

ABSTRACT

This paper presents a little-known project in Fort-de-France, Martinique, by the French practice Candilis Josic Woods, as a starting-point for an anthropological framing of the cultural significance of Modernist architecture and planning in Martinique between the 1960s and the present day. It responds to a dearth of research and scholarship on the modernist architectural legacy in the Caribbean region in general. Well-known for its post-war mass housing projects in France and earlier experimental housing in Morocco of the 1950s, Candilis Josic Woods' work in the French Antillean territories during the post-war years is hardly documented. This paper draws on archival and literary sources to consider the historical and cultural significance of this output at two levels: 1. within the context of the practice's own commitment to an architectural approach founded in an anthropological understanding of culture and everyday life, and 2. as part of the author's ongoing work to develop an anthropological framing of modernist architecture and planning as cultural heritage within the context of postcolonial discourses and concepts of creolisation, and to argue the need for detailed ethnographic fieldwork at the neglected peripheries of canonical modernism to support this line of enquiry through future research.

KEY WORDS architecture; planning; ethnography; Caribbean; modernism; creolisation

1. Introduction: modernism and the 'black Atlantic'¹

The housing scheme of Floréal at Fort-de-France in Martinique, designed in the late 1950s by Candilis Josic Woods following 'departmentalisation' of the former French colony, is one of a number of post-war housing developments on the island that were sponsored by the métropole through the Société Immobilière Antilles Guyane, and which have been subject to a programme of regeneration work over recent years. This paper discusses the historical and architectural background of this project, framed by discourses around postcolonial identity and concepts of 'creolisation' in the Caribbean. It further argues for the need to implement ethnographic research methodologies to augment understandings of how such projects have contributed to an evolving aesthetics of social identity in local, overlooked and under-studied contexts. It supports an approach to analysis of modernist built heritage which extends beyond the key iconic monuments of the West and registers the broader significance of modernist architecture and planning in transforming the urban context and urban lives in lesser-known settings beyond the European perimeter during the process of postcolonial re-ordering following the second world war and up to the present day. It will bring to the fore questions around how modernism, as a spatial and aesthetic strategy of social ordering² equally underwent adaptation and modification by local agents in the process of translation to

¹ Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*

² Hetherington, *Badlands of modernity*

local settings³, mediating between state motives of cultural assimilation and local movements of cultural resistance, and acting as a catalyst for creation of new hybrid spaces of postcolonial identity⁴.

From 1931 onwards – three years after the foundation of CIAM by le Corbusier - the French author Jean de Brunhoff published a series of children’s books about a young elephant growing up, *Babar*. In *Babar: the King*, Babar leaves the jungle of his birth after his mother is shot dead by hunters and goes to the big city⁵. He returns to the jungle, bringing with him the benefits of civilisation. He is crowned king of the elephants and founds the city of Célesteville, named after his wife Céleste. These books, and their appealing illustrations, have long been the subject of a debate around whether de Brunhoff’s work was a self-conscious parody of the bourgeois French colonial vision, or whether it simply manifests intrinsic attitudes on the part of Europeans towards the rest of the world during that period of history. In any case, the image of the new town of Celesteville provides an apt illustration of the stereotype of modernism as a spatial planning strategy designed to solve social problems on linear, rationalising and functional European lines following CIAM-derived ideology. **FIG 1**

As Michelle Wallace has written, ‘the discussions of Modernism ... are defined as exclusively white by an intricate and insidious operation of art galleries, museums and academic art history, and also blocked from any discussion of “primitivism” which has been colonized beyond recognition in the space of the international and now global museum.’⁶ In response, this paper seeks to re-situate received ideas of architectural modernism as an essentially European cultural export, drawing on European Enlightenment values of universalism, rationalism, order, and nationalism, in the context of discourses around Caribbean *créolité*. With reference to work by Clifford, Gilroy, Sansi-Roca, Holston, Price and others, as well as ‘local’ [‘marginal’? ‘postcolonial’?] authors such as Oswald de Andrade, Césaire, Fanon and Glissant, it recognises that the ‘utopian’ ambitions of modernism in the New World (continuing in a long historical tradition from the 16th Century) have also been subjected to *co-constitutive processes* of cultural transformation in the regional context. It suggests that modernism also offered a vehicle for the materialisation of a hybrid, creolised, or multi-layered [postcolonial] Antillean cultural identity, which presented positive possibilities of an imagined and desired, urban future beyond the legacy of slavery.

2. French modernism in Martinique

The influence of modernism on the production of the urban built environment in Martinique from the 1930s onwards can be attributed to a number of routes. The island had been run by the French as an Antillean plantation economy from the early 17th Century, along with neighbouring Guadeloupe and French Guiana on the south American mainland, following its failure to establish a permanent colony in Brazil. When Brazil threw off Portuguese imperial rule in 1822, French culture, perceived as progressive, secular and liberating, with a strong emphasis on the role of the social sciences in political economy⁷, became

³ Wright, *Global ambition*; Nagy, *Dressing up Downtown*; Nasr and Volait, *Urbanism*

⁴ Melhuish, Degen and Rose, *The real modernity that is here*

⁵ de Brunhoff, *Babar the King*

⁶ Wallace, *Modernism, postmodernism*, 47

⁷ Rabinow, *French modern*

influential in the development of a modernist and modernising regime in Brazil⁸. In the 1930s the French established the new University of São Paulo, where Lévi-Strauss established his reputation as the foremost anthropologist of the time, which was to play a key role in the formation of the modern Brazilian state. Le Corbusier's visits during the same period to meet architects and government ministers were instrumental in materialising a new built infrastructure for modern government defined by modernist principles of architecture and planning. The construction of his radical new MESP (Ministry of Education and Public Health) building of 1936 paved the way for Lucio Costa and Oscar Niemeyer's design of Brasilia in the late 1950s/early 1960s as the country's new capital city and centre of governance, described by Holston as 'a radical reconceptualisation of city life'⁹. In 1939, Brazil exhibited its emerging modernist 'Brazilian style' to international acclaim in its national pavilion at the New York World's Fair¹⁰.

Doucet describes how (largely French-trained) Martinican architects, contractors and engineers processed the influence of French modernism both from the metropole, and from Brazil¹¹. But another significant conduit for modernising influence in Martinique was the journal *Tropiques*, founded in 1939 by local writers and intellectuals Aimé and Suzanne Césaire. Their meeting with Lévi-Strauss, André Breton and André Masson, who stopped off in Fort-de-France en route to New York in 1941, fleeing Vichy France,¹² was to open up an exchange of ideas between the Surrealist and modernist movements in France, and the postcolonial resistance movement in the Caribbean. While at university in Paris in the 1930s, Aimé Césaire and fellow students had been instrumental in launching the *négritude* movement. The contact with Caribbean culture and the politics of *négritude* gave a powerful impetus to black awareness and revolutionary Marxist and anti-racist politics within Surrealism itself and its engagement with modernism in Europe. In turn, Surrealism and its influence on writers such as Lefebvre, stimulated an engagement with an ethnographic sensibility to the understanding of everyday life under the conditions of modernity in the pages of *Tropiques*¹³.

In the decades following the war, the *négritude* movement remained politically and culturally significant, while Martinique's negative experience of the French Vichy war-time government led to heightened racial tensions and political awareness on the island. In 1945, Césaire was elected mayor of Fort-de-France, representing Martinique in the French National Assembly. While embracing the economic advantages of departmentalisation, as opposed to independence, Césaire held French state authority at arm's length and established himself as a powerful figurehead of resistance to cultural assimilation by the métropole. His 1958 deal with the new president of France (the Fifth Republic), General de Gaulle, leader of the exiled Free French government during the war, guaranteed improvement of local conditions in Martinique and the granting of certain prerogatives, with an emphasis on social security and housing provision. During the post-war period of rapid inward migration of workers from the countryside following the collapse of the rural economy, Césaire promoted strong views on the importance of the urban domain as a space which would allow for the re-organisation of Martiniquan plantation society and representation

⁸ Williamson, Penguin History

⁹ Holston, The modernist city

¹⁰ Deckker, Brazil built

¹¹ Doucet, Architectures Modernistes – on influence of Brazil

¹² Breton and Masson, Martinique

¹³ Clifford, Predicament of Culture

of local, black cultural identity in the emerging postcolonial world context¹⁴. His urban policies included government support for the construction of self-build shanty town settlements, but also drew on the influence which Modernist architecture had exerted in Martinique from the 1930s onwards¹⁵. In 1945, local architect Louis Caillat, who subsequently supervised the implementation of Candilis Josic Woods' designs for the Floreal project, produced a radical scheme by for the redevelopment of the centre of Fort-de-France along the lines of Le Corbusier's Ville Radieuse [1945]¹⁶. Caillat's sketch proposal, which has strong similarities with Le Corbusier's Plan directeur for Algiers of 1942 – not least in the drawing style itself - retains only the five most important traffic routes through the city, doubling the area of the lower town, reclaiming the bay, and building five Unités d'Habitation lifted above a vast new Savane (the main public square in the city), with access to the new town provided via a clover-leaf-shaped interchange. Although this scheme was never realised, a number of new, Corbusier-inspired social housing projects were built in the city from the 1950s onwards.

FIG 2 The image of Cité St Georges at Batelière (1965), a series of modernist housing blocks designed by Martiniquan architect Maurice de Lavigne St Suzanne¹⁷ constitutes a powerful contrast with the types of images of the Caribbean as a natural paradise which people are normally exposed to. Sheller has documented the history of the idea of the Caribbean as a tropical tourist haven through evolving practices of Western consumption and exploitation over several centuries¹⁸; Gilroy and others have underscored the corresponding marginalisation of the Caribbean to the periphery of modernity in the European consciousness, notwithstanding its central role in the evolution of the conditions of modern life, as the site for the early development of capitalism¹⁹. In this context, architectural modernism seems like an anomaly, but in the post-war years it played an important role in shaping new ideas about the future of an urban Martinican society. It was against this backdrop that the project by Candilis Josic and Woods (protégés of Le Corbusier and founder members of Team X in 1959) for Cité Floreal in Balata, 1957 – 1968, materialised.

Not as striking as the St Suzanne scheme, the images of Floréal are interesting because they demonstrate a less idealised vision of modernism than one which is grounded in the realities of everyday life and environment in post-war Martinique (**FIG 3, 4**). Doucet describes the development as architecturally less successful than Cité St Georges, which he attributes to the compromised process of realisation which took place over a decade following the original competition, under the supervision of local architect Louis Caillat²⁰. However the images also suggest an interesting tension between French cultural identity, as it was embodied in the new formal housing developments, and the emerging local movements of post-colonial resistance and identity, which were to be linked to the spatial imagery and 'bricolage' aesthetics of the self-built shanty towns²¹ by writers such as Chamoiseau and Glissant - leaders during the 1980s of the

¹⁴ see Letchimy, *L'urbanisme, d'hier à demain*. Extract from his closing speech at the Journées Mondiales d'Urbanisme, Fort-de-France, in 2010, published in *Lyann Karaib* 1, 8-11

¹⁵ see Doucet, *Architecture Modernistes*, also Gallo and Doucet, *Case studies in Modernism*

¹⁶ Caillat sketch, 1945, Project for the reconstruction of the centre of Fort-de-France, published in Doucet, *Architectures Modernistes*

¹⁷ Doucet, *Le logement social*

¹⁸ Sheller, *Consuming the Caribbean*

¹⁹ Gilroy, *Black Atlantic*

²⁰ Doucet, *Architecture Modernistes*

²¹ Knepper, *Colonisation, Creolisation*

'créolité' and 'antillanité' movements respectively²². Indeed, Césaire's successor as Mayor in 2001, the urban planner Serge Letchimy, would further celebrate these sites – the city's *bidonvilles* - as 'laboratories of the urban mangrove', heralding an era of 'progressive and responsive caribbean contemporary urbanism, embedded in a new culture of urban democracy and ingenious approach to development'²³.

Surrounded by mangrove swamps, the city of Fort-de-France is typical of colonial development in featuring a grid-plan central area containing French-style colonial buildings built by a mercantile elite. It was significant as a transit city on the crossroads of trade between Africa, Europe and Americas, and an administrative centre, although historically overshadowed commercially and culturally by the city of Saint-Pierre (the Paris of the Caribbean) to the north of the island, until its destruction by the eruption of the volcano St Pelée in 1902 - a catastrophe which brought the first significant wave of immigrants to Fort-de-France. Like other colonial cities, it was socially highly-divided, the central area and elegant Didier district on the hills occupied by elite descendents of the French and mixed plantation class (*békés*)²⁴ with a segregated 'creole' periphery characterised by informal development. Notwithstanding Caillat's proposal for the radical modernist restructuring of the colonial centre, and the efforts spearheaded by Césaire and subsequent urban policy-makers to construct low-income housing in new neighbourhoods, Michel Laguerre, in his book on urban poverty in the Caribbean (1990), presented Fort-de-France as a 'social laboratory' in which the reproduction of space should not be understood as neutral or pure, but (following Lefebvre) rather an ecology which perpetuates the hierarchy of positions and unequal, asymmetrical social relations. Criticising the new housing developments, he attributed their failure to usher in a new social order to an *'inability ... to consider or design for the extended family patterns of the poor...[they]... impose new norms in the daily lives of residents in that they must follow new rules and adopt new behaviours'*²⁵. This paper will therefore turn now to consider how the design of Floréal should be interpreted in this context, framing the question of how far Candilis Josic Woods' vision was conceived as a response to local conditions and an evolving, culturally-informed urban identity in Martinique.

3. Candilis Josic Woods and the dialogue with anthropology during decolonisation

During the 1950s and 60s, the practice made an enormous contribution to the construction of innovative new mass housing in France, as part of its postwar reconstruction (the Thirty Glorious Years). Candilis and Woods had worked with Le Corbusier on the design for the Unite d'Habitation in Marseilles (1947-52), following which they left for Morocco to work with ATBAT (the construction wing of le Corbusier's practice, responsible for the realisation of the Unité) on the construction of low-cost housing with Michel Ecochard in the last years of the French Protectorate there (1956). It was here that they met Josic, before returning to France on winning a national competition in 1955 to build several thousand low-cost (HLM) dwellings in the Parisian suburbs and cities in the south of France – work which was to sustain the practice for a decade. In 1954 and 1955 they also produced schemes for the French Caribbean territories - the Tropical Housing and Tropical Schools competitions for Martinique, Guadeloupe (French Antilles) and Guyane, and in 1957 won the competition to design the Floreal (or Balata) project in Martinique. This was commissioned by the Paris-

²² Chamoiseau et al, *Eloge de la Créolité*; Glissant, *Le discours antillais*

²³ Letchimy, *L'urbanisme, d'hier à demain*, 10

²⁴ see Zobel's description in his novel *Black shack alley*

²⁵ Laguerre, *Urban poverty in the Caribbean*: 165

based state housing association, SIAG – Société Immobilière Antilles Guyane – founded in 1955 to undertake large-scale HLM projects in the French Caribbean territories, following their decision in 1946 (led by Aimé Césaire as Mayor of Fort-de-France) to become French Overseas Departments, rather than fight for independence like Morocco and Algeria. More specifically, it was a response to the embarrassment of French state leaders at the rapid growth of shanty-towns in the Antilles, resulting from the dramatic population increase in the urban centres between 1945 and 1961, which was in turn caused by the collapse of the rural economy due to competition from European sugar beet production. It also represented a political acknowledgement on the part of the French state that the citizens of the new ODs should be guaranteed a comparable standard of living to those ‘at home’, in the métropole.

Candilis Josic Woods’ interest in mass housing was fuelled by their engagement in a vigorous debate around redefining the notion of ‘habitat’ – understood not as the abstract, functional concept embodied in early CIAM ideology (and the dwelling as a ‘machine for living in’) - but rather as a close integration of built and social structure, located in time and place, and as ‘a meeting point between sociology and architecture’, as defined at the CIAM IX meeting of 1953²⁶. The *house, street, district and city* were resurrected as fundamental, structural elements of urbanism, which also corresponded to associational levels of urban social life, not just as functional components of an urban masterplan. Housing was re-evaluated as the basis for development of whole new neighbourhoods and communities designed according to an understanding of everyday spatial practices, and in recognition of the importance of ‘place’ as a source of stability and identity in a fast-changing modernized world. At the same time, they embraced the idea of technology, as product, process and environment, as an integral part of everyday life – from mass-production of housing construction elements, to cars for mobility, and domestic equipment.

This discourse was substantially shaped by anthropological dialogue – notably the work of Lefebvre²⁷ and Chombart de Lauwe. In France, the social sciences had been central to the conceptualisation and development of a republican modern society based on principles of public order, hygiene, and rationalisation of the urban environment, as exemplified both in the Haussmanisation of Paris and the later CIAM²⁸-influenced re-visioning of towns and cities through the 1930s and ‘40s. But during the the intense post-war years of reconstruction, industrialisation, and modernisation, which were heavily dependent on the implementation of new technologies and the mass labour provided by immigrants from France’s fast-disappearing colonies²⁹, an interest in ethnography, as a qualitative method of investigation into social practices, came to the fore. Critics such as Lefebvre³⁰ and Chombart de Lauwe³¹ began to question the so-called ‘hard French’, rationalising models of development embodied in the new Corbusier-influenced housing blocks and satellite towns, and to ask what effect such environments, in conjunction with the new social conditions, were having on people’s way of life. Their position was not simply a critique of

²⁶ Introduction to ‘Analytic Study of Boulogne-Billancourt’ grid at CIAM 9 Aix-en-Provence, by CIAM-Paris

²⁷ Stanek, Towards an architecture

²⁸ International Congresses of Modern Architecture, founded 1928 by a group of 28 European architects organized by Le Corbusier, Hélène de Mandrot, and Sigfried Giedion (the first secretary-general)

²⁹ Ross, Fast cars clean bodies

³⁰ Lefebvre, Critique of everyday life, Notes sur la ville nouvelle, The production of space

³¹ Chombart de Lauwe, Paris et son agglomération; supported by MRU minister Claudius-Petit, commissioner of Le Corbusier’s Unité d’Habitation in Marseilles of the same date (1952)

Modernism, as an architectural ideology inspired by the Athens Charter³² (1933) and Ville Radieuse (indeed CIAM architects themselves were critical of what was happening) but more broadly a critique of the whole French state apparatus and bureaucracy that placed such an emphasis on the application of reductive norms and formulae to solve social problems fast in the name of progress and modernisation.³³ Chombart de Lauwe's survey and structuralist analysis of urban elements in Paris³⁴, and the ways in which social life is hosted within them, helped promote an understanding of urbanism and architecture as a fusion of spatial articulation and social practices, incorporating ethnographic research methods. This provided a basis for CJW's development of specific architectural concepts of 'habitat' through their social housing projects, both in France and abroad³⁵.

In Morocco, the regional director of urban planning Michel Ecochard had emphasised the importance of understanding the existing social and architectural context for new development, implementing extensive surveys of daily life and traditional architecture³⁶. Working with Ecochard and his methods, Candilis Josic Woods explored the need to humanize modern urban planning, through an explicit recognition of the experience of community and privacy, which they defined in the following terms: 'the basis for the physical expression of any social organization [which] leads to the development of "organic" systems and structures which complement and complete the geometric systems and structures... As buildings become closer together and occupy more space, it is clear that they must englobe a greater part of the public activities an that the period of the neatly-zoned, tidily-classified, specific building is passing'³⁷. Along with many other European architects, they actively engaged in architectural and planning projects in the colonial territories as experimental laboratories for the development of new housing concepts which might also be brought back and applied at home to solve the housing shortage and associated social problems in France itself – as a fall-out of the war years; after all, shanty towns had grown up around Paris itself in the inter-war period³⁸.

At the same time, they were working in a context of intensifying postcolonial resistance to, and (violent) rejection of, imposed European cultural and social values³⁹. But there is little information as to how they confronted this disjunction of values through their own thought and practice – in any sense that might suggest a critical re-evaluation of their position as representatives of metropolitan culture, through an engagement with anthropological thinking. In the monograph on their practice published in 1968, the following statement stands out: 'In the study of housing types three principal situations have been distinguished: European housing, Moslem housing and tropical housing. These correspond to three different climates – temperate, hot-dry and hot-humid – and to three different cultures. The European dwelling is extravert, oriented toward the outside world relatively, loaded with mechanical equipment. The Moslem dwelling is introvert, inner-orientated and generally has little mechanical equipment. The tropical house is

³² the fourth meeting of CIAM, focused on the Functional City/ Ville Radieuse

³³ Rabinow, French Modern

³⁴ Chombart de Lauwe, P-H., Paris et l'agglomeration parisienne

³⁵ Avermaete, Another modern

³⁶ Blain, C., Team X online research

³⁷ Joedicke, Candilis-Josic-Woods, 159-60

³⁸ Rabinow, French Modern; Wright, The politics of design

³⁹ Fanon, Black skin white masks; Cesaire Cahier d'un retour; Discours sur le colonialisme

open, a well-ventilated shelter. It has little mechanical equipment.⁴⁰ It stands out for two reasons, firstly because it demonstrates that European architects of this period were thinking about cultural difference and the need to develop an appropriate response to contrasting situations, rather than impose universal solutions; but secondly, because of its somewhat jarring over-simplification of difference, through a climatically and typologically-driven approach to categorization and classification. Typical of the tropical architecture movement at the time, led by European architects⁴¹, it suggests a continuing underlying colonial and patriarchal attitude to designing habitats for the masses in the French overseas territories and former territories. Indeed, there is little or no discussion of actual cultural difference in this volume as a whole, which places a much greater emphasis on climatic/ environmental considerations and spatial and formal articulation in an abstract sense, with no detail about local everyday practice. It largely demonstrates a continuing reliance on systematic, ‘modernising’, models of design which were not necessarily successful in engaging with the complex social and cultural realities of specific settings. On reading it – and notwithstanding Candilis Josic Woods’ profession of interest in habitat as an intersection of everyday spatial practices and architectural form - one has to ask how much they really knew of the Antillean social and cultural context, and how far they understood the social changes taking place following the collapse of the plantation society and sugar economy.

4. The Floréal project

The Balata competition scheme of 1957 was the first of two large-scale housing developments [*grand ensembles*] for Martinique, the second being at Dillon with a masterplan designed by Antoine de Roux, director of urbanism Antilles Guyane. The early site plan strategy of 1957 employs the graphic metaphors of the leaf and its arteries, and the human hand and heart, as a vehicle for describing (or ‘humanising’) the analytical approach. The architects’ notes on the drawing outline four key drivers for the design strategy – the geological conditions (the site is on a plateau, drained by surrounding rivers, with ‘the most beautiful view’); the programme – including 100 collective dwellings, and 200 individual dwellings, a cultural and commercial centre, schools, parking; service and supply routes; and traffic circulation. However there are no explicit references to cultural or social context; indeed the human analogies used are explicitly universal, rather than specific. **FIG 5**

The early development of the scheme (1957) on the southern part of the site shows groups of bungalow type houses grouped in fours, which were subsequently abandoned. The site plan of 1961 showing the whole site, developed in collaboration with local architect Louis Caillat, comprises a combination of short lengths of terraced, prefabricated houses, distinctive Z-blocks, and a number of collective slab blocks. At the centre of the site are school buildings, commercial premises and public spaces (**FIG 6** site plan 1961, showing whole site. See also site model **FIG 7**). This proposal is then developed with more buildings on the western edge. In 1968, Joedicke published in his monograph on the Candilis Josic Woods a photograph of the site as built, which demonstrates the beauty of the location⁴².

The initial scheme provided for 500 low-cost housing units, in a mix of pre-fabricated low-rise terraces (Calad system **FIG 4**) and multi-occupancy slab blocks (Nid d’abeilles system **FIG 8**), on land owned

⁴⁰ Joedicke, Candilis-Josic-Woods, 159-60

⁴¹ Jackson and Holland, Fry and Drew

⁴² Zevi, Spazi dell’architettura moderna

by the city council. Between 1958 and 1968, 1700 units were constructed under Caillat's supervision, to a modified design, as part of government initiatives to solve the perceived problem of the self-built bidonvilles, and provide decent homes for immigrant workers from the countryside – although relatively high rents, and lack of access to state housing benefits in Martinique until 1976, meant that the construction of self-build settlements continued. The development also included commercial premises, a school, public gardens, playgrounds, a sports centre, and youth centre – constituting, in theory, a self-contained new neighbourhood in the hilly area of Balata to the north of the city – framed against the mountains, and with views of the sea (FIG 9).

The Dillon development has recently been regenerated as part of Martinique's urban development strategy, but Floréal has fallen into a state of disrepair, with some heavy-handed rehabilitation work carried out on the Basilier and Z blocks between 1995 and 2001, and another block, Orchidée, demolished in 2009 due to structural concerns (specifically seismic considerations). The project was criticised for not adequately accommodating the everyday practices and family structures of migrants from the countryside, for example the use of outdoor kitchens. In addition, the prefabricated construction proved unsuitable for the climatic context, with many of the aero-dynamic roofs to the bungalows torn off in the cyclone of 1963. On the other hand, as Doucet shows, living at Floréal was considered a form of 'social promotion' to urban status, which did embody a concrete optimism about the future⁴³.

As former head of the ADAM agency (Association pour la defence et preservation de l'architecture moderniste) in Martinique, Doucet maintains that although the Floréal scheme does not have the same architectural distinction as Dillon, or its successor Batelière (commissioned by a locally-based housing association OZANAM), the three projects together represent the most interesting urban development in the capital, Fort-de-France, up until the present day⁴⁴, and should accordingly be recognised as a significant area of under-recognised urban cultural heritage in Martinique. Doucet has argued that Floréal was flawed by the fact that Candilis Josic Woods' original intentions were never properly worked through, while the more cohesive design and implementation of the Dillon and Batelière schemes successfully integrated buildings with public spaces which have genuinely contributed to a sense of communal ownership and participation⁴⁵. This paper, however, suggests that Floréal might be recognised as having particular interest, from the perspective of its cultural heritage value, for the very reason that both its conceptualisation and its materialisation were less coherent. As a consequence, the original scheme underwent a process of *créolisation* which reflected, rather than imposed upon, messy local processes of urban culture formation at the time. As such, it might be seen as foreshadowing the celebration of the shanty-town aesthetic of 'bricolage' by the *créolité* and *antillanité* movements, and the framing of a 'responsive Caribbean contemporary urbanism' articulated by Letchimy within a discourse of postcolonialism. The next section will consider this framing in more detail.

5. Martinique, modernity and créolité

Notwithstanding Candilis Josic Woods' engagement with contemporary anthropological analyses of urban social life and habitat, the original competition proposals for Floréal demonstrated a lack of specific cultural

⁴³ Doucet, Le logement social

⁴⁴ Doucet in correspondence with the author 2009

⁴⁵ Jean Doucet in correspondence with the author 2009

references. Their deployment of universalising natural and anatomical analogies is more suggestive of the French modern' approach to regulation of the built environment described by Rabinow: a specialised, technocratic, cosmopolitan culture of regulations and norms, underpinned by a faith in social science. It was explicitly deployed to tackle social conditions perceived as 'pathological', and remodel environments and their representation – especially in the colonial territories⁴⁶. It defined itself as modern through a commitment to an objective, scientific approach to development, especially urban development - ensuring that social functions and activities would be properly ordered and classified on an efficiency-driven, almost mechanistic model⁴⁷.

This approach underpinned the Redfield has specifically described French colonial intervention in French Guiana as an enterprise driven by the idea that the unhealthy tropics could be brought under control and turned into suitable living environments for Europeans – emphasising that modernising agendas involve *spatial strategies* and technical tools as much as language and action [as critiqued by Fanon]. Redfield examines how 'the technical spaces and natural places at the edge of things provide testing grounds, room for mistakes, leftovers and visions of the past and future'⁴⁸ – ie at the edges of empires; and how global technologies acquire local applications – for instance construction, infrastructure and transport technologies. He describes how, from the 1940s onwards, a new kind of immigrant was coming from Europe to the French Antilles and Guiane – no longer the plantation owner, or mercantile bourgeoisie, but the specialist bureaucrat, engaged in the project of a socially-generalising, universalising, 'middling modernism' – to use Rabinow's term (as opposed to locally sensitive 'techno-cosmopolitanism') – in the name of development.

The Floréal project might then be interpreted simply as an exercise in creating a technical 'milieu' to solve local social and climatic problems from the métropole, shaped by universalising assumptions. But it is also worth considering how far this modernist-inspired project lent itself to the materialisation over time of spaces of alternative social ordering in the urban context, which might be recognised as a significant part of Martinique's modern heritage informed by discourses around créolité and postcolonial identity. It offers a platform from which to question received ideas of modernism as a manifestation of exclusively 'white', universalising, European values, and to examine its role as a vehicle for the co-production of a new aesthetics of social identity in the local context.

In his novel *Texaco* [1992]⁴⁹, Patrick Chamoiseau narrates a history of social development and urbanisation in Martinique presented as a material process of *bétonisation* – or, a steady and gradual hardening and solidification of building materials, a concretisation of the environment, which also critiques state sponsored re-housing policies aimed at eliminating the *bidonvilles* and housing people 'properly' in French-style HLMs (such as Dillon and St Georges). He celebrates the shanty-towns themselves as embodying specific spatial and material characteristics which might be read as essentially Antillean, or créole, contrasting these settlements as light, flexible, and adaptable, with an idea of a 'solid', immutable city which is identified with colonisers and the values of colonialism. The novel followed on from the

⁴⁶ Rabinow, *French Modern*, and cf also Foucault's discussion of 'universal' and 'specific intellectuals' in *Truth and Power* 1980

⁴⁷ Wright, *The politics of design*

⁴⁸ Redfield, *Space in the tropics*: 26

⁴⁹ Chamoiseau, *Texaco*

manifesto which he published in 1989 with fellow writers Rafael Confiand and Jean Bernabé as a rallying call to the idea of 'creolité' as a positive evocation of Antillean cultural identity. Although they acknowledged the violence which lay behind the processes of creolisation - 'the brutal interaction, on.. territories... of culturally different populations'⁵⁰ – they also embraced the idea of the mixed-up, impure, richly interconnected créole identity which had come out of it, compared by fellow writer Edouard Glissant to the rich tangle of the mangrove swamp⁵¹. Described by Gyssels as 'urban-ethno-novelists'⁵² they also drew strongly on surrealist and ethnographic references in the development of this theme. They deployed ethnographic strategies of observation and documentation of local, culturally-specific, everyday social practices in their spatial setting as a basis for their fictional work, reaching back to the exploration of an ethnography of the imagination, influenced by surrealism, in the Cesaïres' journal *Tropiques* in the 1940s⁵³, and forward to Letchimy's urban planning discourse on 'the laboratories of the urban mangrove' as mayor of Fort-de-France from 2001.

The idea that the shanty-towns of the periphery might be revalorised as the habitat of a 'sinuous' creole culture, opposed to the universalising straightness and logic of French 'modern' thought and its spatial and material [*bétonisation*] manifestations⁵⁴, has been explored by francophone scholars Chivallon⁵⁵ and Jolivet⁵⁶ in their work on the significance of space and spatial imagery generally to discourses of memory and identity in post-slavery Martinique, and particularly in relation to the production of images of creole diversity and spatiality in *Texaco*. But this paper is interested in problematising the assumption of a binary distinction, or dualism, between modernist architecture and the forms of the shanty-towns, and the discourses of cultural heritage and identity which the cited literatures have brought into being. It suggests that Floréal itself represents a hybrid project - informed by anthropological thinking around the notion of habitat in time and place, conceived within a broad framework of 'French modern' approaches to regulation of the built environment, implemented with modifications in a piecemeal fashion over a decade under the supervision of a locally-based architect, and deconstructed through inhabitation in the longer-term. As such it might perhaps be recognized as making a contribution to the creation of an aesthetics of creolised postcolonial urban identity, which embodied optimism about the possibilities of a 'caribbean contemporary urbanism'⁵⁷, and draws places of otherness and hybridity into the story of modernism 'at the margins'.

4. Re-framing Modernism in the postcolonial context

Writing on the Caribbean, Sheller has drawn attention to the ways in which a culture which 'was historically pivotal in the rise of Europe to world predominance... [positioned] at the origin of the plot of Western modernity', has been subsequently 'spatially and temporally eviscerated from the imaginary geographies of

⁵⁰ Bernabé et al, *Eloge de la Creolite*, p

⁵¹ Glissant, *Le discours antillais*.

⁵² Gyssels, *La dernière des races*, in Jaffe, *The Caribbean city*

⁵³ Kulberg, *Fieldwork and fiction*

⁵⁴ de Bleeker, Gyseels, in Jaffe *The Caribbean City*

⁵⁵ Chivallon, *Images of creole diversity*

⁵⁶ Jolivet, *Espace, memoire et identite*

⁵⁷ Letchimy, *l'Urbanisme*

“Western modernity”⁵⁸. One of the aims of this paper is to re-centre the Caribbean within the history of modernist architecture and planning, underlining its significance as a geographical and cultural context in which modernist influences both provided a vehicle for, and were in turn re-shaped by, local discourses of postcolonial social identity.

In 1928, Oswaldo de Andrade’s *Manifesto Antropofago* made the case for modernism, linked to pro-Indian nativism, as the representation of a new indigenous future in Brazil which might undermine white superiority – not by imitating, but rather consuming and transforming European forms in such a way as to produce a destruction of the imperial past⁵⁹. Jean Doucet, writing on Modernist architecture in Martinique⁶⁰, argues that both Brazil *and* the Caribbean region manifested a rich experience of architectural modernism, through a process of creative appropriation and transformation which he describes as one of ‘creolisation’, unique to the region – and integral to the representation and creation of a new future, shaking off the legacy of colonial subjugation and slavery. Likewise, the work of Richard Price and Huon Wardle suggests that creole culture is characterised by a flexibility of thought, a creative complexity, ambiguity, and disorder, which constitutes an innate ability to imagine and express alternative (utopian or dystopian) realities, ‘other’ narratives of identity and belonging, incorporating explicit notions of adventure and freedom - which specifically predisposed it to be always in the vanguard of modernity⁶¹.

Kamau Brathwaite coined the term creolisation in 1971⁶² to describe a process of cultural change, through ac/culturation plus inter/culturation, that effectively distinguishes Creole societies in the New World, or Atlantic world, in contrast to the plural-society model of M.G. Smith which constituted the dominant sociological interpretation of Caribbean social reality at the end of the 1960s⁶³. In 1976 Mintz and Price defined Creole cultures as new creations adapting to social and geographical environments which were not continuous with African traditions, but represented a break with them⁶⁴ – in opposition to Africentric scholars who argued for dominance of African culture in Caribbean. However, the strongest rejection of Afrogenesis was to come from the French Caribbean, with the emergence of the ‘creolité’ concept – Confiant stating emphatically that ‘not a fragment of Africanness has persisted in the Créole culture of Martinique’⁶⁵. The evolving debate about the constitution of Caribbean social and cultural identity provides a larger framework for readings of how Modernist architecture may be investigated ‘on the ground’ in Martinique and elsewhere, with a focus on the ways in which it was (and continues to be) adapted to local geographical and social cultures as an embodiment of creolisation, or ‘créolité’ through processes of reception, implementation and appropriation manifested in complex networks of local actors. Such an inquiry opens up larger questions of how Modernist architecture, or the ‘spatiality of modernity’⁶⁶

⁵⁸ Sheller, *Consuming the Caribbean*, 1; also Gilroy, *The black Atlantic*; Hall, *Cultural identity and diaspora*, in Williams and Chrisman, *Colonial discourse and post-colonial theory*; Wainwright, *Timed out*, for further discussion of the contribution of the Caribbean to the formulation of modernity.

⁵⁹ de Andrade, “*Manifesto Antropofago*.”

⁶⁰ Doucet, *Le logement social*

⁶¹ Price, *The Convict and the colonel*; Wardle, *City of meanings*

⁶² Brathwaite, *The development of creole society*

⁶³ Smith, *The plural society*

⁶⁴ Mintz and Price, *an anthropological approach*

⁶⁵ Bernabé et al, *Eloge de la creolité*

⁶⁶ Hetherington, *The badlands of modernity*

might be re-evaluated not as inherently utopian, universalising, and rationalising, but rather as fundamentally heterotopic, ambivalent, and complex.

Sansi-Roca, writing on north-east Brazil, has stressed that modernism should not be seen simply as an export from the West, but rather the result of a two-way process, occurring over hundreds of years of cultural contact, in which Europe and European culture was formed as much by the 'Other' as by its own inherent value-system⁶⁷. In the process, places of 'Otherness', of marginality⁶⁸, and 'transgressive' hybridity were written into the story of modernism, as a narrative central to postcolonial discourse. Most powerful, perhaps, in forcing us to review notions of modernism and cultural identity in the light of the experience of the 'other', is Paul Gilroy's argument for recognizing the experience of the 'Black Atlantic' as central to a redefinition of modernism and modernity as a 'rhizomorphic, fractal, tanscultural, international formation'⁶⁹, challenging an established discourse of cultural and ethnic purity, nationalism, and rationalism within which it sits, and which effectively writes out the contribution and the experience of non-white, non-European 'others' from the history of modernism. As Gilroy points out, such 'over-integrated conceptions of culture' bear little comparison with historical realities shaped by 'processes of cultural mutation and restless (dis)continuity that exceed racial discourse' such that 'Enlightenment assumptions about culture, cultural value and aesthetics go on being tested by those who do not accept them as universal moral standards'⁷⁰.

It is in this context, then, that a study of the material, architectural culture of modernity and modernism, and the nature of lived experience and perceptions of identity and heritage in which it was implicated in Martinique, becomes both significant and relevant to debates about culturally diverse experiences of modernism and modernity, and how spatial and material culture is constituted both as an aesthetics of social identity and as culturally meaningful heritage in different contexts. At the same time it contributes to a re-framing of concepts of Modernism realised through the work of architects such as Candilis Josic Woods at Floreal, as part of a body of Modernist architectural production in Martinique which presented certain opportunities for the representation of a post-colonial identity but one which has been largely overlooked because it does not fall within the canon of Modernism framed by European perspectives.

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⁶⁷ Sansi-Roca, *Fetishes and monuments*

⁶⁸ Shields, *Places on the margin*

⁶⁹ Gilroy, *The black Atlantic*: 3

⁷⁰ Gilroy, *The black Atlantic*, 2; 10

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