Mackandal's execution as an important episode in this Caribbean de-speaking cinema, we are able to sense its deep nature, that of a world that speaks, a *decor* that speaks, an environment that speaks, as soon as they remove themselves from the control and centrality of a Body that wants to speak for everything and everyone. To those who must exit the ship's hold, I propose a detour by way of this world populated by visions and delirium as a preparation before noisily entering into the place-to-come, full of stories and defeats of the desires of heroes and heroines. A place where there are no statues. A place that de-speaks.

Translated from French by Liz Young and reviewed by Shela Sheikh

Notes

1. *Déparlant* means "delusional," "delirious," or "ranting" in Haitian Creole. I met this expression for the first time in the play «Mélovivi ou le piège» by the Haitian poet Frankétienne whose fragments we adapted during the creation of the performance «The Wake» of The Living and The Dead Ensemble. The expression *cinéma déparlant* which I've decided to translate as "de-speaking cinema" allows us to grasp the stakes of daring to speak for a cinema that is concerned with emancipation and, at the same time, the necessity of scrambling the meaning of this same speech by overloading the scene of confession – an idea which I try to underscore throughout this text. The *cinéma déparlant* also tries to establish a link between the apparition of images and the practices of storytelling, which literally makes them stand up and emerge.

2. *Dreamtime* designates the age that preceded the creation of Earth, a period when everything was spiritual and immaterial. According to Australian Aboriginals, dreamtime still exists and can be reached for spiritual reasons. Through dreamtime it is possible to communicate with spirits and to decipher the meaning of bad omens, illnesses, and other misfortunes. The work of the Karrabing Film Collective in particular draws on the powers of this dreamtime to construct a unique cinematic aesthetic, conceived of as a response to the oppression of extractive economies and the destruction of ways of life and the traditional ties between an Aboriginal community and its Earth. A real instance of de-speaking cinema that fully assumes darkness and delirium as forms of struggle against the assignations and colonial modes of representation of the world of Indigenous peoples. Here cinema becomes a habitable place rather than a transparent form of performance.

3. See Olivier Marboeuf, "Those who hold a wake for negro images" ("Ceux qui veillent les images nègres") in *Bamako Encounters—African Biennale of Photography*, exh. cat. (Berlin: Archive Books, 2019), pp. 73–82.

4. This introduction was inspired by the performance *White Dog* by the choreographer Latifi Laâbissi. What seems to me the most remarkable aspect of this scene of errancy in a night at the end of time is that the community that reconstitutes itself slowly before our eyes, that tries to find a common dance (which is necessarily violent and grotesque), never comes to a state of resolution, which would be the peaceful ideal of Creolization. Everything must always be made again, and unmade. Escaping from the repetitive gestures of life within death is not enough. New gestures must be invented that no one knows yet and each individual must do this both from the point of his/her own singular history, from a particular body and memory, and also seek a possible accord, always negotiated. This uneasy world, violent and yet joyful – if we return to laughter a strange and liberating power – could well be the scene of a future where no body will ever again sit in state at the center and no presence will ever again be forced to measure its humanity in order to have the right to present itself there.

5. In several recent texts, I have attempted to develop the idea of a *pays en dehors* ("outer country"), inspired by an expression that speaks in this way of the Haitian countryside in opposition to the *pays en dedans* (interior country), incarnated by the city of Port-au-Prince in particular. On one side the city, the site of power, where French is spoken and where the influence of the West remains dominant; on the other the countryside, the space of the dispossessed, of traditional culture, and the Creole language. But it is also in part a colour line which separates the more white and urban Creole society from the Black society of the countryside, called *bossale*, in reference to its African origins. If the colour line is not as clearly demarcated everywhere, the two Haitian countries are nonetheless clearly the two faces of a political and economic history, one according significant favour to the great leaders of the Revolution and its heroic pantheon inspired by Western historiographies, the other rooted in the anonymous struggles of the Maroon peoples and their armies. These are two scenes of representation, but only the city offers the possibility of a recognized public existence, while the people from the countryside still struggle today for the right to use the land for themselves, and not just as a means to feed the *théâtre bouffon* of the "Republic of Port-au-Prince."

6. Speaking of the court requires us to remember the dynamics of Western mercantilism, which was built from the extraction, but also the exportation, of riches from the peripheries of Empire towards its metropolitan centres. At the same time, and continuing through to the present, these same centres were intent on invisibilizing and minimizing in the Great Fictions of their Official Histories the importance of these resources in the development and survival of the centre(s). We must also remember that all of the

scenes of representation we consider here were organized around a heart – and a Body – in a concentric and centrifugal mechanism. This heart concentrates the material and symbolic power, as well as the legalized (rather than legal) exercise of violence. It is a space for the projection of desires for recognition; in other words, it controls the capacity to affect value and make (things) visible – which tend to become the same thing. It is indeed the aspiration to live under this eye and its legitimacy to offer a respectable image – a reassuring mirror – that de-speaking cinema challenges. De-speaking cinema does not infiltrate via the luminous scene of a plantation, but rather negotiates the conditions of the living at the margins by imagining lives that are worth being lived, in another way, capable of creating other modalities of relation and value.

7. The expression *vies noires* ("Black lives") is a way of coming to terms with the difficulty presented by the Anglo-American term *Blackness*. This is not just a problem of literal translation – for the term has no equivalent in French and "négritude" doesn't seem to suit the extent of its signification – but rather a different contextual reality. We need to forge tools – and thus a vocabulary – which permit us to consider French reality and, specifically, its particular colonial history, its relation to the African continent, to the Mediterranean, to the territories designated as Overseas and, finally, something that is very important in my eyes, to tell the life of people from *banlieues*. It also seems to be necessary, in my point of view, to reintroduce the class dimensions that the term *Blackness* makes invisible, which caused me several times to re-appropriate the word *nègre*, using it as an adjective that qualifies that which is thrown into shadow: unnameable and disposable humanity. The problematic of the N-word in the Anglo-American space forbids us a direct translation of this proposition which roots itself in the desire to form a French tradition of critique from the perspective of the Caribbean in particular. This forces us to translate "nègre" with "Black" and the entire substance of the proposition is thereby lost. I've decided on the expression *vies noires* ("Black lives") to speak of all the lives thrown into shadow and of all those who are treated as *négre*sses*. If it seems to me that the history of Blacks has many specificities, which I do not wish to minimize or trivialize, there is still *un devenir nègre du monde* ("a becoming Black of the world") which touches a vast panel of interchangeable and unimportant lives. And so the *Black lives* (*vies noires*) that I speak of are not only lives of Blacks – even if Blacks have largely been the terrains of experience for them. On the "*devenir nègre du monde*," see Achille Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, trans. Laurent Dubois (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017). Originally published as *Critique de la raison nègre* (Paris: La Découverte, 2013).

8. The expression *terres habituées* ("cleared lands") is used to designate parcels of forest land cleared for the purpose of creating plantations.

9. I try here to position my practice of performance around the speaking body, the storyteller having become a recurring figure of the untimely prowler in my research, texts, and projects. I use the story as a speculative and theoretical tool, nourished by Caribbean traditions of the spoken word as well as by those of the smooth-talkers of today's urban outskirts. A way to *faire son cinema*, in the sense of inventing a world.

10. But, concerning this idea of "spoken" visual arts, there are other ways of considering things than those that will structure this text. For example, in *Listening to Images* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), Tina M. Campt tries, through an effort of attention, to listen to the voices – the discourses – of photographs from the archives of African American and South African culture particularly. Or Fred Moten who conversely, in *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2003), tries to sense the images written into Black musical radicality of the United States in the twentieth century. If the path I employ here is different, notably because it leads into the landscape of the French Caribbean – which forces me to find specific ways of de-speaking French – it also has certain affinities with this idea of incomplete spoken images that are dispersed, desynchronized, or a-synchronous. These images offer as many modes of apparition of Black lives which must use to ensure their existence: an arsenal of ruses, camouflages, and oscillations between presence and refusal. And so we can agree on the idea, present in Moten's work, that the visual heritage of Black lives has a vibratory nature. It is a wave that travels through and perturbs an environment. It exists – takes form – through the manner in which it perturbs that environment.

11. I develop the concept of the White Body of Reference in 'Decolonial Variations: A conversation between Olivier Marboeuf and Joachim Ben Yakoub', May 2019, https://olivier-marboeuf.com/2019/05/09/variations-decoloniales/.

12. To cite just one example from this collection of "amicable" predations, the selfie with person of colour, or SWPOC, is one of the most remarkable uses of racialized bodies as a way to extend symbolic capital

over the social networks of professionals in the fields of art and culture.

13. The academic David Lloyd develops the idea of "social life of things" as a hypothesis of escape for racialized lives from the form of captive objects, as well as that of subjects as this is defined in the thinking of the Enlightenment. This retreat to the state of elusive thing creates one of the modalities of radical and critical redefinition of the question of representation. See David Lloyd *Under Representation: The Racial Regime of Aesthetics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018); and David Lloyd, "The Racial Thing: On Appropriation, Black Studies and Thingliness," *Text zur Kunste*, issue 117 "Property/Eigentum" (March 2020).

14. Clichy-sous-Bois and Montfermeil are two towns in the north-east suburbs of Paris. In 2005, two youths, Zyed Benna and Bouna Traoré, died by being electrocuted at an electric plant while being pursued by the police. These two deaths provoked one the largest revolts in the suburbs in the contemporary History of France. The uprising began in the Paris region and spread to multiple other *banlieues* all over the country. A demand for social justice was claimed through fire. Fifteen years later, as construction for the Grand Paris project promises a radical urban transformation in the perspective of the 2024 Olympic Games, the Atelier Médicis, a new cultural establishment installed in Clichy-Montfermeil as one the symbols of the action of the state, has been questioning its future in terms of cultural, social, ecological, and architectural questions. See the panel "Ateliers Médicis 2025 - Pourquoi imaginer ici, un lieu culturel local et international ?" from July 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N-wUlB2-Zv0&t=4638s and https://www.ateliersmedicis.fr/agenda/pourquoi-imaginer-ici-un-lieu-culturel-local-et-international-17218.

15. *A Surge of Power* is the name of an art work created by the British artist Marc Quinn after the fall of Colston's statue in Bristol. We will discuss this problematic gesture later in the present text.

16. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988), pp. 271–313

17. I explicitly cite the title of Edouard Glissant's celebrated work, *Poetics of Relation*, which over the years has become the Bible of those for whom Relation is the motif of pacification par excellence for all conflicts – and accessorily an inexhaustive resource for globalized contemporary art. It is not my intent here to examine what in Glissant's treatise offers such strategies of absorption and what is only the result of an inattentive reading of the complexity the thinker placed on the path to the scene he imagined. What is clear is that fragments of his book have been transformed into laissez-passers that allow easy entry into minority worlds – where a few rights to opacity will also be accorded in order to facilitate a more amicable acceptance of certain practices of extraction and appropriation – notably in the field of contemporary art. Again, it seems that the Glissantian hypothesis is essentially convoked to counter the identity politics of the African American world, the tensions, and the mistrust – the limits and protections also – that they articulate in both militant and academic spheres regarding the White System. As I have emphasized several times in this text, there can be no emancipating relations without a specified place, situated in space and time. This is why it seems to me that readings of *Poetics of Relation* must always be accompanied – perhaps even joined together in one book – by the *Discours Antillais* (*Caribbean Discourse*) by the same author, a rich work that is rooted in the contrasting moral turpitudes, histories, sociology, economy, and imagination of Martinique. Here Glissant exposes the place from which he projects (himself), the fixations that haunt him, the frustrations he tries to unravel. And it is perhaps by considering Glissant's work as a whole by that we can produce such an operation that re-situates him in a Caribbean problematic of belonging in the world. In other words, in what he calls *Mondialité* (Globalism), but in a particular way, from a singular path that mustn't be forgotten, where the negative part – both negation and shadow – of Western history still resonates.

18. Pedro Morais, "La Biennale de Berlin est en guerre," Quotidien des arts, *edition* no. 1524, 24 June 2018, https://www.lequotidiendelart.com/articles/12833-la-biennale-de-berlin-est-en-guerre.html

19. Like others before him, the Martiniquan researcher Malcom Ferdinand produces in this sense a real critique of the imagination in the Anthropocene, preferring two other scenes (and cenes) which place Black matter and the Plantation at the heart of a tale of catastrophe, where the destruction of the conditions of life for both humans and non-humans are inseparable consequences of the colonial mode of inhabiting ("*l'habiter colonial*"). Malcom Ferdinand, *A Decolonial Ecology: Thinking of Ecology from the Caribbean World* (Polity Press, Cambridge, 2021)

20. Norman Ajari, *La dignité ou la mort. Ethique et politique de la race* (*Dignity or Death: Ethics and Politics of Race*) (Paris: La Découverte, 2019), p. 56.

21. In *Raising Cain. Blackface Performance from Jim Crow to Hip-Hop* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), William T. Lhamon Jr recounts how at the famous Saint Catherine's Market in New York at the beginning of the nineteenth century, fish sellers allowed their Black workers to give impromptu dance performances to attract clients. Given the profusion of the dancers and as a way to regulate the space allotted for each man's dancing, the fish sellers decided to limit each dancer to the space of a crate of eels. The story goes that this reductive space pushed the dancers to invent new dance steps of which some, like Michael Jackson's *moonwalk*, are still with us today, after having made a detour by way of American *Blackface* theatre – where Whites blackened their faces and performed in theatres where Blacks didn't have the right to enter.

22. The scene here is less a physical place than a performance.

23. This scene, if we imagine it without master and owner, is thereby liberated from a desire for recognition, for no one is meant to measure up to an existence of reference. There is neither infiltration nor seizure of power, but a space to produce and, as in the introduction to this text, gestures and manners of living to be accorded provisionally.

24. Here the term indigenous is applicable to two realities: first, that of native peoples poorly treated and often decimated by the colonial order but also, in the specifically French context, populations placed under the *régime de l'Indigénat*. This regime, sometimes known as the *Code de l'indigénat*, was composed of disparate laws applied in variable manners from the 19th to the mid 20th century. It it clear, however, that it was guided by a principle of exception to French law, permitting specific sanctions – seizure of property or assets, deportations… – and offering reduced rights to the indigenous populations of the colonies. We can see here the expression of a systemic racism that still haunts French citizenship today.

25. In his text "Lignes de fuite du marronnage, le « lyannaj » ou l'esprit de la forêt" ((Revue Multitudes, 2018/1 n° 70 | pages 177 à 185. https://www.cairn.info/revue-multitudes-2018-1-page-177.htm), Dénètem Touam Bona reported the following about the use of storytelling by Romani communities: "Jan Yoors, in his beautiful autobiographical novel, The *Gypsies*, shows how those he perceived (when he was a child) as the 'Indians of Europe' protected themselves from the Gadjé (the non-Gypsies) by an incessant flow of fabulations and boring tales that wove an opaque and enchanted circle around the community." What a marvellous occurrence of a de-speaking cinema.

26. Here, the strategy of justice that privileges French as a tool of domination, intimidation, and asymmetry is put in a position of failure by the passionate testimonials of the accused in Creole, while no translation ensues. The attempt to reduce their capacity to defend themselves is countered by the overflowing of speech that literally obfuscates and befogs the trial.

27. I've chosen here a remarkable scene of collective body/ies in the clip "Pour ceux", by the group Mafia K'1 Fry. We're not in *gangster rap* here, with its artificial stagings of wealth, nor in conscious rap, but in a massive politics of hoodlums. See "Mafia K'1 Fry - Pour ceux (Clip officiel)," *YouTube*, 10 January 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QzoBB9NO9Dc&t=297s.

28. Facebook post, 23 May 2020,
https://www.facebook.com/xaxane.chabinedoree.77/videos/1369716899884735

29. The video poses the question of what is preferable to do to save a life and of whether filming one as it is disappearing and then circulating it is not a mechanism that paradoxically destroys any position of witness – to enter into that of spectator. In a recent text I tried to think about this question by coming back to considerations about the representation of violence proposed by the African American academic Saidiya V. Hartman. See Olivier Marboeuf, "Black Hacking : De l'émeute des objets aux propriétés dispersées," in *Pratique du hacking*, online review, Ecole europeénne supérieure d'art de Bretagne/site de Quimper.

30. The movement was created in 2013 in the United States, following the acquittal of the vigil George Zimmerman who killed a Black youth, Trayvon Martin, during an altercation. It aims to denounce police violence towards Blacks, racial profiling and, more widely, the American judiciary system.

31. On this subject see Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake. On Blackness and Being* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

32. While in several European countries rethinking the national storytelling collectively and taking into consideration the systemic nature of racism seemed to finally become possible, the French president Emmanuel Macron chose to refuse to open this debate. On the contrary, he riposted by attacking the discourse of certain academics whom he judged to be guilty of having contributed to "breaking the Republic in two" by "the ethnification of the social question." See Françoise Fresson and Cédric Pietrelunga, "Après le déconfinement, l'Elysée craint un vent de révolte : « Il ne faut pas perdre la jeunesse »," *Le Monde*, 11 June 2020, https://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2020/06/10/il-ne-faut-pas-perdre-la-jeunesse-l-elysee-craint-un-vent-de-revolte_6042430_823448.html.

33. It is in these terms that the author Mazarine Pingeot qualifies the new feminist generation in the newspaper *Le Monde* on 28 July 2020. This tribune joins a vast collection of voices that, at least since the arrival of the #metoo movement, have found ingenious ways to castigate any critiques addressed to the "White Western male." While other famous women before her defended the "right to be bothered" (Tribune in *Le Monde*, 9 January 2018), Mazarine Pingeot deplores "this deadly ennui that is coming" as the consequence of current feminist struggles. She forgets perhaps to signify the place from where she speaks. She is the daughter of a former president of the French Republic, François Mitterand. To a certain extent, her words are a perfect textbook case because they show how much she, like others, is incapable of removing herself from her position of privilege – let alone considering it – when she speaks of the situation of all women and the violence(s) to which they are exposed. This blindness is clearly a syndrome of the continuity of a colonial Body that sees no other violence than the one that can reach it, no other body than its own. See "Mazarine Pingeot au sujet des nouveaux combats féministes : « Ce mortel ennui qui me vient… »," *Le Monde*, 28 July 2020, https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2020/07/28/mazarine-pingeot-ce-mortel-ennui-qui-me-vient_6047461_3232.html; and Valeriya Safronova, "Catherine Deneuve and Others Denounce the #MeToo Movement," *New York Times*, 9 January 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/09/movies/catherine-deneuve-and-others-denounce-the-metoo-movement.html.

34. On the subject of the political scope of vandalism, see Arnaud Elfort, "Polysémie du vandalisme" (version 2, unpublished), available at https://www.academia.edu/41172384/Polys%C3%A9mie_du_vandalisme_version2_.

35. The violent insurrections of 1870 in Martinique also confirmed that the definitive abolition of slavery in 1848 did not signify the end of white privileges. The struggles which continue to the present day underscore how much the compensation given to planters at the moment of abolition and the limitation of rights to cultivate land for former slaves have effectively contributed to the production of economic privileges for the descendants of yesterday's slave masters. The people known as the Békés have thus become dominant operators in the service of dependency on the French Metropole. The Liyannaj Kont Pwofitasyon movement was in part created as a means of opposing these practices. The collective regroups about fifty organizations of syndicate, associative, political, or cultural natures and succeeded in blocking Guadeloupe by a general strike in 2009 in opposition to outrageous exploitation of the island; they demanded identity and cultural rights for Guadeloupeans. Ten years later, in late 2019, demonstrators in Martinique blocked supermarkets and other businesses under control of the Hayot group's commercial empire to denounce both the group's monopoly and its implication in the importation of chlordecone, a toxic pesticide used on banana plantations and responsible for an unprecedented health crisis. It is important to remind readers that the Hayot group also became one of the most important cultural and artistic operators in the Caribbean with, notably, the opening of the Clément Foundation – a museum, artistic patronage structure, and agency for cultural engineering – established on the site of a former sugar plantation. See AJ+ française, "Martinique : jeunesse en colère," 12 June 2020, https://www.facebook.com/ajplusfrancais/videos/270124511008064.

36. On this subject, see Gloria Wekker, *White Innocence: Paradoxes of Colonialism and Race* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

37. https://elephant.art/marc-quinn-jen-reid-how-to-fail-at-being-an-ally-to-the-black-lives-matter-movement-17072020/?fbclid=IwAR0G_dR4XiKMIoylHkMhIM68r3qAOUhswnUYYAcBPyKOQfomD4eQ_dp_z4

wCharlotte Jansen, "How to Fail at Being an Ally to the Black Lives Matter Movement," *Elephant*, 17 July 2020, https://elephant.art/marc-quinn-jen-reid-how-to-fail-at-being-an-ally-to-the-black-lives-matter-movement-17072020/?fbclid=IwAR0G_dR4XiKMIoylHkMhIM68r3qAOUhswnUYYAcBPyKOQfomD4eQ_dp_z4w.

38. Ferdinand, *A Decolonial Ecology: Thinking of Ecology from the Caribbean World*, op. cit.

39. See Norman Ajari, "De la montée en humanité. Violence et responsabilité chez Achille Mbembe," Revue Ubuntou, no. 1 (2013), pp. 20–31.

40. See Olivier Marboeuf, "Returns and overtures: Toussaint on the way to the future," *Versopolis*, May 2020, https://www.versopolis.com/times/reportage/954/returns-and-overtures-part-2.

41. Raphaël Lucas, "Makandal : personnage historique haïtien, entre mythe et histoire," *Revue d'histoire haïtienne*, no. 1 (2019), p. 15

42. J. Michael Dash, J. Michael, "Nous mourrons tous : la révolution haïtienne devient sous-terraine," *Revue d'histoire haïtienne*, no. 1 (2019), p. 525. See also Jacques Roumain, *Masters of the Dew*, trans. Mercer Cook and Langston Hughes with an Introduction by J. Michael Dash (Oxford: Heinemann, 1978 [1944]).

43. This expression from Bouba Touré serves as title and mantra for the text I wrote on the shared cinematic project(s) of Raphaël Grisey and Bouba Touré in *Sowing Somankidi Coura: A Generative Archive* (Berlin, Archive Books, 2017).

44. The project of this film - begun under the title «Let us die rather than fail to keep this vow» - finds its origin in the reading by the british filmmaker Louis Henderson of the book *The Black Jacobins*, written by the thinker of Trinidad and Tobago CLR James then the discovery of the play *M. Toussaint* of the Martinican author Edouard Glissant. From these first readings, he begins a film around the return of Toussaint Louverture in the present of Haiti. The figure of Louverture will not cease to dissolve in a work that will find its form by becoming collective thanks to the involvement of Caribbean authors. *Overtures* thus invents its particular form and a relation to the choral and cacophonic archive.[https://thelivingandthedeadensemble.com/]

45. This is an operation similar to the transformation and liberation proposed by the Belgo-Rwandan artist Laura Nsengiyumva in 2018 on the occasion of the Nuit Blanche in Brussels, Belgium, where she invited the public to attend the melting of a replica (made from ice) of the equestrian statue of Leopold II. See Martin Vander Elst, "people de Laura Nseniyumva, une temporalité décoloniale," 2018, available at https://www.academia.edu/40915458/POEPL_de_Laura_Nsengiyumva_une_temporalité_décoloniale.

46. Ayiti is the indigenous name of the French colony of Saint-Domingue. At the end of the revolution, the island took the name Haiti again as a form of return to its pre-colonial origins. See Ferdinand, *A Decolonial Ecology: Thinking of Ecology from the Caribbean World*, op. cit.a

47. Ibid, p. 407.

48. Michael Sicinski, "New York Film Festival 2020: Gently Download the Stream," *Mubi Notebook*, 7 October 2020, https://mubi.com/notebook/posts/new-york-film-festival-2020-gently-download-the-stream