The Ambivalent Transnationalism of a Literature-World—in French

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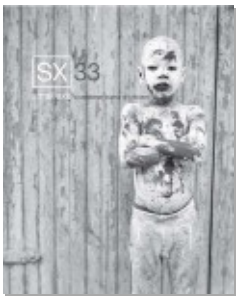

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Like the diagnosis of an illness with regard to the doctor, the analysis of the manifesto is empowering for the critic. The manifesto appeals to critics because it is halfways between self-identification and knowledge: the critics recognize themselves in it, since they are after all the ones who "gave the baby its name," but at the same time they must suspect it for its rhetoric and apply to it their critical faculties. . . . the researcher must be on the lookout for the manifesto's hidden agendas.
—Galia Yanoshevsky, "Three Decades of Writing on Manifesto: The Making of a Genre"

Scripted by Breton writers Michel Le Bris and Jean Rouaud, featured on the cover page of the French newspaper *Le Monde*, and ultimately appearing as the preface to *Pour une littérature-monde*, a collected volume of essays released by Parisian publishing house Les Editions Gallimard, "Pour une 'littérature-monde' en français" reposes on a considerable number of rather obvious ironies. The controversial text, which has sustained at once vociferous praise and virulent condemnation, offers a wide-ranging critique of the world of French letters and calls for acknowledgment of extra-hexagonal contributions to global literature. It is in essence a response to the awarding of the principal French literary prizes in 2006 to writers originating from without France's national borders[1]—belated recognition, it argues, of the fact that so-called francophone writers have provided the major source of innovation and vitality in

1 American Jonathan Little received the Prix Goncourt and Grand prix du roman de l'Académie française; the Prix Renaudot was awarded to Congolese writer Alain Mabanckou; Canadian Nancy Huston received the Prix Femina; and Camerounian Léonaora Miano won the Prix Goncourt des Lycéens.

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French literature over the last quarter century. Positing the centrality of those "relegated to the margins,"[2] the forty-four signatories[3] demand that what they argue is the peripheralizing concept of *francophonie* be retired. Yet while aggressively challenging the existing parameters of "French" literature, the manifesto itself presents several rather troublesome contradictions of both form and content. I propose in this essay to take a look at certain of the document's structural and thematic stumbling blocks, in an effort both to examine the essential dilemmas that reside at the heart of all postcolonial literary production and to consider alternative responses to the issues of belonging and cultural identity raised by "Pour une 'littérature-monde' en français." I look in particular at the noninclusion in this declaration of global franco-solidarity of the Haitian Spiralist writers Frankétienne and Jean-Claude Fignolé—writers who, for reasons having everything to with peripheralization, have found themselves dramatically less "in the world" than the signatories of the manifesto. I draw attention to the fate of these specific authors in order to emphasize the general need for critical vigilance regarding the politicized borders of literature, as even borders meant to subversively redefine can prove troublingly exclusionary.

The very first sentence of "Pour une 'littérature-monde' en français" sets the tone for the conflicted essay that follows. "Later on," reads the manifesto, "it will perhaps be said that this was a historic moment: the Goncourt, the Grand prix du roman de l'Académie française, the Renaudot, the Fémina, the Goncourt des lycéens, awarded in the same year to writers from Outside-France." This initial utterance lays out the terrain: it very matter-of-factly outlines the situation from which the manifesto emerged, yet manages to imply the subversive import of the events it relates. And while the information presented in this opening sentence is straightforward and unadorned, and its tone hardly declamatory, the phrase is ultimately quite heavy with inadvertent irony. In effect, the manifesto's simple-fact-dominated incipit manages to evoke in the space of just a few lines several rather questionable foundational elements: "big H" History, five examples of metropolitan French cultural authority, and an oppositionally constructed identifying label. Indeed, though it is meant presumably to be a declaration of independence—a profound undermining of the European center and unequivocal refusal of France's legitimacy as arbiter of aesthetic value with respect to a literary tradition (and canon) whose parameters it determines—the introductory statement rather unreflectively announces its rooting in the very premises it claims to subvert. This contextual paradox—the distribution of French prizes giving rise to the proclamation of a new "Outside-France" solidarity—is decidedly uncomfortable. It quite pointedly illustrates the awkward dynamic by which "francophone" writers reject

2 Michel Le Bris and Jean Rouaud, "Pour une 'littérature-monde' en français," *Le Monde*, 16 March 2007. All unreferenced quotations are extracted from the text of the manifesto. These and all other translations are mine.

3 Muriel Barbery, Tahar Ben Jelloun, Alain Borer, Roland Brival, Maryse Condé, Didier Daeninckx, Ananda Devi, Alain Dugrand, Edouard Glissant, Jacques Godbout, Nancy Huston, Koffi Kwahulé, Jean-Marie Laclavetine, Dany Laferrière, Gilles Lapouge, Michel Layaz, Michel Le Bris, J. M. G. Le Clézio, Yvon Le Men, Amin Maalouf, Alain Mabanckou, Anna Moï, Wajdi Mouawad, Nimrod, Wilfried N'Sondé, Esther Orner, Erik Orsenna, Benoît Peeters, Gisèle Pineau, Jean-Claude Pirotte, Grégoire Polet, Jean-Luc V. Raharimanana, Patrick Rambaud, Patrick Raynal, Jean Rouaud, Boualem Sansal, Dai Sitje, Brina Svit, Lyonel Trouillot, Anne Vallaeys, Jean Vautrin, André Velter, Gary Victor, and Abdourahman A. Waberi.

the normalizing apparati of Franco-European culture while seeking recognition or legitimation by and within its structures.

This existential and aesthetic quandary is, of course, integral to the very fact of the empire *writing back*—the unresolvable catch-22 by which (formerly) colonized intellectuals endeavor to reimagine the humiliating constructs that determine their individual and collective identities, while remaining largely situated within the sociocultural frame provided (imposed) by those who have long benefited from their alienation. Bearing this in mind, it is particularly important to note the formal structure within which the signatories' call for and assertion of non-Franco-centric literary vigor are declaimed: that of the literary manifesto. Yes, on the one hand, a manifesto—this manifesto—is explicitly proactive. It is forward-looking and provoking. It seizes on an existing reality and affirms it from a position of unity. On the other hand, a manifesto—this manifesto—is unreservedly proscriptive and reactive. Affirming its raison d'être with respect to that which it has been "forbidden" (*interdit*) by the metropolitan center, the manifesto identifies terms of adhesion—its own order—and establishes itself in opposition to a preexisting order. The document at once proposes and performs the instigating act of ameliorative renewal. To use Deleuzian-cum-Glissantian terminology, the manifesto reterritorializes as it deterritorializes. It challenges specific positions of stability, identity, and containment—what both Deleuze/Guattari and Glissant have called *arborescence*[4]—yet cannot thoroughly enough extricate itself from the very idea of containment within an in- and excluding order of things. Moreover, through its evocation of a "historical moment," this manifesto effectively integrates the signatories' declarations into a European modernist perspective. It takes up the practice of announcing its own timeliness and significance with respect to circumstances of dramatic social and historical change—"the crumbling of great ideologies . . . that would soon topple the Berlin Wall"—implying an antitotalitarian resistance to the constraints of the "old" literary institution. Rife with temporal markers—"for a long time," "over several decades," "we are able to date them," and so on—the manifesto implicates notions of progress and binarism so often, indeed, too often, adopted by writer-intellectuals of the nonhexagonal French-speaking world, a phenomenon I examine below.

Given the above, it is essential that we look closely at the multiple possible motivations underlying the production of "Pour une 'littérature-monde' en français." Philosophically, for example, the document seeks to spell out the specific socioaesthetic and historical conditions that justify its intervention and then to establish a certain clarity with respect to its intentions going forward. The manifesto accounts for and acknowledges. It broadly rejects historical phenomena of exclusion and marginalization, and it identifies its exemplars. It outlines its own present- and future-oriented literary practice, making known its disdain for certain literary practices of the recent past. Then, from what might be called an "emotional" perspective, the manifesto represents a broad appeal for acknowledgment—for validation, even—of writers

4 See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), and Edouard Glissant, *Poétique de la Relation* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990).

whose literary presence it claims has thus far been perceived as secondary, writers who have been "barely tolerated" despite their immense contribution to renewing the very essence of French literary production. On a third level, "Pour une 'littérature-monde' en français" is, of course, also quite politically motivated, as are all such texts, the manifesto being first and foremost an "aestheticizing of political aspirations."[5] The word *revolution* is used more than once. Indeed, the littérature-monde manifesto affirms a concerted rejection of what its signatories maintain are the far too persistent economic and political remnants of *francophonie*. It proclaims no less than the death of French letters, as conceived of prior to fall 2006.[6] Finally, and perhaps most significantly, as regards my analysis, are the more and less explicit practical motivations behind the manifesto. Spectacular and performative, the document is *loud*. It is dramatic and confrontational; it is polemical. Indeed, there can be no question but that this manifesto is meant to capitalize on the visibility of the fall prizes—to fix the presence of its signatories in the market spotlight.[7]

It is the question of these "practical" motivations that I think merits particular attention. I would argue that concomitant with the perfectly reasonable efforts toward increased publication, circulation, and translation that underlie the manifesto are the potentially objectionable implications of such self-conscious affirmation. Without rehashing issues that I and others have already addressed rather extensively, I would nevertheless emphasize, for example, the unsettling aspects of the manifesto's implicitly evolution-based rhetorical stance, particularly as it resonates in the context of the francophone Americas.[8] Specifically, this region's literature has long been dominated in the global marketplace by what I have elsewhere termed "figureheads of *francophonie*,"[9] a coterie of writers who enjoy quasi-celebrity extra-regional status, determined largely by a Western literary institution consisting of Franco-European critics and publishers along with I daresay primarily US-based academics—writers who are to a certain extent empowered to lay out the criteria for postcolonial political and literary authenticity. The manifesto as genre very much caters to this practice of autocanonization in the literary tradition of the French-speaking Caribbean, in that it actively provokes and cultivates the critical

5 Galia Yanoshevsky, "Three Decades of Writing on Manifesto: The Making of a Genre," *Poetics Today* 30, no. 2 (2009): 270.

6 The signatories assert that the manifesto "signs *francophonie*'s death certificate."

7 See Alexandre Najjar, "Contre le manifeste 'Pour une littérature-monde en français': Expliquer l'eau par l'eau," www.najjar.org/litteratureMondeEnFrancais.asp (accessed 1 May 2010). Writer and literary journalist Najjar goes so far as to accuse the signatories of outright hypocrisy with respect to issues of market visibility: "The manifesto . . . constitutes, first of all, a 'scuttling' by francophone writers who, rather than wave the flag of *francophonie*, recently celebrated during the Salon du livre and passionately defended by millions of people, instead attempt to make it seem "old hat" [*la "ringardiser"*] and to sow doubt in people's minds, even though the majority of them are part of francophone organizations or serve on francophone prize committees."

8 I am referring here to the tendency in francophone Caribbean letters to rely on a discourse of ameliorative progression, that is, the positing of the theoretical perspectives of particular authors as replacements for and/or improvements on those of their predecessors. The oft-discussed twentieth-century Martinican literary-theoretical trajectory from Negritude to *antillanité* to *créolité* is the most striking example of this phenomenon. See Anthony Appiah, *In My Father's House* (London: Methuen, 1992), 149; Maryse Condé, "Order Disorder, Freedom, and the West Indian Writer," *Yale French Studies* 83, no. 2 (1993): 121–36; and Charles Forsdick and David Murphy, *Francophone Postcolonial Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 12.

9 Kaiama L. Glover, "The Consequences of 'Not-Paris,'" *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 44, no. 3 (2008): 279.

debate so essential to the dissemination of its own message. In other words, the manifesto provides the theorist/critic with an adamantly asserted perspective with which to engage and even do battle (operating, I would argue, from a version of the "there's no such thing as bad press" principle). Indeed, "Pour une 'littérature-monde' en français" commands and has garnered sustained critical attention, as publications such as this one and the international colloquium from which it emerged very clearly attest. Since its appearance in 2007, many of the signatories have been called upon to dialogue with the theorists who study them—to clarify, defend, and justify the manifesto in conferences and salons all over the world. In the light of this phenomenon, the appearance of forty-four names (not forty-three, not forty-five!) representing the writer-intellectuals who at the very least symbolically declare their support for the manifesto might certainly be interpreted as establishing a definitive "in"—as in *included*—group that intends to wield just this sort of influence. Without even the symbolic generosity of an ellipsis at the tail end of its list of authors, the manifesto implies the very sort of finitude for which it condemns the Euro-French center. Thus while "Pour une littérature-monde en français" demands recognition of a new reality, it neglects to interrogate certain of the most deeply rooted and undesirable constructs of the old. It resists one label—and the limits and parameters that this label implies—in order to posit another. It engages in a process of establishing borders, and, somewhat incautiously, it roots itself in language.

This latter point—the opening up to the world through the vector of language—is more problematic than the signatories of "Pour une 'littérature-monde' en français" acknowledge. First, in its lengthy discussion of the situation of "Commonwealth" writers in the English context versus "francophone" writers in the French context, the manifesto (inadvertantly) echoes the familiar distinction between the British and the French manner of managing—or rather, *style* of exploiting—their respective colonies, and so is tangentially evocative of a longstanding competition between European empires. Allocating more than 450 of the manifesto's approximately 1,700 words to a discussion of the veritable domination of anglophone contemporary letters by non-European writers, the manifesto paints a portrait of England as a sort of harmoniously postcolonial utopia for unalienated, future-facing "children of the former British empire," while depicting the French cultural milieu as having remained attached to an embarrassingly retrograde belief in its civilizing mission. Outlining a stark contrast between the successful literary multiculturalism of the anglophone world and France's suffocating ethnocentrism, the manifesto effectively suggests that the French have some catching up to do with respect to their neighbor across the channel. Whether or not such an argument is substantively legitimate, by setting up this shaming comparison between the two former empires, the manifesto proposes yet another paradoxical instance of European sanctioning as validation for its assertions regarding the noncentrality of Europe. That is, it enters into the historic (political-imperialist) and present-day (cultural-imperialist) rivalry between the British and French nations, and thus between the English and French languages. Again we have an example of the broad and perceptible presence

of Europe at the heart of a document that claims to renounce colonial nation-state barriers and to give primacy to perspectives that embrace "the vast world."

The manifesto's tacit self-implication in nationalist European culture wars should be considered in the light of the evermore popular notion of transnationalism, a concept that bears particular weight in the Americas. Broadly speaking, transnationalism posits interconnectivity and the permeation of boundaries as the dominant contemporary context for human social interactions. It emphasizes those elements of sociocultural relationality that allow for the transcendence of arbitrary geopolitical borders. Offering a platform from which to reexamine and challenge existing parameters of analysis across the disciplines, transnationalism has become the desirable lens through which we as scholars are increasingly called on to think about the world. As explained in the description for the UCLA Mellon program Cultures in Transnational Perspectives, headed by the pioneering scholars of postcolonial transnationalism Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih, transnational theory impels us to "rethink identity within a transnational and transcolonial context of shifting affiliations across traditional borders of space and culture . . . [to] transform common understandings of citizenship and community."[10] "Pour une 'littérature-monde' en français" functions rather ambivalently with respect to such objectives. On the one hand, it can certainly claim to satisfy the relational dimension of transnationalism. What does it demand, if not the elimination of borders and the hierarchies they allow? On the other hand, although it refutes the limitations of the nation-state, the littérature-monde agenda remains, as I have argued above, very much anchored in a vertical relationship with metropolitan France. Moreover, writers of the Caribbean in particular—a place of absolute cultural and linguistic plurality[11]—have consistently exhibited a certain wariness with respect to *worlding* systems that threaten their geocultural specificity. Thus where the manifesto proclaims cohesion on the basis of shared global linguistic identification, Caribbean transnationalism would ostensibly require cohesion in the *absence* of a common language. In other words, to truly embrace a transnational ethic-aesthetic of the Americas would mean investing in the seemingly incompatible project of *de*-emphasizing language-based affiliation in the interest of aggressively promoting a different sort of historical and sociocultural community. It would call for transgression of the intra-regional boundaries thusfar so effectively maintained by the constraints of impossible communication.

I am suggesting, then, that to identify first through language, as the manifesto proposes, might be to prematurely renounce or insufficiently imagine the more satisfyingly ex-centric and potentially very productive bonds of history and geography that would supersede national, departmental, and other putatively "post-" colonial identities. Indeed, these are the linkages

10 UCLA Mellon Postdoctoral Program in the Humanities, www2.humnet.ucla.edu/mellon/ (accessed 1 May 2010).

11 Françoise Lionnet offers a related critique of the manifesto's inattention to the issue of multilinguality in her insightful essay "Universalisms and Francophonie," *International Journal of Francophone Studies* 12, nos. 2–3 (2009): 203–21. "The manifesto acknowledges, and aims to promote, the 'returned' presence of the 'world' on the literary scene ('le monde revient'), but oddly enough, it fails to address the nature of language as the hybrid medium that brings this world into being. It focuses on thematic, generic, and categorical issues, but is silent on the quality of the linguistic innovations that have served to anchor literature in specific landscapes and transnational critical geographies" (204).

that have been so thoroughly and convincingly theorized in J. Michael Dash's *The Other America* (1998), Antonio Benítez-Rojo's *The Repeating Island* (1996), and Edouard Glissant's *Caribbean Discourse* (1981), among others. More recently, in *Race, American Literature, and Transnational Modernisms* (2008), Anita Patterson puts the Caribbean in dialogue with the United States and uncovers a literary modernism that emerged from the New World aesthetic of American poets T. S. Eliot and Saint-John Perse. Taking as her point of departure Eliot's assertion in *Notes Towards the Definition of a Culture* (1948) that "those countries which share the most history are the most important to each other, with respect to their future literature,"[12] Patterson uses close reading and analysis to make a case for the usefulness of an intra-regional, transnational intellectual orientation. Her critical practice allows the works to speak for themselves and so theorizes affinities perhaps unimagined and certainly untrumpeted by the poets she considers, a de facto refusal of nation-state and nation-language constraints. Regionally oriented works of New World scholarship such as these provide veritable blueprints for transcolonial readings of the Caribbean, evoking the region's literature against the backdrop of its postcolonial sociohistorical reality. Yet such assessment-imaginations of the Americas risk being overcome by more global schema of postcolonial identity (as, indeed, Glissant himself seems to have done in his post-creolization/post-*antillanité* advocacy of the *Tout-monde*).[13]

Now of course the regional unity theorized and promoted by the above writers and scholars has not yet emerged as a practical reality for the peoples of the Caribbean. As popular and widely circulated as have become images of the Americas as irreversibly and productively creolized, a fully transnational Caribbean reality has proven far more difficult to enact than to envision. Indeed, the borders between the various islands—with respect to one another, to their continental neighbors, and even within certain of these islands—are fiercely guarded. Thus while the convincing perspective of a liberal intellectual zeitgeist tends to posit and even idealize the Caribbean as an open and fluid place, "with neither a boundary nor a centre,"[14] the diverse geographies of the Americas in many respects prove impermeable. I believe it is imperative, then, that we look closely at the distressingly stubborn borders that persist among those American peoples for whom transnational community has been hindered by the legacies of colonialism before embracing and potentially dissolving into a "world literature in French." In other words, it might be more valuable for writers—or, at the very least, the scholars who study them—to work toward transforming that old idea(l) of "Caribbeanness" (*antillanité*) into something viable and real.

Perhaps nowhere are the challenges to transnationalism and the loaded question of language more strikingly apparent than in the case of Haiti. In the face of a utopian ideal of

12 Anita Patterson, *Race, American Literature and Transnational Modernisms* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 1.
13 Regarding Edouard Glissant's increasingly nonspecific, antinationalist political agenda, see Chris Bongie, *Friends and Enemies: The Scribal Politics of Post/colonial Literature* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008), and Peter Hallward, *Absolutely Postcolonial* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2001).
14 J. Michael Dash, *The Other America* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1998), 29.

unfettered "trans-ease" and multiple "at-home-ness," Haiti presents a distressing dystopian real. Its astounding history and contemporary sociopolitical fate are testaments to the divisive colonial attachments, competition for scarce resources, racism, and color prejudice that factor so essentially in the lived experience of Caribbean peoples. Despite its determining role in New World political history and geography, however, Haiti has been exceptionalized throughout the Caribbean region and wider Americas as tragically, irrevocably fallen from its successful initial struggle for black liberation.[15] From 1804 to the present day, Haitians have found themselves isolated and unwelcomed in every part of the Americas, bounded and unwanted. For the waves of Haitian "boat people"—political and economic refugees turned away from the shores of Jamaica, the Bahamas, and Florida;[16] for the educated Haitian elites who seek migration by way of marriage or military commitment on foreign soil; for the stateless Haitians living and working in the cane fields of the Dominican Republic—perfectly expendable, imminently deportable; for Haitians in general, borders have long been ubiquitous and inescapable realities—so many real obstacles to inhabiting the wider world. To the extent to which Haiti's citizens are, then, quite literally, physically *unhomed* in the world, perpetually of the *in-between* (the terms are Homi Bhabha's, naturally), so too are they linguistically-cum-literarily marginalized.[17] In effect, Haiti's relative sociopolitical isolation has impacted directly on the nation's ghettoization with respect to regional canons.[18] Less widely circulated than

15 From Jamaican Claude McKay's lamenting of Haiti's political failures in *Home to Harlem* (1928) and African American Zora Neale Hurston's depictions of Haiti as a corrupt state and profoundly disenfranchised nation in *Tell My Horse* (1938), to portrayals of the revolution's regrettable immediate aftermath in Cuban Alejo Carpentier's *The Kingdom of This World* (1949), Martinican Aimé Césaire's *The Tragedy of King Christopher* (1963), and St. Lucian Derek Walcott's *Haitian Trilogy* (1949, 1958, 1984), the New World imagination has persistently configured Haiti as having failed to "live up to" its revolution as—in a tragically sad irony—a *result* of its revolution. This list might be expanded to include, of course, the numerous overtly racist characterizations of postrevolutionary Haiti, from Marine captain John Houston Craig's *Cannibal Cousins* (1933) and *Black Bagdad* (1934) to Pat Robertson's January 2010 comments regarding Haiti's "pact to the devil" (http://www.cnn.com/2010/US/01/13/haiti.pat.robertson/index.html; accessed 1 May 2010).

16 The phenomenon of Haitian *boat people* is arguably embedded in the consciousness of the entire American region. In the early 1980s, the United States formalized an agreement with the Haitian government to intercept Haitian boats and repatriate prospective immigrants. See Christopher Mitchell, "U.S. Policy toward Haitian Boat People, 1972–93," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 534 (July 1994): 69–80. As recently as early 2010, following the 12 January earthquake, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton stated unequivocally: "Ordinary and regular immigration laws will apply going forward, which means we are not going to be accepting into the US Haitians who are attempting to make it to our shores. . . . They will be interdicted; they will be repatriated" (http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/01/22/AR2010012202274.html; accessed 1 May 2010). Jamaica made its position equally clear two months later when the government's chief spokesman Daryl Vaz announced that Jamaica would be repatriating the sixty-two Haitians who had arrived in fishing boats that month (see http://www.jamaicaobserver.com/news/Haitians-to-be-sent-home-_7505217; accessed 1 May 2010). Throughout the 1960s, policy in the Bahamas was to accept Haitian immigrants, but this policy was reversed in the late 1970s: a 2004 press release by Amnesty International reports that troops were stationed off the southern islands of the Bahamas to intercept and return Haitian asylum seekers. See "Haiti: Refugees and Asylum Seekers Not Part of the Conflict," *Amnesty International*, 27 February 2004, http://amnesty.ca/resource_centre/news/view.php?load=arcview&article=1273&c=Resource+Centre+News (accessed 1 May 2010).

17 To be *unhomed* is, according to Bhabha, to experience an uncanny feeling of the intrusion of the political into the domestic. The term evokes a troubling conflation of the private and public space, which, he maintains, is "a paradigmatic colonial and post-colonial condition." Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 13. The notion of the *in-between* appears throughout *The Location of Culture* and refers to the fundamental instability of post/colonial identity in the face of such phenomena as migration, exile, globalization, and other movements back and forth across increasingly indefinite national and cultural borders.

18 As I have discussed at great length elsewhere (see Glover, "The Consequences of 'Not-Paris'"), Haiti has consistently been understood as radically different from its regional (francophone) neighbors by virtue of its exceptional originary ethos-event. Indeed, the 1804 revolution has left Haiti indelibly marked by a narrative of violence perceived by even the most *sympathetic* scholars as more or less irreconcilable with the literature- and theory-based political struggle of the Antillean overseas departments. Haitian literature scholar Jean Jonassaint has similarly noted the "increasingly frequent"

works from other parts of the (francophone) Americas, Haitian literature has had far less access to the most fundamental benefit of translation—that is, the notion of border-crossing contained in the Latin root *translatus*, defined as that which has been "borne or carried over"—unbound. Given this, it would seem that Haiti's most pressing need—a need that speaks volumes about the presumed viability of regional transcolonialism in the Caribbean—would be to address issues of local belonging before envisioning insertion into a literature-world. In French.

In addition to the problems posed by the Haitian Republic's veritable disavowal[19] by its current New World neighbors and former Old World masters—its literal and metaphorical undertranslation—the nation presents yet another language-related conundrum: its rather ambivalent status as a "French-speaking" country. Indeed, the sole universally spoken language in Haiti is Haitian Creole, and only a small portion of the population has any real functionality or literacy in French.[20] While this minority includes the intellectual elite class to which the country's writers necessarily belong, Franco-literacy is rare among the individuals and communities that these writers often take as their subjects. Moreover, Haiti's long-standing political and economic instability has created a situation whereby its literary culture is largely displaced. Diasporic. An overwhelming number of Haitian writers currently live in "exile" in Europe, Canada, and the United States. They are presented with an embarrassment of linguistic riches. Once again, then, inclusion in *the world* by way of identification with the French language would not necessarily be the obvious choice.

I would like to reflect, finally, on this question of choice as regards both the general premises of "Pour une 'littérature-monde' en français" and the positioning of a particular triumvirate of contemporary Haitian writers with respect to the manifesto. Since founding in 1965 the literary aesthetic they called Spiralism, Haitian writers Frankétienne, Jean-Claude Fignolé, and René Philoctète struggled mightily with the challenge of producing literature that resonates extra-nationally while remaining physically, geographically anchored within the space of Haiti.[21] Resolved not to embark on the path of exile despite the perils of writing under the successive dictatorships of François "Papa Doc" and Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier, the three authors were obliged to write themselves into the world from a position of radical isolation. This physical marginalization left the Spiralists markedly less circulated and translated than their regional French-speaking contemporaries. And although the fall of the Duvalier regime has certainly meant increased awareness of Spiralism in the academy, the fact that the Spiralists

phenomenon by which scholars of the French-speaking Americas "dissociate Haitian writing from Antillean literatures." Jonassaint, "Transnationalism, Multilingualism, and Literature: The Challenge of Caribbean Studies," *Literature and Arts of the Americas* 40, no. 1 (2007): 22.

19 I mean to echo here the title of Sibylle Fischer's masterful analysis of the *silencing* of Haiti's revolution in New World consciousness. See Sibylle Fischer, *Modernity Disavowed: Haiti and the Cultures of Slavery in the Age of Revolution* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).

20 A succinct and nonpolemical analysis of Haiti's linguistic ambivalence can be found in the country study conducted by the United States Library of Congress, http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/httoc.html, "The Language Question: French and Creole" (under chap. 7, "Haiti: The Society and Its Environment") (accessed 1 May 2010).

21 Fearing that leaving Haiti would mean never being granted permission to return, the three Spiralist authors determined to stay in the country despite the consequent physical isolation, censorship, and threat of violence this meant for them as engaged writers.

so little declared themselves and their aesthetic philosophy has left them decidedly undertheorized.[22] It is telling, then, that neither of the two living Spiralist authors figures among the list of signatories of the littérature-monde manifesto. Were Frankétienne and Fignolé asked to join their names to this declaration? The answer to this question is not necessarily of great interest here. Regardless of whether one or both of them were approached, their absence points directly to the issues of in- and exclusion, of auto-canonization and institutional empowerment I evoked earlier. But what is perhaps even more significant is the fact that independent of this manifesto—without having been officially integrated into the "group of forty-four"—the Spiralists have quite vocally wrestled with many of the same issues and identified many of the same objectives as those presented in the manifesto, and for quite some time. Whereas in 2007 the signatories describe a "renewed desire to rediscover the pathways of the world" and a "return to literature's powers of incandescence," a character—a writer—in *Mûr à crever* (1968), Frankétienne's earliest work of prose fiction in French, has the following to say about the current state of literature and about the literature he intends to create:

> The planet has become a jerkin for man's respiration. And now he needs wings to rise up. To conquer the infinite luminous spaces. But literature, that decrepit old man, gets out of breath during the vertiginous ascension. And free-falls terrify him. . . .
>
> . . . And I return to writing like a rebel filled with rage. . . .
>
> . . . The novel is a vision of life. . . .
>
> . . . No sort of fixity should keep the work from breathing fully, which reproduces the accelerations and the unequal spasms of life. . . .
>
> . . . I would like . . . [t]o write a novel-thermometer capable of indicating the temperature of fictional landscapes—to enable the reader to feel their climactic and spatiotemporal variations. . . .
>
> . . . The public will understand. . . . Do you have to be a scholar to know whether the weather is good or bad, if it's night or day, if it's hot out or cold? Everyone knows for certain when it's raining and when the sun is shining.[23]
>
> (La planète est devenue un justaucorps pour la respiration de l'homme. Il lui faut des ailes pour monter. Vaincre les espaces lumineux. Or la littérature, vieillard décrépit, perd son souffle dans la vertigineuse ascension. Et les chutes libres l'effraient. . . .
>
> . . . Et je retourne à l'écriture comme un rebelle plein de rage. . . .
>
> . . . Le roman est une vision de la vie. . . .
>
> . . . Aucun fixisme ne doit entraver la respiration de l'oeuvre qui reproduit les accélérations et les spasmes inégaux de la vie. . . .
>
> . . . Je voudrais . . . [é]crire un roman-thermomètre capable d'indiquer la température des paysages fictifs. Obtenir que le lecteur ressente les variations climatiques et spato-temporelles. . . .

22 In their anthology of Haitian literature, for example, Charles Arthur and J. Michael Dash at once assert the importance of the Spiralist ethic-aesthetic and provide a hint of the reason for its relative exclusion, noting that "within Haiti the only movement with any literary impact was the *ill-defined* [emphasis mine] doctrine of *spiralisme*." *A Haiti Anthology: Libète*. (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1999), 292.

23 Frankétienne, *Mûr à crever* (Port-au-Prince: Mémoire, 1995), 114–18 (translation mine).

> . . . Le publique comprendra. . . . A-t-on besoin d'être grand clerc pour savoir si le temps est beau ou mauvais, s'il fait jour ou nuit, s'il fait chaud ou froid? Tout le monde sait, sans risque d'erreurs, quand il y a de la pluie ou du soleil.)

Originally published nearly four decades before the appearance of "Pour une 'littérature-monde' en français," this passage, which in fact describes the basic premises of the Spiralist aesthetic, vehemently announces the need to renew the relationship between literature and life. Like the signatories of the manifesto, who declare their determination to "rub up against the world in order to capture its very breath, its vital energies," Frankétienne claims that his writings are attached to the world in ways that have been rejected or overlooked by a stale, overly intellectualized European literary milieu.

It is not my intention in evoking the Spiralist authors here to question whether either they or the signatories successfully write this neglected connection between the world and the text. Nor, of course, am I advocating for the replacement of both *francophonie* and *littérature-monde en français* with the term *Spiralism*. I simply want to point out, first, that the intentions put forward in the manifesto are already very much and very explicitly in the world. Second, and perhaps more crucially, I am arguing that manifestos in general risk misrepresenting *belonging* by leaving out important voices; that they are intrinsically and uncomfortably conservative; that they mediate between literature and the world when in fact the simple act of the writer practicing his or her craft is or should be sufficient. Indeed, how can we possibly understand or accept as original and helpful a document that proposes reterritorializing demarcations of *us* and *them*? This is the littérature-monde manifesto's troubling blind spot: its inattention to the fundamentally fraught nature of borders in life and, especially, in art.

Having said all of this, I nevertheless recognize that "Pour une 'littérature-monde' en français" strives sincerely for inclusivity on many levels. Giving the benefit of the doubt to its forty-four signatories, each one of whom has contributed immensely to breaking down oppressive social, cultural, and aesthetic barriers through his or her work, I can certainly appreciate that their collective embracing of the categorical and the strident tone of the manifesto as a genre is deliberately provocative. There is a willingness to do battle here, in the interest of promoting discussion. It is in this spirit that I conclude with some questions that are not, in fact, intended to be rhetorical, and that have been posed from various perspectives by colleagues in the field, in fact largely as a counter to the "Pour une littérature-monde" manifesto. Specifically, if we acknowledge that labels (categories, borders, manifestos, etc.), while perhaps less than satisfying on a conceptual level, serve an important pragmatic function—that they provide contexts and working definitions, if not necessarily for the writer, then for those involved in the production and circulation of literature (critics, publishers, booksellers, academics)—might it not be a more logical though admittedly more challenging project to work toward the rehabilitation of existing categories? That is, perhaps we should do away with the *world* label altogether as a qualifier. After all, it never actually means the whole world, does it? It is impregnated with otherness; it functions as if Europe were somehow not part of the world.

World music provides a fine example of this phenomenon. What if, then, instead of replacing *francophonie* with a suitcase of an expression that is unlikely to prove any more resistant to the pressures of political and cultural bigotry than its predecessor, we were to work toward neutralizing the now so villified category of *francophone literature*? What might be the benefit of insisting that this latter concept be broadened to include the works of Franco-European authors? In other words, what if we were to imagine and insist on semantic expansion rather than allowing differently circumscriptive affiliations to determine the parameters of our world?