WHAT THE SANDS REMEMBER

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environment:
all that surrounds our bodies:
what exists along/be/side us and what we have created:
what surrounds us because of what we surround
. . . . .requires an examination of the distinctions between the human
and nonhuman . . . . . world
implies location, shelter, belonging, not belonging
. . . ..asks how we are both inside and outside, there because here,
interconnected
. . . . .and therefore a center
becomes place and placeholder, repository of guilt and outrage, a
saturated, empty syllable
—Tamiko Beyer, "Notes Towards a queer::eco::poetics"

Drawing this poem's evocation of "environment" into the Caribbean's landscape, might we imagine Tamiko Beyer's "saturated, empty syllable" as something akin to a grain of sand? In the region, sand is ubiquitous; it is, as Beyer puts it, both place (beach) and placeholder (landscape marker). Here, on these islands, it "exists along" and "be/side us"; it "surrounds us." For Beyer, the syllable is a repository of feeling (of "guilt and outrage"), and in this essay I ask that we consider sand as a repository both of feeling and of experience, of affect and of history, in the Caribbean region. Here sand links us unswervingly to place, to a particular landscape that bears traces of both connection and loss. I imagine it to be "saturated" with the presence of people who have walked on and carried it, but simultaneously "empty" of the archaeological and forensic traces that would testify to that presence. If water is the romantic metaphor that has irredeemably made its place in Caribbean and African diasporic studies, sand

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is the less embraced referent that returns us to the body's messy realities. Water washes, makes clean.[1] Sand gets inside our bodies, our things, in ways at once inconvenient and intrusive. It smoothes rough edges but also irritates, sticking to our bodies' folds and fissures. In this essay I ask what it might mean to pay close attention to sand, this object that exists at the point of nature's hesitation between land and sea. Heeding a call by Natasha Omise'eke Tinsley that in black queer studies our "metaphors be materially informed; [that] they be internally discontinuous, allowing for differences and inequalities between situated subjects," I propose that we experiment with sand in addition to water as a tool for that metaphorical thinking, to track fleeting references to same-sex desire and gender transgression in Martinique.[2]

This essay's aim is to bring together two strands of inquiry, first, into the meaning of what Makeda Silvera once (in)famously called the "invisibility of (Afro-) Caribbean lesbians [and gays]" and the endurance of narratives about their relationship to a presumably "silent" archive, and second, into the rapport between tropes of invisibility and the physical landscapes that people who might be called "queer" inhabit in the Caribbean region.[3] One of my concerns is the persistent bias toward what is imagined to be diaspora's radical potential both in academic figurations of "queer" lives in the Caribbean and in activist narratives about what it might take to make those lives qualitatively "better." While queer of color theorists have been doing quite a lot of powerful thinking about Caribbean queerness in relation to diaspora, in this essay I want to insist on a deeply local framing of these questions and to argue for a fine-pointed scholarly interest not particularly in movement, but in place and emplacement.[4]

Sand emerges as a compelling metaphor here, as a repository from which we might read traces of gender and sexual alterity on the landscape.[5] Ever in motion, yet connected to particular places, sand both holds geological memories in its elemental structure and calls forth referential memories through its color, feel between the fingers, and quality of grain. Today's sands are yesterday's mountains, coral reefs, and outcroppings of stone. Each grain possesses a geological lineage that links sand to a place and to its history, and each grain also carries a symbolic association that indexes that history as well. In her groundbreaking essay on the politics of erotic autonomy and decolonization in the Bahamas, M. Jacqui Alexander asks "how . . . sexuality and geography collide," and as diaspora continues to be idealized as the Caribbean's cutting edge, the fate of those who do not or cannot move in this vaunted age of mobility — people attached to local geographies — often drops out of analytic purview.[6] I think with sand here to understand that collision, to both question and document how people with access to only limited forms of mobility, like those of the shifting sands, live their genders and sexualities within the region.

This essay asks what it might mean to refute the idea that queerness does not and cannot exist, or must somehow remain invisible, in the Caribbean, and that it is only through diasporic movement that people gain their capacity to be legible, visible, and politically viable subjects. Rather than reject studies of movement and migration as both analytic frames and material experiences for Caribbean subjects, I ask what it can mean to pay equal attention to the rooted, to those Caribbean people who build lives for themselves right where they are, under conditions of both intense contradiction and sometimes, too, intense joy.[7] Spatial stabilities often profoundly mark the lives of same-sex desiring and gender-transgressing subjects in the region, and this essay demonstrates that considering genders and sexualities in quotidian, place-specific terms can function as a critical dimension of how we join Caribbean to queer analyses.

The events that inform this work take place in Martinique, a territory where centuries-long debates about the ideal nature and extent of its autonomy from the French state continue to be struggled over and illuminated by sexual politics. Because the island is not independent, it operates under a legal regime unique to the Caribbean vis-à-vis sexual rights. As just one example, in many countries in the region homosexuality is criminalized and "homosexual acts" are punishable by law, but these practices clash with France's legal code, which both affords protections and extends certain rights, like access to civil unions, to same-sex couples.[8] In the face of policies like these, local figures have argued that homosexual practices are unacceptable to 95 percent of the Martinican population because this population is said to hold "Christian" values different from those of French metropolitans.[9] This argument runs in tandem with a familiar narrative that displaces all same-sex desire onto the colonizer and onto depraved, decadent white bodies. Sited within the racialized politics of citizenship in France, these questions about community ethics and cultural sovereignty retain tremendous everyday importance for Martinican residents.

Like their heterosexual and cisgendered counterparts, same-sex desiring and gender-transgressing Martinicans are forced to grapple with an intersection of epistemological violences as they navigate various social worlds. Throughout the region Martinicans continue to be understood as products of a kind of modernist failure, having not followed the standard postcolonial teleology to independence as did the majority of the other territories of the global South. Locally, same-sex desiring and gender-transgressing people become subject to a culturalist agenda that rationalizes homophobia as an expression of cultural sovereignty and as a way to defend Martinican "local values" against those of the French state. These same people are also interpellated by a French universalist agenda proffered by metropolitan LGBT activists that requires the revindication of a particular type of (out, loud, and "proud") queer subject — an agenda that also, undoubtedly, violates.[10] This essay revisits tropes of queer invisibility and frames its analysis around a conscious attention to place in this particular (and somewhat peculiar) context, bearing in mind the complicated ways that this putatively (post)colonial situation affects the lives of my interlocutors on the island, both contemporary and long past.

So what, then, does or can it mean to think about queerness on France's Caribbean periphery? This essay seeks to unite a scattered archive of same-sex desire in Martinique, and, following José Muñoz's work in performance theory, it focuses on ephemera, on the traces left behind from moments of queer relation.[11] I use both popular literature and ethnography to track fleeting references to same-sex desire and gender transgression on the island, drawing a through-line between nonnormative practices across both space and time. Queer studies has largely had to define its archive through this kind of trace and absent-presence, searching for ways to both document and describe nonnormative modes of living and loving. Such theorists as Judith Jack Halberstam have compellingly described the assembly of archives, particularly those that unsettle normative interpretive regimes, as a process of scavenge; Mathias Danbolt has named the project of "touching [queer] history" as one shot through with ambiguities; Kara Keeling has written about the dual process of seeing a queer black past and producing it within the interstices; and Heather Love has urged that we understand why genealogies of this sort are at once ambivalent (as reminders of secrecy, violence, and shame) and urgent (as the groundings for future political projects).[12] Bearing in mind these structuring concerns, this essay thinks through the sexual politics of simultaneously memory and place, linking queer presence to the sands of two particular beaches on Martinique's coasts.

Saint-Pierre

In September 1635 Saint-Pierre became the colony of Martinique's first permanent settlement, established at the foot of Mount Pelée by French representatives of the Compagnie des Îles de l'Amérique. Seated on the island's western coast and opening out onto the Caribbean Sea, Saint-Pierre's port was Martinique's administrative and financial center for nearly 260 years. During the nineteenth century the city became known in colonial circuits as the Paris of the Antilles, as a cosmopolitan place where liberal sexual mores and a laxity about church membership were at the heart of the city's culture.[13] It housed the largest population of European migrants in the Caribbean region, and for that reason too it was a place of major social division. In a census taken in July 1901, Martinique's entire population was counted at 203,781 people, 36,011 of whom lived in Saint-Pierre. In the half century between emancipation (which came to French colonies in 1848) and Saint-Pierre's demise at the beginning of the twentieth century, fierce battles were fought in the public sphere among members of *béké* (white colonist) families, white functionaries from the metropole, members of the growing *métisse* and *mulâtre* (mixed-race and fair-skinned) middle class, and the overwhelmingly black servant/worker majority. Saint-Pierre was also a city of contradiction, for while violent struggles for power were endemic to the city's workings, so too was a type of social mixture that was most evident in the private and, above all, sexual sphere. The city's theater, brothels, and carnival celebrations were legendary, attracting wealthy joy-seekers from all over the island and from other islands, too, all throughout the year. While a spirit of *libertinage* had come to characterize French landholdings in the Americas from New Orleans to Saint-Domingue, Saint-Pierre emerged as a central site in France's eighteenth- and nineteenth-century economic, political, and sexual conquest of the region.[14] As the Martinican author and cultural critic Raphaël Confiant has argued, "Saint-Pierre was the city of all excesses."[15]

But on the morning of May 8, 1902, Mount Pelée, the volcano that sits just above the city, erupted — killing nearly everyone in Saint-Pierre within five seconds. It was the kind of volcanic eruption that inspired divine interpretation: a boiling, three-hundred-degree cloud of gas, steam, dust, ash, and pumice formed within the mountain and then burst forth. Hugging the earth and moving laterally at five hundred kilometers per hour, the cloud engulfed the city before anyone had time to react. This feat of nature was later named a *nuée ardente*, or a pyroclastic cloud. It was a phenomenon that had never been seen or analyzed before by the era's geologists and volcanologists. While Plinian eruptions (eruptions that shoot straight up into the air and end in lava flows) were familiar to the scientists of the day, this "new" type, which came to be known as a Peléan eruption, seemed to have come out of nowhere.[16] The Caribs, the indigenous inhabitants of Martinique, surely knew of the dangers of this volcano — they called it "Fire Mountain" — but that knowledge was lost in the genocidal campaign that the French waged in the name of imperial expansion. By 1902 Pierrotins (as the residents were called) had grown accustomed to living at the foot of a volcano and had taken to enjoying the warm sulphurous waters at its base for their curative practices. While there had been minor eruptions at the mountaintop in 1792 and again in 1851, these had been judged insignificant final gasps of a volcano on the decline. No one suspected that by the end of 1902 a local priest would have published a memoir called *Funeral Pilgrimage in the Ruins of Saint-Pierre*, or that a children's book comparing Saint-Pierre to Sodom and Gomorrah would claim to illustrate the wages of sin(s) gone too long unpunished.[17] Nor could residents anticipate that a year later, marking the first anniversary of the eruption, the island's newspaper would bear the headline: "Only Sodom is the analogy that we can make to the disaster at Saint-Pierre."[18]

The equation of Saint-Pierre with Sodom is of most interest for the present essay, particularly because the image of that doomed city is a recurrent one in Caribbean cultural imaginaries.[19] Alexander, commenting on the problems of invoking Sodom in the Caribbean, asserts that "Sodom requires no point of reference other than itself; it can assert authority without comparison, evidence, or parallel. Its power lies in the ability to distort, usurp, or foreclose other interpretative frameworks, other plausible explanations for its destruction, or other experiential dimensions of homosexuality [nonnormative practices] that oppose and refuse [dominant] constructions."[20] Here Alexander makes a compelling case for the metaphor's uselessness, for its power to obscure. But looked at differently, what might this repeated evocation of Sodom help us understand about the lives of Saint-Pierre's residents at the turn of the century? How might the image of Sodom have stood in for a range of things that could not be said or that could not have been spoken directly into the archive? Looked at differently, what traces might this image help us reveal?

When after the eruption Clémence Cassius de Linval, a longtime *béké* resident of Saint-Pierre and author of *Coeurs martiniquais*, wrote that "Sodom will sink because the volcano has vomited on the imprudent," or when a local priest criticized the city by calling it "the sad testimony to the impiety and immorality of this country: it is a real Sodom that God has punished," what did these writers communicate to their broader reading publics?[21] Rather than dismiss these writing strategies as reductive sleights of hand employed by chroniclers seeking the moral authority conveyed by biblical allusion, we might see these invocations of Sodom as a mode of indexing knowledge not only about same-sex desire but also about other modes of nonnormative relation and gender transgression, in pre-eruption Saint-Pierre. In an era when writing directly about these "queer" practices was taboo, calling Saint-Pierre the Sodom of the Antilles might have functioned as a privileged gesture — as a nod toward a mountain of things that could not be referenced directly.

Beyond these allusions, though, there remains at least one textual trace of Saint-Pierre's queerness: an erotic novel from the nineteenth century. While the relationship of fictional narrative to social analysis is not uncomplicated, it is clear that fiction captures something that social science often cannot. It moves beyond what can be readily observed, measured, and tabulated to more ephemeral phenomena that empirical methods often fail to capture. The novelist Samuel Delany warns about "generaliz[ing] from our fictions," but in this essay I ask that we consider them spaces for sustained inquiry and that we approach this work of pulp fiction as the location for an unstable, atomized archive of queer relation.[22]

Originally published in 1892 and rereleased in 1901, then recuperated and reprinted in 1992 and 1996, *Une nuit d'orgies à Saint-Pierre, Martinique* (*A Night of Orgies in Saint-Pierre, Martinique*) captures the social and linguistic registers of life in the city at the end of the nineteenth century.[23] Written in both French and Créole under the playful pseudonym Effe Géache (the initials F. G. H. in French), it is the story of three men who have long been running buddies, and in a classically French formula for narrative diversity, one is white (Philippe), one *mulâtre* (Jules), and one black (Hubert).[24] The erotic novel is the story of just one night, when after the friends have reunited they reminisce around a dinner table about old sexual liaisons and then head to a party in town. Confiant, in his preface to the 1992 edition, reminds readers that Géache's work is critical because it centers on experiences of misery, violence, and, of course, sex — experiences that, he maintains, were some of the most important dimensions of everyday life for residents of Saint-Pierre. Unlike the work of de Linval, who narrates life in Saint-Pierre as if it were a town populated only by *békés* and French metropolitans, Géache's story attempts a more realistic vision of the era's social context.[25] According to the historian Liliane Chauleau, after France's Third Republic was established in 1870, life in the capital took on a significantly more racially mixed character.[26] While misery and violence were undoubtedly an important part of that "mixed" life in the city, the representation of sex in *A Night of Orgies* is the narrative's most striking aspect. There Géache describes a range of sex acts for his readers, both consensual and not, sexual encounters enacted often in public: group sex, play with sex roles, female ejaculation, more cunnilingus and fellatio than can be counted on two hands, loads of anal play and penetration, and doggie-style sex (that, it seems, was fairly transgressive for the time). But Géache also offers two moments in the novel that give readers indirect access to same-sex desire and gender transgression in pre-eruption Saint-Pierre.

Early on in the narrative, Hubert (the dandy of the bunch) is on his way to the port to meet Jules, who is arriving on a boat from Fort-de-France, when he happens on a group of five women on a street corner. With little fanfare, these women are said to be "comparing and poking at each others' pussies."[27] It is a striking, but still oblique image, and is quickly passed over when Hubert throws up one of the women's skirts and forces her into a brief and violent sex act in front of her friends. This becomes a scene of base sexual violence, but what kind of trace of queer relationality might that one moment, just as Hubert arrived, have given us access to? Who were these women and what were they doing when Hubert approached? These women are later referred to as a group of whores (*catins*), but it is never clear whether that is their profession or a moniker ascribed to them as a result of their practices. Almost all of the women in the novel are called whores at one time or another, no matter what their social position. Hubert has clearly had a relationship with one of the women in the group, Jeanne, who jealously pulls his penis out of the woman he is raping just as he is about to ejaculate. But long before Hubert's arrival, when the women were alone and connecting with each other, what allowed this group's intimate touching, particularly in public, to be narrated in such a fashion? The language makes it seem commonplace, as if they were admiring each other's hair. So what does it mean that they were "comparing" pussies? And "poking" them?

Theorists of women's same-sex desire have made important use of these kinds of fleeting presences. They have challenged conventional disciplines' privileging of visible, empirical evidence, interpreting those stances as indictments of women-desiring-women's practices and forms of identification as either "impossible" or unmentionable.[28] The anthropologist Serena Owusua Dankwa, for example, writes compellingly about everyday intimacies between women in Ghana and about "modes of sexual sociality . . . [that exist] beyond the subcultural language of sexual identity politics."[29] In her analysis, norms of discretion and indirection structure relationships between women, with codes legible only to and between them. This, she argues, is not silence nor absence but a kind of tacit engagement that well reflects the kind of "queer" presence that has long been a legible part of life in Martinique: present yet not particularly remarked on, and represented only fleetingly.[30] These are the kinds of engagements that, as Jafari S. Allen has so elegantly described them, "require no parade and no declarations outside of [their] own cocoons of recognition."[31]

The second moment in the narrative that draws our queer attention comes midway through the novel, when the friends decide to leave the conviviality of their dinner table to attend a party at a place called Chez Babette, a bar and dancehall that actually existed before the volcano struck. Géache writes that Philippe helps his companions to "se travestir" before heading out into the night.[32]

Se travestir is an ambiguous, polysemic term, meaning simultaneously to disguise oneself and to cross-dress, and would also have been so in nineteenth-century Martinique. In this instance, the fact of the companions' work to change their physical appearances may be an important one. Martinique is known throughout the Caribbean for its "unusual" Carnival practices. Whereas Carnival is a time of sexual excess nearly everywhere in the region, in Martinique it is also a moment when men — from all walks of life and with varying attachments to masculine identities — *se travestissent en femme*, dress as women.[33] This practice was said to have begun in Saint-Pierre, the center of the first Carnival celebrations on the island.[34]

By 1892, the date of the novel's publication, cross-dressing had been firmly anchored in the social life of Pierrotins. When just under ten years later Pélée erupted and many of the city's former residents were dispersed throughout the French Caribbean, they brought the practice elsewhere, most notably to French Guyana, where the familiar figure of *touloulous solidaires* are often men dressed as women in the prototypical head-to-toe Carnival disguise.[35] The anthropologist Thierry L'Étang, in his oral histories with descendants of Pierrotins, has explored popular reinterpretations of the disaster that focus on *malédiction*, or divine retribution, as the genesis of the eruption. While the logics that he elicits are largely confined to stories of residents' disrespect of religious figures, he also documents stories that suggest that magically related gender transgression may have been a part of the city's maligned reputation. His interlocutor Antoinette, for example, talks of hearing about "young boys who turned themselves into dogs. They transformed into *diablesses* at noon, and *zombis* in the evening."[36] And his interlocutor George talks about a couple who always made their appearances in town "dressed as women . . . [who] frightened the young."[37]

Given this context of gender play and *travestissement*, Géache's mention of the men's redressing on their way to the dance could be read not simply as their dressing *up* but also as their assumption of nonnormative gender presentations. When Jules first arrives at the dock and Philippe proposes that they go out to this party, Jules laments that he has brought nothing to wear. That problem is easily solved later on, when Philippe presumably loans both men the necessary "disguises." Just as he had described the women on the corner, Géache writes this moment with little fanfare, yet both of these scenes highlight the indirect ways that moments of queer relation show up in Martinique's textual archive.

Like these moments unremarked upon yet inescapably present, when one drives the island's western coast today from the town of Carbet, up through Saint-Pierre, and on to the northernmost cove at Anse Couleuvre, it is impossible to miss the fact that the beaches' sands range from a light charcoal gray to deep, deep black.[38] Like the fleeting references to same-sex desire and gender transgression in *A Night of Orgies*, the sands in the area that surround Saint-Pierre are today a visual reminder of Mount Pelée's eruption. Like people, like places, like objects or ideas, sand has a history, a genealogy. The composition of sand varies, yet that variation is deeply dependent on its environment. Sand always carries a local imprint. In this area the beaches are black because particles in the sand are made up of basalt, which comes from volcanic ash. There the sands remember — or at least they reference — the eruption, and in doing so they call up all of the associations we might have with the city that once was. Those sands carry the imprint of the world that Mount Pelée both dispersed and destroyed on that day in 1902.

Sainte-Anne

Far to the south and east of Saint-Pierre, in an area that sits at the tip of a small outcropping on Martinique's other shore, lies a commune called Sainte-Anne. While pre-eruption Saint-Pierre was often imagined as a space of hedonistic racial mixture, Sainte-Anne has long held a far different reputation. During the 1950s the out-of-the-way commune was known as a refuge for rebels, for people who contested the continued dominance of *béké* and *mulâtre* elites in the lives of ordinary (mostly black) Martinicans, and was the center of the island's small cultural nationalist movement.[39] In the 1970s community members protested the building of the island's only Club Méditeranée and have since worked concertedly to thwart the development of a tourist industry in the commune.[40] After the local activist Garcin Malsa was elected mayor in 1989, he launched a campaign to remove all of the *tricolores* (the blue, white, and red French flags) from their official perches and to replace them with a red, black, and green flag, meant to declare Martinican independence from France. Today, when you drive into Sainte-Anne from the island's major highway, the first thing you see as you cross the boundary is a roundabout where the red, black, and green waves. But Sainte-Anne is known for another reason, too: it is home to one of the island's few meeting spaces for same-sex desiring men, a secluded cove called Anse Moustique on the least visited part of its largest beach, Les Salines.

On my first visit to the island, I hiked out to Anse Moustique at midmorning. Not only was it long before noon, but it was also the middle of the week, and I found myself alone on the beach, wondering how this empty place squared with the stories that I had heard men tell about their liaisons there. It was just a cove flanked by trees and low-hanging brush, opening onto a shallow stretch of the sea. The waves there were gentle, and the sand freshly flattened by the high tide. I was beset by two questions that have remained with me since. The first: why make this cruising spot all the way out here, in Sainte-Anne? On a good traffic-free day, Anse Moustique is over an hour's drive from the island's urban center. While the capital seems to always have one operational cruising strip, alternating between the central waterfront, La Savane (a city park), and the port, this beach is the only drag that has remained constant for more than two decades. Distance is one good reason, but there are other beaches on the island, themselves equally difficult to access. That Anse Moustique sits in one of Martinique's two nationalist communes reminds us of the omnipresence of queer relation. Rather than restrict the archive of these presences to the decadent city that Saint-Pierre once was, often read as European, Anse Moustique takes us into the hinterlands, often read as the site for black authenticity, to a context far different from the one described in Géache's novel. While Saint-Pierre was the embodiment of the island's cosmopolitanism, Sainte-Anne is a sleepy backwater. There unemployment rates sit at nearly 35 percent, and people remember vividly a not-so-distant time when many made their living by doing the tedious work of salt-collecting out on the flats.[41] People who live in the island's contemporary urban spaces often speak of places like Sainte-Anne, pejoratively, as being *en commune*. Said with a frown of the face and a roll of the eyes, they imagine the people in these places incapable of acquiring the sophistication assigned to the residents of more urban grounds.

As we sipped espresso in a café in Fort-de-France, I asked thirty-two-year-old Guillaume to describe Anse Moustique for someone who had never been there.[42] He and I had been talking about our experiences of the place, and most particularly about his first journey there, when a friend whom he had met online (through the website Adam 4 Adam) gave him a ride to the beach.[43] It was there that he first had oral sex with another man. This is what he said:

Guillaume: Listen, it's not like it's on anyone's way anywhere else. Anse Moustique? Whew [he sucks his teeth]. You have to drive all the way out to Sainte-Anne first (And with the traffic here? That can take over an hour!) and then you have to continue, continue, continue . . . all along that smaller road to Les Salines. And then you still have to get to Anse Moustique — now that there's that new access road — you know the one I mean. That you took for the party? — no, I don't remember when they opened it . . . my memory's bad . . . but you know the road, with all of the rocks and potholes, and it gets flooded, too, every time it rains (and you know it rains all the time here!). And then even after you park, you have to put on your boots and hike! [he laughs] But when you get there, you know. You know that the guys who are there are in the same spirit as you.

Vanessa Agard-Jones: How does that feel?

Guillaume: *C'est magique, chérie. Tout à fait. C'est magique.* [It's magic, my dear. Completely. It's magic.]

What makes Anse Moustique magic for Guillaume is the kind of shared space that it offers to the people who go there. This kind of experience is a critical dimension of what might be called "queer" culture on the island. The beach is so far out of the way that those who find themselves on its sands are a self-selecting bunch. The men there do not usually call themselves gay — instead of embracing an identity, they identify with an affective state — they often say they are *chaud* (hot) — in a hot period, needing release. In addition to the space, this is the "spirit" (*esprit*) that they share, a shifting terrain of desire much like the sands that heat and cool throughout the day. Many, like Guillaume, have girlfriends and wives on other parts of the island and are able to make the long journey out to the beach only a few times a month. As Lionel, another of my interlocutors, said to me, *On vient pour koker — c'est ça le but.* (We come to fuck — that's the goal.) But other things happen, too, at Anse Moustique. Men come to know and recognize each other, an important, but also potentially risky process on an island as small as Martinique, where propinquity feeds the gossip mill. Men who have come by bus and on foot often leave with others who have cars. Drinks and joints are brought and shared. Men play and bathe and rest in the sea. The magic is sexual but also social, equally about what Guillaume described as the "best blow job of [his] life" as about the kinds of connections, however tenuous, that the space offers for its users.

I think of Anse Moustique as another example of what Delany describes in his powerful set of essays *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*, where he recounts the kinds of relationships that men built in Manhattan's porn theaters in the 1970s and 1980s. Refusing an easy nostalgia, Delany writes, "Were the porn theaters romantic? Not at all. But because of the people who used them, they were humane and functional, fulfilling needs that most of our society does not yet know how to acknowledge."[44] For Delany, these were places that fulfilled sexual needs, but also social ones — allowing for a kind of cross-class contact that was otherwise rare in his daily life. In Martinique, this kind of contact is even more rarified, as the island's class stratification is exacerbated by disparities in access to transportation and by the fact that living without a car limits access to a wide range of places on the island. This is not Delany's New York City, where, however cynically we might think about it, even the mayor rides public transportation. In Martinique, public buses run only in the capital, and they operate only Monday through Friday from 5 a.m. to 6 p.m. and on Saturdays until noon. Collective taxis get people without cars from town to town, but they are unscheduled and unreliable, and only go to the town centers rather than to more out-of-the-way places, like Anse Moustique.

Through Guillaume I met Bruno, an HIV-positive man in his forties who lives on social assistance in a small apartment in Fort-de-France. He scrapes to get by most months, supplementing his state income with a variety of hustles.[45] While he does not have access to a car, he travels to Anse Moustique fairly regularly, either by bus or hitchhiking to make his way to that other shore. When I asked him to describe a particularly memorable moment at Anse Moustique, he said this:

> *Bruno*: It was a Sunday a couple of years back, and I met a young man, a *béké*, who was seventeen years old. . . . I saw him walking with a piece of wood, swinging it like this, and he had on hiker shorts — and I asked him, "Are you lost?" He said "No, no, no. I'm just taking a walk." I asked, "Do you know where you are?" And he said, "I know this route." So I did a U-turn and came back to him and said, "Do you know there are a lot of homos here?" And he said, "Oh yes? I didn't know." And I said, "You didn't know?" "(You know when they say they don't know, they really know.)" And he said, "And you, are you homo?" And I said, "Yes, I'm homo — but don't be afraid." And he said, "I'm not afraid!" But he was scared to be penetrated, you know, because I had on a cap and baggy jeans, I was looking very BadBoy, and he had this idea about what was going to happen to him — but when I offered to suck him off he said — *tout de suite! — On va où?* (Where can we go?) *Tout de suite!* (Right away!) So we walked across the mangrove, and laid down a towel, and we made love there . . . but that young man he was seventeen — and he was a *béké*! And we talked for a long time afterward — he told me that he was a *béké*, and that he was in high school at the rich people's school, the private one in Fort-de-France. That's a story that I would love to see happen again — no, I haven't seen him again yet, but when we see each other . . . that would be something nice.

Bruno's story about his encounter with the young *béké* highlights the function of the beach as a space of both cross-class and interracial connection. In Martinique, *békés* are the descendants of the white colonial elite, the planter class that continues to dominate the island economically, though no longer politically. *Békés* are notorious for their remove from the rest of the island, for their enclosed communities on the east coast in and around Le François, and for their continued staunch refusal to "mix" with the rest of the island's population.[46] For Bruno, having this liaison — and, particularly, this postcoital conversation with a *béké* — remained in his memory as a singularly significant moment in his nearly twenty years of frequenting Anse Moustique. The conventional racial scripts that would have made their connection unlikely are disrupted here by the prospect of a blow job, by the potential for a moment of shared pleasure. Like Guillaume, who thinks of the beach in magical terms, Bruno appreciates it not just for the sex but also for the other kinds of social connection that the place makes possible.

While most evenings Anse Moustique is a cruising space for men alone, a few times a year a promoter named Jean-Marc throws large parties on the beach, trucking in a generator, DJ equipment, tiki torches, and party lights to welcome nearly two hundred people to dance and connect. Everyone brings a bottle to contribute to the bar (a requirement for admission), and after drinking and dancing most of the night away there is time for sea baths at dawn.

I arrive at 2 a.m., just as the party is getting under way. The sandy dance floor is already marked by the footprints of ecstatic dancers, moved by the DJ's facility with diasporic music — he moves seamlessly from soca to zouk, through calypso and dancehall, back to hip hop and R&B, and then again to something close to, though not quite, Chicago house. Women come to these parties in striking numbers, setting up their towels in a cove slightly separate from the men's side of the beach. Like their male counterparts, they drink and dance, often leading the more raucous line-dancing interludes orchestrated by the DJ. They too are the first to the sandy dance floor when the selector plays a slow zouk, and their grinding and twirling entices the male couples to join, swaying to the syncopated beats, forehead to forehead, crotches intertwined. There is a good deal of semipublic sex on these evenings among both men and women, who use the cover of night's darkness and the privacy of the surrounding brush to consummate their unions, however tenuous.

The day after one such party I called a woman in her forties named Karine to talk about the night's events. Karine works as a security guard and identifies herself by the French term *garçon manqué*, or "missed boy" (tomboy). In the years that I have known her, she has never had a serious relationship, but at these beach parties she is quite popular and is usually surrounded by a group of women of varying gender identifications. I had seen Karine head off down a path with a younger woman just as I was getting ready to leave the party. On the phone, I asked her what it was that she remembered most about the evening. In response, she said this: *Seigneur* (God), I woke up this afternoon with sand in my ass and all I could think about was that hot little *chabine* that I had on the beach.[47] Powerfully mediated through her experience of sand lodged in an uncomfortable place, Karine's corporeal association of the beach with her lovemaking made me wonder anew what the sand might offer us as a repository for queer memory.

Beyond the stories that Guillaume, Bruno, and Karine are able to recount, what remains of the vibrant sexual encounters that they have had at Anse Moustique? After the parties are over, and the blankets, empty bottles, and sound system cleared away, what reminds us of the importance of this site, for so many people? On that beach, the sand that people dance and lie down on holds something of those experiences — perhaps not materially, but metaphysically. Thinking about how we might understand this phenomenon, the second question that has beset me since my first solitary visit to that cove is this: what could an empty place tell me, an ethnographer, about same-sex desire on the island? Perhaps it is in the sands that I have my answer. The sand tracks this presence in a place where the archive is shallow, and where the ravages of the plantation, then later of the colony, and even worse still, of the salinated air, has meant the slow erosion of all things putatively concrete. Sand is born of, and speaks of, that erosion. On a beach where people live and love and dance together, there can be no definitive record. But far from V. S. Naipaul's condemnation of the Caribbean as a site of "ruination," the sand, even in its erosion, has its own integrity and retains its own history. The sand's memory is "a resolute commitment to those with whom . . . we are still dancing," a diffuse and oblique archive of movement in place, of loving on a local scale.[48]

Sand Is History

In his magisterial and now-iconic poem, St. Lucian writer and Nobel laureate Derek Walcott contends that, for the Caribbean region, "sea is history."[49] Invoked time and again as the ideal metaphor to index the complicated calculus of presence, loss, and absence that attends the history of the African diaspora in the Americas, Walcott's articulation of the sea is much like those of a cadre of literary workers and cultural critics who employ watery metaphors to help us better grasp and understand this history.

Working from a different angle, in my attempt to pay close attention to place, this essay invokes the most fine-grained element — quite literally — of the place where I work: the sand. From the sand on the beaches of Saint-Pierre, to the morning-after sand in Karine's ass, sand is everywhere in Martinique (as it is throughout the region). It is, of course, on the beaches, but it is also carried on the wind and on our bodies. It ends up on the kitchen floor, in the backseat of the car, in the bottom of my handbag, and in all manner of bodily orifices. While we have work that inspires and elucidates using metaphors of the mangrove and of the sea in Caribbean cultural studies, the sand has received no such attention. But what can the sand tell us?

Nearly everywhere on earth, sand is principally made up of one element—in some places silica, in others limestone. Ninety percent of a grain is almost always just one of those two elements. But the other 10 percent is the percentage with a difference—the percentage that, in its difference, matters—the percentage that can tell us something about the history of a place. In Saint-Pierre and its surroundings, that variable 10 percent is made up of the basalt that makes the sands black.[50] In Sainte-Anne, there is no geological marker in those grains, but they hold something all the same. While the sand's referents are far from concrete, they provide a model for one way to understand the memory of same-sex desire and gender transgression on the island—as diffuse yet somehow omnipresent. "Queerness," then, retains a kind of oblique permanence in Martinique that has resonance both in the structure of the sand and in the connections made on the island's shores. Rather than invoke ideas about absence and invisibility as the condition of same-sex desiring and gender-transgressing people, turning to sand as a metaphor for the repository of memory may help our analyses engage with more fine-grained and ephemeral presences than our usual archives would allow.

Notes

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queer/feminist studies networks were extraordinarily helpful as I made my way through the revision process, even at the height of Swedish summer. Finally, I thank *GLQ*'s three anonymous reviewers for their insightful and incisive readings, and hope to continue to engage their feedback as the broader project that includes this work develops. During the time that I developed this essay, my research was generously supported by a National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship (and its Nordic Research Opportunity) under grant number DGE-0813964, as well as by the Bourse Chateaubriand of the Embassy of France in the United States.

1. This is not to discount the deep associations of water with both physical and emotional pain, with death and drowning, or of specific bodies of water (and their boundaries) with militarism. My point is also not to set sand in brutal opposition to water but to highlight the different kind of work that it might do given its material constraints, in its moderation of ideas about fluidity and motion. For important discussions of water, pain, and black historical memory, see Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley, *Thiefing Sugar: Eroticism between Women in Caribbean Literature* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010); and Marcus Wood, *Blind Memory: Visual Representations of Slavery in England and America, 1780–1865* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000).
2. Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley, "Black Atlantic, Queer Atlantic: Queer Imaginings of the Middle Passage," *GLQ* 14 (2008): 204.
3. Makeda Silvera, "Man Royals and Sodomites: Some Thoughts on the Invisibility of Afro-Caribbean Lesbians," *Feminist Studies* 18, no. 3 (1992): 521–32. While Silvera's argument is pegged specifically to *lesbian* invisibility, and the particular silences/erasure that she argues condition our lives, I believe her broader critique would extend to same-sex desiring Afro-Caribbean people more generally. I use the words *queer* and *queerness* here as a shorthand, fully cognizant of the fact that they are not words that appear in the lexicon of same-sex-desiring and gender-transgressing subjects in Martinique. For a masterful analysis of the challenges of fitting language to our interlocutors' form/s and practice/s in black queer studies, see Tinsley, *Thiefing Sugar*, 5–15.
4. For work on queer Caribbean diasporas, see, for example, Ronald Cummings, "(Trans) nationalisms, Marronage, and Queer Caribbean Subjectivities," *Transforming Anthropology* 18, no. 2 (2010): 169–80; Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes, *Queer Ricans: Cultures and Sexualities in the Diaspora* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009); Rinaldo Walcott, "Queer Returns: Human Rights, the Anglo-Caribbean, and Diaspora Politics," *Caribbean Review of Gender Studies*, no. 3 (2009); Timothy Chin, "The Novels of Patricia Powell: Negotiating Gender and Sexuality across the Disjunctures of the Caribbean Diaspora," *Callaloo* 30, no. 2 (2007): 533–45.
5. I am inspired here by feminist technoscience studies and by efforts to theorize a "posthumanities" that breaks down boundaries both between academic disciplines

and between bodies and their surroundings. For example, Anneke Smelik and Nina Lykke argue that "the human body can no longer be figured either as a bounded entity or as a naturally given and distinct part of an unquestioned whole that is itself conceived as the 'environment.' The boundaries between bodies and their components are being blurred, together with those between bodies and larger ecosystems (x)." This essay's use of sand as both material and metaphor resonates with Smelik and Lykke's concept "bits of life" (page xxi) and their theorization of people simultaneously with the biological/geological/chemical environments in which they live. Similarly, in her bid for complex systems thinking across disciplinary divides, Elizabeth Wilson calls for "some middle ground of conceptual advocacy in which the metaphoricity of depression and the neurobiology of depression cohabit, entwine and are inherently shaped by one another" (page 292). Like Smelik and Lykke, she works productively between metaphor and science, across the literary and the empirical, in ways that this essay also seeks to situate its work. See Anneke Smelik and Nina Lykke, "Bits of Life: An Introduction," in *Bits of Life: Feminism at the Intersections of Media, Bioscience, and Technology*, ed. Anneke Smelik and Nina Lykke (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008), x, xxi; and Elizabeth Wilson, "Neurological Entanglements: The Case of Paediatric Depressions, SSRIs, and Suicidal Ideation," *Subjectivity* 4, no. 3 (2011): 277–97; quotation on 292.

6. M. Jacqui Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).
7. The anthropologist Gloria Wekker has long done this work in Suriname, and her *Politics of Passion: Women's Sexual Culture in the Afro-Surinamese Diaspora* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006) is a compelling examination of many of the concerns with which I am preoccupied here.
8. N.B.: "homosexual acts" often serves as a gloss for anal penetration, a practice engaged in by people across sexual spectra, yet used to single out and penalize male same-sex couples for their lovemaking.
9. See, for example, an interview with Vauclin's mayor Raymond Occolier from 2007, just before the French national election campaign: www.dailymotion.com/video/x1i17o_occo-bondamanjak_news. Beginning at 3:20 he describes his stance as an "élu chrétien" (itself an oxymoron to the French state) as one that requires that he take a position against marriage, adoption, and other legal reforms for LGBT people. In the interview he purports to speak for the great majority of Martiniquai(se)s when he declares himself to be against sexual acts he calls "against nature," yet emphasizes that his positions on these issues do not, in his view, make him homophobic.
10. Vanessa Agard-Jones, "Le Jeu de Qui? Sexual Politics at Play in the French Caribbean," in *Sex and the Citizen: Interrogating the Caribbean*, ed. Faith Smith (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011).

11. José Esteban Muñoz, "Gesture, Ephemera, Queer Feeling," in *Dancing Desires: Choreographing Sexualities on and off the Stage*, ed. Jane Desmond (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001).
12. Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005); Mathias Danbolt, "Touching History: Archival Relations in Queer Art and Theory," in *Lost and Found: Queerying the Archive*, ed. Jane Rowley, Louise Wolthers, and Mathias Danbolt (Copenhagen: Nikolaj, Copenhagen Center of Contemporary Art and Bildmuseet Umeå University, 2010); Kara Keeling, "Looking for M—: Queer Temporality, Black Political Possibility, and Poetry from the Future," *GLQ* 15 (2009): 565–82; Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).
13. Claude Rives and Frédéric Denhez, *Les épaves du volcan* (Grenoble: Editions Glénat, 1997).
14. Doris Garraway, *The Libertine Colony: Creolization in the Early French Caribbean* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005).
15. Raphaël Confiant, "Libertinage à la Créole," in *Une nuit d'orgies à Saint-Pierre, Martinique*, by Effe Géache (Paris: Arléa, 1992). Unless stated otherwise, all translations from French and Martinican Créole are my own.
16. Alwyn Scarth, *La Catastrophe: The Eruption of Mount Pélee, the Worst Volcanic Eruption of the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).
17. U. Moerens, *Pèlerinage funèbre aux ruines de Saint-Pierre, Martinique* (Lille: Société Saint-Augustin, 1903).
18. Patrice Louis, *L'enfer à Saint-Pierre: Dictionnaire de la catastrophe de 1902* (Martinique: Ibis Rouge, 2002), 151.
19. This also holds true for sexual politics in other regions, wherever the influence of the biblical tale retains cultural meaning. For an analysis of the threat of Sodom-like destruction in early New England, see Jonathan Ned Katz, "The Age of Sodomitical Sin, 1607–1740," in *Reclaiming Sodom*, ed. Jonathan Goldberg (New York: Routledge, 1994).
20. M. Jacqui Alexander, "Erotic Autonomy as a Politics of Decolonization," in *Pedagogies of Crossing*, 51.
21. Louis, *L'enfer à Saint-Pierre*; Scarth, *La Catastrophe*.
22. Samuel R. Delany, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 147.
23. Effe Géache, *Une nuit d'orgies à Saint-Pierre, Martinique* (Paris: Calivran, 1978).
24. This formula, echoed in more contemporary film and fiction as a black/blanc/beur triad, activates tropes of cross-racial friendship and common French citizenship while eliding both historical and contemporary structures of racial violence. For master-

ful analyses of antiblack racism within French multiculturalist imaginaries, see Pap Ndiaye, "Pour une histoire des populations noires en France: Préalables théoriques," *Le mouvement social* 213, no. 4 (2005); Ndiaye, *La condition noire: Essai sur une minorité française* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 2008); and Tricia D. Keaton, "The Politics of Race-Blindness: (Anti)blackness and Category-Blindness in Contemporary France," *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race* 7, no. 1 (2010): 103–31.

25. For a searing critique of de Linval's whitewashed representations of the city, see Alain Yacou, *Les catastrophes naturelles aux Antilles: D'une soufrière à une autre* (Paris: Karthala Editions, 1999).
26. The archivist and historian Liliane Chauleau has chronicled these everyday conditions in two separate publications: *Le Saint-Pierre d'antan: Quelques aspects de la vie des Pierrotins d'autrefois: Conférence faite au Rotary à l'occasion de son 5e anniversaire, le 9 mai 1975* (Fort-de-France: Les Archives départementales de la Martinique, 1975), and *Pierrotins et Saint-Pierrais: La vie quotidienne dans la ville de Saint-Pierre avant l'éruption de la montagne Pelée de 1902* (Paris: Editions L'Harmattan, 2002).
27. Géache, *Une nuit*, 8.
28. Gayatri Gopinath, *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005).
29. Serena Owusua Dankwa, "It's a Silent Trade": Female Same-Sex Intimacies in Post-Colonial Ghana," *Nora-Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research* 17, no. 3 (2009): 193.
30. I take my naming of "tacit" forms and unremarked upon presences from Carlos U. Decena, "Tacit Subjects," *GLQ* 14 (2008): 339.
31. Jafari Sinclaire Allen, "For 'the Children': Dancing the Beloved Community," *Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture, and Society* 11, no. 3 (2009): 315.
32. Géache, *Une nuit*, 108.
33. On Carnival and sexuality more generally in the Caribbean, see Kamala Kempadoo, "Theorizing Sexual Relations in the Caribbean," in *Confronting Power, Theorizing Gender: Interdisciplinary Perspectives in the Caribbean*, ed. Eudine Barriteau (Mona: University of the West Indies Press, 2003); and Linden Lewis, *The Culture of Gender and Sexuality in the Caribbean* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003). On the francophone Caribbean, see Thomas Spear, "Carnivalesque Jouissance: Representation of Sexuality in the Francophone West Indian Novel," *Jouvert: A Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 2, no. 1 (1998); on Martinique in particular, David A. B. Murray, "Defiance or Defilement? Undressing Cross-Dressing in Martinique's Carnival," *Sexualities* 1, no. 3 (1998): 343–54; also see Patrick Bruneteaux and Véronique Rochais, *Le Carnaval des travestis: Les travestis makoumè* (Case Pilote: Éditions Lafontaine, 2006), which in calling attention to wide-ranging participation in the practice, insists that the phenomenon of *travestissement* was (and remains) "transclassiste."

34. While cross-dressing is also part of celebrations in Brazil, it is rarer in the insular Caribbean and does not hold the kind of traditional permanence that the spectacle of *travestis makoumè* holds in Martinique.
35. Isabelle Hidair, *Anthropologie du Carnaval cayennais: Une représentation en réduction de la société créole cayennaise* (Paris: Editions Publibook, 2005), 43.
36. The *diablesse* (*guiablesse*, *djablès*) is a popular folk figure, a female consort of the devil whose beauty is reputed to seduce men to their deaths. See also Lafcadio Hearn, "Martinique Sketches: La Guiablesse," for a nineteenth-century rendering in *Two Years in the French West Indies* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1903).
37. Thierry L'Étang, "Saint-Pierre, Martinique: Mémoire orale d'une ville martyre et eschatologie de la catastrophe," in *Saint-Pierre: Mythes et réalités de la cité créole disparue*, ed. Léo Ursulet (Guyane: Ibis Rouge Editions, 2004), 25–26.
38. Édouard Glissant has written extensively about Martinique's black sands, most notably in "La Plage Noir" ("The Black Beach"), where he uses the beach's mutations (in this case, the one at Diamant) to think through both relationality and disorder in Martinican politics. See Édouard Glissant, *Poétique de la Relation* (Paris: Messageries du Livre, 1990).
39. See Sainte-Anne's longtime mayor Garcin Malsa's memoir for one perspective on this history: *L'écologie ou la passion du vivant: Quarante ans d'écrits écologiques* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2008).
40. Éric Coppet, "L'avenir, Sainte-Anne et le marin," *Politiques publiques*, October 5, 2010.
41. For employment rates, see Institut National de la Statistique et des Études Économiques statistics, 2010 (www.insee.fr).
42. All names are pseudonyms.
43. Adam 4 Adam (www.adam4adam.com/) is an online dating and chat site for men who have sex with men, used often in Martinique by men seeking casual sexual partners, as well as friends.
44. Delany, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*, 90.
45. The anthropologist Katherine Browne, in *Creole Economics: Caribbean Cunning under the French Flag* (Houston: University of Texas Press, 2004), provides an important analysis of the ways that people make ends meet on the island, through a combination of legal and extralegal economic pursuits.
46. Emily Vogt's unpublished doctoral dissertation is one important source for this history, "Ghosts of the Plantation: Historical Representations and Cultural Difference among Martinique's White Elite" (University of Chicago, 2005), as is Édith Kováts Beaudoux, *Les blancs créoles de la Martinique: Une minorité dominante* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2002), the belated publication from her field research on the island in the 1960s.
47. In Martinique, as in other parts of the French Caribbean, a *chabin/e* designates a per-

son of African descent with light (often very light) skin, but "African" features. These distinctions are well documented in Jean Luc Bonniol, *La couleur comme maléfice: Une illustration créole de la généalogie des "blancs" et des "noirs"* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1992) as well as in the anthropologist Stéphanie Mulot's doctoral dissertation, "'Je suis la mère, je suis le père!' L'énigme matrifocale. Relations familiales et rapports de sexe en Guadeloupe" (École des Haute Études en Sciences Sociales, 2000).

48. Allen, "For 'the Children,'" 320.
49. Derek Walcott, "The Sea Is History," in *Collected Poems, 1948–1984* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1986).
50. My understandings of sand's composition are drawn from Michael Helland, *Sand: The Neverending Story* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009); Bernard W. Pipkin, D. D. Trent, Richard Hazlett, and Paul Bierman, *Geology and the Environment* (New York: Cengage, 2007); and F. Michel and H. Conge's film *Histoire d'un grain de sable* (2004).