Gladys M. Francis, *Odious Caribbean Women and the Palpable Aesthetics of Transgression*. Lanham MD: Lexington Books, 2017. xxiv + 153 pp. (Cloth US\$90.00)

In *Odious Caribbean Women and the Palpable Aesthetics of Transgression*, Gladys M. Francis undertakes an ambitious study of the role of the body in re-creating individual and collective memory in the Caribbean. She looks at works by Francophone Caribbean women writers, visual artists, and performers that feature visceral, “odious” representations of embodied praxes and experience. “Corpomemorial tracing” is proposed as an interface through which reader-spectators engage in an act of conscientious witnessing with such “texts.” In Francis’s theory, works transgressing generic and aesthetic bounds perform, along with the reader-spectator, the reinstatement of the Caribbean woman as a subject in a larger story.

Francis aims to confront the silences within the colonial archive by turning to creative “texts” as alternative sources of knowledge about the legacies of slavery and colonization, focusing on female-identified creators to bring to light often-disregarded approaches to expressing and observing Caribbean subjectivity. She draws, for example, on the work of Guadeloupean dancer and choreographer Lénablou, and her philosophical exploration of *gwoka* and *léwoz*, features of a Guadeloupean music and dance tradition, to illustrate methodologies of reading the “fragmented” body within “texts.” And she extends as well her own concept of “odious aesthetics,” which arise when confronting self-conscious testimonies of bodily transgression. Such aesthetics transgress the boundary between reader-spectators and the body in performance, forcing them into an intersubjective experience. Francis then discerns a process of “corpomemorial tracing,” in which a memory of the “text” is formed in the conscience of the reader-spectator, and “gives *body* to; *embodies*; gives presence to—a *body* (whether an individual or a group)” (p. xii). This paradigm presents performatic “texts” as catalysts for the inscription of the real and imagined phantoms of the Caribbean within historical memory.

Francis illustrates her arguments through an analysis of the plays *Mémoires d’îles* by Ina Césaire, *Pension Les Alizés* by Maryse Condé, and *Trames* by Gerty Dambury; novels that include Dambury’s *Les Rétifs*, Fabienne Kanor’s *Humus* and *D’eaux douces*, Giséle Pineau’s *Cent vies et des poussières*, Simone Schwarz-Bart’s *Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle*, and Miriam Warner-Vieyra’s *Juletane*; paintings by Béatrice Mélina; Sylvaine Dampierre’s documentary film *Le Pays à l’Envers*; and performances and techniques of Kanor and Lénablou. Theory from postcolonial, gender, performance, and trauma studies informs this interdisciplinary study. Francis begins by exploring the body as an extension of its geopolitical and historiographic contexts. Embodied performance within

“ekphrasis writing” is theorized as a space for reclaiming breadth of origin and specificity of identity. Overturning the negative connotations of *départenance* (an idea developed by Mireille Rosello in *Research in African Literature* 24[3], 1993), Francis identifies in representations of Caribbean oral and embodied praxes a mnemonics of collective resistance. She then develops her thesis that performatic depictions of transgression work to break down the distance between reader-spectator and “text.” This compels the reader-spectator into a witnessing “from which it is difficult to disengage” (p. xv). However, distinct from representations of violence in the media, the chosen “texts” give agency to characters to narrate their embodied experiences. Vivid dialogue and narration convey the refusal of victimhood and claims to self-determination. Zooming in on the sexualized black body, Francis’s concluding chapter argues that haptic, nonconforming depictions of female sexuality explode received notions of Caribbean femininity. She draws her argument back to the capacity of multi-sensorial reader-spectator experiences to collapse time, reshaping the realm of possibilities for the Caribbean woman across the past, present, and future.

In her introduction, Francis effectively invites reader-spectators into her analysis by recalling her own participation in live embodied performances by Rosamond S. King, Gabrielle Civil, and Wura-Natasha Ogunji. Across her chapters, she then constructs a dialogue among the works in question, shedding light on the multiplicities of each and on Caribbean female creation. The intricacies of this dialogue make for cumbersome reading at times, but emphasize the richness of Francis’s approach. Her incorporation of Lénablou’s work will introduce many readers to a rising figure in postcolonial thought, though it falls short of giving full credence to the theoretical capacities of Blou’s philosophy of *bigidi*. Interviews with various artists studied strengthen Francis’s thorough readings.

To scholars and students interested in alternative processes of memory, history, and identity within the Caribbean, this work is a fruitful resource. It contributes important tools and perspectives for exploring visual arts and writing as extensions of the body that perform memory. It thus expands the field of conception for relating to complex, ongoing negotiations of Caribbean female identities.

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