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STEPPING OUTSIDE THE MAGIC CIRCLE: THE CRITICAL THOUGHT OF MARYSE CONDÉ

The writings of Maryse Condé are critical to their core. Her novels dismantle the pieties of everyday life to look at what lies underneath: the fragile narcissism of subjects who erect façades of ideology and self-importance around the naked core of their being to ward off ever-impinging social violence. This social violence can take the most varied forms; from the most intimate tribulations between mother and daughter, to the anonymous violence of neocolonial societies of systematic dependency, in which every individual encounters constant daily reminders—in employment, in consumption, in leisure and travel, in education, in language—that it is not they, but a far off Metropolis that determines the parameters of their existence. To survive in such a context, to survive not simply as human animals who have a right to minimal social benefits (the health care, unemployment insurance, aid for single mothers, and other benefits that Guadeloupeans enjoy in contrast to many other Caribbean nations), but to survive as human individuals against the constant undermining of one's autonomy is, according to Condé, to construct and produce.

Like the slaves who were their ancestors, slaves who refused to be reduced to animalistic quotas of production by their masters, but who rather produced a new culture from the shattered remains they found at hand—Wolof, Norman and Breton, Bantu, East Indian, Native American, Chinese, and many others—the contemporary subjects of French neocolonialism produce, constantly. In their situation of structuralized dependency on the Metropolis, however, certain paths of production remain blocked. Where would one find the capital to start a hotel when one must compete with Meridian, Sofitel, and Accor? How can one place locally-produced goods in competition with mass-produced European items, particularly when a local preference for all that is European negates any value-added benefit from the marker “Made in Guadeloupe”? But human subjects will produce as long as they live.

The critical thought of Maryse Condé seeks out the heteronymous productions we resort to when our autonomy is blocked. We barricade ourselves within a private world, of family or romance or fiction, where the illusion of autonomy can persist, until eventually the reigning structural dependency infiltrates its way into our lives through cracks in the walls we have built with the received, pre-socialized materials we have at hand (the ideologies and beliefs of parents, educators, friends, the media). Every subject, every individual, exists in his or her individuality as a construct of pre-existing society. There

is no individuality prior to socialization; the maroon cannot escape into autonomy, but only into the sheer animality of mere survival in the forests.¹ What Rousseau called the inferior “freedom” of the state of nature may indeed be preferable to the violence and terror of slavery, and perhaps even to the soft contemporary dependency of neocolonialism. It is, however, both an unsustainable illusion in a globalizing world and unequal to the modern possibility of autonomy first imagined by Rousseau and actualized beyond anything he could imagine in the Americas in the events of the Haitian Revolution. Human autonomy is not an originary human essence, the foundation of our “Being,” but a construct and production of modernity. The Enlightenment created the ideological conditions for Louis Delgres’ 1802 revolution that, like the Haitian Revolution, was addressed not to ameliorating local working conditions, but to a universal claim for human autonomy and the rule of law irregardless of color (“A l’univers entier, le dernier cri de l’innocence” wrote Delgrès before he blew himself up, along with his troops, and a few of those Napoleon sent to reconquer Guadeloupe).

Paradoxically, the same unceasing colonial progression of modernity into every dimension of Guadeloupean life has so far served primarily to capture colonized subjects in a net of systematic dependency, from consumerist consumption to political irrelevancy as subjects of Matignon and the EU. While what we make of those materials is indeterminate, everything we use to build our fortress of subjectivity—our biological destiny, language, food, and belief-systems—comes from beyond us, pre-formed. And when social violence forces subjects to flee into the masquerade of alienated subjectivity, every individual must constantly bail out the encroaching floodwaters that seep through the cracks of that barricade. The materials used to construct each fortress of subjectivity itself are, in this antagonistic situation, like so many Trojan horses that constantly re-import the social violences a fragile subject strives to keep at bay. It is in this sense that one may describe the work of Maryse Condé as profoundly critical: instead of constantly helping subjects to patch up these leaks in their individual belief systems (whether *Créoliste*, *Africaniste*, *Doudouiste*, *Franciste*, *Etats-Uniste* or any other *-iste*), or pandering to identity politics to make one feel beautiful in an ugly world (both internal and external), Condé works to describe the illusory spells subjects weave around themselves, and to rend their veil. This is unquestionably a violent gesture in and of itself, shattering the force of the magic incantations we tell ourselves (“I am free/beautiful/whole/at home/loved”). But no one is forced to read her. Moreover, the hope a reader finds in Condé’s work is that in recognizing oneself in the fragile, fictional subjects she describes, one might gain some purchase on one’s own life, that one might visualize one’s own entanglement in these multiple webs of dependency masquerading as autonomy. Like an analysand gaining insight and, perhaps, some measure of control through

1. Richard Price gives a dramatic example of the attempt of a modern “maroon” to persist in Martinique in the 1920s in *The Convict and the Colonel*.

knowledge of his or her subjection (to the unconscious, to ideology), Condé's literature hopes to be therapeutic; only, it can never acknowledge this for fear of invoking the reader's defense mechanisms ("Who is she to tell me about being Guadeloupean?"). Each book only hopes silently to find its way to readers who might recognize themselves in the fragile characters described therein.

If this modesty is true of Condé's literary texts, anyone who has heard her speak or read her works of literary criticism knows she is not one to hold her tongue. In this light, I wish to focus here on a dimension of Condé's work that has received relatively little attention in comparison with her fiction. While of modest proportions when compared to her voluminous production of fiction, Condé's properly critical texts are, I think, an integral part of her overall project of critical thought. Consisting of five short books from the late 1970s (*La Civilisation du bossale*, *La Parole des femmes*, *Le Roman* and *La Poésie antillaise*, and *Profil d'une oeuvre: Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*), and a number of shorter pieces from the 1990s, these works must be understood as laying the critical foundation of Condé's fictional project. These works support Condé's fictional texts, in the sense that the latter strive to represent subjective experience, and then through this intensive, inward focus on the smallest details, open out upon postcolonial experience in its totality. Her critical works consist of scholarly reflections upon the materials that will form the tools and content of her fiction. In music, one speaks of a composer's "materials." These are not simply the notes of a scale, any more than a writer writes only with the letters of the alphabet, or even the words in a dictionary, whose corollary are the chords of musical harmony. A composer, like a writer, forms the tools of her trade from an immersion in all that has come before her, through an intensive study of what it means to compose, what it has meant to compose for all those she responds to as models and predecessors.

Condé's critical texts testify to a methodical investigation of Antillean history, culture, and literature that has born mature fruit. While they tell us many things about Antillean literature and culture in itself, these studies also allow Condé's writing to achieve a richness and depth beyond any mere personal, anecdotal reflections on African diasporic experience. It would be wrong to think that Condé abandoned her early scholarly investigations of Antillean culture to write fiction. In my view, the entirety of her work is very precisely the continuation of the methodical investigation we find in these early scholarly texts. What changes is not this will to methodical and objective investigation, but rather the forms in which these investigations are objectified for us as readers. Since Condé's object of concern remains resolutely individual, in her refusal of grand universal abstractions, she must also rework the forms of representation that would be adequate to her project. Her goal is not to depict in broad objective strokes the history of the Antilles or Antillean literature, but rather to produce something like a multifaceted study of singular human experiences. To create figures of such lifelike reality that they stand on their own, autonomously, and to give them the semblance of life, she must find for her words a form that will not subtract out precisely the unique, individual experiences she wishes to depict.

The series of texts Condé publishes around 1978 furnish the tools from which she will forge her science of Antillean experience. Least typical of them all, yet perhaps bearing a hidden essentiality for Condé in its exemplary singularity, is her 1978 study of Aimé Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* for Hatier's *Profil d'une œuvre* series. Atypical in its respect for Césaire's poetic monument, this study nonetheless announces and remains faithful to Condé's critical project: the "dissipation [of] myth" (6). What presents itself to us as a solid literary monument must be dissolved, broken down into its constituent parts to reveal its constructed, historical nature. The timeless nature of myth, of ideology, must stand revealed in its naked contingency. The critic's corrosive voice wears down, chips away at the rock-like semblance of solidity of our every myth. And the *Cahier* is surely the *Ur*-myth of Antillean literary culture. Césaire, the Moses of Martinique, the young genius who traveled overseas to Paris and the Ecole Normale Supérieure, where from 1936–38 he etched in stone the verses that articulate the imperative to autonomy of the colonized: to rise up and surge forth "debout et libre."² This imperative finds its echo in Condé's critical voice: her most frequent rhetorical gesture the admonition "il faut . . .": "Il faut avoir présent à l'esprit la société martiniquaise au début de ce siècle" (6); "Il faut se rappeler ce que représente l'Afrique dans la conscience antillaise" (6); "il faut hélas le dire . . ." (9); "Il ne faut pas oublier que . . ." (18); etc.

Césaire's text garners force in its refusal to remain a hollow affirmation of black identity, but instead depicts in all its complexity the contradictions of Antillean unfreedom and dependency as a prolegomenon to a real freedom beyond mere wish-fulfillment. In consonance with the poem it analyzes, Condé's *Profil* is an analogous call to the objectification of the *Cahier*, to our understanding the poem in its complex constructedness; an admonition to refuse its blind worship, and instead to reveal its machinations so as to better grasp the poem as the very performance of the autonomy it calls for. And yet the ambiguity of this critical study is that it remains Condé's most pious and least autonomous work of criticism. Again and again its critical voice struggles against the binds it has imposed upon itself: "Il convient peut-être pour conclure de . . ." (50). The last thing we would expect of Maryse Condé—as of Césaire himself—would be to submit to socio-historical norms and expectations, simply to go along with what an editor expects of her. Condé remains surprisingly devout in her critique of the *Cahier*. The *Cahier* remains for Condé what André Breton called "the greatest lyrical monument of the age." In its absence of irony, Condé's closing comment is stunning for a reader of her subsequent works: "Ce qui est certain, c'est que [Césaire] est une référence essentielle pour les écrivains négro-africains francophones. Il est sans contredit le fondement d'une littérature antillaise authentique" (71). An "authentic" Antillean literature! Condé momentarily allows herself to subscribe to a jargon of Antillean literary authenticity that she will later fustigate in the *créolité* movement.

2. Césaire, 55.

If the critical analysis Condé offers of the *Cahier* is merely competent when seen in the context of the vast literature analyzing the poem (most of which appeared in the years following Condé's study), her study is perhaps unique in its steadfast refusal to regenerate blindly the aura of sanctity that surrounds Césaire's poem. For if Condé ultimately remains a devoted defender of the *Cahier*, this standpoint is won through a laborious dismantling of these inherited and reigning pieties. Again and again Condé points to the mythic character of the poem's reception. Haiti, the origin for Césaire of Negritude itself, "s'est édifié en véritable mythe" (14), Condé avers her reader. Condé pays particular attention in her analysis to the mythical qualities of the poem itself,³ and this critical focus reveals the constructed, temporal nature of any myth. What presents itself as timeless Being is ideological to its core; Césaire's recourse to myth paradoxically reveals an impulse to the historicization of Antillean experience: "On peut considérer le *Cahier* comme une tentative de s'emparer des symboles et des images relatifs au passé, de donner à l'histoire un éclairage nouveau et d'emmener le peuple à prendre vie" (37). Myth stands revealed under the gaze of critique as an invocation to history, to the self-transformation of Antillean colonial experience out of the ever-recurring circularity of dependency and unfreedom, a movement into a newly constructed historical existence. Césaire's description of a putrid Martinican stasis, mired in the mythical world of colonial dependency, is a shocking cure for its reader, hypnotized by the siren song of French assimilation. Critique, for Condé and Césaire alike, is a psychological shock-therapy for the dependent: "Nommer son mal est un élément essentiel de cette cure psychiatrique à laquelle va se livrer Césaire" (37). The Africa of Césaire's Negritude stands revealed in Condé's analysis as mythic invocation devoid of any experiential content: "L'Afrique dans l'œuvre de Césaire est donc une grande idée, un mythe. Un mythe ne saurait s'analyser à la lumière de la raison" (46). Condé strikes out against the academic worship of the *Cahier* as itself mythologizing: "L'œuvre de Césaire est l'objet d'un véritable culte dans certains milieux universitaires, ce qui à notre avis la dessert. Pour qu'une œuvre reste vivante, il faut qu'elle soit soumise et réchauffée au feu de la critique et non pas transformée en pièce de musée dont on s'approche paralysé de respect" (30). Critical thought, far from putting to death the work of art in its act of dissection, reanimates what had become a ghostly zombie, reanimates it with the life of insight, in the consciousness of the reader who comes to understand its innermost workings. Condé's analysis of the *Cahier* is particularly successful insofar as it manages in its innermost form to reproduce mimetically, in diffraction, the ambiguities of the poem it analyzes. As Césaire stands in reverential awe before mythical Africa, yet simultaneously undoes the mythical awe of the prostrate colonized before the colonizer through the caustic, hortatory power of his verse, so Condé resurrects the *Cahier* as a monument to an "authentic" Antillean literature in the very act of destroying its mythical solidity through critical analysis.

3. See Condé, *Profil* 37-42.

In *La Civilisation du bossale: réflexions sur la littérature orale de la Guadeloupe et de la Martinique* (1978), Maryse Condé writes a prehistory of Antillean literature, recreating the origins Antillean modernity in a historically informed, imaginative recreation of events lost to the past for their having largely escaped documentation. Condé names the entirety of this oral civilization of slavery the “bossale,” extending the range of this term beyond the newly-arrived African slaves to whom it was traditionally ascribed in Antillean culture (7). *La Civilisation du bossale* is organized in three moments: an examination of the negativity of colonialist slave-holders’ ignorance of their slaves’ psychic life and identity; in counterpoint, a description of that psychic life in the only traces that remain, the oral literature of the *contes*; and finally, the announcement of the transformation of this mutual alienation of slave-holders and slaves in the passage from an oral world to that of the written following abolition in 1848. Condé opens this analysis with a categorical assertion of Antillean historical heteronomy: “Toute l’histoire des Antilles se situe sous le signe de la dépendance” (5). Antillean cultural history is therefore to be written not as the gradual unfurling of a hidden identity, nor as the persistence of a subterranean truth or being that will finally disclose itself as prejudice and social violence retreat before the affirmation of a people’s eternal singularity, but instead this cultural history reveals itself in the violence of unresolved contradiction. Condé thus seeks out the points of greatest paradox in Antillean culture, constantly underlining not a people’s hidden essence but rather the gradual growth of social specificity arising from social violence itself. It is precisely a violent clash of civilizations, “Afrique contre Europe . . . [qui] puisse produire une forme de culture originale et ne laiss[er] [à l’africain transplanté aux Antilles] d’autre choix que d’oublier son moi précédent pour naître au sein du Nouveau Monde” (6).

The colonialist writings Condé surveys reveal a thorough alienation from the psychic life of Antillean slaves. Above all, the slave is perceived as a dehistoricized being, one utterly static in its essential, brutish nature (13). On the plantation, the slave is reduced to a pure functionalism, a human animal-machine that must simply give the greatest productive output for the least input and expense. This dehumanization engenders the birth of Antillean society itself, “née du sang et de la violence” (15). Amid this violence, the slave remains utterly opaque to the master: “Nous ne saurons jamais que ce qu’il [le maître] prétend voir, que ce qu’il dit voir” (16). Our only knowledge of this (mis-)perception arises, paradoxically, from the traces of the effort to police and smother all signs of the slave’s autonomous subjectivity. While these records reveal little to nothing of the slave’s experience, they are at least eloquent in testifying to the violent mercantalism and devotion to the abstraction of labor from their “possessions” (17).

In contrast to the slave-holder, the testimony of travelers to the Antilles holds out the promise of a less prejudiced examination of this world. While they frequently manage to condemn certain excesses of violence and cruelty on the part of the slave-holders, these observers systematically fail to question the

static, essentialist view of Africans they inherit as colonialist ideology. "Le fait important à nos yeux est qu'en dépit de [leur] condamnation, ils ne remettent pas en question l'image du Noir qui leur est proposée" (19). The contradictory status of a Père Labat lies in his profound implication in the mercantile industrialization of Antillean plantation life, in utter contradiction to the moral creed of his missionary faith: "C'est un véritable industriel" (23). Having arrived in the Antilles to evangelize the slaves, in other words to transform those slaves through Christian faith, Labat merely reaffirms the profound and immutable ahistoricity of African being: "L'Éthiopien ne peut pas changer de peau quoiqu'on le lave" (cited by Condé, 23). These texts reveal not the truth of black experience, but simply its utter opacity to European colonizers: "Personne ne sait ce qu'est un noir" Condé concludes (26).

By contrast, the oral literature of the *contes* reveals under Condé's critical gaze the obverse dimension of this ignorance: the self-knowledge of the *contes* is deceptive and mythical not simply in its external form, as imaginary stories of talking animals (Lapin, Zamba) and the heroic exploits of mythical humans (Ti-Jean), but in their ideological structure, these proverbs and stories reveal the illusory nature of any Antillean "identity." Lapin, Bouki, Zamba, and others testify to the fabricated nature of identity itself; their subjectivity consists quite simply of "l'intériorisation du stéréotype" (27). The world of the Antillean *conte* is the only surviving trace of "l'univers mental de l'esclave et nous y voyons solidement implantés les traits qui figurent dans les descriptions et jugements des voyageurs et des missionnaires concernant les nègres. Lapin-Zamba se comporte comme le maître et ses acolytes attendent qu'ils se comportent, et n'envisagent pas eux-mêmes de se comporter autrement" (39). Antillean identity has no "authentic," non-alienated origin that we might discover in returning to the *contes*; its very substance is created heteronomously out of the violence of forced objectification that is slavery and the world of the plantation. Nor is the anthropomorphic figure of Ti-Jean a site of Antillean authenticity; his quasi-Christian moral code articulated in a world of utter moral depravity

correspond chez l'esclave à un nouveau degré d'aliénation ... où il s'efforçait de se forger un nouveau type de comportement, celui où il s'efforçait de réaliser l'ascension spirituelle vers ce qu'il croyait des qualités propres au maître. ... [Ti-Jean] témoigne d'une totale intériorisation du stéréotype du Noir, d'un désir de fuite et d'une aspiration à entrer dans le monde du maître (41).

The search for an originary Antillean identity leaves us with nothing but the violent, reciprocal mirrorings of stereotyped perception of the self and other. *La Civilisation du bossale* draws from this critical reflection on the pre-history of Antillean literature a despondent picture; even after 1848, "rien apparemment n'a changé aux Antilles. ... Pendant toute la fin du XIX^e siècle, le noir sera frappé de mutisme comme un enfant craintif qui n'ose parler en face des

adultes dans sa terreur de commettre des fautes. Il n'osera ouvrir la bouche que lorsqu'il se croira en mesure de la faire, quand il saura réciter par cœur les leçons reçues" (52). Not until Césaire's *Negritude* will this situation be reversed.

La Parole des femmes: Essai sur des romancières des Antilles de langue française (1979) constitutes an act of sympathetic witnessing, and is thus notably less critical in its methodology than the works considered so far. "Nous avons pensé qu'il serait intéressant d'interroger quelques écrivains femmes des Caraïbes francophones pour cerner l'image qu'elles ont d'elles-mêmes et appréhender les problèmes dont elles souffrent... Nous avons adopté un plan très simple, voire simpliste, qui va de l'enfance aux grandes expériences féminines (la maternité surtout) et à la mort" (5). Condé is particularly attentive to the interiorizations of social violence ("honte, sentiment de culpabilité, malédiction") that disfigure female subjectivity. In Michèle Lacrosil's *Sapotille et le Serin d'Argile* and Simone Schwarz-Bart's *Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle*, Condé discerns the psychological "mutilations," the "blessure intérieure inguérissable" that reinscribe in the young Antillean female subject "le processus d'aliénation" ever-*anew*" (13). First in family life (24), then in school, this "process of alienation" leads young Antillean women to live always for another, never for their own fulfillment: for a parent, for a schoolmaster, for a husband (20). In contrast to this constant reinscription of "neurosis" (22), Télumée's grandmother leads the protagonist "à prendre conscience de la richesse contenue dans 'son corps vivant' et de l'offrir aux autres" (24).

Beyond the primary mutilations of family and school, the social world Antillean women come to inhabit is no better at affirming their autonomy. "La micro-bourgeoisie dont sont issus les personnages de Michèle Lacrosil ne peut fabriquer que des créatures en conflit avec elles-mêmes et partant avec les autres dans un univers où tout grince" (33). Condé discerns within the daily lived experience of alienation and psychological mutilation the contours of a politics of female practice.

Ceux qui ont reproché au roman de Simone Schwarz-Bart d'être totalement apolitique ont à notre avis fait un contre-analyse. Ce n'est pas simplement la méchanceté, la légèreté ou un destin aveugle qui écartent les hommes de Télumée. C'est la structure sociale d'un pays dominé, l'exploitation dont les Nègres sont victimes qui ne permettent pas le bonheur des êtres, et détruisent les couples (35).

This passage reveals quite precisely the political, critical orientation of Condé's own work. Her focus is not the objective determinations in society, whether historical, economic, or political, that limit the freedom of Antillean subjects (as one might imagine in a Marxist macro-economic or historic analysis), but rather to trace tirelessly the effects of this macro-structural dependency and alienation as it manifests itself in the figures and dispositions of Antillean subjective experience. In their vision of men, in the experience of maternity, of re-

ligion and the supernatural, of nature, Condé searches out in the traces of Antillean women's literature the forms of reification, what she echoes Césaire in calling "chosification" (63), in which women are reduced to mere objects and are never autonomous ends in themselves. In conclusion, Condé reaffirms her critical stance, refusing the facile and hollow recourse to "positive role-models" in favor of a call to an enlightened self-awareness that identifies freedom in the consciousness we cultivate of our own limitations and unfreedom.

On demande souvent à la littérature de tiers-monde de présenter des héros positifs. . . . Mais exiger des écrivains des héros positifs nous paraît hautement dangereux. Cela conduit à un dirigisme littéraire où le slogan tiendrait lieu de pensée. . . . [Il faudrait] s'interroger sur le rôle de la critique, trop souvent conçue comme une condamnation ou une approbation, s'appuyant uniquement sur des critères politiques. Tous ces romans féminins qui n'abordent pas les problèmes politiques, qui ne font qu'effleurer certaines tensions, qui ne prétendent pas donner de leçons, n'en sont pas moins précieux pour la connaissance que nous pouvons avoir de nous-mêmes (77).

This call to self-awareness is where Condé situates her political practice, recognizing that the practice of everyday life constitutes the realm of the political in its smallest, often invisible forms.

Following these critical texts from the 1970s, Maryse Condé turned to fiction as the form most suited to reveal the violences she first described in these early studies. In a series of shorter essays from the 1980s and 90s, however, she returns to this earlier mode of cultural critique. Condé's essay "Unheard Voice: Suzanne Césaire and the Construct of a Caribbean Identity" (1998) might serve as an appendix to her earlier study of female writers of the French Caribbean. In this later essay, she draws attention to the under-appreciated work of Suzanne Césaire, whose short life in the shadows of her more-famous husband have left her a mere footnote in most studies of Antillean letters. Condé offers a forceful reappraisal of Césaire's importance, describing her as "one of the first intellectuals who tried to piece together the broken fragments of the Antillean identity and restore the shattered Caribbean history" (62). Condé points to Césaire as the inventor, theorist, and practitioner of a "literary cannibalism" that her husband would later describe in his well-known 1956 speech "Culture and Colonization."⁴ For Condé as well as fellow Guadeloupean writer Daniel Maximin, Suzanne Césaire has become what Condé approvingly calls "a Caribbean icon" (63). Condé retraces Césaire's

4. It would perhaps be more accurate to describe Suzanne Césaire as the first to adapt this practice to Francophone culture, since the Brazilian modernist poet Oswald de Andrade had already borrowed the term from Francis Picabia to describe the cultural practices of New World Societies in his 1928 *Manifesto anthropofagico*.

literary trajectory through her articles in the wartime Martinican journal *Tropiques*. Césaire's statement, "La poésie martiniquaise sera cannibale ou ne sera pas" marks for Condé a reappropriation of a stigmatized label and a rebirth or "parthogenesis" of Antillean identity. Unlike her husband's Negritude, however, Martinican cultural cannibalism implies no stable identitarian black or African essence, nor does it imply a mere redirection of the destructive instrumental reason of European colonialism that would now become a tool for the liberation of the colonized. Rather, cultural cannibalism invokes a mode of relating to the world that refuses destructive confrontation. Unlike the actual ingestion of missionaries by the Brazilian Tupi Indians—what Oswald de Andrade called the "*asorção do inimigo sacro*" (absorption of the sacred enemy)—cultural cannibalism renews rather than destroys the culture it absorbs and transforms. European and African cultures do not cease to exist when they are cannibalized in the New World. Instead, they extend their compass—revalued, transformed, and renewed in novel cultural contexts.

Condé proposes that the failure to recognize the importance of Suzanne Césaire's contributions to Antillean letters reveals a reactionary, phallographic dismissal of her independence of mind (64). "Fifty years before these contemporary theoreticians [Glissant and the authors of *Créolité*], Suzanne Césaire rejects the binary opposition of black/white that impedes the multiculturalism of the Carribean" (65). Unlike those critics who share her concern for Caribbean unity, Suzanne Césaire finds her understanding of this world upon a "deep concern for the sociopolitical realities which are a legacy of the plantation system" (65). Condé extends this critique of *Créolité* as a mere aestheticization of Antillean reality in her article, "On the Apparent Carnivalization of Literature from the French Caribbean." Here, Condé links Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of a "carnival sense of the world" to the French Caribbean literature of the Martinican Creolists (cited by Condé, 91). Beyond the mere presence of the Caribbean carnival as thematic setting for much of this literature, Condé underscores the celebration of a graphic sexuality and sensuality particular to the work of Raphael Confiant. Confiant and Chamoiseau rely upon a language of "verbal extravagance and outrageousness" (95). Beyond the mere titillation of such language and the breaking of superficial taboos, Condé wonders whether

this extravagance, this tumultuous representation of Antillean sexuality with added spice of Creole satisf[ies] a need—that of the [French] Other? He is the one transported to an exotic locale. It is through his eyes that Antillean sexuality becomes mouth-watering, burlesque, almost folksy. In my opinion we would be wrong to consider the writing in these texts as the transgression of colonial taboos or the edification of a universe refusing norms and routine. On the contrary, they flatter the taste for the diverse, for the different exhibited in French culture (96).

Condé's critical view would deflate the self-aggrandizing will to transgress all taboos on the part of Confiant and Chamoiseau as a mere pandering to a global, and more specifically French desire to consume the Antillean Other as eroticized object. "What is behind the apparent carnivalization of this literature? What is behind the riot of words, the exaggeration of images, their total gratuitousness?" Condé asks in conclusion. In the era of globalization, of Maastricht, when the independence movement in Guadeloupe has become a forgotten dream, the writers of *Créolité*, she responds, are merely the mouthpieces of the bad conscience of the *rendez-vous manqués* of the last century, from Negritude to decolonization, independence, and autonomy. Instead of a literature that would more truly describe the contemporary "creole" reality of social displacement, the post-BUMIDOM blues, and economic and atavistic racial resentment,⁵ this Creolist bad conscience hides itself behind mere verbal acrobatics, instead pursuing and justifying dogmatically the aestheticization and depoliticization of Antillean culture. "Deep down the writer is conscious that the intellectuals have failed their mission. So what is left? The pyrotechnics of the text" (97).

The most substantial of these recent articles is perhaps Condé's 1994 text "Pan-Africanism, Feminism, and Culture." In this 1988 talk, Condé revisits many of the themes of her earlier studies, placing particular emphasis on the categories of consciousness and production. The essay looks back upon the hopes and aspirations that she shared with other activists in the 1960s, hopes that pointed toward the trans-national unity of African Diasporic cultures. This was understood to be a unity not merely of biology and history, but one that was, it was thought, becoming a lived reality in the consciousness of those involved in the fight for decolonization and social justice. Condé begins by telling two stories. The first recounts the travails of the Popular Movement for the Independence of Guadeloupe, whose leaders were arrested and sentenced to thirty years in prison by French authorities. Condé recalls her participation in public demonstrations at the time, when banners linked the movement's leader Luc Reinette with the plight of Nelson Mandela (56). The problem of universal justice became particularly pressing for Condé not merely in the global fight against the South African Apartheid regime, but because the failure of the French public to recognize the relevance of this fight to the situation in Guadeloupe underscored an ambiguity within the fight for social justice itself. "Was the life of one man not equal to the life of another? Were Luc Reinette and Nelson Mandela not fighting injustice and oppression?" (56). Condé came to understand that the fight against neocolonialism was itself riven by contradictions that mirrored the overarching tendency to discount the plight of South Africans by the West. The deceptions and contradictions of Pan-Africanism thus extended into the innermost workings of the movement itself, making impossible any unitary front in the face of neocolonial injustice.

5. See Condé's article "Penser nos vérités," in Condé, *Parole*.

In a second anecdote, Condé describes her attempt to foster a consciousness of Caribbean unity in the face of the plight of migrant Haitian laborers in Guadeloupe. Condé's book for children *Haiti chérie* (1988) constituted an attempt on her part to express to Guadeloupean children the plight of these Haitians who occupied the lowest rungs of their social world, despised and violated. Condé understands the book as a form of ideological critique, in which young Guadeloupeans might be led to question the racist prejudice and economic exploitation of Haitians in the contemporary Guadeloupe of their parents' generation. In her conclusion, Condé places these anecdotal works in the context of the failed aspirations of 1960s Pan-Africanism.⁶ While her own hopes for a decolonized world of autonomous black subjects were shattered following her experience living in Sékou Touré's Guinea and post-Nkrumah Ghana, Condé is nonetheless astounded at the degree of ignorance of African realities she observes in her fellow Guadeloupeans.⁷ In this forum, she briefly abandons her critical stance, and we are suddenly allowed to witness the hidden idealism of a 1960s radical utopianist, a faith that lies hidden behind the corrosive force, and even cynicism, of her unrelenting critique: "When I try to explain the African independence movements of the 1960s, or speak of the magic of leaders like Sékou Touré or Kwame Nkrumah, [Guadeloupeans of today] simply do not understand. For them Sékou Touré was just another dictator who died in his bed. They do not even think about Africa" (59). Such an admission discloses the foundation of Condé's critical project to reveal the magical belief structure of Antillean and Pan-African ideology: she was herself once a subject of its magical incantations, she has known their spells most intimately. Her critical writing feeds upon the pain of such shattered hopes. "We were led to believe that Africa was an ideal home. When we discovered it was not, we suffered" (60).

In response to the shattered Utopianism of the Decolonization movement, Maryse Condé's critical thought refuses to place hope in a transcendent beyond of disalienated subjectivity and noncoercive decolonized societies. Instead, her turn to critique constitutes a dissection of the actual world as the lived experiences of dependency, alienation, and suffering. What she finds in her examination of this world, of her world, is the radical disappearance of autonomous production. "The younger generation [in Guadeloupe have] become consumers rather than producers" (63). The critical thought of Maryse Condé is enunciated imminently, from within the experience of this neocolonial alienation and vitiation of productive forces that she has lived through. As she put the matter in her memoir *Le Cœur à rire et à pleurer*, "I was 'Black skin/White mask,' it was for me that Frantz Fanon was going to write his

6. The talk itself was originally given at a conference on Pan-Africanism in Claremont, California.

7. See Condé's reflections on this period in her life in Pfaff, 18–33.

book" (102). Following the bitter deception and the shattered hopes of the 1960s, Condé's critical imperative is to describe in its every hidden detail the forces that prevent the dream of decolonization and autonomy from becoming a reality. She does this not by depicting that u-topic, nonexistent world, but rather by discerning in the minutiae of the alienated life-experiences of the subjects she depicts, the outlines of an immanent, future possibility cast today in negative form. In so doing, by refusing all utopianism, and yet constantly producing work after critical work, Condé stands as the subjective, limited refusal of a contemporary capitulation of all autonomous productive forces. "I must show them [the younger generation, and women in particular] that writing is not something useless, but rather that it is full of creativity" (63). In redirecting her vision from the utopian ideal of global decolonization to the micro-politics of daily lived experience in the French Caribbean and African Diaspora, the critical thought of Maryse Condé rescues the traces of an autonomous, decolonized subjectivity and politics that lie not in any utopian beyond, but rather in the insight we gain into our own modes of subjection to violence in a neocolonial, paternalist, consumerist society.

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