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Parasitic Reproduction: Recording the Female in the Early Works of Patrick Chamoiseau

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PARASITIC REPRODUCTION: RECORDING THE FEMALE IN THE EARLY WORKS OF PATRICK CHAMOISEAU

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In *Solibo Magnifique* (1988), Patrick Chamoiseau's narrator-ethnographer comes to the following realization: "Je n'étais plus dans ce marché qu'une sorte de parasite, en béatitude stérile" (44). His successful integration into the market environment of the *djobeurs*, his object of study, has caused him to become "sterile"—immersed in their world, he is unable to maintain the critical distance necessary to observe, and thus is no longer capable of producing writing. This failure extends to his tape recorder, the accompanying scientific instrument that appears to have lost its capacity or desire to observe the other, which the narrator refers to as: "cet isalop de magnétophone dont l'enregistrement depuis mon arrivée ne s'intéressait qu'à son propre souffle trop clairement bronchitique" (45). With the guidance and prodding of an old-school *conteur*, *Solibo Magnifique*, Chamoiseau's "tragic caricature" of an ethnographer (Kullberg 106) transforms into a full-fledged *Marqueur de paroles*, whose writing draws from oral tradition to produce *oraliture*. By the following novel, *Texaco* (1992), the tape recorder is also meant to have evolved from its previous status as an imperial tool of empirical study and reproduction, to a medium whose new aesthetic potential is explored and manipulated in the service of *oraliture*. And yet, we find the narrator still using the same unreliable tape recorder to record his new subject of study: Marie-Sophie Laborieux, a female *conteuse*.

The evolving relationship between recording technology, gender, and sound explored by Chamoiseau in these two early novels warrants further investigation. Since he explicitly frames his ethnographer as a "parasite," I propose to turn to an earlier work by French philosopher Michel Serres, *Le Parasite* (1980), to tease out their points of intersection. Drawing from the polysemy of the word "parasite" in French, Serres seeks to demonstrate the intrinsic relation between the three meanings of the word (the biological microbe, the figurative social leech, and the static or interference on a channel of communication), arguing that they execute parallel functions in a system. These three figures find direct parallels in Chamoiseau's novels, through the constellation of the female body, the ethnographer, and the tape recorder. This article thus proposes to use Serres's theorization of the parasite to posit the tape recorder as a site of renegotiation between *oraliture* and gender in *Solibo Magnifique* and *Texaco*.

If the shared use of the term "parasite" serves as our point of departure, there are two further reasons why Serres's philosophy is especially relevant to the representation of gender and technology in the works of a postcolonial Francophone Caribbean writer such as Chamoiseau. First, Serres defines the

original host(ess) as female: “Elle est l’hôtesse universelle du parasite universel” (387), with the human fetus as the original “protean parasite” (413). His subsequent use of the fables of Jean de La Fontaine to illustrate the fundamental role of the social parasite in the logic of colonial and postcolonial hospitality therefore carries significant implications for the female body within the historical space of the French Caribbean.¹ The comparison of Serres and Chamoiseau is mutually beneficial: Serres helps us identify and articulate new gendered differences in Chamoiseau’s work, and the specific postcolonial context of Martinique exemplifies Serres’s theories in a more cohesive way.

Second, Serres uses these intertwining parasitic figures to elaborate a theory of relation, which he illustrates through the third incarnation of the parasite, noise. Although Serres’s text appeared in 1980, just one year before Édouard Glissant’s first elaboration of his “poétique de la relation” in *Le discours antillais* (1981), there is no evidence of any collaboration between the two philosophers, and the potential overlap in their theories of relation remains unexplored. In 1990, Glissant defines Relation in *Poétique de la relation* as the irreducible singularity or difference of the Other during a nonhierarchical form of exchange. He conceptualizes this irreducible difference through the concept of opacity, which challenges the imagined transparency of Relation. Along the same vein, the co-authors of the *Éloge de la créolité* asserted their right to opacity as follows: “Notre plongée dans la Créolité ne sera pas incommunicable mais elle ne sera non plus pas totalement communicable. Elle le sera avec ses opacités, l’opacité que nous restituons aux processus de la communication entre les hommes” (Bernabé et al. 53-54). For Serres, there is no such thing as a perfect and immediate relation; such perfection would effectively erase any and all relational aspect. Instead, he defines relation as mediation, which, he argues, is necessarily imperfect and cannot exist without parasites (32)—“des pertes, des obstacles, des opacités” (30). Serres therefore defines the third figure of the parasite, noisy interference, as the essence of relation: “Il est l’être de la relation, il en procède, et elle procède aussi de lui. Ses rôles ou ses avatars sont fonction de la relation, la relation en est fonction, en causalité circulaire, en loupes de feed-back” (117). Paradoxically, the “noisy” parasite is at once the condition of possibility of relation, and the external actor that threatens to disrupt relation, or the condition of its impossibility.

Serres’s emphasis on mediation is productive for shedding light on the obscured role of the tape recorder within Chamoiseau’s novels. Apart from Helmut Rumpf’s article on “Technology-Based Orality,” which focuses on Glissant’s concept of the relational poetics of the internet (267), very little critical attention has been paid to the consequences of using technology to mediate orality. On the one hand, Chamoiseau has advocated for an audiovisual future of *oraliture*. In *Texaco*, the narrator expresses the conviction that technology announces a new horizon for the coexistence of speech and writing: “Il m’était de plus en plus sensible que l’audio-visuel offrait de nouvelles chances à l’oraliture, et permettait d’envisager une civilisation articulée sur l’écriture et la parole” (496). The tape recorder certainly seems to offer a solution to the “erosion of voice” instigated by writing, and lamented by his fictional characters. On the other hand, the tape recorder that appears in *Solibo Magnifique* and *Texaco* is effaced

as a tool that merely serves writing, rather than preserving and disseminating *oraliture* in its own right. This attitude towards technology is evidenced by Chamoiseau's own writing process: if the author has claimed that he "writes with his ear,"² this includes (re)listening to personal field recordings of *conteurs* taken in Sainte-Marie in 1988. In critical writings and personal interviews, he explains that this aided his study of the formal economies of oral narrative, as well as strategies of dissimulation or "opacifying" his expression: "Je les écoute et je les enregistre aussi souvent que cela m'est possible. [. . .] Et je les écoute moins pour entendre ce qu'ils disent que pour savoir *comment et pour quels effets* ils le disent" ("Que faire" 155-56). As he does not intend to publish the original audio,³ Chamoiseau has thus employed sound reproduction technology in a manner reminiscent of the ethnographers of the early recording era.⁴ I will show how the tape recorder—be it fictional or real, foregrounded or obscured—imposes new paradigms of linearity, fidelity, and uniqueness upon narrative form and vocal transmission, which are in turn coded as either male or female in Chamoiseau's work. If Serres's metaphor of the feedback loop appears to overlap nicely with Chamoiseau's tape recorder, a shift in focus to the act of listening exposes the limits of their compatibility by revealing divergent implications of technology in their work.

Disrupting Linearity

In *Texaco*, the male *Marqueur de paroles* calls attention to the task of correcting and re-ordering female speech. He highlights the ways in which he re-orders "la parole errante de l'Informatrice" (268), at times consulting her notebooks to "rectify" her occasional omissions or contradictions (494), and elsewhere meticulously labeling his interview to facilitate further edits, "car l'Informatrice ne racontait rien de manière linéaire. Elle mélangeait les temps, les hommes et les époques" (495). One could argue that Marie-Sophie is simply echoing her father's own non-linear discourse: "*Il n'avait jamais raconté son histoire de manière linéaire. Il avançait en tracée tournoyante, sorte de bois-flot chevauchant des raz de souvenirs*" (256; my emphasis). The description of Esternome's storytelling directly echoes the above passage, with one crucial difference. His nonlinear narrative is described as a "tracée," the term proposed by Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant in *Lettres créoles* (1991) to refer to the infinite, tiny paths that deviated from the straight colonial routes and their predatory function, which they claim "témoignent d'une spirale collective que le plan colonial n'avait pas prévue" (13). The fact that these paths are tied to the *marron*, or runaway slave, subsumes the *tracée* into the male lineage and trajectory of *oraliture*. Marie-Sophie is denied the agency of consciously applying such rhetorical strategies to the stories she relates. Instead, as Maeve McCusker suggests, her authority as a *conteuse* is consistently undercut by forgetfulness, omissions, and contradictions (91). If she does manage to subvert linear, imperial discourse, it is by accident, and not through mastery of the oral idiom.

In theory, the narrator of *Texaco* turns to his tape recorder to help capture Marie-Sophie's meandering speech. Sound recording technology imposes chirographic paradigms of linearity, or unidirectional sequence, on the sonic

artifacts it captures, by fixing them to a single iteration that can only move forwards or backwards along the same magnetic band. However, the narrator's tape recorder is described as unreliable or malfunctioning in both novels,⁵ the significance of which has been interpreted by Wendy Knepper as "the impossibility of recuperating the past perfectly" (145). In McCusker's words, the malfunction of this "paratextual apparatus of historiography" serves to further undermine the objectivity of historical sources, which have already been called into question through the ethnographic posture and his manipulation of materials (99). However, the explicit pairing of the female and the malfunctioning tape recorder warrants further attention:

[Marie-Sophie] me raconta ses histoires de manière assez difficultueuse. Il lui arrivait, bien qu'elle me le cachât, d'avoir des trous de mémoire, et de se répéter, ou de se contredire. Au début, je notais ses paroles sur un de mes cahiers, puis j'obtins l'autorisation de brancher mon isaloperie de magnétophone. Je ne pouvais pas compter sur cet appareil. (493)

By writing the tape recorder as malfunctioning, Chamoiseau injects an element of unpredictability or chaos into the mimetic relation between orality and writing, as the machine introduces its own *tracées* into the transmission of orality. In this manner, technological malfunction reveals itself to be an alternative, if also accidental, form of fidelity to the *tracée*.

Michel Serres's theorization of the parasite may be used to elucidate the relationship between female, linearity, and malfunction. Given that Serres upholds the female as the universal hostess, with the human fetus as the ur-model of parasitic relation that precedes the social relation of hospitality, colonization constitutes a perversion of the hospitality paradigm, as the invader imposes himself upon and subjugates his "host." It follows that the systemic rape of female slaves in the French Caribbean offers a perfect illustration of the entanglement of the biological parasite (here, the human fetus), and the social parasite (the French colonizer). While Marie-Sophie's disruption of narrative linearity was portrayed as accidental, the darker legacy of colonial violence does give rise to female agency. Knepper has called attention to the importance of "the tracing of broken genealogies, brutal sexual encounters, and aborted reproductive narratives" in *Texaco* (147). If Marie-Sophie's grandfather helped women induce abortion during the time of slavery (*Texaco* 49-50), she herself resorts to abortion to put an end to unwanted pregnancies: "J'avais tant saigné, je m'étais tant abîmée avec cette herbe grasse [. . .] que mon ventre avait perdu l'accès au grand mystère" (346), eventually becoming sterile. The mediated, nonlinear *tracée* therefore finds an alternative origin in the history of enslaved women who disrupted their own genealogical lineage in order to spare their own child from the horrors of slavery, or to get rid of an unwanted product of rape. Although the *marrons'* creation of *tracées* during their flight from slavery was not without risk of violence or death, not only is the corresponding female *tracée* brutally inscribed in the body, but the trauma of colonial violence is also passed down from generation to generation. Despite arguing for an equivalence between the three figures of the parasite, it is mainly through the third figure of noise or static that Serres articulates his paradox

of relation, whereby the static on a line of transmission both disrupts relation and constitutes the essence of relation. In this regard, the French Caribbean female embodies Serres's paradox of the noisy parasite, as she serves both as the "vessel" or means of reproduction, and the agent who disrupts her own biological lineage—what Serres might therefore term "le bruit des femmes."

Parasitic Reproduction

The reproductive function of the tape recorder requires further unpacking, and mobilizes slightly different elements of Michel Serres's theory of the parasite. First, Serres reminds us that, in order to survive, the biological parasite (such as a microbe) must often mimic its host to blend into its new environment: "Le parasite joue le mimétisme. Il ne joue pas à être un autre, il joue à être le même" (362). In living off its host, the biological parasite weakens it without killing it. The microbe thus closely parallels the social parasite, exemplified by Molière's impostor, Tartuffe (361-86), who gains access through mimicry or flattery, and who subsequently drains his host's resources: "[Le mimétisme] est une ruse nécessaire au voleur, à l'étranger, à l'invité, il est un déguisement, un camouflage aux couleurs du milieu, quand le milieu est l'hôte, qu'il est l'autre" (363). Serres claims that this mode of relation finds a parallel in technological reproduction: "Le malheur du temps est le naufrage du nouveau dans le duplicata, le naufrage de l'intelligence dans la jouissance de l'homogène. La production, sans doute, est rare, elle attire les parasites qui la banalisent tout aussitôt" (17-18). The notion that mechanical reproduction somehow diminishes the value of the original of course echoes Walter Benjamin's seminal essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1936), in which he argues that the act of reproducing an artwork withers its "aura" (220-21). In the early decades of sound recording, this concept of the parasitic weakening of the original was first explored through the early anthropomorphizing of the phonograph, who would devour or "feed off" live speech or music (Brady 40). However, by *reproducing* the sound it has supposedly "devoured," recording technology deviates from the traditional, unidirectional parasitic relation of irreversible loss. Furthermore, as Jonathan Sterne has shown, advertisements promoted an ever-increasing fidelity.⁶ At its most hyperbolic, the copy would lay claim to full equivalency to the original, or even surpass it in supposed permanence, thereby recalling a social parasite such as Tartuffe, who not only mimics, but threatens to usurp. Whereas sound reproduction is predicated upon the concept of an original, and upholds reproductive fidelity as its aesthetic goal, the *créolistes'* elaboration of *oraliture* does not make any claims of equivalency to original orality. However, by ostensibly basing the narratives of *Solibo Magnifique* and *Texaco* on ethnographic field recordings, be they real or entirely fictional, Chamoiseau filters *oraliture* through the sound recording paradigm of fidelity, which fundamentally alters the relation between orality and collective voice. Furthermore, the intermediate lens of the tape recorder brings out new, alternative gendered differences in Chamoiseau's depiction of oral transmission.

After Pipi performs a reconstruction of Solibo's final performance, the ethnographer spends months elaborating a translated transcription of the recording

he purportedly made. The resulting annexed document suggests that he recovered a distance sufficient for observation, thereby curing his ethnographic sterility. And yet, Chamoiseau's ethnographer expresses dissatisfaction with his textual ersatz: "Il était clair désormais que sa parole, sa vraie parole, toute sa parole, était perdue pour tous—et à jamais" (226). His regret over the loss of Solibo's unique voice marks a critical departure from the traditional transmission of anonymous and collective oral history, which could in fact be explained by the fact that he is working from a mediated source that imposes a new paradigm of fidelity to an original.⁷ In continuing to channel the oral heritage of an anonymous, collective voice, and managing to escape being recorded, the *Maître de paroles* essentially denies the possibility of a true "parasitic" relation of copy to original, as each subsequent reproduction points backwards to the *absence* of a stable, monolithic origin.

Whereas Solibo manages to elude parasitic technological reproduction, and the irrevocable loss of his unique voice is mourned, Marie-Sophie's engagement as a female *conteuse* ironically comes at the expense of her own unique voice. In his critique of *créolité* as a masculinist movement, A. James Arnold argues that the fact that Marie-Sophie is "called upon to relate the legendary knowledge of her male ancestor, an authentic *Marqueur de paroles* [. . .], completes the gendered paradigm of cultural communication" (18). By merely serving as the "medium" that transmits her father's voice, Marie-Sophie sees her role as a *conteuse* reduced to ventriloquizing an authoritative male origin, and as such, she fulfills the same basic function as the tape recorder. Furthermore, if the narrator cites their correspondence, her notebooks, and occasional interviews throughout the text, the sound recording is excluded as a historiographical source. The narrator's apparent obscuring of the actual recordings of her voice from his novel contributes to the longstanding practice of associating the medium with the female, whereby the female body becomes effaced as the medium through which the male recuperates authorship and creativity.⁸ In fact, Serres's coupling of the "universal hostess" and the wax tablet, "sur quoi tout est inscriptible" (388) further supports this reduction of the female to pure medium. Knepper claims that the intersubjective discourse of *Texaco* "makes it impossible to separate Marie-Sophie from her father's voice or Chamoiseau's voice from that of the Urban Planner or Marie-Sophie" (147), the merging of which she later compares to a "composite mosaic" (149). However, I would argue that the premise of a narrator composing a novel from specific recordings of Marie-Sophie's unique voice establishes a clear opposition to his previous attempts to reconstruct Solibo's words. This might be clarified by Roland Barthes' concept of the "grain of the voice," which he defines as "that materiality of the body emerging from the throat," suggesting that the voice itself bears the imprint of its corresponding body (255). It follows that Chamoiseau's implied reference to vocal recordings should mean that Marie-Sophie's unique "grain of the voice" imposes itself as an audible palimpsest, whereby "le bruit de la femme" reshapes "la parole de l'homme."

By committing her father's oral histories to writing, Marie-Sophie also participates in the "parasitic" enterprise of ethnography. Having paid close attention to her father's final words, Marie-Sophie claims to have found them

“intact” when she begins to write them down in her notebooks years later (*Texaco* 255). As she recovers his voice from the recesses of her memory, she first experiences the act of writing as *listening*: “Ecrire c’était retrouver mon Esternome, réécouter les échos de sa voix égarés en moi-même...” (411). However, she finds that each phrase committed to paper weakens the auditory memory of his voice, irrevocably replacing it with her insufficient French: “Chaque phrase écrite formolait un peu de lui, de sa langue créole, de ses mots, de son intonation, de ses rires, de ses yeux, de ses airs. [. . .] Les mots écrits, mes pauvres mots français, dissipaient pour toujours l’écho de sa parole et imposaient leur trahison à ma mémoire” (412). Caught in the transition from oral heritage to literacy, Marie-Sophie thus experiences writing and orality as mutually exclusive, with the process of writing as a parasite that does not simply feed off her aural memories, but completely and permanently erases or “devours” them. In hopes of forestalling this erasure, she begins repeating her father’s words to herself: “C’est pourquoi l’on me vit souvent parler toute seule, à mon corps même, me répétant sans respirer des choses inaudibles” (412). This act of preservation reveals that Marie-Sophie has not yet fully subscribed to the new paradigm of unique voice imposed by the tape recorder: she is still able to repeat her father’s words without perceiving her own voice as an auditory palimpsest or consuming parasite.

The Listening Tape Recorder

Marie-Sophie’s experience of ethnographic transmission as “listening” calls for a closer look at the relationship between noise and listening in mediated orality. While Serres’s theory of the parasite has allowed us to bring to the fore the unexplored impact of recording technology on gender and voice in Chamoiseau’s novels thus far, the question of listening reveals divergent implications of the tape recorder for each thinker’s work. Although Serres’s use of the feedback loop as a sonic metaphor for relation (117) usually refers to a network or line of communication rather than sound reproduction technology, the “circular causality” of feedback loops appears to overlap nicely with Chamoiseau’s tape recorder. We might then reformulate Serres’s thesis, to say that the tape recorder itself is an apt figure of listening and/or relation. However, if we consider the consequences of an actual feedback loop, when sound is reproduced with exponentially increasing degrees of distortion, it quickly becomes unintelligible. Samuel Beckett’s *Krapp’s Last Tape* (1958) and Alvin Lucier’s “I am sitting in a room” (1969) are excellent demonstrations of the sonic decay of isolated, narcissistic reproduction. It therefore comes as no surprise that Chamoiseau chooses to explore the crisis or “failure” of listening through the metaphor of the isolated feedback loop, which emerges in the absence of relation.

In *Texaco*, the narrator’s failure to listen is attributed to incomprehension and inattention, as opposed to successful cultural immersion (as in *Solibo Magnifique*). On the one hand, the *Marqueur de paroles* enjoys immersing himself in Marie-Sophie’s pure, unmediated voice: “Alors, je ne pouvais que l’écouter, l’écouter, l’écouter, prenant une trouble ivresse à débrancher mon magnéto pour mieux me perdre en elle, et vivre au plus profond les chants de sa parole” (496). On the other hand, not only is he unable to understand Marie-

Sophie's "voix pas claire," the sonic signature of the *Maître de paroles* through which she establishes her position of authority, but he also admits to relying on the tape recorder to compensate for his "trous d'attention" (493), as he is unable to follow the *tracées* of Marie-Sophie's narrative. These evident difficulties in comprehension call into question his capacity to properly transmit oral tradition. One might be tempted to attribute this breakdown in communication to the *conteuse*'s successful deployment of opacity, but since she is not allowed these skills, what is at stake is the basic ability to listen for an increasingly literate public.

In fact, in *Solibo Magnifique*, Chamoiseau already implied that there was a general crisis of listening in Martinique, irrespective of gender. Towards the end of his life, Solibo had come to face with a waning public interest: "Dans ses derniers temps, le Magnifique ne trouvait plus de tribunes. Il tenait à inscrire sa parole dans notre vie ordinaire, or cette vie n'en avait plus l'oreille, ni même de ces creux où s'éternise l'écho" (*Solibo* 222). Eventually, he was driven to start talking to himself: "Alors, il s'adressa au seul qui pouvait le comprendre, et on le vit aller, les lèvres battant silence, en discussion avec lui-même" (*Solibo* 224). This impulse recalls Marie-Sophie's own inward turn, albeit for different reasons. Still, in repeating their own stories to themselves towards the end of their lives, they both enter a sterile feedback loop wherein the self becomes the ultimate listener. In this manner, they are conscious incarnations of the self-interested tape recorder, who is only interested in its own breath, and whose stories loop back on themselves. By reframing the gulf between orality and *oraliture* as an act of listening to the self in the absence of the other,⁹ Chamoiseau makes a strong case for the feedback loop to denote the failure of relation.

Then again, Serres called on the feedback loop to serve as a *sonic* metaphor for relation. What happens when the other is present, but does not understand what he hears? The apparent overlap between the *créolistes*' assertion of their "right to opacity" and Serres's third figure of the noisy parasite bears nuancing. While both may disrupt a line of transmission, opacity only denies legibility to the cultural or linguistic outsider. Serres's static does not bear semantic content; rather, it is the disruption itself that signifies. The call-and-response system of oral storytelling in the French Caribbean is useful for thinking through the relationship between noise and listening, as the audience vocalizes the confirmation of its ongoing attention to the *conteur*.¹⁰ Chamoiseau creates two opposing sonic figures of organic and mechanical *Krik? Krak!* to highlight the fact that his tape recorder actually enables a third sonic paradigm that is neither fully opaque, nor fully parasitic.

First, despite the generalized decline in interest, there was a participating public present for Solibo's final performance. When Solibo lets out his dying word, "Patat' sa," the audience misinterprets this nonsense word as a verbal cue demanding a response, which they give as "Patat' si" (34). The word that is misinterpreted as inviting or signaling continued communication is the very same word that ironically cuts off communication by "asphyxiating" the *conteur*. This purely oral entity leaves no trace behind, stumping the investigators. As a noise that is both devoid of true meaning and the agent of disrupted communication,

Solibo's last word conforms to the paradoxical nature of Serres's parasite. Second, in both novels, the narrator expresses frustration over his inability to capture and transmit the breath of his subjects: "[Mon écriture] ne transmettait rien du souffle de l'Informatrice" (*Texaco* 497); "[Solibo Magnifique] était la vibration d'un monde finissant, pleine de douleur, qui n'aura pour réceptacle que les vents et les mémoires indifférentes, et dont tout cela n'avait bordé que la simple onde du souffle ultime" (*Solibo* 227). He does, however, qualify the noisy intrusion of the tape recorder as its "breath" (45). As opposed to the malfunction discussed previously, the continuous hissing of the tape recorder signals its proper functioning, a mechanical *Krik? Krak!* that constitutes the sonic trace of its listening. At the same time, this hissing also signifies its capture, or "writing," thereby serving as a mechanical double to the "word scratching" of the observant parasite as he commits a transcription to paper. According to Rose-Myriam Réjouis, Chamoiseau's preference for the term "word scratcher" over "writer" stems from the implications of the palimpsest trope for the concept of origin: "Chamoiseau chooses a creativity tied to history over one that stresses complete originality, presuming itself as the point of origin" (184).¹¹ Yet, if both palimpsestic figures audibly "write over" their oral source, the tape recorder differs from writing in that it also preserves the original soundtrack in transmission, allowing them to coexist. Crucially, these two palimpsestic types of parasitic noise, scratching and hissing, do not disrupt transmission; rather, they are the rendering-audible of the very means of transmission.

Conclusion

This brings us to the question of the gendered codification of the tape recorder's hissing. Thus far, Serres's work has helped us tease out the ways in which Chamoiseau's parallels between the female *conteuse* and the tape recorder actually deny female agency. Not only is Marie-Sophie relegated to the role of "medium," but her inability to control the meandering *tracée* of her stories is not attributed to her mastery of the oral idiom, but rather, compared to technological malfunction. Then again, by re-examining the depiction of listening in Chamoiseau's novels, we find a generalized failure that is not necessarily attributed to gender; moreover, if the tape recorder "listens," the trace of its listening allows for the coexistence of original voice, male or female. Ultimately, if the postcolonial Martinican setting of Chamoiseau's novels has shown to be a productive illustration of Serres's theory of the parasite, the tape recorder supports a gendered split between the three parasitic figures. On the one hand, the biological and social parasites are represented by the male colonizer and the male ethnographer, and their mimicry is compared to the reproductive fidelity of sound recording. On the other hand, the noisy parasite is represented by the Francophone Caribbean female subject and the audible palimpsest of the tape recorder's hissing, thereby reframing relation as "le bruit des femmes."

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Notes

¹ Mireille Rosello also explores Michel Serres's theory of the parasite in *Postcolonial Hospitality: The Immigrant as Guest*.

² "J'écris avec mon oreille." Patrick Chamoiseau, "Le Sens et les sens/Sense and the Senses," International Colloquium for 20th and 21st Century French and Francophone Studies, 6 Apr. 2017, Bloomington, IN. Keynote.

³ Personal interview, Bloomington, IN, 6 April 2017.

⁴ Such is the case for one of the earliest field recording missions to the French Caribbean, led by Elsie Clews Parsons from 1924-27.

⁵ For example, the narrator of *Solibo Magnifique* refers to the machine as "mon petit magnétophone à piles qui ne fonctionnait jamais" (43).

⁶ In his chapter entitled "The Social Genesis of Sound Fidelity" (215-86), Sterne illustrates the ways in which material and mechanical improvements to sound recording technology transform the corresponding discourse of fidelity in the early recording era.

⁷ This new emphasis placed on unique voice is further supported by Lydie Moudileno's assertion that the title of the novel reflects the *créolistes'* intention to "aborder l'oraliture à partir de la personne, nommée et singularisée," thereby bringing the *conteur* out of anonymity (108).

⁸ For a comprehensive study on the coupling of female and medium, see Katharine Conley, *Automatic Woman: The Representation of Woman in Surrealism*.

⁹ The breakdown of listening rather recalls the controversial claim made by the co-authors of the *Eloge de la créolité* in 1989, that "La littérature antillaise n'existe pas encore. Nous sommes encore dans un état de pré-littérature: celui d'une production écrite sans audience chez elle..." (14). In fact, Mireille Rosello invokes Serres's noisy parasite to illustrate the ways in which this claim both provoked reactions or rumors (30-31), and served as an incomprehensible disruption that diverted attention away from "l'espace discursif où une voix monolithique cherche à se maintenir" (34). To this, I might add that their choice to write such a manifesto in *French* corresponds to the mimicry of the biological and social parasites.

¹⁰ Examples of rhymes exchanged between *conteur* and audience during "contes cricraks" (*Solibo* 29) include "é krii? é kraa!" (33; 233) and "misticrii? misticraaa!" (234; emphasis in original).

¹¹ In fact, the English translation of "Marqueur de paroles," or "Word Scratcher," foregrounds the audible component, the "scraping" or "rubbing," contained within the Greek roots of the word "palimpsest."

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