

The Muscle and the Fruit

Pawòl douvan — *ola nou yé*

Prèmyé é dènyé tèks an maké asi travay a Minia, avan tala, *ka fè tibwen plis ki on lanné. Avan kovid, avan tounsa nou sav konyéla. Anbyans-la té lou, sé gran difé-la, grèv-la, konba é ré-présyon a yo té ja la ; Minia té Grènòb pou wouvè montraj a-y « j'ai tué le papillon dans mon oreille » [*an tchouyé papiyon-la an zorèy an mwen*]. Nou té ka bokanté olwen, é an té ka maké anlè papiyon-la. Té ni tousa Minia té ka rakonté-mwen asi Gwadeloup é asi son a tanbou a po a travayè la RATP¹ ki té an grèv, kon an ja maké-y, é anplis-disa kò-la pa alèz a-y kon souvantfwa, fwadi-la, é fo Minia té rété la pou fété bout a lanné-la, pa ay anbala, pa ay Mèksik nonplis. Près on lanné apré, an ka kontinyé bokanté dépi olwen, èvè Minia, asi travay a-y. Pou dènyé bokantaj virtyèl an nou, li i Gwadeloup — men noutout nou koumansé abityé èvè distans-la — é mwen an ka ékri gwo ansent, kò-la pa alèz a-y menm é délé, doulè ka travèsè-y toubòlman. Minia ban-mwen li *Les Sœurs de Solitude : Femmes et esclavage aux Antilles du XVIIe au XIXe siècle*² liv a Arlette Gautier. Adan on TGV ka fè Marsèy-Pari, an ka koumansé li on chapit non a-y sé « Maternités esclaves » [*Manman afrikenn anbajouk*] ; vwazen an mwen, on jenn Nèg, ka gadé-mwen, ka pozé-y kèksyon ki asi vant an mwen ki asi tèks-la an ka li la. An ka koumansé maké.*

An ka pozé-mwen kèksyon asi komann-la yo fè-mwen la. Maké on ésè kritik pou prèmyé monografi a Minia Biabiany, a pa ti chaj, non ; piplis, sé podui on maké èspésyal, ki ni kòd a-y ki ta-y, oben réaji parapòt a-y. On ésè kritik adan on monografi : sé konsi, rivé on moman-tan, ou ka vwayajé adan on ouvraj annantyé ;

¹ Régie autonome des transports parisiens.

² Rèn, Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2010 (1985).

Prologue—*Where We Are*

I wrote my first (and last, until now) text on the work of Minia Biabiany a little more than a year ago—before COVID, before everything that we know. It was a tense time; there had been great fires, the strike, confrontations, and crackdowns. Minia was in Grenoble for the opening of her exhibition *j'ai tué le papillon dans mon oreille* [I killed the butterfly in my ear]. And we were corresponding, and I was writing about the butterfly. Everything Minia told me about Guadeloupe and the sound of the hide drums of the struggling RATP¹ workers, I wrote down. And the banal discomfort of the body, the cold, the question of *being here for the holidays*, not there; for Minia, not being in Mexico either. Almost a year later, I'm still writing about Minia's work far away from her. She was in Guadeloupe during our last virtual conversation. But distance has become normal for everyone. I am writing from a pregnant body, full of discomfort and racked at times with deep physical pain. Minia has given me *Les Sœurs de Solitude : Femmes et esclavage aux Antilles du XVIIe au XIXe siècle* [*Sisters of Solitude: Women and Slavery in the Antilles from the Seventeenth to the Nineteenth Century*] by Arlette Gautier.² I begin a chapter entitled "Slave Maternities" on a train from Marseille to Paris, and my neighbor, a young Black man, gazes curiously at the book and my belly. The writing begins.

I wonder about the request that has been made of me: to write a critical essay for the first monograph of Minia Biabiany's work is to take on a certain amount of responsibility, it is to produce a well-known form, with all of its conventions, or to react to it. A critical essay in a monograph: a journey into the entirety of an oeuvre to date; it is the intelligent unwinding of

¹ Paris's mass transit company.

² Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2010 (1985).

sé on kirikilòm vité ka woulé on mannyé savan, on pòtfolyo, on karyè, tousa on moun pou di. Sé voyé douvan tématik fondal a-y. Dépi kitan Minia ka fè ouvraj ? An ka réyalizé an pa sav, pa sav pou bon. An sav an ki lan-né Minia Biabiany sòti adan on lékòl pou aw èvè diplom ; an konnèt lis a tout montraj a-y é tout pri i trapé ka gloriyé travay a-y. Plizyè fwa, Minia di-mwen dé mo asi jaden a fanmi a-y lè i té timoun, asi désèrten fòm ki la toujou dépi tan-lasa — ès i té ja ni pratik artistik, adan jaden-lasa ? Adan on ésé kritik, sé gloriyé ou ka gloriyé. Sa ka tonbé byen, davwa tousa an vlé, sé gloriyé travay a Minia. Tansèlman, pou li kon pou mwen, sa pé ké adan on fòm fòsè, dwèt kon pikèt, ka mèt annòd chak ti moman a lavi, chak enprévi, chak lokazyon, chak détou, chak garé, chak alévini ; on fòm ka obliyé déparfwa sa ki ka fèt jòdla, konyéla.

Dènyé montraj a Minia Létànri, Amili (*Tanneries, Amilly*) — men ou pé pa vwè-y fasil, davwa yo fèmé sé èspas kiltirèl la — ka fèt sé jou-lasa (an ka maké lin-lasa an mwa-mas 2021). Dènyé fwa an jwenn Minia puvré, nou bwè on té ansanm adan on rèstoran ki té wouvè toujou, èvè i té ka di-mwen kijan sa té rèd dé-plasé, kijan i té k'ay rédui monté é désann a-y, konmen fwa bèl ti né a-y té oblijé sibi tès PCR, é tout boulvès a kabèch an nou. Létànri (*Tanneries*), sé *l'orage aux yeux racines* [*loraj adan zyé chouké*]. I ka montré iskilti é désen ki nèf. An pòtèkò j'en vwè désen Minia fè si papyé : an ka dé-kouvè yo an foto anlé pòtab an mwen. Yo ka touvé yo anpawmi iskilti, ki yomenm a yo fèt èvè kòn a lanbi (sé on kokiya, ché a-y blan, fèm é ka fonn an bouch a-w ; on lanbi sé on grannjans adan manjé karibéyen. Manjé an mwen ké ni gou a vakans é a lilèt ka sanm paradi, sé sa 750g.com ka di-mwen. Pannansitan, an ka éséyé vwè ès fo an maké mo-la èvè on granlèt toutlè – mi mi-y, gay jan sa brital), èvè mòso-bwa akajou iskilté, é fil-di-fè. I ka sèvi èvè kréyon, fèt,

a curriculum vitae, of a portfolio, of a career, of a whole practice; the unveiling of its major themes. When did Minia start making work? I realize that I don't know—not precisely. I know when Minia Biabiany graduated from art school, the list of her exhibitions, and the prizes her work has been awarded. Minia has spoken to me several times about her childhood garden, about the recurrence in her work of certain forms from that time of her life—was she already making art back then in that garden? A critical essay is a celebration, a joy, since all I want is to celebrate Minia's work. However—for both her sake and mine—not at the expense of this constrained, linear form that organizes and categorizes every stage of life, every coincidence, every event, every detour, every mistake, every diversion, every round-trip, only to forget what is happening today, right now.

Minia's most recent show, which isn't easy to see since cultural institutions are closed, is up at Les Tanneries in Amilly. (I write this line in March 2021.) The last time I saw Minia in the flesh, we had tea in a restaurant that had managed to stay open and she told me about how hard it was to move around, how she was going to try to travel less, the innumerable PCR tests that had permeated her tender nose, and the movement of our skulls. At Les Tanneries, there was *l'orage aux yeux racines* [the storm with root eyes]. She exhibited new sculptures and drawings. At the time, I had never seen Minia's drawings on paper. I encounter them through pictures on my phone. They surface from among the sculptures, which themselves are made of lambi conch shells (*A shell with a white, firm, and above all tasty flesh, the conch is one of the stars of Caribbean gastronomy. It will give your menu a little air of vacation and paradisiacal islands, the website 750g.com tells me when I look up whether the word should always be capitalized—behold the brutality!*), sculpted pieces of mahogany, and iron filaments. She uses pencil, felt, black ink, cutouts, white space, and shapes derived from the bark of

lank, an nwè, pyès dékoupé, tibwen blan akoté, é fòm ki fèt èvè po a pyé-bannann : wòb a pòyò. Ou toujou ka rikonnèt tibwen on kèchòz , on fòm ka fè-w sonjé on biten ou ja vwè. É tousa anlé, près iskilti osi : anlé masonn-la, an bout a on tij, pli lwen ki on fil. An li *Les Sœurs de Solitude* é an ka vwè osi manman-vant, kòkòt, bout-a-tété, ovè, délivrans, pyébwa ki ni palm é kal a bato. Dotwa biten plen fil : mis oben fwi, mis é fwi. Pou sé iskilti-la, Minia travay èvè Papa-y. Bwa-la, sé bwa ki tonbé apré on siklòn, bwa yo té kenbé akaz a yo. Désèrten kòn a lanbi wouvè, tayé é iskilté, gran wouvè. Ou ka dékouvè jéométri a yo, wòz ; biyoloji a zo-la.

Minia Biabiany sé on artis ki ka fè wouchach, anvré ; a pa davwa travay a-y ka sèvi èvè archiv a listwa, oben davwa sé on pawòl moun abityé di. Minia ka fè « wouchach lib an péda-goji », é i ka travay anlé sa, ajékontinyé. Minia ka bennyé adan liv, adan konnésans, listwa alantou a-y. Minia ka li toubòlman, sa kriyan-kriyan. Adan ouvraj a-y, toujou ni tras a sa i li, a sa ki maké lèspri a-y, a jan i ka mèt swen adan-y. Kou-lasa, Létànri (*Tanneries*), sé *Les Sœurs de Solitude*³, ki sé liv potomitan pou-y ; tit-la menm sé on pogram. On liv ka sèvi èvè métòd syantifik pou konprann kijan konmès a kò aka zèsklav té ka woulé. Sé la sé désen-la sòti.

Minia ka di-mwen dé mo asi vidéo i ka travay anlé yo. I ka di, adan travay a-y, on vidéo sa la pou konsantrasyon. Ni tout adan, son-la,

³ Milatès Solitid, sé on pèsonnaj ki maké listwa a rézistans a Nèg é milat ki té anba jouk, é ki goumé pou yo pa woumèt lèsklavaj Gwadeloup an 1802. Solitid ay goumé tou ansent ; yo kondanné-y é fè-y vwè bon mizè jis a lanmò, apré i akouché. I vin on senbòl a manman ka goumé kont sistènm kolonyal la ki ka maré lilèt-la toujou. André Schwarz-Bart fè toutmoun konnèt-li gras a on woman i maké : *La Mulâtresse Solitude* (1972).

banana trees: *rob a poyò*. One seems always to be on the verge of recognizing something in her work, some form that is more or less familiar. And it floats—even the sculptures: on the wall, at the end of a rod, from a thread. I have read *Les Sœurs de Solitude* and so I see in these forms so many uteruses, vaginas, nipples, ovaries, placentas, palm trees, and ship's holds. And two or three stringy things: muscles or fruits, muscles and fruits. Minia collaborated with her father on the sculptures. They gathered wood that had fallen after a storm, *wood stored at home*. Some of the conch shells are open, carved and sculpted, gaping. Inside, their pink geometry is exposed: the biology of the bone.

There is no question that Minia Biabiany is an artist who is also a researcher. I don't say this because she uses archives in her work, or just because it sounds good. Minia is an “independent researcher in education” and she has always worked this way. Minia surrounds herself with books, with knowledges, with stories. Minia is above all a wonderful reader. Her work is forever imbued with her reading, with her attention, with the care she places in it. For her show at Les Tanneries, *Les Sœurs de Solitude*,³ a book that uses scientific research to try to understand the sexuality of enslaved people in the epoch of slavery, was foundational, she tells me. The drawings flow from it.

Minia talks to me about videos she's working on. She says that in her work,

³ Editors' and artist's note: The “Mulâtresse Solitude” was a historical figure in the resistance movements of Black and mixed-race enslaved people who fought against the reinstatement of slavery in Guadeloupe in 1802. She joined the insurrection while pregnant and was sentenced to death and tortured after giving birth. She became a symbol of the resistance of mothers and women in the struggle against the colonial system under which the island still exists today. André Schwarz-Bart popularized her as a heroine in his 1972 novel *La Mulâtresse Solitude*.

zimaj-la, koulè-la, chalè é fwadi, lajouné é lannuit, men é chini, òbjé, ouvraj, fòm, jaden, éléman, vwa. Dèlè fo déployé — é la, tin ti désen ka volé an bout a fil la —, délè fo konsantré, kon gran lésiv, é alòs mi sé vidéo-la.

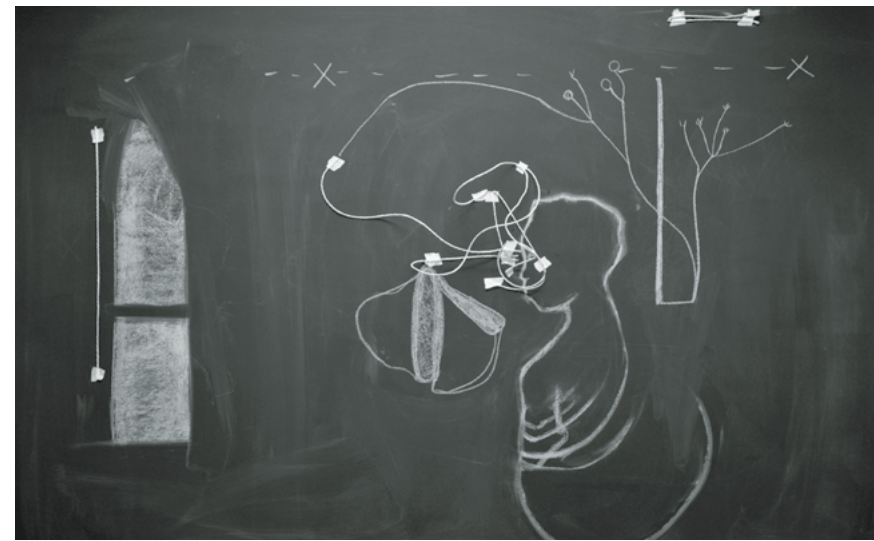
Pou èkzanp, *tolì tolì* (vidéo), lè ou ka montré-y, sa ka fè konsa an zòrèy é an zyé ; on may douvan, on may dèyè : son, nwèsè, dégradé, zimaj, tèks. « Ka sa yé, posédé latè? » Èpi, lang, diféran lang, lang a Minia, zimaj, i ka chanté « Do you sing the same song alone or with others ? » [ès ou ka chanté menm chanté-la tousèl oben èvè dèt moun ?]. *tolì tolì* ka woupran ; ékran nwè, ékran wouj, dlo, ékran wouj, tala ka diré, ékran tè, ékran vèw pou bout. Doukou. Doukou sé on faz a lalin-la. Péyizaj rapid, van. (a pa péyizaj. Minia té di-mwen dé mo asi tèks a Suzanne Césaire⁴ — on bèlté ka véglé-w, bèlté a péyizaj twopikal la ka boulvèsé séla ki ka maké la, bèlté a sé èspas-la, ka opozé-w vwè kèksyon fondal — granbonnè kon sa ! mi on pawòl ka kléré, !). Ankò on ékran nwè : on konpanyon a Christophe Colomb ka palé asi téritwa « Guadalupe ! ». Dwèt ka tisé, avan yo ka dousiné. « The resistance to the plantations system » [rézisté douvan sistenm a sé bitasyon la]. Yo ka tisé ; van é dlo. *tolì tolì* ankò. « Here, country with no anthem » [isi, on péyi san chanté pou gloriyé-y].

⁴ Nòt a sé éditè-la : Suzanne Césaire, *Le grand camouflage, Écrits de dissidence* (1941-1945), Pari : Seuil, 2009. Suzanne Césaire (1915-1966) sé té on makèz, on pofèsè é on militan antikolonyal é féminis. Travay a-y, ki suiv osi lidé siréyalis, ka mèt idantité kiltirèl afro-antiyé adan on chan ki ni plizyé dimansyon, kèlanswa senkrétiz i pé ni. Maké a-y sévi karèsòl pou dévoplé mouvman sosyopolitik té ka démonté lasimilasyon, kolonyaliz é lidéyaliz/mannye yo té ka vwè Lakarayib. On pati adan èsè i maké sòti adan jounal matinié *Tropiques* ; i té adan sé moun-la ki kréyé jounal-lasa, é i té maké adan, èvè mari a-y Emé Césaire.

a video is an object that concentrates. Everything is in there: sound, image, color, the heat and the cold, day and night, hands and caterpillars, objects, works, shapes, gardens, the elements, voice. Sometimes, you have to unfold—and so little drawings take off in flight at the end of strings—and sometimes you have to concentrate, as when washing clothing, and then the videos emerge.

For example, the projected video *tolì tolì* creates this sensation in the ear and the eye. A knit stitch, a purl stitch: sound, black, fade, image, text. “C’est quoi posséder la terre?” Then languages, different languages, Minia’s languages, images. She sings, “Do you sing the same song alone or with others?” *tolì tolì* resumes: black screen, red screen, water, red screen—this one lasts a while—earth screen, and finally green screen. *Doukou. Doukou* is a phase of the moon. Furtive landscapes, wind. (These are non-landscapes. Minia once told me about a text by Suzanne Césaire:⁴ the beauty of the tropical landscape is a blinding beauty that intoxicates those who write; it is a beauty that prevents us from seeing the real questions.” Such enlightened words!) A black screen again: a compatriot of Christopher Columbus speaks of the land, “Guadeloupe!” Fingers weave; before, they caressed. “The resistance to the plantation system.” They weave: wind and water. Again, *tolì tolì*. “Here, country with no anthem.”

⁴ EN: Suzanne Césaire, *The Great Camouflage: Writings of Dissent (1941-1945)*, Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2012. Suzanne Césaire (1915-1966) was an anti-colonial and feminist writer, teacher, and activist. Her work, also influenced by surrealism, situated Afro-Caribbean cultural identity from a multidimensional perspective, beyond syncretisms. Her writings established the development of socio-political movements that examined assimilation, colonialism, and idealisms projected in the Caribbean. Part of her writing was published in the Martinican magazine *Tropiques*, of which she was also co-founder and editor along with her husband Aimé Césaire.



blue spelling, a change of perspective is a change of temporality, 2017
Video Vidéo
2' 22'

Plizyé mwa aprés, dapré mwen an vwè adan *tolì tolì*, migannaj a zimaj a chakmoun, é an vwè la yochak ka kréyé. Lèkti ki avèg é ki ka véglé — a on péyizaj, a on dèt. Inyorans oben sistenm a lidé ékran. Ouvraj a Minia ka èspliké tibwen pouki sa té pé fèt, sa pé fèt. Listwa kolonyal ka sanm on mistè ki pa ni sans, andéwò a sé kòz é kondisyon ékonomik la ; sa ka vin on zimaj ka tòtòy lèspri a-w, ka wouviré toulong ; sé sa yo vwè : grenn-mayis èspésyal la, pépit an lò la. Vidéo a Minia ka vansé kon sènyo an twèl, oben menmjan ou ka konstwi, ou ka chanté. Anho anba, chantè répondè. Vwa é lang ka touvé-yo jwenn, soudé èvè sa ki pli fò ki yo, pli puisan, pli pré on bondyé kréyatè, pli chouké adan latè. Èvè métafò, sa ka di-nou osi kimoun ki ni pouvw, kimoun ki pé dékrété é di ka i ni, di sa ou ni anba zyé a-w : sa kriyan-kriyan, sa kolon-la ka di, sé sa ki ni ; konsi sé maji, malérez-sò.

On dèt koté, adan *musa* (on dèt vidéo, 2020), sé tousa ki vivan adan plant, é ki andémik, préistorik,

A few months later, I believe I’ve seen in *tolì tolì* a mixture of the images of each one and a view of exactly where the creation of these took place. Blind and blinding readings, from one landscape to another. Ignorance or a system of screen-thought. Minia’s work explains a little why this has been possible, is possible. That which may seem like the absurd mystery of colonial history, beyond economic causes and clauses, becomes a haunting, fascinating image: the famous golden nugget corn kernel. Minia’s video progresses like a weft, it moves forward like we might build a song. Above-below, verse-chorus. Voices and languages come together, united by that which is stronger than them, that which is more powerful, more demiurgic, more telluric. This also speaks metaphorically about who has the power to decree, to determine what is, to say what they behold: the astonishing performativity of the colonial as dark magic.

Somewhere else, another video, *musa* (2020), offers prehistoric, endemic, anthropomorphic plant life for



musa, 2020
Video Vidéo,
13'

antwopomòrfik, pou nou kontanplé. Anlè sa, tin lang (plizyè lang). Épi bèlté, bèlté a fòm a sé plant-lasa, ka vèglé : alòs ou ka touné alantou, ou ka koupé-yo pou vwè kijan yo fèt, ou ka kuit yo. Ou ka manjé yo é ou ka dijéré yo. Zyé an nou sé bouch, lang, vant. Dayèpouyonn, nou vwè dé vant. Ès sé on pawòl asi on *modèl dévoran* ? Sa osi, sa sòti adan listwa kolonyal? Minia ka tisé é ka mèt tousa adan on sénaryo, tou dousouman (adan on listwa ki anba rèskonsabilité a-y?). Sa ka kléré, sa gran wouvè, sikatris, ti paké. Film a Minia, sé pèyizaj osi ; yo ni tout adan.

Manman-vant, flè a pyé-bannann, kalbas, kal a bato.

Dékoupaj, volim, kò.

Minia travay anlè monografi-lasa, i fè on kat, kon i abityé fè : on gran pèyizaj èvè sinaps plen koulè. An ka

our contemplation. There is language (several languages). And beauty, the blind beauty of these vegetal forms: we move around them, we cut them open to see what they are made of, we cook them. We ingest and we digest. Our eyes are mouths, tongues, stomachs. In fact, we have seen two stomachs. Does it speak of devouring? Is this also inevitably part of colonial history? Minia weaves this all together (in a story she is responsible for?). Shine, dilation, scarification, a compact beauty. Minia's films are landscapes too, fully.

Uterus, banana flower, calabash, ship's hold.

Cutout, volume, body.

Minia worked on this monograph, as she so often does, by creating a map: a great landscape of multicolored synapses. I let myself be guided there, between the stories, there where Minia waits for me.

lésé-y gidonné-mwen, anmitan sé kont-la, la Minia ka atann-mwen.

On dèt koté, pli lwen, an ka vwè Minia ka palé asi vòlkan, ka palé ba vòlkan. I maké kont. I ka palé osi asi lotonomi a péyi Gwadeloup, é ankò asi Répiblik dominiken.

An ka arèsté èvè-y adan jaden-la.

qui vivra verra, qui mourra saura. An 2019, Minia Biabiany prézan-té on enstalasyon ki té ni non-lasa, o CRAC Alzas, Altkirch. Ouvraj fèt èvè plant. Plant a jaden kréyòl Gwadeloup⁵. On jaden pou bèbèl, on jaden pou swannyé. Qui vivra verra é Qui mourra saura, sé plant plant ki adan jaden kréyòl Gwadeloup ; jaden-lasa, sé on jaden pou bèbèl é on jaden pou rimèd, on jaden pou swannyé. Jaden kréyòl lasa, sé jaden a zèsklav, on koté adan sistenm a bitasyon-la. Sé on jaden ki byen la, men ès i majik toujou ? Minia travay èvè liv a on antwopològ Catherine Benoît : *Corps, jardins, mémoires. Anthropologie du corps et de l'espace à la Guadeloupe*⁶ ; i sèvi èvè-y pou rakonté jan jaden-la ranjé é kijan i ka swannyé.

Adan liv a-y, Catherine Benoît ka di ki manyè, adan diféran analiz téorik moun fè asi sosyété kréyòl karibéyen ki sòti anba lakoloni-zasyon é sistenm a bitasyon èsklavajis la, yo toujou vwè sé sosyété-lasa kónsi ka manké on biten ; *èspéyalman lè sé pou pran listwa*

⁵ Nòt a sé éditè-la é artis-la : Jaden kréyòl, sé on èspas èsklav té ka planté, é ki vwèjou lè sé kolon-la désidé yo pa ka ba èsklav manjé ankò. Yo té ka planté lè yo pa té ka travay, kifè sé tè-lasa té ka ba-yo manjé ; délé, té ni plis manjé ki sa yo té bizwen, kidonk yo té ka bokanté èvè sé lézòt fanmi-la. Menmsi jaden-la pé ka chanjé wòl, davwa sa ka dépann adan ki kontèks kolon é èsklav yé, èspas-lasa sé on koté ki bay prèmyé manyè pou vin otonòm.

⁶ Pari : CNRS Éditions-Éditions de la MSH, 2000.

Somewhere else, further off, I perceive Minia talking about volcanoes, talking with volcanoes. She has written stories. She also speaks of Guadeloupe's autonomy and the Dominican Republic, once again.

I stop with her in the garden.

qui vivra verra, qui mourra saura [who lives will see, who dies will know]. In 2019, Minia Biabiany presented an installation thus titled at the CRAC Alsace in Altkirch. The Qui vivra verra [Who Lives Will See] and the Qui mourra saura [Who Dies Will Know] are plants, plants in the Guadeloupean Creole garden⁵ which is an ornamental garden and a herb garden, a medicinal garden. This Creole garden is a garden that belonged to enslaved people, a space that existed somewhere in the network of plantations. This garden is very much there, but is it still magic? Minia worked from the anthropologist Catherine Benoît's book, *Corps, jardins, mémoires. Anthropologie du corps et de l'espace à la Guadeloupe* [Bodies, Gardens, Memories: Anthropology of the Body and Space in Guadeloupe]⁶ to recreate the shape of this garden and how we can heal there.

In her book, Catherine Benoît recalls the moment when Caribbean Creole societies that had grown out of colonization and the system of plantation slavery began to be analyzed in terms of absence as a result of different theoretical developments: *an absence that would situate itself in particular in an inability*

⁵ EN and artist's note: The Creole garden is a cultural space that arose when colonists decided to stop feeding enslaved people. Cared for during free time, these patches of earth became an important source of food and sometimes produced surplus that could be exchanged between families. Although the function of these gardens has shifted over time, emerging from a particular context of colonizers and enslaved people, it is a zone that gave rise to one of the first strategies of autonomy.

⁶ Paris: CNRS Éditions – Éditions de la MSH, 2000.



qui vivra verra, qui mourra saura (détalle détail), 2019
 Instalación Installation
 Fotografia Photographie : Aurélien Mole
 Cortesía de Courtesy du CRAC Alsace

*é tiritwa-la an chaj*⁷. Okontrè, makè-lasa chwazi fè ankèt asi tère-ren-la menm, kifè i rivé touvé lidé é pratik gwadeloupéyen alantou a kò-la é èspas-la ; konsa, magré pakèt mitasyon-la ki fèt la, ou ka vwè kijan kòsmogoni, ki sé chouk a idantité, bay on ansanm byen doubout. Liv a Catherine Benoît òganizé alantou a twa larèl : syans asi kò-la é maladi, jan la moun ka rété òganizé, é jan pratik pou swanné moun silon sé diféran rèlijyon-la ka woulé ansanm⁸.

Qui vivra verra é Qui mourra saura, ki sé non a enstalasyon a Minia la, té planté douvan é dèyè kaz a sé zèsklav la. Qui vivra verra ka pwotéjé kaz-la kont jalouzi é mové lès-pri. Qui mourra saura, ki planté dèyè la, ka kenbé sikré a-y, konnésans a-y é syans a-y, asiré-sèten.

⁷ Maud Laethier, « Catherine Benoît, Corps, jardins, mémoires. Anthropologie du corps et de l'espace à la Guadeloupe », *L'Homme*, n. 160, òktòb-désanm, 2001, 245-247.

⁸ *Menm koté*.

to appropriate territory and history.⁷ In contrast, Benoît based her approach on field surveys that allowed her to retrace Guadeloupean conceptions and practices relating to the body and space that reveal a structured entity that bears witness—despite many mutations—to *foundational cosmogonies of identity*. As Maud Laethier has noted, *Catherine Benoît's work is organized around three axes: knowledge of the body and illness, the organization of inhabited space, and the cohabitation of therapeutic practices tied to different religious affiliations*.⁸

The Qui vivra verra and the Qui mourra saura—those who lend their names to Minia's installation—were planted in front of and behind slave huts. The Qui vivra verra protects the house from the jealousy of evil spirits. Planted behind the house,

⁷ Maud Laethier, "Catherine Benoît, Corps, jardins, mémoires. Anthropologie du corps et de l'espace à la Guadeloupe," in *L'Homme*, n. 160, October-December, 2001, 245-247.

⁸ Ibid.

On ti kaz byen pwotéjé ! Sé silon sikti-lasa Minia ka konstwi ouvraj a-y : sikti-la ka woupran fòm a kaz a zèsklav-la — plan a kaz-la maké atè-la èvè sèl —, é « masonn » a-y ka parèt anlè gras a mòso séramik ka pann. Alantou, dèt iskilti an papyé-twèl é plant séramik ka tonbé. Doubout é maji. Pwòpté ènèji-la èvè sèl, doubout-pyébwà, doubout-lyann, doubout-transandans...

Jaden-lasa pa ka ègzisté ankò, oben ès i ka viv toujou ?

On ti mémwa ka ètenn kon bouji.

A pa sa poubon, davwa tin liv-lasa omwens, é asiré-sèten tout sé tras-lasa la toujou, èvè Minia ka travay, Minia ka pran swen.

Men pétèt tin syans ki disparèt, é kakwè, é maji, é rèlijyon.

Biten ka pasé.

Awa, padavwa travay a Minia, a pa on lègzanmen a sa ki fèt adan listwa, i ka èché bay lavi. Sa nou konnèt asi kò-la é maladi, jan moun ka òganizé la yo ka rété, é jan pratik pou swanné moun silon sé diféran rèlijyon-la ka woulé ansanm⁹, kijan pou nou pé santi sa ? Sé mèt kò a-w adan èspas-la é pétèt lésé-yo menné-w. Minia ka wouban-nou zimaj, fòm é èspas, séla ki sòti adan on mémwa nou konnèt tibwen oben nou pa konnèt menm. Alòs on biten ka rivé nou — é nou sav —, on dèt jan ki èvè sa liv-la ki anlè kuis an nou la ka ban-nou kon konnésans.

Tout travay a Minia Biabiany, sé konsantrasyon a-y, zòrèy total a-y, on zòrèy véyatif, ka kouté on koté, on tè. É san démòd, i ka èché tout zouti i pé touvé pou kouté-y é byen tann li. Zimaj a on kòn a lanbi asi zòrèy-la. Po a Minia. Minia ka véyé, é a pa anki sa ki fèt avan. Minia ka pran swen.

⁹ *Menm koté*.

the Qui mourra saura ensures that its secrets, knowledge, and wisdom are kept safe. A well-protected little cabin! Minia's work is based on this structure, the structure of the lodgings of enslaved people, its outline drawn in the ground with salt, and "walls" of ceramic shards suspended in the air. All around, other sculptures of tissue paper and ceramic vegetation hang. Verticality and magic. Energy cleansing with salt, tree-verticality, liana-verticality, transcendence-verticality.

This garden no longer exists; where is it still alive?

A little memory trying to put itself out like a candle.

Although not really, since this book exists, and all of these traces, and Minia working, Minia caring.

But perhaps knowledge has disappeared, and belief, and magic, and religion.

Things pass.

No, for Minia's work is not a historical overview, rather it seeks to give life. *The knowledge of the body and of illness, the organization of lived space, the cohabitation of therapeutic practices tied to different religious affiliations*,⁹ how do we make ourselves feel them? It involves putting your body in space and, perhaps, letting it *be affected*. Minia gives us back images, forms, and spaces that come from a memory about which we know little or nothing. And so, something happens to us—we know it, in a different way than if it had been given to us from the book resting on our knees.

The unity of Minia Biabiany's work resides in her concentration, in that perfect, attentive ear, cocked towards a place, a piece of earth. In her stubborn dedication to finding all the possible

⁹ Ibid.

Tini on biten ou ka kouté é ou ka palé, sé lang-la (é tini osi, anvré, lang-la, ti ògàn wòz la). Toujou, sé on kèksyon pou Minia. Pou monografi-lasa osi, sé on kèksyon : tini anglé, fransé, kréyòl, pannyòl. Silon lòd a lalfabé-la. Kèksyon a sé diféran lang-la, é jan yo ka viv ansanm, épi kèksyon a chalviraj-la. Jan kréyòl é fransé ka liyanné.

Men toupatou kèksyon a lang la : Nou ka deviré asi swannyé-la ; Catherine Benoît ka étidyé sistém médikal lè ni plizyè pèp ka viv ansanm, é i ka maké osi nou pé sévi èvè lidé a Wittgenstein « je a langaj » pou di on « pwennviz ki ni andidan-y swen moun bizwen »¹⁰.

Ka pou fè èvè chalviraj an kréyòl la?

An sav Minia ka kalkilé onlo, an jan a-y é èvè mwayen a-y ki ta-y – men sa pé maké-la oben chalviraj-la, kon jòdla toupannan i ka travay asi monografi-lasa – asi jan i ka fè kréyòl-la palé. Sé sa osi ka fè pratik artistik a Minia espésyal : tin on travay poubon ka fèt on dèt koté ki adan fòm plastik a aw kontanporen, ki ka nourí yo (é sé fòm plastik lasa ka nourí aw kontanporen la osi). Kanmenmsa, travay asi lang-la, sé travay asi fòm-la, nenpòt ki fòm (anvré?), fòm ou ka vwè, fòm plastik, fòm ou ka tann. Antouka, aka Minia, alévini-la ka koulé kon dlo. Adan liv-la ou ni an men a-w la, i ka maké on kont an kréyòl, on dèt an pannyòl. Osi, i chwazi on légzès politik pou òbjé-lasa; tout sé tèks-la chalviré an kréyòl. Minia ka èpliké-mwen kolòn zòtobral a lang kréyòl ka woupran kolòn zòtobral la ki pitité plizyè lang Lafrik-dè-lwès. Sé osi on lang ki fèt adan on kontèks la yo fè moun vin zèsklav. Kréyòl ka sévi èvè lang

¹⁰ Catherine Benoît, *Corps, jardins, mémoires. Anthropologie du corps et de l'espace à la Guadeloupe*, Paris : CNRS Éditions – Éditions de la MSH, 2000, cité dans Maud Laethier ka sité-y, *menm liv*, 246.

tools for good listening and hearing. The image of a conch held up to an ear. Minia's skin. Minia on the lookout, not only for the past. Minia *caring*.

There is something that we hear when we talk; it is language (and materially, it is also the tongue, that little pink organ). This has always been a question for Minia. It is even a question for this monograph, where there is Creole, English, French, and Spanish. In alphabetical order. It is a question of the multiplicity of languages and their cohabitation, and of course, it is a question of their translation. The relationship between French and Creole.

But language poses itself everywhere (as a question):

Returning to the theme of caring, Catherine Benoît also suggests in her study of medical systems in pluri-ethnic contexts that we can borrow Wittgenstein's idea of the "language-game" to evoke a "vision of the world in which therapeutic treatments inscribe themselves."¹⁰

What to do about the translation of Creole?

I know how worried Minia is, in her own way and in her own mediums—which sometimes include writing and translation—about how Creole sounds. It is here that the specificity of Minia's artistic practice lies: she engages in real work beyond the material bounds of contemporary art, and this work nourishes the forms (and is nourished by them). However, working on language amounts to working on a form, a form like any other (really?), visual, plastic, aural. In any case, in Minia's work, the exchange is fluid. In the book that you hold, she has written a story in Creole, another in Spanish. She had placed a

¹⁰ Catherine Benoît, *Corps, jardins, mémoires. Anthropologie du corps et de l'espace à la Guadeloupe*, Paris: CNRS Éditions – Éditions de la MSH, 2000, as cited in Maud Laethier, op. cit., 246.



Nota fotogràfica: acciones en el jardín familiar
Note photographique: activités liées au jardin familial
Saint-Claude, 2015

a kolon pou vokabilé a-y, épi i ka mofwazé, é chouboulé. Lang ki doubout asi on imajiné a lalit. Senbòl a on konba pou santi, konprann, ka sa yé kolonyaliz fransé lasa ki toupatou. Lang a lalit endépandantis.

on kréyòl, kréyòl Gwadeloup, kréyòl a on konminoté

on kréyòl gwadeloupéyen maké, wi i ka ègzisté poubon, sé on konba

Séré adan lang-la : on kèksyon pli laj a yérarchi kolonyal la, a katèl kolonyal la, a tout mannèv yo pòtè pou jistifyé pouvwa kolonyal la. On lang ka sizé tout fòs a-y asi on dèt, ki pa menm ka vwè-y, adan sé lékòl-la, pa ka lévè-y digad, pa ka gouyé pou gadé-y, adan on hoté entéléktyèl a li san ayen adan.

Ki réparasyon? On lwa¹¹, dèt jéné-rasyon, lèspwa.

¹¹ Jou jédi 8 avril 2021, Parlèman fransé adòpté poubon on popozisyon a lwa a lopoziyon, pou pwotéjé é voyé douvan lang réjyonnal, apré Lasanblé nasyonal té voté wi pou dézyèm lèkti-la.

political exercise within the pages of this object: we have translated all of the texts into Creole. Minia explained to me that Creole's structure mirrors that of several Western African languages. It is a language that was constituted in a context where humans were enslaved. Creole draws its vocabulary from colonial languages; it transforms and it deforms. It has been the language of the struggle. It is the incarnation of a struggle to feel—to understand—what it is that this French colonialism that imbues all things really is. It is the language of the struggle for independence.

a Creole, Guadeloupean Creole, Creole of a community

a written Guadeloupean Creole, yes, it exists, it is a struggle

Nestled inside this language is a broader question about colonial hierarchy, colonial contempt, colonial processes of legitimization. About a language that sits heavily atop another language, one that it doesn't recognize in school, and that, in all its disinterest, laziness, and empty intellectual prestige, it doesn't even see.

Isi, adan sé ouvraj-la, lang a Minia, kivilédi a pa j'en lang-la, men sé toujou langaj-la : enkantasyon (*blue spelling*), chanté pou timoun (*toli toli*), rakontaj é poézi (*pawòl sé van*) — adan sé parantèz-la, sé tit a ouvraj a Minia.

An ka sonjé on artis ki té ka ponmlé tout fòs a-y toupatou asi latè èvè sak a-y « Remember the ride » [Sonjé pasaj-la] ; sak-la té ka reprézanté plan a kal a bato la é jan sé zèsklav-la té ranjé adan. Sé on artis an enmè onlo, ka brilé kò a-y adan mémwa-lasa, kon baton lansan. Sa diféran. Sa pa plibyen ni pli mové. Sa ka fè mal on mannyè, travay a Minia, ki plen sèl, pa ka fè mal konsa.

Catherine Benoît ka sèvi èvè èsprésyon *chimen pou géri*. An té ké byen enmè menné èsprésyon-lasa on dèt koté, pou palé asi travay a Minia, é asi Minia. Minia, tranntwa lanné asi latè é asi chimen pou géri, tranntwa lanné étyoloji sòsyèz, tou kalm é toujou èvè touplen dou-sè. Kimoun Minia ka swannyé ? Kimoun nou ka swannyé èvè travay a kréyasyon an nou ? Noumenm an nou, fanmi an nou, sé *lézòt-la pou nou*, silon la chimen-la ka menné nou, épi on ti biten anplis (ki biten anplis ? Pli gran, pli abstré, pli transandan, oben mwen klè ?) An ka sonjé on liv an té li pannan lété, *Mon frère*¹² a Jamaica Kincaid. An chalè-la. Jamaica ka palé asi on frè ki malad, èvè sida, on frè alanmò, on frè kon bobo ankavé. Sé on liv ka swannyé, ka swannyé Antig, on vyé ti lilèt san lèspwa adan Lézanti, frè malad la, manman-la é vyolans a-y, Jamaica ki manman li osi (*kijan i pé konprann manman-y ki ta-y èvè vyolans a-y, é kijan i pé limenm géri, lè i ka pasé jouné a-y ajou-nou pou èskizé-y douvan timoun*

¹² I parèt an 2000 aka Éditions de l'Olivier pou vèsyon fransé la, sé Jean-Pierre Carasso é Jaklin Huet ki chalviré-y.

What reparations? Laws¹¹, new generations, hope.

Here in the work is Minia's language—never a language, but always the ability to speak: incantation (*blue spelling*), nursery rhyme (*toli toli*), story and poetry (*pawòl sé van*). The titles of Minia's works are in parentheses.

Another motif that recurs again and again in Minia's work is that of weaving. I wrote up above “fiber”, “above-below”: muscles or fruits, muscles and fruits. Beyond its formal model and its intrinsic beauty, weaving says something about Minia's patience, about her slow method of working, work that is never finished.

I remember an artist who roamed violently around the world with a bag stamped with the words “Remember the Ride” and an image of a diagram of a slave ship that showed the position the enslaved were forced to assume in its hold. I very much like this artist, who burns her body in this memory like a stick of incense. It's different. It's neither better, nor worse. It hurts in a way that Minia's work, full of salt, doesn't.

In her book, Catherine Benoît uses the expression *therapeutic itinerary*. I would like to extend this expression to talk about Minia and her work. Minia, thirty-three years of life on earth, of therapeutic itinerancy, thirty-three years of *witchcraft etiology*, through calm and with an infinite softness. Who does Minia heal? Who do we heal with our creative work? Ourselves, our families, our *others*, by chance along the way, and then something *more* (more what? Bigger, more abstract, more transcendent, hazier?). I think of something I read in the summer—*My Brother* by Jamaica Kincaid—in the heat. In her book, Jamaica conjures a brother sick

¹¹ On Thursday, April 8, 2021, the French parliament officially approved the “Molac Law,” which protects and promotes regional languages.

*a-y, mi sé sa i ka maké*¹³). Sé on liv ka swannyé Antig ki kolonizé, ka swannyé tala ki pati la é séla ki rèsté la, é ki swannyé mwen. Èvè ki maji? Kincaid té ka di konsa, pou li, maké, a pa pou plonjé adan lawonn piblik la, men sé on mannyè pou ègzisté. Sé on travay ki toujou ka fè mal, men an ka asèpté sé on réyalité, ou pé pa ba-y masko¹⁴. Chimen pou géri.

Pawòl pou bout — *la sé menné yo ka menné mwen*

Manman-vant an mwen ka vin bòskaf.

Mis é fwi.

Travay a Minia ka kenbé nou an lonbrik an nou.

Lavi, lavi, lavi pou fòm a-y !

¹³ Jamaica Kincaid, *My Brother, Nyonyok* : The Noonday Press, 1997, 27.

¹⁴ Jamaica Kincaid « Jamaica Kincaid Hates Happy Endings », bokantaj èvè Marilyn Berlin Snell, *Mother Jones*, sèktanm-òktòb 1997, ou pé touvé-y asi : <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/1997/09/jamaica-kincaid-hates-happy-endings/>.

with AIDS, a brother in the process of dying, a brother who is decomposing. This book heals; it heals Antigua, that little unfortunate and hopeless island in the Antilles, the sick brother, the mother and her violence, the mother who is Jamaica (how to understand her own mother and her violence, and heal herself, when she herself *spend[s] a good part of [her] day on [her] knees in apology to [her] own children*¹²). It is a book that heals colonized Antigua, that heals those who left and those who stayed, that heals me. With what magic? Kincaid says that her writing was not a means of projecting herself into a public sphere, but simply a way of being. *The process is always full of pain, but I like that. It's a reality, and I just accept it as something not to be avoided.*¹³ A therapeutic itinerary.

Epilogue—Where I Am Affected

My uterus is deformed.
Muscle and fruit.
Minia's work holds us by the navel.
Life, life, life to its forms!

¹² Jamaica Kincaid, *My Brother*, New York: The Noonday Press, 1997, 27.

¹³ Jamaica Kincaid, “Jamaica Kincaid Hates Happy Endings,” interview by Marilyn Berlin Snell, *Mother Jones*, September-October 1997, available at: <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/1997/09/jamaica-kincaid-hates-happy-endings/>.