

Blue Land

Olivier Marboeuf



Places:

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

The characters:

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

Oh!

Where begins
Where to begin?
That's the question
That's the vain

question

It's the blue
vein
that vibrates

under the surface of black skin

Who's talking?

From what underwater
and lost country
Ocean

will you return me

The bone
and the eye,

The mouth
And the sound

[Performance.]

He repeats the same thing
modulating the tone
and pitch of his voice,
over a scrim of overseas blue
with precious gems
in his mouth.

A ceramic pineapple
balanced on his head.

Smile my treasure!

It's an artistic performance

It's fun.

It's cool.

A mauve light
and slide projections of sea shells.
Shitty Caribbean, cobbled together
for the loving eyes of the West.
To pay the rent on a lousy room
in a European capital;

he consents
and watches himself on Instagram,
and watches his life
a brief, empty, ephemeral story
he consents.
A life in the prison of an eye
which isn't his.
He consents.
And to think: "what I want is to come"
and finding it beautiful
and finding it clever.
And one day he'll find that everything is old.
Already.]

It's not the vein
No
the vain question
It's not
coquetry
either.
Where to begin
Where in space do you plant your eyes
Where in time
do you breathe?
fresh air
What air?
Where to carve out a space?
On the frozen surface
of the ocean
a woman
thrown overboard
at least that's what we think
we recognize
despite the absence
of a face
thrown overboard
a long time ago
a very long time
rises up
shows her chest
covered with worms and mollusks.
Mouth open
to the sky

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

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

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

she de-speaks.

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

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

She can see again

She speaks
and de-speaks

Shaking the bodies

of those who watch her.

Filling eyes and

thoughts

with smoldering

images

Ash

Fly!

over the ocean

Fly!

in the fiery wind

Fly!

in the purple mouth

of the storm

Ash

of a one-armed fugitive

burned by the French

in the colony

marked by the dreadful name

Saint-Domingue

which is written

over the name

Ayiti

This is how we say

property of sugar

and death

of France

Ash

Fly!

And plant

in the mud

of this other island

Living

Faceless

and without a name

Plant
your piece of burned flesh

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

Boom!

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

The chorus

Makandal is alive!

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

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

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

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

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

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

Oh!

In what period
and at what distance

You think that it begins

you think someone sees
something
that doesn't need to be
the start.
I leave you the start
the origin,
man
I'll let you recount your *life*
woman
I leave you
your little property to you, you, you
I leave you History
and its diversions
You have all the means
of production
to tell it
and to have it told
your History
again
and again

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

Now

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

in decomposition

who is my liquid

continent.

And that

you can't imitate it

because you can't imitate life

under death

in the worlds of death

the life of death

which is life

which is breath

from which

you hear me

speak to you.

Boom!

Oh!

I don't lower my eyes

however

I don't lower arms

cut off

and breath

the same

Beneath the capitalist sky

inlaid with precious

gems

mineral knowledge

speech treasure

words

extracted from the depths of the mine

of the throat

immediately circulate in veins

circulate

supple and

fluid

repeat repeat repeat

and acquire value

in armpits

and thighs

and brown torsos

Take!

We have nothing to hide

We have no words

I swear

We have nothing

that isn't our own

and that we could hide

We have nothing but dirty hands

where nothing lingers

Take!

All the white guys

can be Black women

queer

now

And the white women

too

It's easy

and it's cool

You can serve yourself

You just

tap

on available matter

Take!

in the gold

of sweat

lick tears

on the surface of eyes

Audre Lorde

My dear!

Octavia Butler,

My heart!

Hortense Spillers

Oh!

bell

hooks!

my little kitten

Meow!

Meow!

Voilà!

You want it, you have it!

Everyone wants it

Everyone wants

to be a Black woman

and if possible

queer

and brilliant

and shiny

and fluid.

Endless matter

amicable
and

available

Oh!

Saidiya!

in the mauve

mauve light

But without
this hell

and this eye

wasteland that haunts
the head
without the immense

painted in monochrome orange-Blue
of night

on the National highway

head lost

at the ends of the world
a map-less
periphery

in the shadow of a door

Rodney,
did you fall asleep
there?

on the edge of the expressway,
Weird guy!

Adama,
did you put your handsome profile
on backwards,

big guy?
on the tarmac, why?

In order to say what,
to do what?

Catch your breath.

Catch it!

Do it!

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

Who squeezes, who knocks
at the door

of your nerves?

No one wants to be

this pile of criminal bones,

I'm telling you

everyone wants,

but not that

stop bothering us

Everyone wants to be bothered

but not that

wake up from your delirium

wake up!

No one wants to see

your life

spread out

in this stroboscopic

and liquid

light

no one wants to see

your life.

Who painted your eye

that scintillating blue?

What would you call it?

Overseas blue?

Cobalt?

Royal?

Limoges

porcelain blue

or Toulouse?

Who moved your mouth

in the French landscape?

Who squeezed your dangerous

muscles

who smashed

the dangerous door

of your dangerous breath?

Catch

Catch

If you want it,

you have it.

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

Oh!
Pile of breathless
bones
tossed in the morning
a lighter blue air presently
almost sky
watercolour
of the West
Plastic bag blue
Blue that shoots
White
shoots at
Red
Bang!
And dies.
Everyone wants
but
No one wants you.
There
I'll tell you
in this ocean
Marine blue
Petroleum blue
Atlantic blue
At the bottom of abysses
There where there is no sky
Where there are never eyes,
our monuments
are lying.
There!
Sculptures
or fossils
it depends
mouth against the floor
of the world.

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

Here we are

Boom!

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

Boom!

I am not

your little sugar archive

I'm not your beautiful quotation
Your *pretty native informant*

darling

Go ahead!

I'm not

your wallpaper

rifleman blue

I'm not

your matter

indestructible

and beloved

I'm not

your crazy dancer

Neon blue

Liquid blue

I'm out of that.

I remove myself from that.

On my tongue

there are landscapes of night

oranges and blues

and there's the din

of an angry ocean,

of a celebration.

My story is

hidden

behind the noise

and behind

the images,

in the decor,

my story is

hidden

and my breath

is

hidden.

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

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

where the hero kills
to come
as the master tells him
to come
better perhaps
even more implacable
to become this man
entirely free
to give
death
to shoot bullets
that pierce
resistance
to what he wants
to what he believes he wants
because he's free to kill
And he's free
to come.
There's no other History
Except maybe there
in what remains
and the decor
in the trash
and smoking
rubble
of the crime scene
which is the scene
of endless
orgasm
there is
a surviving
eye
there is
the beginning of a place.]

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

Forget then
the origin

the beginning
and the idea of the beginning

and seek rather
the critical moment

the primitive scene

that then repeats.

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

but still hover

the ghost
of the primitive scene

which is perfect
which is terrible and perfect
terribly perfect.

The plantation.

Oh!
That's where we'll begin

like Malcom Ferdinand

but for other reasons.

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

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

The chorus

(in an ocean sound à la Turner):

Splash!

The plantation

in the Caribbean

that’s where we’ll start

for we have to start somewhere

far from staring eyes

at the peripheries

of the Empire

there where everything is more intense and naked

a primitive scene

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

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

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

It is not just
and it is not only.

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

Everyone wants to be

but a Black woman,
but

Oh!

in the half-light of the plantation house

where hands
are available

and comb
blond hair endlessly

where lips

are available
and without a word
where buttocks,
breasts genitals legs
are available
and also the pierced eye
into which dramas
are poured
the immense vulnerability
of masters
and the impossible comfort
which never has enough
hands
my dear
that's our house
our home
that's how
our world is
and there is no other world
We must care for it
and understand it
and accept it
in all its light
and in all its darkness
Very dark blue
What would you say?
Black with bluish reflections
Like the feathers
around the eye
of a bird.

Come!

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

Never

Stay here so I can feel you

Give me
your cool hands

to wipe my fever

You'll be my twin sister

And we'll found a sky

of sorority

in the fading afternoon

behind the hills

Why don't you love me

with a true love?

Like me, I love you

Why that idiotic smile?

These lifeless arms

and that nod of the head

And that stupid slowness

with which you drag

your stupid feet

when I call you?

Why am I so tired and weary

of you refusing me?

Don't you want to do

what I ask?

Don't you want to be

my collective work

my speaking installation

my collaboration?

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

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

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

A big family
loving and just?

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

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

No
that we leave the scene

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

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

There is nothing

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

For we are the arch
and we are the Maroons.

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

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

and invent gestures
so we won't become

the last captures
of what disappears
and must
disappear.

Splash!

You won't go
far
it's not worth it

Over here

Over there

Not far

There's no other world

There's only this world

Leave the plantation
a moment

outside
is not

another world
but learn to breathe

to taste the air

and listen

to those who speak softly
a monument of whispers

and low masses.

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

Creaks

and cries

We must learn
to breathe
inside of all this

and outside of this familiar
eye that calls

Who calls you?

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

and yet we must breathe
right next to this world

as it is

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

It's the place that comes
and we speak loudly
now

we de-speak it
It is the unsure
fragile
place
that comes

Amid the decomposition
something
rises and stands up
something escapes too

let escape
what needs to escape

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

Nothing consents
in this place.

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

What I want is to come.

Uproot your desire
for these old stories
Stay calm
and smile at your enemies
undo the anger
which is desire for power
desire of kings of queens
desire for children
kings and queens
save the other anger
which is bloody
monument
and don't set yourself either
immediately
to braiding
as you've always had to braid
endlessly
before
because you were afraid
of not being part
everyone wants to be, but
Don't offer your hands anymore
forget that you're being called
Who is calling you?
Take back your desire
and your eyes
and let come
what rises
a form
that no one decides on
rises up presently
with no master
by the mere
swarming presence
of worms
in the blue black matter
of the living
and the dead

it is our language

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

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

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

Boom!

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

there is a place.

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