



Faire Mondes

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Patrick CHAMOISEAU
FACING VISITS FROM BEAUTY

*A conversation with Dominique Brebion from the Southern Caribbean section
of the International Association of Art Critics*

FAIRE MONDES: I think you have something to say before our conversation begins?

Patrick CHAMOISEAU: Yes, just to clarify a number of things. First, I'm talking here as an artist, so it's the testimonial of a practice and a state of reflection, not a truth I'm trying to impose on anyone. My tone, which is somewhat assertive at times, expresses only a sincere conviction that still struggles with doubt and questioning.

FAIRE MONDES: What do you mean by "the artist"?

P.C.: For me, an artist is someone who works with "matter", "forms" and "forces". His practice aims to bring about in his existence, and above all in what he creates, *visits from Beauty*. The writer is an artist like so many others. His "matter" is languages; his "forms" are narrative bodies where the active principle of knowledge is "language"; the "forces" he confronts are human existential situations explored in "states-of-the-world".

My practice in this field since my teenage years means I am today able to identify what makes up my "toolkit", which is in fact: my "aesthetic". Aesthetics is a science of ways of knowing the sensible and the beautiful, taking account of the presence of the beautiful in human existences, but also, at a practical level, what the artist uses to tackle his art every day, his "toolkit" in a way.

FAIRE MONDES: What is literature?

P.C.: Despite my many years spent on the practice of artistic writing, I still don't know what "literature" is, and even less what "Art" is. I'm still writing to try and understand what it is, to approach its elusive galaxy. I know when literature is there, I know when it's gone somewhere, and when it's absent from a text, I know, I feel it. Nonetheless, I couldn't give an accurate definition of it. That's why I keep on writing. I feel that this impossibility I live with is valid for all areas of Art.

FAIRE MONDES: In what way?

P.C.: Understanding what your art is, for an artist, is a "great desire that remains a desire". This lack and this unfulfilled wanting are what ensure the artist's creative fertility. Each work produced tells the artist about Art in general and about his own art. Each work offers him "perspective lines" and glimpses of the horizon that are still not enough to provide certainty. Each work of Art only serves to intensify the inextricable nature of the mysteries in which we have to live.

However, although works never offer definitive answers in the course of their creation, they teach, they enlighten, they make the artist want to know more, know better. They indicate paths to follow without giving them away. This is how they build up to form what will become the "aesthetic" of the artist concerned in the course of a practice.

Only this aesthetic is made up of more questions than answers, more desires than satisfactions. Any aesthetic of a practice is above all a desire that remains a desire: it keeps on evolving and questioning, which is why all artists create and search throughout their lives.

FAIRE MONDES: How do you define this search?

P.C.: I think all artists are making their way towards an understanding of their own art, towards their irreplaceable quality, that which can't be reduced to anything else, towards their mystery. To do this, they strive to bring about *visits from Beauty*, in their work and through their work. For me, Art questions and problematises itself, as much as it questions and problematises the world.

FAIRE MONDES: What do you mean by "Beauty"?

P.C.: Our relationship with that which exists and its mysteries draws on two intensities. A *prosaic* intensity (drinking, eating, surviving, fleeing, attacking, reproducing, conquering, dominating, etc.); a *poetic* intensity (loving, singing, dancing, marvelling, contemplating, becoming intoxicated, showing solidarity, participating, laughing, living in love, living in dreams, giving life, etc.). Our relationships with Art are on the poetic side. "*Beauty*" is a *poetic path of sensible knowledge of the world*. This path is explosive by nature as it functions in surges.

FAIRE MONDES: What do you mean by a "surge of Beauty"?

P.C.: A surge of Beauty, or one of its visits, is a disruptive explosion that profoundly changes a large proportion of your usual perceptions: perception of what you are and of your relationship with the world. Each great *visit from Beauty* changes our perception of the world and in a way changes the aesthetic of the era, its science and its "beauty standards". The "beauty standards" in force are pushed into the background with each surge of Beauty, which can then (via critics, Art philosophers and individuals' sensibilities) bring new standards to the fore.

Beauty standards are part of what I call "reality", which consists of the dominant perception of our relationship with the existing state of affairs. This perception is made up of various internalisations, of our acquired sense of truth, fairness and beauty... We all live in the bubble of "reality" constituted by our personal history, our culture, our time and our era...

But beyond "reality", I consider that there is the "real". It's unknowable, it includes all the unattainable complexity of that which exists, life, death, matter, the infinity of details in the inexhaustible ocean of acting totalities. *When a visit from Beauty takes place, it's like a flash of lightning that dissipates the horizons of our "reality" to hint at the landscapes in the outside realm of the "real"*.

Anything beautiful is always the result of a historic journey. Beauty is always the beginning of a new story of our sensibility. This is how each visit from Beauty amplifies the bases of our knowledge, renews our knowledge and transforms our ways of living and acting¹. This is why, as Sapiens is a being of knowledge and action, our relationships with Art are as important as our relationships with science or the scientific spirit.

If we remain locked in our "reality" (its idea of beauty, its knowledge, its absolutes, its truths), we very soon become immobilised, both in the amplitudes of our consciousness and in the scope of our action. The "real" must constantly come to complexify, increase, disrupt and feed our "reality" to allow us to find true fulfilment, both individually and collectively.

All of Art history and philosophy reminds us of the path of the surges of Beauty, and the way they've exploded our successive "realities" and restored us to the rejuvenation of the "real".

FAIRE MONDES: Indeed, you say that "Art is at once an exploration, a problematisation and an overcoming of the existing artistic order. An important artist disrupts the aesthetic of his era". Is this process of overcoming accomplished in the visual arts of the Caribbean?

P.C.: To answer that, we need to take a little detour.

The artist is an individual. Not a community, a nation, a country, a school of thought: he is just a special individual because he is (as shamans, quimboiseurs [Antilles term for sorcerer] or wizards used to be) on the uncertain border between a "reality" and the "real". In general, the individual artist suffocates a little in the bubble of "reality" which only expresses one dominant vision, which is why, through the practice of his art, he often leaps into the unknown realms of the vertigo of "reality". He brings back from these salutary leaps "visions" that he turns into "matter", and techniques with which he produces "forms". Forms which are in fact *configurations of forces*.

Every work is a "configuration of forces" which recalls the vision that the artist brought back from the unknown of the "real". The creative gesture that feeds on the "real" is not a reasoned, reasonable and transparent activity. It's a small earthquake of the idea, the obscure and the sensation, during which the artist perceives "things". These "things" are forces because the vision does not reproduce the visible but makes visible, as Paul Klee said, and what we see in artistic visions are

¹ - A visit from Beauty has explosive effects on the sensible mappings of a process of becoming, and this at an intensity that is equivalent, sometimes superior, to those of Love. This is why in every creation, there is a "desire for love" that animates the creator: to love, to be loved, and thus connect with all the presences of the world. In all "desire for Art", whether on the creative side or the receptive side, in all aesthetic stimulation, there is a force of the same order: the formidable need to be fertilised or to fertilise, which has been instilled in us by the laws of life and the imperatives to perpetuate the species. (Notes from the author)

Love given and received is always an expansion of consciousness by the magnificent way of the sensible. (Proofreading notes)

The individual in the process of becoming is filled with "solar sensors of desire" that shimmer, direct themselves, and adjust their intensities according to the various aesthetic stimulations that come from the individual's encounters during his journey in the states-of-the-world. (Notes from the author)

above all forces: twists, tensions and counter-tensions that generally constitute our existential situations and "states-of-the-world". These forces made visible sometimes take on configurations that touch the artist. He then seizes them almost on the fly, sometimes without knowing why or how, and returns to his studio with his haul. He then begins to discover what he's brought back and to turn it into matter and forms. This process of "bringing to light" can be very long, very thoughtful or very instinctive.

When the work is great and powerful, it constitutes *a visit from Beauty* for the artist and for the people of his time, in other words *an extension of knowledge, consciousness, the realms of the sensible and possibilities for action*. Then the whole existing order of the beautiful explodes.

Notebook of a return by Césaire was explosive in that way. *Caribbean Discourse* by Glissant and *Dezafi* by Frankétienne are, too. So are the vegetal forces that Wifredo Lam captured in *The Jungle*. Artistic blows like those struck by the Black-Caribbean School or the Fwomaje group, also. *The White series* by Mr Breleur, too... etc. So, through all these individualities, overcoming has taken place on many occasions and in all art forms.

But to answer your question properly, we have to return to the mystery of Art. It's a protean entity that transcends the categories and other distinctions that have structured us until now, visual arts, living arts...etc. Art is essentially, as I've already said, *an act of knowledge of the real and the world through "matter", "forms" and "forces"*. That's all. We could add "techniques" to that, but I'm not sure: technique is only a conveyor for matter and forms.

From this point of view (matter, forms, forces), Art emerged very quickly in our Caribbean "catastrophic reality". I say "catastrophic reality" because from the point of view of Art, the catastrophe is precious, it disrupts established orders, it constitutes a dire emergency that allows us to consider any "matter", even the most indigent or the most vile; that allows us to envisage, link or combine any "forms", from the most ordinary to the most fantastical; that allows us to take hold of any "forces" and to articulate all possible configurations with them. Catastrophe disrupts the initial maps and opens up the infinite realm of possibilities. This kind of radically open space is where Beauty likes to pay us visits. Therefore, a visit from Beauty is always an aesthetic catastrophe that will put in place a new order of the beautiful and bring about a new "overcoming" as you say.

FAIRE MONDES: Can you explain what you mean by "Caribbean catastrophic reality"?

P.C.: The slave trade, plantation slavery and colonial wrongdoings were refounding blows to the Caribbean and the Americas. Catastrophes. They were at once a point of collapse and a place of emergences. Those crimes established a new order of reality (with its standards of what is fair and beautiful) in which our existential situations had to unfold, and which they of course had to overcome.

FAIRE MONDES: So, is this overcoming accomplished in the visual arts of the Caribbean?

P.C.: In our homeland, Art began immediately. If we think in terms of the usual categories, we had to wait a long time to see what we call "visual arts", as we understand it today, emerging in our histories. The current definition would require us to see in our collective trajectory a kind of artistic "wandering in the wilderness", a long absence of certain categories. But the vision changes if we keep

to the essential. The essential thing for me is that Art is above all an instance of production of *matter-forms-and-forces*.

So you could say it emerged right away!

The body would be its inaugural medium. The body killed on the boat, silently swallowing its tongue, or the one thrown overboard into the jaws of sharks. The body which begins to dance on the plantation and reanimates all human memory, and which calls to the rhythm, striking an artistic blow against the walls of the dominant "realities". Rhythm and dance will call to the singer, who will also strike at the slave-owning, colonial "reality"; then the father of language and literature, the Creole storyteller, will appear, a monster-artist who will endeavour to make visits from Beauty surge forth in the dark night of slavery. If we consider what is essential, *matter-forms-and-forces*, Art was there right away, in a shimmering of infinite facets.

But to come back to the question of accomplishment, what seems important to me is that here, Art was immediately *meta-modern*. It emerged whole, outside of current categories, it multiplied in its irreducible generic form: *matter-forms-forces*. The visual arts (artists, video-makers, photographers, film-makers, etc.) are already in the gesture of the suicidal man on the slave boat or in the structurings of the one who dances, beats a rhythm, or sings and makes language at the same time. There were no signs or symbols yet on our tools, on our calabashes, on the walls of our huts, but Art was already there, and its signs are powerful. *For the sign of the presence of Art is always a proclamation of the very-human and the very-living, of the human in the living, the living in the human*. This is the definition that could be attributed to all the great acts of resistance against slave-trading colonial domination. Our Total Art immediately invalidated the standards in force, including those of beauty, on the boat, on the plantations, and in the face of the protean evolutions of dehumanising colonisation. The immediate, constant and sublimating problematisation of *matter-forms-and-forces* was present even on the boat, and is still present in the arts of the Americas.

In the contemporary world, Art is more and more of a mystery, all the old categories are falling apart, all the categories are interpenetrating. Contemporary Art can emerge from all matter, all forms, all configurations of forces; it problematises all the old instances to innovate constantly, connect constantly, reinvent or sublimate what used to be done; it has a taste for what has never been done, and it can revisit everything that has already been done. In this way, it meets up with our original Art.

One of the dynamics showing the instantaneous contemporaneity of our initial Art is that it was immediately "individual". The quimboiseur, the dancer, the tanbouyé, the singer and storyteller, the suicide or the brown negro, have always been individuals confronted with this appalling tension between "slavery reality" and the "real". They were fundamentally loners who had to improvise their art (or we might say: their resistance) using any means necessary. But as their issue was resistance and rehumanisation through the living, in the living, they were immediately in solidarity with everyone. When one of them managed to trigger a *visit from Beauty*, it represented a humanising step forward for each of them individually and all of them at the same time.

This aesthetic phenomenon, which can be summed up by "connect-associate-revisit-overcome-make-use-of-all-matter-forms-and-forces", can be found all over the Americas, including the Caribbean. This is our initial hallmark. Therefore, this is the most important thing: the fact of having

emerged in an existential catastrophe means that the artist of the Americas and the Caribbean, when he is powerful, is immediately an "artist of Relation".

FAIRE MONDES: What do you mean by "artist of Relation"?

P.C.: The existential catastrophes of the slave trade, plantation slavery and colonisation triggered unprecedented relational flows between cultures and civilisations in the world. These flows (which can be summarised by the term "Relation"), allowed individuals to escape from the communal "diktat-realities". The community defined its Beauty standards, its signs and symbols, and the artist in his community often served the continuity of the community. He enabled it to gradually expand its borders with the "real" by enriching everyone's imagination and helping beauty, signs and symbols to evolve. Although he was solitary, an artist could still be defined by his community, his skin, his god, his territory, etc., by all the old identity markers.

Relation changed everything.

Communities split because of the flows of inter-retro-actions instituted (by force or by desire) between cultures, civilisations, peoples and individuals. Individuation has become a determining equation for understanding the contemporary world. The individual no longer inherits a ready-to-wear existential garment. Like oysters and spider conches, he must secrete his own "shell" through an irreducible and singular alchemy: that of his open experience in these inter-retro-active relational flows that Glissant calls *Whole-World*.

So for me, Relation is the soul of contemporary art.

The realities that the artist-individual must overcome are no longer community-based, but are to be found in the uncertain, the unpredictable, even the unthinkable aspects of the relational flows that make up his era and the world. "Living-in-relation" has nothing to do with "community-living-together": one chooses one's place, one's allegiances, one's struggles, one's dreams and one's actions, and this solely according to one's experience in the world. It's like living under the open sky but without a sky, without a top, without a bottom and without a horizon, and yet constructing oneself in the most highly human, most highly alive way possible. Each of us, each individual, must construct ourselves in Relation, each of us needs the *world-food and a life-celebrating sensibility*. Among these world-foods, forming the basis for this life-celebrating sensibility, are aesthetic stimulations. The *visits from Beauty* are the vastest aesthetic stimulations imaginable: they are irreplaceable and determining.

FAIRE MONDES: Whereas nations hitherto excluded from the international Art market, such as China, India and Africa, made a remarkable entry onto the market at the beginning of the 2000s, the Caribbean has not yet been spotted there as such, even though individual artists such as Télémaque, Allora and Calzadilla, and Kcho are present there. How would you explain this situation with the visual arts whereas some Caribbean writers and musicians are internationally renowned?

P.C.: In Relation, all the community realities and their absolutes have been mixed up; the sacred and the taboos have broken down and are being put together again in an unpredictable way; the ancient imaginaries are no more than springs that flow into an unpredictable river made up of

individual experiences. Although it might have been easy to shake up norms in a community, it's much less so when you find yourself as an artist-individual on the great stage of the world. What characterises this great stage is that all the doors, all the walls, all the canons of beauty have already been battered down or problematised. Contemporary art no longer belongs to a community or a geographical area: it's in the process of becoming in the matter of the world, it's essentially and fundamentally seen through solitary-solidary journeys.

So, whether he's an artist or an ordinary person, what happens in the world of Relation is the achievement of an individual in Relation, not of a community, a geographical area, a territory, or a school. In my opinion, it's now a question, not of "Caribbean art", or of "art of the Americas" (even if from a pedagogical or didactic point of view, these configurations still need to be established and explored): *it's about the art of the Relation of the detail to the whole, and of everything to everything.* The Caribbean way of being in the world was immediately of great relational modernity, and all this is disseminated today by individual trajectories in Relation. A contemporary artist today only counts and has value in the relational matter of the world. Not in his skin, not in his history, not in his root territoriality, but in *his way of bringing about visits from Beauty in the determining issues of our existential situations and of the countless "states-of-the-world" that traverse us.*

Nowadays, nothing eludes the countless states-of-the-world. They are what constitute the determining artistic context; all the rest belongs to the "small contexts" or "secondary contexts" – although these must absolutely not be neglected. Why? Because "Place" is unavoidable, as Glissant said. Only "Place" is an individual construction. It's bigger than the native land, the region, the homeland, the nation, the root, it's a geographical, cultural, sentimental, affective, aesthetic and, frankly, hazardous construction that results from the trajectory of individuals in the relational flows of the world. We all build up our "Place". The "Place" of an artist is made of everything we love and that touches us in the world. And the most dizzying thing is that the "Place" that our artistic individuations inhabit is now augmented by formidable virtual extensions in the digital ecosystem.

The full meaning of an artistic work is given to us only in Relation; the small contexts can illuminate certain edges, certain flashes or certain key elements, but *it's Relation alone that can give us its power.* That's why *visits from Beauty* are happening less and less in small contexts or in secondary contexts. So there's no point looking for the presence of the Caribbean entity in the world, however you can try and guess the unexpected families of artist-individuals that are intertwined with it².

² - In contemporary reality, "artistic overcoming" takes place at a global level more than a local level. Caribbean artists who have managed to "overcome" their reality have opened themselves up to the world in a way, they've opened up their experience to the world. And this experience will go off into the matter of the world to touch other artistic experiences in the process of becoming, wherever they are. The individuation in which the contemporary artist finds himself means that his "overcomings" cannot change anything about the local situation, but they can fertilise any other artist anywhere in the world. This is why a great artist may not have local descendants but can have sons and brothers anywhere in the world. The Caribbean produces artistic individuations and works that go off into the matter of the world, but there is no longer a contemporary entity that could be called "Caribbean art". Artistic brotherhoods and filiations are now made according to the individual imagination of the artists, that is to say the modalities of the aesthetic they implement in the face of the only great artistic challenges that are worthwhile: *our existential situations in the matter of the world perceived as a whole.* It's more useful to try and draw the relational tree of an artist in the matter of the world, than to anchor him in a region and force him into an ethno-geographical box. (Notes from the author)

FAIRE MONDES: In spite of everything, do you think that the new, the unexpected, the unpredictable combination, likely to favour the recognition of Caribbean art outside its borders, will be carried by alternative initiatives by artists' collectives on a self-organised basis?

P.C.: In Relation, anything is possible. Artists can organise themselves according to a similar trajectory, a shared history, a common territory, a phenotypic solidarity... everything is possible! But what makes the most powerful brotherhoods is given by *the structures of imagination*, that is to say by the ethical and aesthetic relationship that's conducted in the face of the multiple challenges posed by the current states-of-the-world! It's at that level that it's happening! Relational brotherhoods are erratic, unexpected, even unthinkable. Télémaque's relational tree, not his family tree, is vast. Breleur's tree has endless branches. The relational canvas of a major artist immediately shrinks if you look for his aesthetic family only in his native land, in his region of origin.

FAIRE MONDES: In your latest book, "Le conteur, la nuit et le panier", you say the artist must confront a fundamental catastrophe in order to be able to create on a blank canvas. But how do the artist and the catastrophe come to meet each other: must the artist learn how to discern the catastrophe that's been imposed on him/her? What catastrophes are young artists currently facing?

P.C.: I think the catastrophe principle is the basis of creation. In my book, I talk about something every Caribbean knows: cyclones awaken existence, awaken nature, trigger a profusion of flowers and fruit in their wake. Among human beings, they provoke collapses mixed with thousands of new possibilities.

If we carry over this principle of the disruption that opens us up to all possibilities (to the point of opening up to the unthinkable, which is the ultimate matrix of all possibilities), we can say that the slave trade, slavery and colonisation in general can be considered as "existential catastrophes". They disrupted the old order of the world, which until then was organised into community-based absolutes. They shattered millions of people around the world, spattered all the continents, all the islands, all the archipelagos with them. These catastrophes also changed the people who brought them about.

One might have thought that the artists who were to appear, resist and sublimate these monstrosities, had a kind of "immense blank page", a page free of all the absolutes and standards of the old communities, and that they would be able to unleash limitless possibilities in their creations. Alas: *existential catastrophes immediately fill up the pages they've cleared!* The racist order, the invention of the bestial negro, white pre-eminence, the domination of the Western project, the annihilation of Africa, etc., immediately filled the page, the canvas, the scores, bodies and minds. Our proto-artists then had to "resist" in the determining sense, in other words not accept anything that had been done with them and thus clear the page once again. This came down to problematising the magic triangle *of matter, forms and forces* to death. It's this extraordinary problematisation that I call an "aesthetic catastrophe".

To truly create, the artist must overturn all the aesthetic and even ethical standards that the dominant order, the dominant idea of beauty has made rigid within him. This creative catharsis is

achieved through *an internal emotional cataclysm* (you could also say: an emotional enthusiasm) where idea and sensation, body and mind, concept and poecept, enter into total "dys-fusional" effervescence. This emotional flash of lightning allows the artist to take his leap into the unknown of the "real" where everything becomes possible again. So the artist is by definition a great emotional athlete. *An enthusiast of the sensible and of the idea!* It takes great courage to see this through, but from what I understand, *visits from Beauty* like courageous artists. *All great artists are giants of aesthetic courage.*

FAIRE MONDES: Do "existential catastrophes" never favour creation?

P.C.: They drive people to extremes, shatter absolutes and make things possible, but they are not enough in themselves. Many great artists have been suffering incarnate, but it wasn't their suffering that made them what they became, rather what they were able to do with it. Our existential catastrophes, although they refounded the Americas and the Caribbean, were not enough either. They in fact created flows of subordinate relationships, of "putting-under-relation" ("mise-sous-relation"), which formed the terrible and non-virtuous basis for the unpredictable and extraordinary aspects of "Relation". The problem of our existences as Caribbean artists, American Creole artists, was how to go from "putting-under-relation" to "putting-in-relation". "Relation" in itself has no morals, it can strike you with the dominating, destructuring and sterile negative of "putting-under-relation", or it can allow you to experience the unpredictable splendour and richness of "putting-in-relation". "Putting-under-relation" is dealt as a blow that can be annihilating; "putting-in-relation" is a long and slow creation of oneself in the world and the world in oneself, of oneself in the living and the living in oneself, so it's a magnificent construction. The creative gesture in the Caribbean and the Americas was central to this issue, and this issue is now central to the world.

On the other hand, it was perhaps due to their refounding existential catastrophes that the arts of the Americas and the Caribbean were immediately "meta-modern". A modernity that recapitulates and overtakes all modernities. Our proto-artists emerged after an existential catastrophe that disrupted the whole world and in spite of everything, they had to trigger within themselves a new catastrophe — aesthetic this time — not only to oppose oppression but to assert a new way of being human and inhabiting a world in the process of becoming, a way of realigning oneself in the living world.

It was a prodigious foundry!

Like I said, they began with their own bodies, that was all they had! They continued by making use of all matter, even the most unimaginable, all media, connecting all forms, accumulating, mixing, sublimating them... A whole culture of resistance which is in fact eminently creative because it draws on the riches and shadows of countless cultures and civilisations. Examples are often reductive, but it puts me in mind of the quimbois, symbolic, magical, mystical and religious constructions that people used to place at crossroads or in front of churches. For me, they are unexpected artistic constructions. For many of our countrymen, contemporary art produces the same effect as a quimbois; I experienced it personally in Saint-Pierre with the "totems" we offered!

Jazz is a perfect example of this meta-modern artistic spirit I'm talking about. Nobody can really define jazz. We only know that it's a form without form, matter without matter, an open power,

and that it can summon all matter, all forms, all the sonic, rhythmic, melodic, harmonic forces of the world, passing them on in this aesthetic catastrophe represented by individualities improvising in the oceanic earthquakes of polyrhythm! This is to some extent the active principle of the arts of the Americas and the Caribbean, and in fact it's the active principle of the aesthetics of the contemporary world...

FAIRE MONDES: As an individual, how does the contemporary artist construct the matter of Art in the complexity of the world today?

P.C.: Individuation is the most determining dynamic of Relation. The first art was community-based. The artist — and his source: the sorcerer — were installed on the border between the "community reality" and the "real", committed to sublimating the community's beauty standards by opening them up to disruptive *visits from Beauty*. Archaic and post-archaic communities thus fuelled their processes of becoming with aesthetic simulations. In his individuation process, the individual needs skills, knowledge, but also experience; the experience of the other feeds my own experience sensibly and almost immediately. A work of Art is an "experience" that is precious for my own experience before the "real" of the world, and this encounter (if vast) can transform or touch the individual at equivalent intensities.

On the other hand, in Relation, the artist-individual is enriched by all the histories and proto-histories of Art, all the doors that were open until that point, all the walls that have now been battered down. Contemporary consciousnesses are no longer autotelic, as closed in on absolutist rigidities as before. The "avant-garde" are obliged to resort to provocation in order to give the impression that they are overturning something or innovating, but provocation is based on raw and immediate emotion, a kind of empty mechanism that merely mimics the unpredictable upheavals of knowledge that a *visit from Beauty brings about*. On the contrary, the latter mobilises the slow, subtle, deep and complex emotional forces that are conducive to "unveiling".

Creating is infinitely difficult when there are no summary or crude prohibitions to overturn; you can't open a door that's already been opened, nor break down walls that have already collapsed: this is the whole problem and the awesome challenge of contemporary art. You can still easily be "creative" (come up with little tricks with matter, forms and anecdotal forces) but it's infinitely difficult to be a "creator" (trigger a *visit from Beauty*).

Moreover, the contemporary world is subject to neo-liberal forces that damage individuations by dedicating them to the sterile selfishness and self-centredness of consumption, competition and purchasing power. Because of this, the Art world is under the control of a commercial ecosystem with a whole galaxy of critics, biennials, museums and galleries that sanctify its codes, laws, legitimacies and values, a system that almost floats above ground, that the ordinary person looks at from below and from afar as one would from an alien planet. The "creatives" romp about in this world; the "creators" stand on the side-lines, tormented by the unanswerable question: *What is Art? What is my art?* For me, the answer to these questions lies in *the imaginary of Relation*, and this imaginary is available to all artists.

FAIRE MONDES: How can we define such an imaginary?

P.C.: In Relation, each individual ejected from the community shell finds himself in a process of individuation. If this process is damaged or perverted, the result is a selfish, egocentric, rigid individual who cares only about his own interests and his power to buy and consume; on the artist's side, the result is a "creative" who is busy selling and following trends, sometimes engaging in provocations that excite the galleries.

If individuation is achieved, if the individual fully realises himself, he becomes what I call a "Person". That is to say, a solitary human being who is nonetheless rich in what his community of origin has given him, while being open to all the riches and possibilities brought into play by the relational flows of the Whole-World. The "Person" is in fact a very flexible, very open individual, capable of living in the unpredictable, uncertain and even unthinkable realms of Relation. He's not afraid of endless "becoming", and doesn't seek refuge in the identity-based, technical, racial, religious or symbolic comforts of old communities. On the artist's side, the emergence of a "Person" gives us a "creator".

The contemporary artist (who is therefore first and foremost an individual) must construct himself as a "Person" in the relational matter of the world. This means he finds himself offered, through knowledge or intuition, to all the proto-histories and histories of Art that have crossed paths with homo sapiens' consciousness. It can be said that the "creator" works in the presence of all types of "matter", those already used and those not yet used, all conceivable media and "forms", all configurations of "forces" likely to open up unknown paths towards the unthinkable of the "real" and to clear the way for *visits from Beauty!* Added to this are all the possibilities offered by the dizzying acceleration of digital technology, techno-science and bio-nano-technologies.

It's magnificent, but it's also terrifying!

The contemporary artist must more than ever be without illusion, almost in a state of enchantment-disenchantment about what Art is, and what its functions would be. And it's there he discovers that even in this hostile and radically new ecosystem, *Art remains essential!*

The imaginary of Relation puts us in the process of becoming, and it's this process of becoming that creates, among individuals (who are themselves becoming), deep-seated brotherhoods and shared places for thought and action. The contemporary collective cement (which is not essentially community-based) comes from sharing the imaginary of Relation; it allows each individual to be fulfilled while remaining in a process of "becoming"; to build a fertile solitude in a shared and solidary way. That's why I think *aesthetic stimulations can be considered as catalysts of Relation*. They elect in each of us, not fixities but truly "becomings", and they turn the individuation processes into creative archipelagic groups.

The most fertile thing within a "creator" is always and firstly a great desire for a *visit from Beauty*. This is enough to start his process of "becoming". The forms that will surge forth from the *matter* and *forces* that he uses are imbued with this desire for Beauty which cannot fail to become permanent. In a piece of work by a "creator", it's this tension which creates those enigmatic flashes that will touch individuals capable of remaining in a state of "becoming" in front of his works. They share this "movement in the unknown" which the "creator" has experienced.

FAIRE MONDES: How do we distinguish the "creative" from the "creator"?

P.C.: The "creative" is well adapted to his era and functions "in" and "for" the dominant Art world; if he doesn't succeed in this, he spends his time desiring it endlessly. His work is a production (sometimes pretty, sometimes nice) that remains outside of him, that doesn't really change him, doesn't broaden the bases of his consciousness or sensibility, doesn't allow him to trigger a real *visit from Beauty among us*. It just allows him to perform well in the dominant Art superstructure.

The "creator" is an artist-individual whose individuation tends towards fulfilment or has been a fulfilled as a "Person". He is an artistic entity who is both solitary (he constructs himself in the world through his work and his work constructs him in the world) and solidarity-conscious (he is aware of the challenges, stakes, struggles, accelerations, shadows and lights of his era and of the states-of-the-world). To do this, he has access to *prosaic* knowledge (science or enlightened intuitions) but at a deeper level, he resorts to the *poetic* in order to constantly broaden, strengthen, and complexify the bases of his consciousness, the extent of his relationships with the all-possible of the world, to live as a better human in the detail and in the whole of the living world, etc. It's because he "realises" himself as a human being in the world that he produces a work that "realises" him in the world.

So we need to bear in mind that in the contemporary world, the ordinary individual is a *process that is becoming* and functions like the living world, in other words he needs to fertilise and be fertilised by all possible modes of knowledge, starting with the sensible vertigo of aesthetic knowledge. In order for the individuals of our time to be able to truly be fulfilled as "Persons", cultural policies, pedagogies, art critics, innovative places are needed... in fact, the creation of a public ecosystem favourable to "encounters" with the works of Art is needed. Cultural policy must ensure that these "encounters", these aesthetic stimulations, allow individuals, in their unpredictable and singular experience of the world, to find the resources, impacts and structurings that contribute in the richest and broadest possible way to their fulfilment as "Persons".

The artist is in the same position.

The progression of his work triggers in him aesthetic stimulations, *visits from Beauty*, which construct him, structure him, elevate him, enlarge him, and finally enable him to become a "Person". *The "creator" constructs himself in his "encounter" with his own work*. It enlightens him about himself and the world, without giving it all away. What happens between the "creator" and his own work continues among the individuals who come into contact with his output. As the fertilising phenomenon has existed between the "creator" and the work, it is very likely to be reproduced between his output and those who come into contact with it. As often as possible, therefore, the ordinary individual must make contact with the works of Art whose stimulations will enable him to construct himself in the world and construct the world in himself. Yet it's only the individual open to "becoming" who "encounters". One who has hardened himself against becoming never "encounters" anything.

The aesthetic stimulation, the resulting experience, allows both the arrangement of an individual singularity and the setting in motion of a "becoming" whose principle can be shared, and which thereby creates solidarity. *People come together in openness*.

FAIRE MONDES: You say it's futile trying to explain a work of visual art completely. You favour aesthetic and emotional impact over artistic contextualisation and conceptual deconstruction. Do you mean there's no point in art criticism and outreach work by museums and art centres?

P.C.: The contemporary individual, unlike his community counterpart, is a living process that will come into contact with the works of the artists of his time, who are themselves living processes. It all happens at two levels, in the artist's "encounter" with his own work, then (if the contact is fruitful) in the ordinary individual's "encounter" with that work.

The quality of the artist's "encounter" with his own work is linked to the artist's ambition, the dimensions of his consciousness, his ability to draw on the imaginary of Relation. Cultural policies must therefore help budding artists to become genuine creators.

But these policies must above all favour and amplify "encounters" between ordinary individuals and works of Art, across all eras. These "encounters" need to be very numerous, fertile, structuring, sublimating. They must enable individuals not only to broaden their sensibilities, their bases of knowledge and awareness, but also and above all to increase their ability to remain fluid, open, available for all unpredictable transformations. The "Person", a permanent meta-form, is a power in the process of becoming, it's always learning, feeling and increasing, it's endlessly and consciously "becoming" in Relation.

Therefore, faced with a work of Art, the individual needs no explanation. To explain a work is to fix it in an interpretation. Criticism must simply give us a taste for lengthy contemplation, for returning to the work often, suspending any immediate interpretation, being open and available in front of what remains a fertilising mystery. Good criticism gives me the tools to welcome this alchemy unlike any other, unique every time, which occurs between us and the works of Art with which we come into contact. It helps us to be capable, not of "understanding" them but of *experiencing them in a state of availability*, making them into an existential dynamic, which means: *encountering* them!

That's what's at stake.

Art criticism, cultural policies, museum apparatuses and all those things that have yet to be invented, must organise educational and creative ecosystems, aiming to ensure that contacts between individuals and works of Art can reach, in mystery and unpredictability, the highest degree of creative and interactive fertility that the "encounter" allows. They have to act on creation as well as reception. What happens in the "encounter" between an individual and a work of Art cannot be decided in advance, which is why explanation is futile; *it's the most sensitive, open and unpredictable part of the individual that will turn the contact with the work into an "encounter", a structuring individual event*. The critic has to stand aside in the face of this phenomenon. On the other hand, he can stimulate the open, questioning part of the individual to the maximum, and enjoy what will or will not happen. In the face of contemporary Art, "encounters" (adherences or rejections) are completely erratic, singular, and (unlike community reception) they only find collective adherences in an archipelagic mode, *a family of subjectivities*.

FAIRE MONDES: So what happens if the "encounter" with a work doesn't happen, there's no impact, no emotional dynamic?

P.C.: I experience this phenomenon all the time with contemporary art. Many works leave me unmoved, even more so when I read all the explanations the artists give in profusion, as if they didn't really trust their work.

I don't think you can "encounter" everything.

There are great works of literature that have never touched me, important authors who haven't moved me; I know what the educational discourse says of them but there has been no "encounter".

My first reading of Césaire's *Journal* was obscure and simply magical, it directly made an obscure emotional impact. My first encounter with *Malemort* by Glissant was a violent rejection; today it's a key work in my experience as an artist. On the other hand, Saint John Perse, Faulkner and Villon took a while to reach me, yet now they're crucial to me. With Breleur, *the White period* moves me deeply, and still nourishes me, yet many of his other series leave me cold, although I've read tonnes of explanations about them...

Therefore, what matters most is that as many people as possible have as much contact as they can with works of Art. Contact is an opportunity to "encounter", it's necessary but not sufficient. Critical discourses, even those of the "creator" himself, must prepare them for this, encourage them, accompany them, bring them to "live in Art", encourage them to want to listen to what a work says, although it will remain inaudible, out of reach anyway. To nurture a "contact" who remains open and available, you don't really need to explain, *you need to inspire desire*. Explanation doesn't clear the way for any "encounter", it just places a blanket of silence over the work³.

FAIRE MONDES: What are these "possibilities" that arise when an aesthetic stimulation has occurred and has brought about an "encounter"?

P.C.: They may be virtualities already sketched out in the questioning of the individual in the process of becoming, or unexpected desires that emerge from new horizons, glimmers of perspectives that suddenly become fireflies in the night. Illuminations, surges, unveiling, but also opacification, complexifications, disturbances and strangenesses, erasures that suddenly transform customary landscapes of sensations, emotions, feelings or ideas. Unexpected, sudden, a-rational desires. New-found enthusiasms. But fundamentally: an expansion of consciousness and a not always explicable reconnection to the joy of life and enthusiasm.

FAIRE MONDES: We're emerging from the strange and disturbing pandemic period, slowly and with difficulty. We've all experienced an extreme form of physical isolation and often had to find alternative modes of human interaction. How might this affect our understanding of what it is to be human, particularly regarding the interaction between the individual and the community, and by extension between the local and the global? And what impact could this unprecedented experience have on artistic creation and the experience of the work of art?

P.C.: The pandemic above all revealed our existential emptiness. We've realised how much our individuations are damaged by neo-liberal values, and how, in our process of finding fulfilment as a "Person", we have to get rid of capitalism, its principles, its values, its markets and its economy. It's a

³ - What is most determining in a work of Art is not what we "understand" but what has happened in our "encounter" with it, which concerns our becoming in ourselves and in the matter, forms and forces of the world. The "encounter" is in itself a process, it unfolds immediately or in the slowness and detours of the deferred, whether conscious or subconscious. (Notes from the author)

political process. Only the great human politics have always been inaugurated by poetic people, and by their aesthetic stimulations. *So the pandemic revealed to us that we eminently need Art in our individual constructions.*

That said, as the virus reminded us, there is no longer an "elsewhere", therefore no more "local" or "global". We're immediately in touch with the totality of the world. The "creator" is forced to live in an inextricable tension between "local" and "global", with the two fertilising and overcoming each other, and thus cancelling each other out. You could simply say the "creator" lives in "Relation". His "Place" is in inter-retro-action with all the "Places" in the world. His brotherhoods, his families, his evolving alliances, are given to him by the structurings of his imagination in the face of the fundamental challenges which are ours and which eminently determine the relevance of contemporary art.

For me, these challenges are as follows:

1- The collapsed natural ecosystem, and the need to reorganise the way we exist in the living world.

2 – The urban ecosystem that is becoming a determining factor in our lives, thinking and actions.

3 - The digital ecosystem and artificial intelligence that force us to ask ontological questions about the essence of the human being and the possibility of Art.

4 - The nano-techno-scientific ecosystem that is going to disrupt all the modalities of our lives at great speed, and change all our principles of creation.

5 - The cosmic ecosystem that will become more and more present in our imaginations until it profoundly changes them and changes our creative dynamics.

These entities are inseparable and in constant inter-retro-action. We have to consider them in their details and in their indefinable whole. An incredible complexity that establishes Art as one of the precious forces of knowledge. Outside of these entities there are, in my opinion, only small and secondary contexts that cannot achieve the full meaning of a contemporary work.

This, in my experience as an artist, is what the contemporary creator is faced with. The whole problem lies in finding out how to learn to construct oneself as a "Person", in the unthinkable of all these entities, and how to trigger powerful *visits from Beauty* there.

Interview by Dominique Brebion. July 2021

. **Patrick CHAMOISEAU.** Born in 1953, in Fort-de-France, Martinique. He is the author of a considerable body of work (*Texaco*, *Solibo magnifique (Solibo Magnificent)*, *Éloge de la créolité (In Praise of Creoleness)*, *Écrire en pays dominé*, *Antan d'enfance (Childhood)*, *Biblique des derniers gestes*, *Les neuf consciences du Malfini ...*) consisting of novels, folktales, essays and unclassifiable texts, translated into several languages which have earned him numerous awards, including the Prix Carbet de la Caraïbe and the Prix Goncourt. His latest books published at the Éditions du Seuil in 2017 are the unanimously critically acclaimed « *La Matière de l'absence* », a flamboyant humanistic and poetic appeal called « *Frères migrants* », and most recently « *Le conteur, la nuit et le panier* ». Today, he is one of the most influential writers in the Caribbean and a major contemporary writer.

