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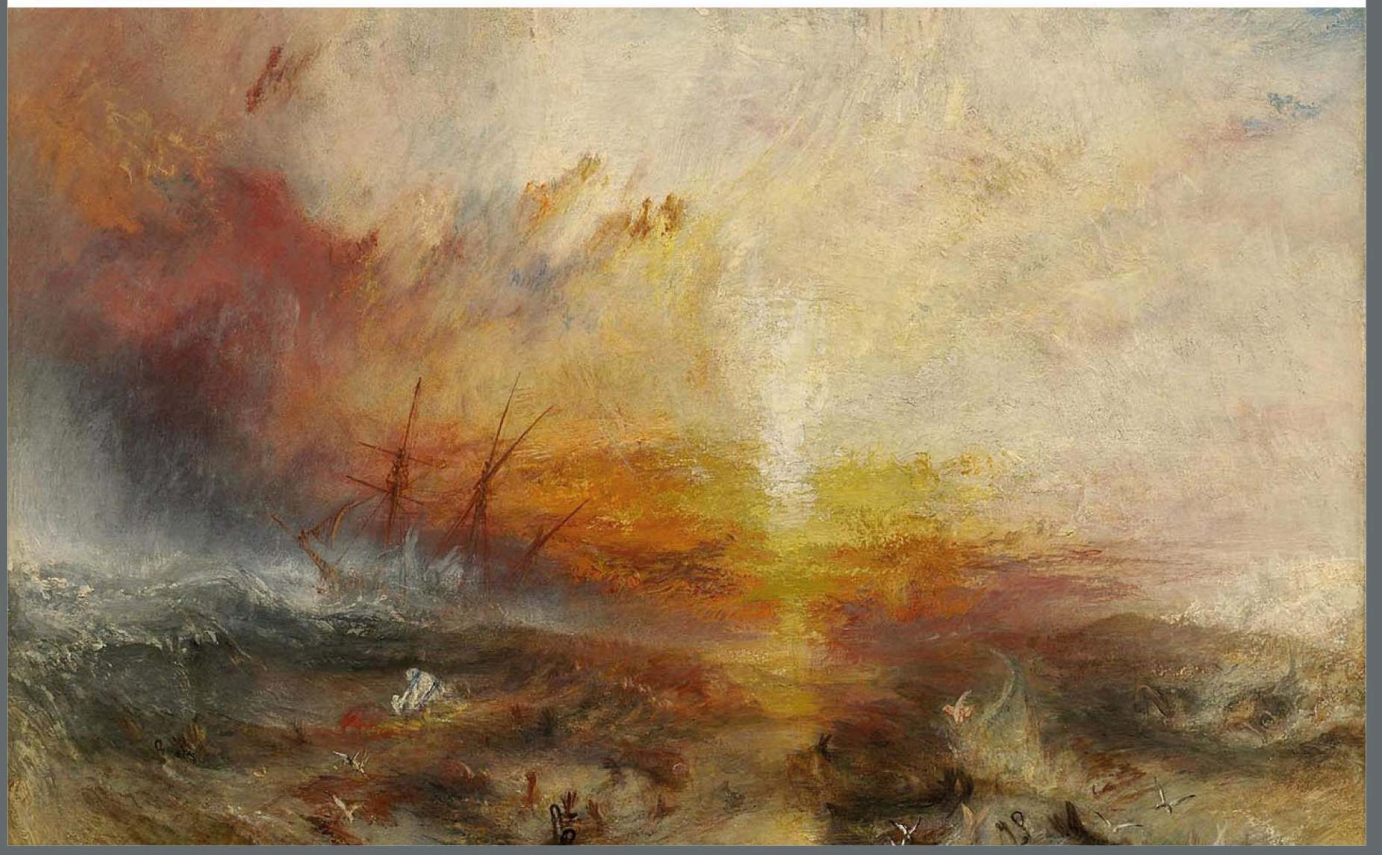

Sitting in the Room with Glissant

Imagining, Relating, and Translating the World

Devarya Srivastava

GENEVA GRADUATE INSTITUTE

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ABSTRACT

Existing in deep relation with the work of poet, philosopher, and theorist Édouard Glissant, this paper, taking as its grounding the Caribbean archipelago, explores ways of thinking/being/imagining/inhabiting the world as constituted in and through relations of multiplicity. The pages that follow take up this task through a series of philosophies co- constituted in dialogue with Glissant. Reading Glissant generatively (albeit, at times errantly) through the optic of 'translations', this paper takes up the 'big' questions confronting political philosophy, such as, 'thinking', 'being', 'freedom', 'difference', 'space', and 'time'. Suggesting that these questions can be usefully approached from the tortured landscape of the Caribbean, this paper makes the case for orienting critical inquiry and political action around modalities of relationality, multiplicity, and non-systematicity. In doing so, this paper puts forward a poetic mode of critique, which, while thinking through the world- breaking historical violence instituted by coloniality, slavery, and other dispossessions, is immanently able to overcome them through an affirmative, de-territorialised, and inventive ethico-political stance.

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DEVARYA SRIVASTAVA

Devarya Srivastava is a doctoral candidate at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies (IHEID), working on the history of aesthetics, decolonisation, and literature in South Asia. He also completed his masters at the Geneva Graduate Institute, studying International Relations and Political Science. More broadly, he is interested in studying the temporalities, socio-cultural processes, and shadows of decolonisation, especially as instituted in the realm of literature and art.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface

Arrival

Location

1 The Ariana Museum in Geneva, Switzerland is proud of its collection of ceramics and glass. Representing all the main techniques associated with the art, such as pottery, stoneware, earthen ware, porcelain, and china, it boasts of being the only museum in Switzerland—and one of the few in Europe—devoted entirely to the arts of fire. The collection includes over 27,000 objects, bearing witness to twelve centuries of ceramics in Switzerland, Europe, and the Middle and Far East. For the Museum, this expansive collection is a source of pride. According to the Museum's account, the Islamic collection, along with the series of oriental porcelains, attests to the interactions between the East and the West, and as a plaque reminds us, constitutes a historical truth in the *universal* history of ceramics. In addition to the huge collection of pots, vases and plates, the Ariana Museum is designed to impress. Heralded as an architectural marvel, huge colonnades underpin vaulted ceilings filled with stars and artwork, with gleaming marble floors and stained-glass windows providing an added touch of luxury and magnificence.[1]

2 I visited the Ariana Museum sometime in March 2022. Amidst reading and writing on slavery, colonialisms, and dispossessions in preparation for what was to become this project, the Museum visit was meant to provide a brief hiatus, a benign prospect to spend the day marvelling at the craftsmanship, art and beauty these objects represented. And yet, as I began my tour, my eyes soon started to glaze over the neatly labelled and numbered pots, cups, and other figurines. Something was out of place. I felt I was in some way off-course as I made my way through the gallery. My encounter with these objects betrayed the long-cultivated relationship selves and objects are supposed to have. I couldn't summon the proper dispossession or the *feelings* the space seemed to demand. Rather than spurring fascination, appreciation or joy, these objects gave rise to a sense of *unease*. This unease continued to intensify as I made my way from the temporary to the permanent exhibitions, the experience of disorientation, along with a growing sense of negation as I proceeded through the spacious halls with their luminous artwork and tapestry.

3 I soon realized that it was the underlying architecture of the museum that was hindering the habitability of my body to its space. This Museum was not built simply to move around or as a container for cultural artefacts. Above all, it was a monument to civilisation, memory, and history with the act of collecting as its centrepiece. Lined throughout the walls of the Museum are testaments to the precocity of collection and the cultures contained therein. But importantly and what the Museum is silent on, is that '*classification precedes collection*'.[2] More than a passive act of collections, institutions *assemble*, preparing facts and sources for historical intelligibility.[3] At the edges of this history of collection that the Museum valorises lies sublimated narratives of classification which have historically strived to accommodate, appropriate, and extend taxonomies of humanity and systems of knowledge. To be classified in the Museum and in the world, means being educated into an order of things, an order that distributes mobility, extending the 'surfaces of some bodies and not others'.[4] Navigating the Museum required attuning my body to this field of power that had historically charged itself through notions of racially determined classificatory regimes.

4 My unease mounted as I made my way to a section titled 'Orient-Occident (East-West)'. Despite the now out-of-fashion framing, the exhibition is meant to simultaneously celebrate and attest to the universality of ceramic history. Reciprocity becomes the star theme here. Capital (read through economic and commercial imperatives) intervenes to refashion cultural difference into comforting affirmations around diversity, multiculturalism, and tolerance, silently passing over other translations of classifications and collections. Diversity in the Museum, as with many other institutional spaces, becomes a 'happy sign', incorporating the categories and assumptions associated with progress.[5] If the twentieth century was grounded in overcoming cultural difference through dreams of modernisation, progress, and the forward march of history, the twenty-first century smuggles in many of the same motifs, redirecting difference by emphasising issues of diversity and multiculturalism. Difference is negated in favour of diversity, for difference is dangerous as it demands confrontation, but diversity is laudable as it can be contained, regulated, and managed. Put another way, diversity yields to tolerance, to the extent that certain differences are seen as non-threatening. Progress still remains a forward march albeit now framed through categories that emphasise diversity and multiculturalism, without the philosophical problem of difference becoming a *political* problem.[6]

5 Continuing to think with the exhibition, it would seem that the 'Orient' finally arrives, finding its way in a metropolitan centre that celebrates cultural differences, but the doubt still persists, is arriving *enough*? Can difference arrive, and yet the more things stay in place? It becomes important here to consider the East/West, Orient/Occident figuration underpinning the exhibition's claims. As Edward Said in his magisterial *Orientalism* noted, Orientalism, more than an elaboration of the verifiable truth of either the East or the West operated as a discourse, as a mode of power inextricable from configurations and assumptions of knowledge, of how things are supposed to be, or of how the world is made up.[7] Additionally, as Sara Ahmed has argued, spaces never just 'are', but acquire direction by how we inhabit them. By forming relative positions within the exhibition, 'East-West' or 'Orient-Occident' are presumed to be ready-made categories that are contained within space, rather than *contained by* space, side-stepping the political question regarding the social construction of these spaces, along with the histories of inequity, racialization's, and theft contained therein.[8] We need to

ask what happens when diversity becomes co-opted within these institutions, such that the very real and material demands that differences place, are turned into something that simply 'are', and can thus be 'had', by taking them 'in'. We also need to rethink space and by consequence difference, to generate liberating avenues which refrain from drawing lines in space, and instead seek to complicate the relationship between space, histories, and differences.

6 As I browsed through the museum, my education forces me to remember other things or to borrow from Aimé Césaire here – histories of 'thingification' that lurk uncomfortably within these seemingly progressive gestures.[9] I am reminded that more than ceramics construed as commodities, *bodies turned into commodities* also passed through these circuits. I am reminded of the Africans in the slave hold, the Africans thrown overboard, those who reached the New World under the weight of iron shackles, the banishment and removal of indigenous peoples to fuel plantation complexes, and the subsequent importation of indentured bodies from China and South Asia under the historically contingent and shifting category of the 'coolie' to work in these complexes.[10] These are histories that are not distant, histories that cannot be safely consigned and frozen in the past, but histories that form the gestation of modern life, its violence bursting into the sinews of contemporary life. Lines of stratification, Black death and deeply embedded racialised beliefs are etched into this genealogy of violence, mendacity, excess and dispossessions.[11]

7 As my tour came to an end, I wondered, if it is indeed possible to tell these ongoing stories within the spatial and epistemic location afforded by the Museum or if these stories were doomed to remain invisible, lying on the margins of our texts, the murmuring of their presence barely discernible when new ways of progress lead to blurred visions of the world. That is, if Museums such as the Ariana Museum serve to materialise memory and enact pedagogies which position viewers to have a certain experience of the past, how does one remember, or more appropriately mourn those pasts which come back to rupture the present. What forms of occlusions stem from the underlying assumptions and design of the museum? Thinking a bit more conceptually, what new stories might emerge when we move from thinking in terms of collections to thinking through the at once fragile and durable traces of these vexed and violent genealogies that get re-activated to remain with us?

8 We need new stories of alterity that try to articulate these arrivals which are not-always, not- yet arrivals. These are stories that require, above all, *work*, for in telling these stories one soon realises, that form and language continuously fracture. As Christina Sharpe in her work on the ongoing orthography of Blackness, slavery, and white supremacy argues, we must become *undisciplined* to do this work.[12] We need to think of difference not as something that arrives as an always self-cohering, ready-made category, but as traces of history bereft of life, body and property. We need to 'slow down reasoning', pushing against proposals that gloss over 'ontological dissonance', to pursue a new disposition towards reflexivity.[13] Most importantly, the question is one not simply around the not-yet arrivals of these not-always graspable differences, but rather one of how we might *turn* towards them.

Dialogue

9 I begin with this extended mediation on the personal, not in order to be parochial, but to connect my specific arrival and the disorientations it generated in a museum in Geneva, to the histories of other unfinished arrivals. The arrivals I have in mind here consist of the interlocking dispossessions of land, body, community, and life that coalesce in the ongoing disaster wrought by the ruptures of Atlantic and Caribbean slavery and its aftermath. These are violent arrivals which leave a trace in the present, traces which return and unsettle the apparent closure of difference under the garb of the universal. As the Haitian anthropologist and historian Michel-Rolph Trouillot writes,

> 'The past is only the past because there is a present'[14]

10 It is in this sense that the 'past has no content', for the terms through which we as contemporaneous subjects call upon the past depend on our performance of pastness in the present. Put another way, the *past isn't dead*, but is contemporaneous with the present, forming a disjuncture of the present within itself. It is these past-present precarities that yield unfinished arrivals that I explore in this paper. Put otherwise, the question I seek to address in the pages that follow is: what different arrivals might come to light if we focus on imaginations of humanity by those excluded, silenced, erased, and above all censured by liberal humanist narratives of freedom, progress, diversity and capital. In particular, I do so through a philosophy (or various philosophies) co-constituted in dialogue with the work of the poet, philosopher and theorist Édouard Glissant. More specifically, by turning to Glissant, I seek to address the ongoing reverberations of histories shaped by slavery, property, and other forms of 'thingification' by centring analytical attention on a counter-poetics perpetually in-arrival. In interrogating these arrivals, however, it is not my intention to provide an answer to what these arrivals might finally look like, for the story that follows does not have an allotted designation. Instead, conversing with Glissant, it hopes to discover new ways of arriving, arrivals that consent to the idea of being one and multiple at the same time.

11 Taking as its grounding the Caribbean archipelago, this paper exists, in *deep relation* with Glissant. Following Robbie Shilliam, by deep relation I mean a method which rather than producing or collecting knowledge, seeks to *cultivate* knowledge.[15] In other words, what I pursue here, to paraphrase Dionne Brand, is a dialogical practice of reading, a method of close- narration, which requires sitting in the room of History with Glissant, whereby I enter into a critical dialogue with Glissant, while allowing, in some sense, Glissant to speak back.[16] By sitting with Glissant, I seek to discover, map and plot new histories of non-unitary relationalities anchored in an ethico-political bond towards alterity to discover new ways of feeling, inhabiting, seeing and imagining the world. In a way, this allows me to confront the ethical and epistemic status of those we read and research about by not treating Glissant as an object to research and write about, but by imagining Glissant as a figure capable of thinking, writing, and answering back. Sitting with Glissant and at times even against him then, is a deliberate strategy which leads to a broader conversational praxis, limited not just to an exercise in contextualisation, but which becomes a creative pursuit centred around listening closely to how Glissant's formulations about critique, ontology and poetics might help

us devise frameworks which reflect upon related phenomena in the contemporary present.[17]

12 Proceeding with this dynamism, the history that this paper engages with opposes narratives where the past, present, and future cohere to a poetic fragmentation which consists of infinite variations and the multiplicity of contacts, and conflicts. These are temporalities that bind colonial pasts to decolonial presents, as well as persons and communities hitherto separated by colonial logics of division. This history thus encounters difference, not through the logic of Hegel's 'Aufhebung', that is the act of superseding by displacement, or for that matter by turning towards comforting affirmations of diversity, but through a process of *habitation*, where 'knowledge is creatively released as the practitioner enfolds her/himself in the communal matter of her/his enquiry.'[18]

13 Ultimately, and I must confess, this paper is a provisional effort, for this effort to re-see, re-imagine, and re-inhabit the world might well fall flat. And yet, it is where this paper fall apart that multiple visions of arrival might finally be discerned. By interrupting theories of progress embroiled in still existing teleologies of being Human, I hope this effort could potentially turn out to be something in excess of itself, its ongoing, unfinished and provisional character becoming and providing a productive site and archive to learn and create from.

14 What follows then, are a series of *hopeful* and *provisional* assemblages of philosophies, conversations, and ultimately relations...

FOOTNOTES

1. "Ariana Museum," Geneve, accessed May 31, 2022, https://www.geneve.com/en/attractions/ariana-museum.

2. John Elsner and Roger Cardinal, "Introduction," in *The Cultures of Collecting*, ed. John Elsner and Roger Cardinal (London: Reaktion Books, 1994), 1.

3. For an account of the role of power (and the silences contained therein) in the production of power, see Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 52.

4. Sara Ahmed, "A Phenomenology of Whiteness," *Feminist Theory* 8, no. 2 (August 2007): 162.

5. Ahmed, 164.

6. On the distinction between difference and diversity, see here Huzaifa Omar Siddiqui's excellent, "Ambedkar, Gandhi and the Rise of Subcontinental Philosophy," accessed May 31, 2022, https://thewire.in/society/ambedkar-gandhi-subcontinental-philosophy.

7. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 1-13.

8. Ahmed, "A Phenomenology of Whiteness.", 12-20.

9. Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), 42.

10. There is a veritable literature around these themes, so far from naming a comprehensive account, see here amongst others, Stephanie Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007) for an account of transatlantic slavery.; Cheryl L. Harris, "Whiteness as Property," *Harvard Law Review* 106, no. 8

especially for the connections between slavery and indigenous dispossession and the role of whiteness in operating as the common denominator between the two.; Moon-Ho Jung, *Coolies and Cane: Race, Labour, and Sugar in the Age of Emancipation* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2006) provides an excellent account of ambiguous category of the "coolie" and its co-optation within economic regimes of slavery.; Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015) for the different intimacies between different societies, peoples, and regions in sustaining racial difference and distinctions.

11. Again, given the vastness of the work done (and being done) around the afterlives of the raced history of slavery, dispossession, and property, I provide here only a selection, see, Christina E. Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).; Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).; Robert Rothstein, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* (New York: Liveright, 2017).; Ruha Benjamin, *Race After Technology:* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019).

12. Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, 11-13.

13. David L. Blaney and Arlene B. Tickner, "Worlding, Ontological Politics and the Possibility of a Decolonial IR," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 45, no. 3 (June 2017): 307.

14. Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, 15.

15. Robbie Shilliam, *The Black Pacific: Anti-Colonial Struggles and Oceanic Connections* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 13-33.

16. Dionne Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes on Belonging* (Toronto: Vintage, 2001).

17. Along with Robbie Shilliam, for my purposes here, I have found Gary Wilder's framework of 'thinking with' those we write and speak about particularly useful, see here, Gary Wilder, *Freedom Time: Negritude, Decolonization, and the Future of the World* (Durham: Duke, 2015), 12-26.

18. Shilliam, *The Black Pacific: Anti-Colonial Struggles and Oceanic* Connections, 24.

Introduction

Glissant

Maps

1 To read Glissant is to discover a new world, for when Glissant writes, he writes the world. If language is like cartography, a process of finding the right symbols with which to map the world, Glissantian maps don't follow existing cartographic conventions, borders or lines. Much of the value of the maps Glissant provides us with lies in the way they disrupt stable coordinates of the world, for historically contingent ones. This is a world not of immutable fixity, but of *endless* blending *and* becoming, relation *and* difference. All of Glissant's work as a poet, philosopher and theorist has been concerned with exploring the possibilities of this new cartography, a map which refuses and escapes a comfortable belonging within either the nation, elusive universals, academic silos, or identity politics. Whatever the genre employed, Glissantian thought always moves beyond oppositional discourses which partition the world into binary divisions and towards forms of relation and being where it becomes possible to become *both,* one and multiple, the same and the Other, here and there. Relationality provides the productive model for this inquiry into Glissant, a theoretical vocabulary that provides the exegetical and interpretative tools needed for understanding, conceptualising, and ultimately abolishing uneven global structures predicated on hierarchical, gendered, racialised, sexualized, and economised notions of social existence.

2 Dissatisfied with Western Philosophy's quest for absolute knowledge, where man, thought, and history come to a definitive closure (exemplified by Hegel's Geist), each of Glissant's works explodes taken-for-granted categories along with the ethical and emotional demands these categories insinuate. In the Glissantian lexicon, words (dis)assemble themselves (and ourselves) in a non-systemic manner, constantly unsettling the rhythms and certitudes of time- honoured practices that we imagine we comprehend. And yet this putative non-system of thought forms within the Glissantian worldview a philosophy or rather philosophies of relation. Glissant not only refuses the systemic structure that connects colonial violence with global linear thinking and divisions, but also names new ways of thinking and being in the world.

3 Employing a hermeneutics which re-evaluates the very notion of the thinking subject, the cogito, ergo sum of Cartesian dualism, Glissant simultaneously dislocates and extricates Western fantasies of pure filiation, the sovereignty of self-consciousness, and the transparency of difference. As Michael Dash has argued, for Glissant, 'too many others and elsewheres' disturb and disrupt the monomania of the self-structuring self.[1] Instead, Glissant decentres subjectivity to *assemble* new philosophies of language, history, time, community, space, memory, aesthetics, and in the process the very task of thinking itself. But how does philosophy (un)think itself? This, perhaps, is Glissant's most challenging, important, and interesting question for us.

Concepts

4 In the same vein that Glissant unsettles faith in a full, self-present, always-cohering subject- hood, he seeks to undermine assumptions that portray history as something that develops over time, as a coherent, progressive system. As a philosophical system History (with a capital H), has operated as a 'functional fantasy of the West', attempting to systemise the world through a spatial and temporal hierarchy.[2] It is this hierarchical process grounded in a proper historical consciousness, as defined by the European enlightenment that Glissant denies. For Glissant, history leads to 'neither a schematic chronology nor a nostalgic lament'.[3] Instead the past is submitted to a 'painful notion of time' which moves towards its 'full projection forward into the future'.[4] The disaster or the pain was and is/continues to be transatlantic slavery. As Michael Dash observes, informed by the rupture which occurs with the Middle Passage and the imposition of slavery, Glissant follows Derek Walcott in understanding history as the sea 'with its always changing surface, and capacity for infinite renewal'.[5]The sea not only tells a history but also *gives* a history.

5 *The discovery of the Americas through the colonizing voyages of Christopher Columbus across the Atlantic Ocean in 1492; the slave ships which traversed the Atlantic to turn African natives into commodities; the Africans (re)figured as cargo thrown, jumped, dumped overboard during the Middle Passage; the littoral, the border where the African landscape disappeared into the sea.*

6 This world that emerges, must be thought from the *underside* of this history, from the slave ship, the bodies buried under the ocean, and the flesh: the bodily surplus of those who toiled and worked on the plantations. No longer the comfortable symmetry of linear progression, history becomes a scream, an act of excessiveness, for as Glissant writes, 'our land is excessive'.[6] Like the silt of the sea, this history also sediments and entrenches itself, establishing a 'measure of man and a ranking of life and worth' that devalues life through 'a racial calculus and political arithmetic' yet to be undone.[7] But silt is never purely a substance made of dead elements, blocking, filling, or clogging. Silt is also residue, the debris that speaks to processes that escape their naming. Silt is that which *remains*, depositing itself along the bank of rivers, the ocean depth, morphing with the corals of the sea, and dispersing itself throughout deserted and arid landscapes.[8]

7 Glissant speaks of silt as both, the tragic traces of those who made, were (un)made, or (re)made during the journey through the Middle Passage, and as something fertile, something that despite being indistinct and unexplored, possesses an insistent presence that we are not incapable of experiencing. Silt then, more than detritus, also

speaks to something else, the possibilities of retrieval and reversal in order to forge new forms of life, community, and language. Rather than acquiesce to the condition of social death that the Middle Passage and slavery impose, Glissant does not lose sight of the many excesses that were not encompassed within systems of domination, but as ongoing practices of *freedom* that this violence also gave rise to.[9] It is these excesses that texture the ways Glissant reads the world, inform his ways of being in and of the world, and determine his relations to others in the world. Nonetheless, the genres of freedom that Glissant reads through these excesses should not be substituted by references to either agency or resistance. By assuming full, coherent, self-made subjects, these categories presume that subjects when exercising agency always work against something. This is not to say that these categories are always useless in this context, but as Alexander Weheliye has argued, that it is 'just that we might come to a more layered and improvisatory understanding of extreme subjection if we do not decide in advance what forms its disfigurations should take on'.[10]

8 Profoundly philosophical, Glissant's work extends across the Caribbean. From engaging with the ethico-political need for unsettling the modernity/colonial matrix to offering sustained comments on the post-structuralist moment within the humanities, Glissant has been deeply and critically involved across both the global North and South, making him an important global intellectual figure.[11] And yet, central for Glissant, and this what I want to argue across this paper, will always be the *Caribbean*, the rhizomatic space from which he experiences, imagines, and begins to speak the world. This is the ground that Glissant walks on, speaks from, and that lays out what it means to live in relation to a pained history while also determining the possibilities that might be opened up within it to question racial exclusion, ontological negation, and the other myriad dispossessions constitutive to the colonial constitution of the Human and the modern world. Sharing this at once perilous and productive ground with other theorists of Caribbean self-formation such as Césaire and Fanon, Glissant carries their work into new dimensions. Fuelled by the power of a rich imaginary and poetics derived from the openness of the Caribbean landscape, Glissant throughout his oeuvre reveals the fluidity of relation beyond closed systems of thought which treat difference as a threatening aberration from established norms of stability order, and safety.

9 This is a venture which ultimately depends on the conceptual work that Glissant performs throughout his oeuvre. To list a few – the 'imaginary' is offered as the force that can counter colonial mentalities, 'relation' as that which determines the substantive contents of this process, and 'poetics' as a transformative and emancipatory medium to represent this new form of decoloniality.[12] In Glissant's work however, these concepts never exist in mutual exclusivity to each other, but perpetually *intertwine* and are continuously *modified* depending on the theoretical context within which Glissant's thinking of difference emerges. Stability is not an intrinsic feature of Glissantian concepts. As Ann Laura Stoler writes, stability does not form an 'a priori attribute of concepts' but is construed as such through a grammar of comparison and commensurability.[13] Glissant wards of any certainty that concepts might pose, offering a conceptual make-up that disrupts, questions and remakes what had previously been taken to be self-evident.

10 Concepts form a web of relationalities that realise their meaning through boundless movement. A Glissantian concept acts in concert with other concepts, accumulating the force of its meaning by being in constant *relation*. Most importantly, this relationality

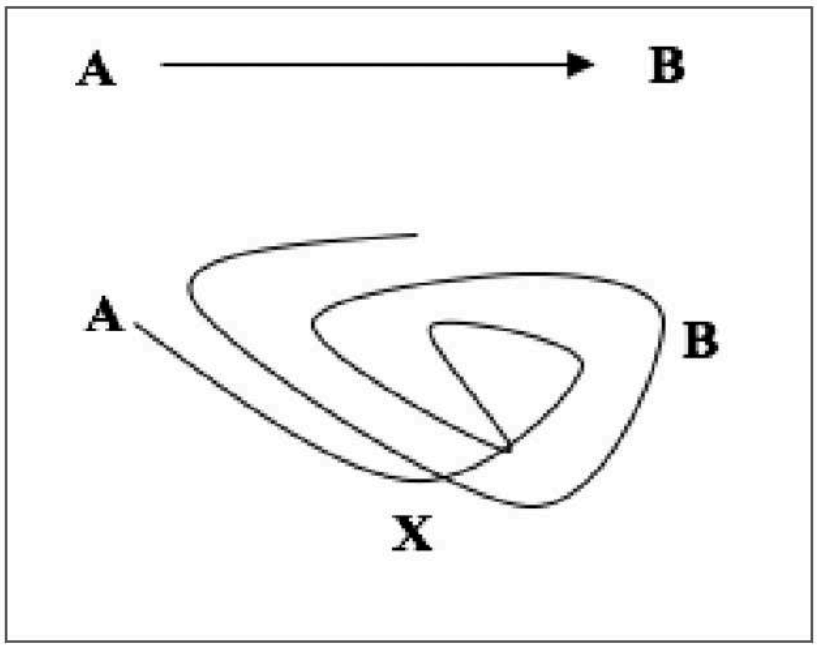
does not act on concepts in a manner that makes them either reducible or separable, for within Glissant's poetic world, replacing one concept with another 'changes the elements composing it, and consequently, the resulting relationship'.[14] Taking seriously the potential of critique to not only debunk and deconstruct, but also to *affirm* and *invent*, Glissant re-opens the starting point of thinking politically. By prolonging and privileging movement, Glissant forwards a technique of critique that de-territorialises itself by positioning itself within movement, and in turn sets the terrain for a radical politics of and for difference. This is a new mode of politics which by cultivating disparate modalities of relation crafts a poetic uprising against the very roots of conventional reason and its related order of rationality.

Translation

11 To the extent that scholars have engaged with Glissant and his concepts, his work is often divided into different periods.[15] Some, such as Peter Hallward and Nick Nesbitt, have lamented that Glissant's early work on alienation which was predominantly characterised by a radical politics of self-determination, gives way in his later work to a somewhat aimless, apolitical and banal universality.[16] Others, such as Neil Roberts and Robbie Shilliam, even while self-avowedly retrieving the productive aspects of his work, end up provincialising Glissant by primarily situating him as an Antillean and Caribbean thinker.[17] Throughout this paper, I question both this division of Glissant's work and the relegation of Glissant to the status of a theorist only of and for the Caribbean. Instead, I argue that while its mode of expression might change, Glissant's work retains its politicality throughout, and that his insights reverberate across the Caribbean. But what fuels this politicality is not secure foundations and heroes, but a form of reflexivity which leads Glissant to constantly dwell on questions, reposing them, without ever fully solving them. The methodological challenge then is to clarify his work without isolating the unity, flux, and evolving relationalities defining his work. To this end, rather that treating the structure of Glissant's work as steadily yielding to some kind of definitive conclusion, I read and analyse his texts *within* the socio-political framework of the Caribbean while simultaneously rending his work as meriting philosophical analysis *beyond* the Caribbean.

12 In what follows, I want to treat the different philosophical concepts that Glissant works with as themes which resonate, conjoin and cross-link with each other. I want to propose further that these linkages constitute performative acts of counter-meaning that can be read generatively through the optic of *translations.* Importantly, I don't approach translation here in its most common, intralingual sense, as the transfer of meaning between different languages, but as a vertiginous method of wandering, which emphasises the always negotiated, relational and transformative dimension of translating. More concretely, I follow Talal Asad's suggestion that 'a straight line isn't always the most useful way to explore things because it assumes that the shortest way to it from the starting point is always the best'.[18] In this paper, therefore, I neither intend to be comprehensive nor exhaustive, but instead move in an open and speculative manner, purposefully employing translations in a fragmentary, and at times suggestive tone. Importantly, I repeat things with the Glissantian belief that 'it is through repeating things that one begins to glimpse the emergence of something new.'[19]

Errant Translations



In this paper, a translation is never a direct move from discourse A to discourse B, but instead always requires a mediating sign (X). X doesn't operate as simple connector between A and B, but instead opens the translation to a form of vertiginous wandering. Meaning is not to be found when a translation gets to point B, but in the errant movement between multiple points. To put it otherwise, the points are not important, but movement is.
Visual made by author.

13 Throughout this paper, I employ different translation strategies for exploring the philosophies of Glissant. While the analysis that proceeds is primarily rooted in textual exposition, each act of translation frames Glissant with companion discourses. Thus, the reading I propose here does not conform to any form of exegetical loyalty, but instead proceeds through contrast, juxtaposition, and opposition in order to create new modalities of reading Glissant within the interstices of the text itself. Rather than frame this paper through conventional chapters with neatly ordered beginnings, middles and conclusions which to my imagination quite often ends up being too tidy, too restrictive, and too formalistic, I adopt a style of writing that is anarchic, open, and I hope a little unsettling. In the course of my writing, I often take detours which will appear complex, erratic and opaque. I will also revisit themes, modifying them as I work my way through the different expositions: this is my way of reading Glissant. The following four chapters are composed of and by a translation each, while the conclusion follows the style of a self-reflexive discussion written with Glissant. Adding another thread, the paintings, photographs and maps presented throughout are meant as guides, and are not meant to illustrate the text that precedes, proceeds, or accompanies them, but as provocations, presenting another story alongside the text.

14 Foregrounding the recent discovery of unmarked graves in Canada, the first chapter works with Glissant's figure of the Caribbean archipelago to offer new ways of thinking about the spatiality of thought. I propose reading Glissant's archipelagic thinking as a

spatiotemporal translation of an ongoing and ruinous existence which reorients processes of meaning-making by uprooted populations through geography and geopolitics of space. In particular, I argue that this mode of thinking in contradistinction to continental thought which is systemic is best characterised through a Caribbean vocabulary of ambiguity, proliferation and effervescence. With the 'archipelago' as my interpretative frame, I take up the ontological question of 'being' in the next chapter, probing into how the New World experience of slavery alters concepts of knowing, acting, thinking and creating. Reading Deleuze and Guattari's category of the 'rhizome' against itself and through the Glissantian inspired notion of the 'Creole', I put forward a *(mis)translation of being* as an unpredictable process of becoming which renders any enunciation of 'roots' as ethically and epistemologically suspect. In the third chapter, tracing a lineage of intellectual critique from Aimé Césaire to Frantz Fanon, I turn my attention towards a *contextual and intertextual translation* of intellectual revolt as it manifests within a Martinican genealogy of decolonial critique. More specifically, anchoring Aimé Césaire's *Return to My Native Land* as a crucial precursor to both Fanon and Glissant, I show the ways in which the ramifications of Fanon's decolonial praxis are articulated more fully by Glissant through his Caribbean and Creole inspired notion of 'relation'. While what ties the first three chapters together is translation, even though the sense of translation is not always the same (nor direct) in each instance, the fourth chapter explores the *limits* of translation. Exploring this impasse from my own disciplinary vantage point, I engage with a reading of scholarship within and beyond postcolonial global thought seeking to counter translations of difference. Working through the critical and postcolonial interventions of Dipesh Chakrabarty and Marisol de la Cadena, I articulate what it might mean to think of difference when it is not summarily translatable. Building on this discussion, and drawing on Glissant's concept of 'opacity', I forward a poetics of difference, highlighting the *always incomplete, partial, and inconclusive movement of difference.* In lieu of a conclusion which recapitulates what is already an always errant argument, I stage an *encounter* between Glissant and myself, considering where Glissant might lead us. Conceptualised as a political-theoretical reflection, I recursively engage with Glissant to render his work consistent with our socio-political objectives in the present, while conjuring new Glissantian inspired futures to lay claim to.

FOOTNOTES

1. Michael J. Dash, "Introduction," in *Caribbean Discourse*, by Édouard Glissant, trans. Michael J. Dash (Charlottesville: University Press Virginia, 1989), xii.

2. Édouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, trans. Michael J. Dash (Charlottesville: University Press Virginia, 1989), 64.

3. Glissant.

4. Glissant.

5. Dash, "Introduction", xxix.

6. Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 160.

7. Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2007), 6.

8. Achille Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, trans. Laurent Dubois (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 181.

9. See here Orlando Patterson who characterizes slavery as the death of the slave, Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).

10. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human*, 2.

11. John E. Drabinski, *Glissant and the Middle Passage: Philosophy, Beginning, Abyss* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019), ix.

12. See also here for a brief overview of these concepts, Betsy Wing, "Translator's Introduction," in *Poetics of Relation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997).

13. Ann Laura Stoler, *Duress: Imperial Durabilities in Our Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 17.

14. Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 172.

15. See here for instance, Jacob Kripp, "Arendt and Glissant on the Politics of Beginning," *Constellations* 27, no. 3 (September 2020).

16. See here, Peter Hallward, *Absolutely Postcolonial: Writing Between the Singular and the Specific* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), 66-76.; Nick Nesbitt, *Caribbean Critique: Antillean Critical from Toussaint to Glissant* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), 231-250.

17. Neil Roberts, *Freedom as Marronage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).; Robbie Shilliam, "Decolonising the Grounds of Ethical Inquiry: A Dialogue between Kant, Foucault and Glissant," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 39, no. 3 (May 2011): 649–65.

18. Talal Asad, *Secular Translations: Nation-State, Modern Self, and Calculative Reason* (Columbia University Press, 2018), 2.

19. Édouard Glissant, *Introduction to a Poetics of Diversity*, trans. Celia Britton (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2020), 19.

Chapter 1. Thinking

Archipelago

> 'Thinking thought usually amounts to withdrawing into a dimensionless place in which the idea of thought alone persists. But thought in reality spaces itself out into the world. It informs the imaginary of peoples, their varied poetics, which it then transforms, meaning, in them its risk becomes realized.'[1]

Ruins

1 In May, 2021, Canadian officials began to unearth the remains of hundreds of children at the sites of now defunct schools in British Columbia and southern Saskatchewan. The bodies belonged to Indigenous children, who went through Canada's state-sponsored residential school system.[2] As of September, 2021, more than 1300 unmarked graves had been found on the sites of five former residential schools. It is estimated that for most of the twentieth century, at least 139 of these schools with approximately 150,000 Indigenous children were run with the financial support of the federal government. The legacy of Canadian colonial history, these schools, scattered across the country, were set up with the intention of eradicating the cultures and languages of First Nations people. In the mid-1800s, as white settlers moved westward, they forced indigenous people off their land, battling and massacring the tribes that resisted. [3]Driven by the doctrine of manifest destiny, these settlers expanded their dominion, justifying claims to Native land by recourse to capitalism and Christianity. But this policy was expensive, and as space for relocating the remaining Native population ran out, the government turned to forced assimilation in the late 1800s. Education became the instrument though which the Indians were to be 'civilised', with the residential schools effectively serving to 'kill the Indian', and 'save the Man.' But in practice (as has now been extensively documented), this system of education was a place of subjection and isolation, not civilisation.[4]

2 Since the unearthing in 2021, the handling and remembering of these graves has unravelled into a series of renewed confrontations over Canadian colonialism, settler

memory, and the project of the modern nation state. Indeed, over the years, through commissions, courts and councils, the Canadian nation state has attempted to examine the full effects of the Residential School System with the purpose of beginning the healing process towards reconciliation and justice. In 2008, the then Canadian President Stephen Harper even issued an apology to address the government's role in the history of Indian Residential Schools but followed it shortly by asserting in 2009 that the country had 'no history of colonialism'.[5] More recently, noted historian of Canadian Indigenous history, Kenneth Coates offered his own 'second thoughts' around the discovery, arguing for a refocus of attention away from residential schools, for as he puts it, it would be incorrect to define the Canadian nation as a whole by reference to the schools.[6] To be sure, while apologies have been issued, restitutions paid, and committees established, the message has been clear: the responsibility for promoting healing has been done. In this story, the bodies that were interred in the land become the exception to the system. The moral lesson that follows is that whatever differences subordinated the Indigenous experience in the past, it could be overcome in the present through a regime of tolerance and diversity realisable *within* the domain of the modern and multi-cultural Canadian nation-state.

3 But as Glen Coulthard has argued, simply promoting the politics of recognition is not enough for addressing colonial domination. Against the assumption that the colonial relationship between Indigenous people and the Canadian nation state can be transformed through multi- cultural inclusion, Coulthard argues that it instead produces the 'very configurations of colonial power' that Indigenous demands for recognition have 'historically sought to transcend'.[7] By remaining tied to a modality of recognition granted to them by the colonial state and society, the relationship between settler states and the Indigenous people foreclose the recognition of humanity to the colonised. Consequently, rather than assuming that suffering must be followed by recognition from the liberal state, I want to commence by thinking this suffering as integral to social existence itself. More concretely, I want to argue that the violence Indigenous populations experience *precedes and exceeds* affirmative gestures towards inclusion. At issue here are the uneven, asymmetrical, and non-reciprocal sedimentations of colonial effects in their often tangible, but also elusive forms. The bodies interred due to the Residential School System are not the exception, but the *ejection* through which colonialism imagines and re-constitutes itself.[8]

4 I start with this extended discussion on the Canadian Residential School System to look at the ways in which ongoing acts of the past open a spatial-temporal continuity between the lived and the dead, the here and there, in the present. I do so not to posit that contemporary violence's can be simply accounted for by the legacy of colonial histories, but rather to inquire into how these histories resurface to 'yield new damages and renewed disparities'. [9]Working with Édouard Glissant, I imagine how it might become possible to extricate thought from structures and signs that continue to take hold of the present. I treat Glissant's figure of the 'archipelago' as an ongoing locus of enunciation which attends to these questions by reorienting thought around the entanglements of time, space, and place. By locating thinking within the abysmal presence of the Middle Passage, the archipelago affords an analytical and conceptual category that defines historical time and place in a fresh way. While I have anchored the initial discussion in the context of Canadian settler colonialism and its afterlives, I turn to Glissant's Caribbean inspired category of the archipelago in what follows. This is not done to conflate the experience of Caribbean slavery with Canadian settler

colonialism, but to illustrate the necessity of thinking through the history of racial encounters whose presence continues to shape the environment we presently inhabit. Further, for my purposes here, the archipelago also provides an opening for what I want to understand as a spatiotemporal translation of Glissant's archipelagic thinking: a conceptualisation of time-space that is in perpetual beginning.

Imaginary

5 Epitomised in Johannes Fabian's influential phrase, 'the denial of coevalness', and as has now been well rehearsed, configurations of temporal relations have been historically integral in justifying the violence of colonial and imperial projects of conquest and racial expropriations.[10] Rather than going over this now familiar story, a meaningful thread I want to pursue here is how time has been historically bound within a vocabulary of geographic domination and racial condemnation. Space never just 'is', but is produced through practices of domination which locate its physical materiality though imaginative configurations around space, place and race.[11] If as Dipesh Chakrabarty writes, a hyperreal Europe works as a silent referent in the production of historical knowledge such that it 'remains the sovereign, theoretical subject of all histories', I want to propose that these knowledges are also based on a geographical schema that designates the space of the New World as 'inferior', making these geographies incongruous with claims to being Human.[12] In its quest to justify its power through myths and fantasies, as Achille Mbembe notes, the West considered 'itself as the center of the earth, and the birthplace of reason, universal life, and the truth of humanity.'[13] Similarly, tracing a racial longue durée genealogy of the Human, Sylvia Wynter has argued that in the wake of the 'West's reinvention of its true Christian self' through the transmuted terms of the 'Rational self of Man', it was the people of the 'military expropriated New World territories (i.e. Indians)' and the 'enslaved people of Black Africa (i.e. Negroes)' who were made to occupy the 'matrix slot of Otherness'.[14] In this transmuted reformulation, the concept of the 'Other' is carried over and re-described as the ultimate 'space of Otherness'.[15] As a symbolic construct then, race coincides with a geography of domination which spatialises difference through the hierarchisation of the Human.

6 I draw on this history in order to introduce the existential ground from which the central metaphor for thinking emerges for Glissant. Defying general classifications, the archipelago for Glissant is that which foregrounds the 'geographic imperative that lies at the heart of every struggle for social justice.'[16] With the archipelago, Glissant turns to geography not to discover or recover spaces rendered un-geographic and illegitimate by Eurocentric modernity, but to initiate a different sense of place. As Katherine McKittrick has argued, geographies of domination hold in them the possibilities of contesting, re-mapping, and providing 'new, or different, and perhaps more just, geographic stories'.[17] The archipelago as a geographic category is both haunted and developed by these histories of racialisation, hierarchisations and dispossessions. By manipulating and recasting its meaning within geography, Glissant underscores the transformative effect of reading and critiquing the coloniality of space from within 'the geography of reason'.[18] As Glissant explains,

> 'Within this universe of domination and oppression, of silent or professed dehumanization, forms of humanity stubbornly persisted. In this outmoded spot,

> on the margins of every dynamic, the tendencies of our modernity begin to be detectable. Our first attempt must be to locate just such contradictions.'[19]

7 As I noted in the introduction, Glissant's oeuvre is predicated on a dislocation or a displacement of the individual self. There is no zero-point in the Glissantian world from which the knowing subject in a transparent and disincorporated sense can map the world. Instead, Glissant starts in place, shifting attention from the 'enunciated to the enunciation', and in so doing challenging the very assumptions that shape the locus of enunciations.[20] By locating the archipelago inside the history and memory of space, Glissant locates thinking specifically within the Caribbean and the New World experience of slavery. Situated between the 'solitary confines of the islands that constitute it, and the expansive territory of the mainland towards which it points',[21] the Caribbean as an archipelago provides a productive site for understanding the 'dwelling space'[22] from which thinking unfolds. The archipelago is not just another category of thought, but instead (dis)assembles the entire problem of thinking by gathering attention towards questions of loss, memory, and return. Importantly for Glissant, the Caribbean as an archipelago is marked by a non-history. Unlike the collective memory of the European people where historical consciousness deposited 'gradually and continuously like sediment', in the case of the Caribbean archipelago, loss replaces the synchronicity associated with historical consciousness.[23] Upended by ruptures that began with the brutal dislocation of the slave trade, the Caribbean experience is characterised foremost by shock, contraction, and explosion.

> 'It all begins naturally with the first African snatched from the Gold Coast. Our new world was the trader's ocean. The land on the other side (our land) thus became for us an intolerable experience. But the traded population became a people on this land.'[24]

8 The Caribbean archipelago was the original site of the 'first landing of transported slaves, after which they were sent either to North America, or Brazil, or the islands of the region.'[25] While the ships which brought them traced circles, plying back and forth, the African slave turned into an Atlantic commodity traversed a 'relentlessly linear course', an inexorable trajectory that gave shape to the slave diasporas in the Americas.[26] But the Caribbean archipelago, as Glissant goes on to convey above, was not only a site of an 'intolerable experience' but also involved a transformation, for the 'traded population became a people on this land.' While the original impulse of these transplanted populations was to devise ways to return to Africa, for most 'no opportunity to attempt the return home materialized.'[27] Like the African captives who resisted their commodification by charting new paths within the violence of enslavement, Glissant with the archipelago reconstructs thought out of the traces of this traumatic past to claim a different beginning for the Caribbean predicated on the resistance and political struggle of its people. Most importantly, the archipelago does not simply serve as the background to thought but opens the possibility of thinking about the ongoing and unfinished production of space. By turning to what lies on the underside of this history, the archipelago discloses the unapparent histories spread beneath the surface.

> 'So, history is spread out beneath this surface, from the mountains to the sea, from north to south, from the forest to the beaches. Maroon resistance and denial, entrenchment and endurance, the world beyond and dream. (Our landscape is its own monument: it's meaning can only be traced on the underside. It is all history.)'[28]

9 The archipelago not only describes this history, but also names it. Elucidating the importance of geography for Glissant, McKittrick draws attention to the ways in which naming place for Glissant becomes an act of 'naming self and self-histories'.[29] As a process of self-assertion, this naming makes visible the inevitable presence of alternate geographies, in turn producing a new analytical opening that undermines existing spatial arrangements. But the archipelago does so not by clarifying but by diverting thought. The archipelago is ultimately a 'non-systemic, inductive' mode of thinking which, as it assembles, simultaneously disassembles thought.[30] Instead of clarifying what the archipelago simply is, the archipelago preserves the space for enslaved Africans to collectively make a new sense of place. Put another way, the archipelago by not systemising thought, delivers a complex sense of place which creates a way to challenge oppressive spatial formulations while allowing different spaces of inhabitation within it.

> 'This boundless dimension in the landscape is also true of all the poetics of the New World. If this limitlessness is characteristic of the Americas, it is not so much because of an infinite variety of landscapes as of the fact that no poetics has been derived from their present reality. The solid virtues of the patient peasant are perhaps quickly acquired but leave traces less quickly.'[31]

10 Glissant's archipelago, however, does not by any means diminish the injustices on which Caribbean societies were built. Instead, the archipelago provides a distinct setting for creatively exploring thinking anchored in non-linearity, ambiguity, and contradiction. In contrast to the tightly regulated, mono-logical, and ritualised rhythm Glissant identifies with Europe, the archipelago offers the imaginary for a poetic excess, which he elsewhere terms as 'irrué', implying irruption and rush.[32] In effect, by representing the Caribbean experience under the sign of the archipelago, Glissant challenges the unity, continuity, and systematicity associated with the European temporal and spatial ordering of thought. Not derived from a unitary vantage point, the archipelago points towards the limitless geographic tools available to discover an 'infinite variety' of landscapes.

Beginning

11 Starting his *Poetics of Relation* with a chapter titled 'The Open Boat', Glissant provides a deep mediation on the experience of the Africans who were deported to the Americas. Introducing the image of the 'abyss', Glissant highlights the temporal entanglements between the past and the present, centering analytical attention on the ongoing reverberations of the slave trade. As Louiza Odysseos indicates, with the 'abyss', Glissant reads the memories of the archipelago as a 'threefold dispossession: of place, of history, of language'.[33] Confronting the petrifying unknown, in the first instance, the 'abyss' describes the belly of the boat that the enslaved were stowed in as they were wrenched from their 'everyday, familiar land, away from protecting gods, and a tutelary community' and 'crammed into a space barely capable of containing a third of them.'[34] Stifling the cry of the slave, the hold (belly) of the boat consumes, dissolves and expels the slave into the complete unknown. The next 'abyss' is formed by the depths of the sea. As Glissant explains, whenever being given chase by hostile ships, it was easiest for the slavers to 'lighten the boat by throwing cargo overboard'.[35] The 'abyss' in this second instance, describes for Glissant the violence inflicted on the captured Africans

in the service of human commodification, the remains of those drowned acting as underwater signposts that mark the African slave course between the 'Gold Coast and the Leeward Islands'.[36] And yet, the 'abyss' and the dispossessions that accompanied it, in the final instance, also formed 'one vast beginning', albeit one whose time is marked by the pain Glissant identifies with the 'abyss'.[37] For Glissant, the 'abyss' constitutes not just the death and loss of a world, but also the beginning of a new one. As Glissant goes on to write,

> 'Experience of the abyss lies inside and outside the abyss. The torment of those who never escaped it: straight from the belly of the slave ship into the violet belly of the ocean depths they went. But their ordeal did not die; it quickened into this continuous/discontinuous thing: the panic of the new land, the haunting of the former land, finally the alliance with the imposed land, suffered and redeemed.'[38]

12 The archipelago was not simply a chaotic site of transit, passage, and dispossession, but also formed the space for a new beginning. As Glissant avers to in the above quote, the ordeal that the enslaved underwent 'did not die', but 'quickened into this continuous/discontinuous thing'. It is this new beginning that for Glissant forms the archipelagic grounding for a creative orientation towards the future. In this perspective, the 'abyss' was not the ontological condition of life, but gave rise to a new dissident and spatiotemporal translation of time, space and thought that while situating critique within the here-ness of displacement, de-territorialises itself to reach across and beyond the ongoing temporality of dispossession. In other words, the 'abyss' is not only a split from the former land, but provides the means for grappling with the unknown. The crucial link of time (abyss) with space (archipelago) is made when Glissant writes,

> 'The unconscious memory of the abyss served as the alluvium for these metamorphoses. The populations that then formed, despite having forgotten the chasm, despite being unable to imagine the passion of those who foundered there, nonetheless wove this sail (a veil). They did not use it to return to the Former Land but rose up on this unexpected, dumbfounded land.'[39]

13 As a spatiotemporal translation, the archipelago at once begins with the materiality of space, by orienting thought in place through the New World experience of slavery, and moves beyond space through the notion of recurrent and new beginnings. But importantly, this translation, doesn't return to the 'Former Land', but instead stages a different uprising on this 'unexpected, dumbfounded land'. Ultimately, the archipelago initiates a mode of thinking not predicted on a quest to return, but a creative beginning, central to which is the inseparability of the violence of the Middle Passage and perpetual beginning.

14 Extending Glissant's image of the 'abyss' to the contemporary moment, more recently, Louiza Odysseos has read Glissant as providing the analytical and critical tools needed for illuminating the ongoing reverberations of transatlantic slavery. For Odysseos, the 'abyss' offers the creative potentials for pursing a critical posturing beyond the limits of Glissant's world. In other words, Odysseos wants to renew the political import of the 'abyss', by moving beyond the original thinking-space of the Caribbean archipelago from which Glissant first conceived his notion of the 'abyss' (a position she describes, borrowing from Gary Wilder as non- provincial) and towards articulating a new set of possibilities for and in the contemporary present.[40]

15 While agreeing with Odysseos on the need for pluralising and extending Glissant (both temporally and spatially), I, however, want to conclude this chapter by arguing that this proposal to extend Glissant, while important, ends up engaging with Glissant

outside of the historical space from which his thinking emerges. This leads Odysseos to reduce the political importance that place, space, and its inhabitants bear on Glissant's work. This is not to say that Glissant does not provide the critical tools needed for articulating, explaining and overcoming the problems of the present, but that it does so through the immanent spatiotemporal context of the Caribbean. In the next few chapters, I pursue this opening that Odysseos identifies, but I do so not from the outside, but from the inside of the Caribbean context. Predicated on a (mis)translation of time-space that brings to the fore a mode of being which rises from the shoreline of the Caribbean experience, in the next chapter, I explore the possibilities of becoming multiple as an ontology that thinks 'being' as an existential, historical, and geographically situated reality.

16 How does 'being' become multiple?

FOOTNOTES

1. Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, n/a.

2. "Unmarked Graves at Residential Schools in Canada: What to Know - The New York Times," accessed July 10, 2022, https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/07/world/canada/mass-graves-residential-schools.html.

3. "What Happened at Residential Schools for Indigenous Children in North America?," *The Economist*, accessed June 10, 2022, https://www.economist.com/the-economist-explains/2021/07/26/what-happened-at-residential-schools-for-indigenous-children-in-north-america.

4. See here, Ian Mosby Millions Erin, "Canada's Residential Schools Were a Horror," Scientific American, accessed July 10, 2022, https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/canadas-residential-schools-were-a-horror/.

5. "Really Harper, Canada Has No History of Colonialism?," vancouversun, accessed June 10, 2022, https://vancouversun.com/news/community-blogs/really-harper-canada-has-no-history-of-colonialism.

6. "Second Thoughts about Residential Schools," The Dorchester Review, accessed June 10, 2022, https://www.dorchesterreview.ca/blogs/news/79434753-second-thoughts-about-residential-schools.

7. Glen S Coulthard, "Subjects of Empire: Indigenous Peoples and the 'Politics of Recognition' in Canada," *Contemporary Political Theory* 6, no. 4 (November 2007): 439.

8. On the notion of racialized violence being constitutive to social existence, see, Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*.; Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human*.

9. Ann Laura Stoler, "Introduction: 'The Rot Remains' From Ruins to Ruination," in *Imperial Debris: On Ruins and Ruination*, ed. Ann Laura Stoler (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 7.

10. Johannes Fabian, "The Other Revisited: Critical Afterthoughts," *Anthropological Theory* 6, no. 2 (June 2006): 139–52.

11. Katherine McKittrick, "Plantation Futures," *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism* 17, no. 3 (November 1, 2013): 1–15.

12. Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 27.

13. Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, 11.

14. Sylvia Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation--An Argument," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 3 (2003): 266.

15. Wynter, 274.

16. Ruth Wilson Gilmore, "Fatal Couplings of Power and Difference: Notes on Racism and Geography," *The Professional Geographer* 54, no. 1 (February 2002): 16.

17. Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota, 2006), xix.

18. On the geography of reason and its links with coloniality see here, Drabinski, *Glissant and the Middle Passage: Philosophy, Beginning, Abyss.*; W. D. Mignolo, "The Geopolitics of Knowledge and the Colonial Difference," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 101, no. 1 (January 1, 2002): 57–96.

19. Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 65.

20. Walter D. Mignolo, "Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and Decolonial Freedom," *Theory, Culture & Society* 26, no. 7–8 (December 2009): 160.

21. Chris Bongie, "Reading the Archipelago," *New West Indian Guide / Nieuwe West-Indische Gids* 73, no. 1–2 (January 1, 1999): 89.

22. Ahmed, "A Phenomenology of Whiteness."

23. Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 62.

24. Glissant. 38.

25. Glissant, *Introduction to a Poetics of Diversity*, 4.

26. Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora*, 6.

27. Smallwood, 186.

28. Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 11.

29. McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle*, xxii.

30. Glissant, *Introduction to a Poetics of Diversity*, 26.

31. Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 160.

32. Glissant, *Introduction to a Poetics of Diversity*, 3.

33. Louiza Odysseos, "Stolen Life's Poetic Revolt," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 47, no. 3 (June 2019): 343.

34. Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 5.

35. Glissant, 6.

36. Glissant.

37. Glissant.

38. Glissant, 7.

39. Glissant.

40. Odysseos, "Stolen Life's Poetic Revolt". 371-372.

Chapter 2. Being

Rhizome

Return

1 In an interview with Édouard Glissant about his theories of relation, Manthia Diawara asks Glissant if there is any form of 'return' for those Africans transported across the complete unknown during the Middle Passage. Replying with a laugh, Glissant answers that there is a return, and that return is right here. As he goes on to convey,

> 'That's why I said that Christopher Columbus leaves, but I'm the one who returns. I don't mean myself, Édouard Glissant. What I mean is that those who were forced to leave as slaves return not as slaves but as something else, a free entity, not only free but a being who has gained something in comparison to the mass of humanity. And what has this being gained? Multiplicity. In relation to the unity of the enslaving will, we have the multiplicity of the antislavery will. That is what we've gained, and that is the true return.'[1]

2 In the previous chapter tying together the different but related threads of space, time and translation, I introduced Glissant's figure of the archipelago as a spatiotemporal translation dedicated to new forms of knowing. Reading the Caribbean as an archipelago, the landscape of the New World ceases to be 'a passive envelope' for an 'all-powerful narrative', but emerges as the 'changing and enduring dimension of all change and all exchange.'[2] Neither dominating, systematic, nor imposing, the dimension of the archipelago becomes not that of Unity, but Multiplicity. Rather than function as an archive of colonial domination, the archipelago as a mode of thought in Glissant names a process which by accumulating traces forms new meanings. The archipelago in this reading becomes at once the site of a particularly historic and geographic act of dispossession, and a promise that one can move beyond these fixed cartographies by evacuating thinking to mark new beginnings. Locating beginning before return, becoming for Glissant is no longer teleological and determined, but nomadic, errant and multiple.

3 And yet, as Glissant in his answer to Diawara avers, there is a return. However, as Glissant answers, at the moment of return, the 'being' that returns is 'not only free, but a being who has gained something in comparison to the mass of humanity.' If as Sylvia

Wynter has noted, the fifteenth century voyages of Christopher Columbus mark the beginning of a new cosmogony that transforms the spatial conception of the earth to a space that is entirely explorable and open (and thus colonisable), Glissant offers a different narrative whose beginning is predicated on radical becoming.[3] It is in this sense that Glissant says to Diawara that it is Cristopher Columbus who leaves, but Glissant who returns. Refusing to think 'return' as akin to being rooted, Glissant dislodges belonging from comfortable affirmations within an inviolable origin. Instead, 'return' becomes a creation place, emptied of uncontaminated survival, which is why Glissant identifies the 'true return' as becoming multiple. This 'true return' allows Glissant to make a distinction between a 'people that survives elsewhere' and 'maintains its original nature' and a population that is 'transformed elsewhere into another people'.[4] For Glissant, this modality of displacement is also what distinguishes the persecution of the Jewish Diaspora from the enslavement of the African diaspora, for the Jewish population maintained their Judaism, 'they had not been transformed into anything else'.[5] The New World experience of slavery does not give rise to a pure and uncontaminated 'return', or as Glissant puts it, 'theologies of territory, theologies of belonging, theologies of ancestry', but instead 'opens onto an infinite number of possibilities'.[6] If the nature of the slave trade eclipses, silences and erases historical experience, then the Caribbean identity is no longer singular, serving as a secure foundation for 'being', but multiple, hybrid and fragmented. Naming this unrooted subject the 'rhizome', Glissant crafts a unique Caribbean subjectivity from the shorelines of the Caribbean archipelago.

4 Given the vastness of Glissant's writing on the subject, in what follows I offer an adumbrated discussion of how Glissant, by situating his approach to subjectivity within the historical problematics of the Caribbean archipelago, places a renewed focus on the question of 'being' as a continuous process of becoming multiple. In contrast to locating 'being' as something comfortably closed upon itself, I argue that by reading Deleuze and Guattari's category of the 'rhizome' through the analytical markers provided by the topology of the Caribbean archipelago, Glissant (re)assembles and (re)makes the ontology of the subject around Caribbean notions of creolité (creoleness), errancy and diversion. Importantly, in doing so, I position Glissant's engagement with Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome as not merely a transfer of ideas, but a radical and purposeful (mis)translation which allows Glissant to develop a conceptual language of and for 'being' from within the context of the Caribbean archipelago.

Multiplicity

5 Towards the end of his *Poetics of Relation,* Glissant offers a series of interlinked aphorisms around the question of 'being'. What is particularly compelling about this series of proclamations is how in addressing the meaning of 'being', Glissant puts into motion an ontology of the subject predicated on the lived experiences of the Caribbean archipelago. Carefully distinguishing Being (with a capital B) from 'being', Glissant writes,

> 'Beings, which subsist and present themselves, are not merely substance, which would be sufficient unto itself.
> Beings risk the being of the world, or being-earth.
> The being of the world realizes Being:-in beings.'[7]

6 In this departure from Being 'as not merely substance, which would be sufficient unto itself', Glissant marks a rupture within metaphysics and ontology. Discerning the difference between Being and 'being', Glissant focuses on 'being' not as an abstraction from material reality or as something which possesses an essence and to which subsequently qualities can be added. Instead, 'being' emerges as a force that posits language, history and space at its core, in turn providing the contours for an ontology of the subject which rises from the shoreline of the Caribbean archipelago. Writing against what he terms 'systematic thought', Glissant's 'being', more than a semantic shift, initiates a discussion which moves from Unity (Being) to Multiplicity (beings).[8] However, abandoning the idea of a fixed, and self-referential Being does not simply entail the pluralisation of the subject, for as Glissant reminds us, multiplicity does not translate into mere multiplication.[9] Instead, Glissant's conception of 'beings' stretches across the earth, realising itself 'in beings'.

7 The evocation of the earth is an important move here, for the earth in Glissant's rendering becomes both a literal and figurative evocation of a place. With the invocation of the earth as a place, I want to argue that Glissant, along with the shift from Being to 'beings', also prompts a movement from the 'continent' to the 'archipelago'. As Glissant writes in his *Introduction to a Poetics of Diversity,* unlike the 'continent' which is closed upon itself and linked to the idea of a singular identity, the archipelago moves beyond national frontiers, disintegrating and rebuilding itself as a non-systematic and dynamic reality. Fleshing out this implication more fully, Glissant writes,

> 'I believe that we have arrived at a moment in the life of human communities in which the human being is beginning to accept the idea that he is himself perpetually in process, that he is not Being, but a being, and that like all beings, he changes. And I think that this is one of the major intellectual, spiritual and mental permutations of our age, which means that we are all afraid. We are all afraid of this idea that one day we are going to admit that we are not an absolute entity, but a changing being.'[10]

8 No longer an absolute entity, but a changing one, perpetual movement becomes central to the formation of 'being'. Importantly however, central to Glissant's conceptual topology here is that 'being' realises this experience of change (which is perpetually in process) not in a vacuum, but against a tortured geography of slavery, oppression and dispossession. As argued in the previous chapter, through the image of the 'abyss', Glissant is labouring here against, as John Drabinski describes it, 'not just Being as the absolute but also the shadow of nothingness, of Non-being'.[11] Glissant's 'being' thus unfolds within the rupture of captivity caused by the experience of New World slavery to foster a radically different grammar for socio-political existence and resistance. As Glissant goes on to argue in *Caribbean Discourse*, the invasion and colonisation of the Caribbean archipelago forces the population subjected to it to 'question in several ways any attempt at universal generalization.'[12]

9 And yet, therein lies not only distress and loss, but the opportunity to resist mimicking an all- encompassing Being, in favour of asserting an ontology engaged with the complex interplay of memory, history and the spatiotemporal configuration of the Caribbean archipelago. With this assertion that couples subjectivity with loss, Glissant thinks with/against Deleuze and Guattari's distinction between the 'single root' and the 'rhizome'. Indeed, as John Drabinski has noted, the turn to Deleuze and Guattari stands as the singularly most important one in Glissant's constellation of influences.[13] For

Glissant, the insights provided by the figure of the rhizome develop beyond a logic of comparison and into the possibility of writing a philosophy of the 'subject' located inside the experience of Caribbeanness. So, what is the Glissantian 'subject'? And further, what is the political and analytical purchase of Glissant's re-writing of Deleuze and Guattari's figure of the rhizome?

Creole

10 In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari oppose the 'rhizome' to the 'tree' or the 'root', emphasising that that they each represent different modalities of thinking. The root is that which is singular and atavistic, which by rooting existence within localised, linear and hierarchical models reduces the multiplicity of 'being' to the unity of Being. Imitating the world as art imitates nature, the root is the 'law of reflection'.[14] Endlessly developing the 'law of the One' by following a strong principle unity, for Deleuze and Guattari, the system of thought associated with the 'root' fails to reach to an understanding of multiplicity. Against the figure of the root, Deleuze and Guattari propose the relational and vertical rhizome. Not amenable to any idea of 'genetic axis or deep structure', the rhizome is never closed upon itself, not having available a supplementary dimension over and above its own multiplicity.[15] Instead, the rhizome ceaselessly moves outwards, decentring itself to reach out into other dimensions and registers. The rhizome is fundamentally un-plotted, multiple, and irreducible. Not drawing its life from fixity and order, the rhizome traces uncertainty and indeterminacy through maps that are always 'detachable, connectable, reversible, modifiable, and has multiple entryways and exits, and its own lines of flight.'[16] This distinction is crucial, for if 'being' is 'rhizomatic' it is no longer something that is always full, self-present and cohering, but is always un-plotted un-reconcilable, and de-territorialised.

11 It is in this sense that when Glissant writes that the 'single root is that which kills everything around it whereas the rhizome is the root that reaches out to meet other roots', he identifies Deleuze and Guattari's image of the rhizome with the principle of Caribbean identity.[17] Glissant's 'being' does not attempt to read the Caribbean and New World experience as fixed and univocal but as infinitely varied and inexhaustible. But, by characterising the 'rhizome' within the language of the 'root' Glissant points us towards something essential about the 'rhizomatic' sense of Glissant's notion of subjectivity and 'being'. More than drawing a straightforward equivalence, the rhizome is (mis)translated by Glissant, (re)assembling it from the 'shadow of Being'.[18] Indeed, as Cleves Headley has argued, what is radical about Glissant's ontology is that he approaches the question of existence as an 'historically and geographically situated reality'.[19] Thinking 'being' from the obscurities, vicissitudes, and fissures that abound in Caribbean history, Glissant develops an ontology *emergent* from the contested contact wrought by colonisation.

12 Using the notion of 'filiation' Glissant identifies Deleuze and Guattari's 'root' with the founding myth of the West. Further, this myth for Glissant has been complicit in sustaining a philosophical fascination with discerning a continuous connection from the Community's present back to a Genesis or a founding Unity. For Glissant, this infatuation with the 'One' leads to a totalising and colonial impulse that negates the

'Other', by claiming that identity will be achieved only when 'communities attempt to legitimate their right to possession of a territory through myth or the revealed word.'[20]

> 'The West, therefore, is where this movement becomes fixed and nations declare themselves in preparation for their repercussions in the world. This fixing, this declaration, this expansion, all require that the idea of the root gradually take on the intolerant sense that Deleuze and Guattari, no doubt, meant to challenge.'[21]

13 Moving away from the discourse of 'filiation' and 'genesis', Glissant counters the monologue of the 'root' by shifting the grounding of 'being' from the modern West, where 'movement becomes fixed', to the shorelines of the Caribbean archipelago. Approaching the question of 'being' by centring analytical attention under the sign of 'Creole', Glissant illuminates the entanglements between the uprooting, colonisation and genocide forced upon various peoples of the Caribbean archipelago, and the development of what he terms in *Caribbean Discourse* as a 'poetics of the subject'.[22] It is in this context that Glissant also identifies how uprooting can work towards identity. Articulated thus, Glissant's 'being' imagines itself neither through 'imitation' nor 'reaction', but through the 'burning need for modification'.[23] This modification is realised in Glissant's rhizomatic configuration of the Creole as metonymous with the question of 'being'. Explicating the difference between 'métissage', (which in Glissant's view fixes 'being' in time and place) and 'Creole', Glissant writes,

> If we posit métissage as, generally speaking, the meeting and synthesis of two differences, creolisation seems to be a limitless métissage, its elements diffracted and its consequences unforeseeable. Creolization diffracts, whereas certain forms of métissage can concentrate one more time. Here it is devoted to what has burst forth fro, lands that are no longer islands. Its most obvious symbol is in the Creole language, whose genius consists in always being open, that is, perhaps, never becoming fixed except according to systems of variables that we have to imagine as much as define.'[24]

14 Glissant here is careful to distinguish his understanding of Creole from métissage. While métissage sublimates differences in order to synthesise, Creole always opens out to a plurality of entangled elements which can never be contained or fixed within a closed system. Glissant's fundamental assertion here is that 'being' (read through the metonymic figure of 'Creole') cannot be understood as having a deteriorated or de-territorialised situation of origin. Instead, rejecting filial roots, 'being' opens up at the moment 'Creole' challenges and discards the 'root' that totalises Being. Importantly, the evocation of the Creole in Glissant is neither 'apolitical nor is it inconsistent with the will to identity', but is at variance with the 'predatory effects of the unique root.'[25] It is here that Glissant configures 'Creole' as 'rhizomatic'. Creole, unlike the singular root, never realises its 'being' in some static or essentialised form, but always as *becoming multiple*. No longer describing 'being' as something akin to a taxonomy that fixes identity by foreclosing the possibility of cross-cultural mixing, the Creole is 'made by and made in rhizomatic swerves', and begins to name the various *composite* cultures that describe Caribbean life.[26]

15 It becomes important here to consider how Glissant with the notion of the Creole makes the split and fractured lived experience articulated by the enslaved population disturb the monologue of the 'root'. In *Caribbean Discourse*, Glissant specifically identifies Creole as a *rhizomatic strategy of diversion* that provides the occasion for countering Being, and consequently the 'root'. From the perspective of the Caribbean archipelago, 'diversion' is 'not a systematic refusal to see', but the ultimate resort of a population whose domination is concealed.[27] Although not directly tangible, Glissant

underscores how Creole provides a key area of diversion for the enslaved. In the face of the colonisers' attempt to fix and silence the enslaved as mute and empty, Glissant promotes Creole as a 'systematic process of derision'.[28]

> 'You wish to reduce me to a childish babble, I will make this babble systematic, we shall see if you can make sense of it. Creole would then become a language that, in its structures and its dynamics, would have fundamentally incorporated the derisive nature of its formation.'[29]

16 Translating a colonial rationality that homogenises the experience of the enslaved, Creole, by making 'this babble systematic' affirms the 'being' of the enslaved. Organising speech as a 'blast of sound', Creole provides Glissant with a 'communicative vessel' with which he can imagine how 'enslaved Africans and their descendants' could 'actively (rather than vicariously) cultivate a sense of self-determining collective.'[30] Specifically, and this is important for Glissant, Creole does this not by returning to some immutable state of Being, but by the 'unceasing process of transformation.'[31] In this, Creole is 'not a language of a single origin', but a 'cross-cultural language', its critical import lying in never becoming fixed and always being open.[32] As we have seen, Glissant repositions and (mis)translates Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy of the rhizome by raising the question of the 'subject' from the problematic of the Caribbean archipelago. Creole does not only offer a crucial figure for rethinking the multiple and always poly-rooted ontology of 'being' as rhizomatic but provides an account of the *rhizomatic consequences* of thinking 'being' from the landscape of the Caribbean archipelago. It is in this sense that Creole, by providing an ontology of the 'subject' *simultaneously* affirms the 'being' of the enslaved by tracing the coming into being, the meaning and the self-consciousness of a people, and as a rhizomatic imaginary names an *unpredictable* process of becoming that exceeds the original possibilities that created it.

17 However, for Glissant, Creole must ultimately go beyond simply being a subversive form of resistance. While Creole forms a necessary component of defiance on the part of the enslaved, it can neither build nor sustain a collectivity, for as Glissant writes, even though Creole has at its origin a 'kind of conspiracy to conceal meaning, it should be realised that this initial purpose would soon disappear.'[33] The main idea for Glissant here is that for Creole to transform loss into an act of liberation, one needs to find within the excesses of its speech a form of *self- expression*. As he goes on to explain,

> 'Our aim is to forge for ourselves, by either one of these not necessarily mutually exclusive ways, and based on the defective grasp of two languages whose control was never collectively mastered, a form of expression through which we could consciously face our ambiguities and fix ourselves firmly in the uncertain possibilities of the word made ours.'[34]

18 Whatever the form that it takes, Creole must be able to move towards a conscious expression of Caribbeanness. And yet, this new form of expression which 'faces our ambiguities' and fixes 'ourselves in the uncertain possibilities of the world made ours' while emerging from the struggle for acquiring self-expression must embody the multiplicity and unpredictability of 'being'. Without ever fixing 'being' definitively, for Glissant, 'relation' provides the mechanism for achieving this move by offering a way of transforming collective suffering into collective resistance. Relation forms a decolonial praxis that rejects both the possibility of redeeming the essence of the enslaved and claims that self-expression needs to be bound to territorial boundaries. Instead opening out from the problem space of the Caribbean, relation offers the means to cultivate a

decolonial politics based around diffraction, relationality and political struggle. relation thus provides Glissant with the critical resources to stage a revolt, which while instituting a new world, is able to keep the space of its creation contested and open. Articulated thus, 'relation' sets into motion the real work of 'being'. Importantly, Glissant's invocation of relation can be linked to the long-standing and complex engagement of Glissant with the works of his fellow Martinican's Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon, albeit while also revealing a certain tension with respect to their different decolonising discourses.

19 With this, let us turn to the Caribbean once again, but now with Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon as our guides.

FOOTNOTES

1. Édouard Glissant, One World in Relation: Edouard Glissant in Conversation with Manthia Diawara, interview by Manthia Diawara, trans. Christopher Winks, 2011.

2. Glissant, *Introduction to a Poetics of Diversity*, 12.

3. Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom", 107-123.

4. Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 15.

5. Glissant, 17.

6. Glissant, *Introduction to a Poetics of Diversity*, 102.

7. Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 187.

8. Glissant, *Introduction to a Poetics of Diversity*, 7.

9. Glissant, One World in Relation: Edouard Glissant in Conversation with Manthia Diawara, 9.

10. Glissant, 14.

11. Drabinski, *Glissant and the Middle Passage: Philosophy, Beginning, Abyss*, 103.

12. Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 14.

13. Drabinski, *Glissant and the Middle Passage: Philosophy, Beginning, Abyss*, 104.

14. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 3.

15. Deleuze and Guattari, 8-9.

16. Deleuze and Guattari, 22.

17. Glissant, *Introduction to a Poetics of Diversity*, 37.

18. Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 161.

19. Clevis Headley, "Glissant's Existential Ontology of Difference:," *The CLR James Journal* 18, no. 1 (2012): 77.

20. Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 13.

21. Glissant, 14.

22. Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 149.

23. Glissant.

24. Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 34.

25. Glissant, 20.

26. Drabinski, *Glissant and the Middle Passage: Philosophy, Beginning, Abyss*, 108.

27. Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 19.

28. Glissant, 20.

29. Glissant.
30. Shilliam, “Decolonising the Grounds of Ethical Inquiry.”
31. Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 52.
32. Glissant, 127.
33. Glissant, 125.
34. Glissant, 168.

Chapter 3. Revolt

Caribbeanness

> 'We must return to the point from which we started. Diversion is not a useful ploy unless it is nourished by reversion: not a return to the longing for origins, to some immutable state of Being, but a return to the point of entanglement, from which we were forcefully turned away; that is where we must ultimately put to work the forces of creolization, or perish.'[1]

Loss

1 In his monumental prose poem, *Return to My Native Land*, Aimé Césaire opens with a scene of aporetic loss.

> 'At the end of the small hours delicately sprouting handles for the market: the West Indies, hungry, hail-marked with smallpox, blown to bits by alcohol, the West Indies shipwrecked in the mud of this bay, wickedly shipwrecked in the dust of this town.'[2]

2 The opening passages go on to describe the island of Martinique as a place of desolation and geographic decadence, where human life has been debased by three centuries of colonial rule. Emphasising the structuring force of loss, community and landscape, Césaire with his *Return to My Native Land* was one of the earliest Caribbean writers to consciously examine and raise the question of colonialism and its effects. But unlike his later *Discourse on Colonialism,* Césaire in *Return to My Native Land* did so not conceptually but poetically. There are no people in these opening passages. Instead, Césaire paints a panoramic topography that decentres individual subjectivity, and in doing so articulates the impact of the long, painful shadow that French colonial history continues to cast on the island. Not concerned with detailing the suffering of the victim, throughout the first part of the poem, Césaire instead describes vividly the geography of colonial squalor and social immobility that the island has historically been subjected to. At once lyrical and visceral, Césaire renders open the wounds of the island's suffering through a vocabulary of violence, degradation and loss. In this

disowning island, the. 'malarial blood of the heights' are infested with 'fumaroles of anguish.' 116 Here, life remains 'inert, breathless' and 'deaf to its own cry of hunger and misery, revolt, and hatred'. [3]Crowds no longer gather, but disengage, 'make off', and 'slip away'.[4] Ultimately, for Césaire there is no easy solution to this situation and the only remedy available now is the violent destruction of the old colonial order.[5]

3 The history of this island that Césaire describes so disdainfully *in Return to My Native Land,* was *'discovered'*—according to a Eurocentric narrative—by Cristopher Columbus in the fifteenth century before being claimed for France in 1635 by the conquistador Pierre Belain D'Esnambuc.[6] Under the colonial system that quickly developed since the 1650s, the sole purpose of Martinique, along with the other French Caribbean colonies of Guadeloupe and Saint Domingue was to supply the metropolis with tropical produce, becoming in turn 'full- fledged plantation economies based upon African slavery.'[7] While the initial work of colonisation was undertaken by engagés or indentured labourers, by the mid-1650s, as Robin Blackburn notes, the French islands contained 'some 13,000 whites and 10,000 black slaves'.[8] Importantly, the slave economy that had developed in the islands was regulated by the notorious French Code Noir (Black Code), which made race central to the regulation of Caribbean plantation life. Drafted almost a century before France's revolutionary Declaration of the Rights of Man, the Code Noir governed every aspect of the slave's daily life, turning them into human commodities to market. Even as France formally abolished slavery in 1848, a series of decrees continued to indemnify slaves to an 'authoritarian colonial administration that governed a racially organized society'.[9]

4 It is under these conditions that Césaire went to Paris to further his education and subsequently wrote *Return to My Native Land* on his return to Martinique. As part of its colonial policy, as Mazisi Kunene writes, France did not establish a university in Martinique, 'hoping to achieve full assimilation of the Martinican intellectuals who had to go to France for their higher education'.[10] But contrary to French colonial expectation, Césaire in Paris, along with other Black intellectuals (most notable of which was Leopold Senghor), organised collectively to establish the ideology of Negritude. As Achille Mbembe notes, with these other poets Césaire responded to a 'long history of subjugation and bio-political fracturing' by making the exaltation of the Black race a rallying cry for reclaiming and asserting the cultural identity of a population hitherto denied and negated by a whole system of European values.[11] Through this cry, Negritude expressed the will of the enslaved and colonised to escape centuries of resignation, and finally express themselves as a 'free and sovereign community' with their 'own points of origin, their own certainty, and their own destination in the world'.[12] Indeed, Césaire's *Return to My Native Land* was a direct product of this transimperial cry that circulated across Africa. But for Césaire, in order to embrace this new subject-hood and this new freedom that accompanied this reclamation, the mutilated subject had to first overcome their initial expulsion by radically defining anew notions of time, space and beauty. Ending his *Return to My Native Land* with a triumphant vision, Césaire's subject is 'no longer miserably confided to a facial angle, to a type of hair' or 'to a pigmentation' and is able to finally repossess their lost island.[13] As Césaire writes towards the conclusion of his poem,

> 'No race holds a monopoly of beauty, intelligence, and strength
> there is room for all at the meeting-place of conquest we know now
> that the sun revolves around our earth illuminating the plot
> which we alone have selected

that every star falls at our command from the sky to the earth
without limit or cease.'[14]

5 Shortly after the poem's publication in 1939, Césaire was appointed to the post of modern languages at the Lycée Schoelcher in Fort de France, Martinique. It was at the Lycée that Frantz Fanon along with his contemporary Édouard Glissant (albeit three years apart) were introduced to Césaire. In many ways Césaire's passionate denouncement of colonial racism and his ideas on Black consciousness stood as a crucial precursor to the strands of decolonial politics that the two were to subsequently develop through their own writings and political affiliations. As a theoretical horizon (and this was crucial for both Glissant and Fanon), Césaire's account of Negritude opened up for the young Fanon and Glissant the question of the relation between the old and new, the past and future. And yet, both Fanon and Glissant went beyond Césaire in their own ways, developing a decolonial stance that readily agreed in their shared critique of Césaire's cultural nationalism articulated through Negritude. Unlike his teacher who re oriented the loss cause by colonialism by drawing strength and inspiration from a pan-African movement, Fanon wholly reconceived his relation to the past, advocating a violent and revolutionary break from the colonial present as a way to create a new decolonial future. Like Fanon, Glissant also returned to the point Césaire started from. But, unlike Fanon and Césaire, rather than retrieving a traumatic past (Césaire) or effecting a break from it (Fanon), Glissant extended their insights, his advance on both lying in the complexity with which he engages with the space and place of the Caribbean.

6 In the following discussion, I want to propose that Glissant with his notion of relation institutes a counter-project of decoloniality that takes part in an intellectual and political genealogy from Césaire's founding Negritude poem to Fanon's epistemological break effected in *The Wretched of the Earth.*[15] Underlying my analysis is the question of how to understand the resemblances between these writers, while discerning the important *differences* in their response to the political dilemmas presented by colonialism. To this end, I treat Glissant's Caribbean-inspired account of relation as providing a crucial *contextual and inter-textual translation of freedom* as it manifests within a historically specific problem space of decolonial praxis informed by the legacies of colonial conquest.[16] More specifically, turning to Fanon's project of decolonisation, I argue that Glissant's creative and meticulous re-working of Fanon through the space of the Caribbean allows us to radically reimagine the meanings through which decolonial futures can be imagined. In doing so, I argue that Glissant's 'relation' reopens layers of decoloniality that are hitherto foreclosed by Césaire and Fanon.

Violence

7 One of the most widely studied works of colonial alienation is presented in Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*.[17] Writing from a locus that speaks to and for the colonised, Fanon brings to the fore the unbearable weight exerted by colonial imaginations on ways of being human. Confronting the question of epistemological location, Fanon explores what happens when the colonised refuses to be a subject of colonialism's violent grasp. Making a foundational statement about language that effects this epistemological break, Fanon starts *Black Skin* by saying,

> 'To speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilisation.'[18]

8 If to speak a language means to support the weight of a civilisation, Fanon's work offers a deeply phenomenological account of the lived experience of race that attempts to reconstitute and resurrect the location of speaking by grasping a different morphology, using a different syntax and above all, by assuming a different culture. Conceptually, this epistemic difference that Fanon introduces at the beginning of the book emerges most viscerally in his chapter on 'The Fact of Blackness'. On one level, this chapter recounts Fanon's personal experience of inhabiting a Black body, but on another level, the text can be read as providing a template for understanding and analysing the spirals of negation the racialised body experiences. The chapter opens with Fanon recounting how he 'came into the world imbued with the will to find a meaning in things', his 'spirit filled with the desire to attain to the source of the world', only to find that he was nothing but 'an object in the midst of other objects'.[19] This experience of negation anchors the abstract existential experience of inhabiting a Black body for Fanon. Sealed into a crushing objecthood, Fanon turns 'beseechingly to others'.[20] But even as he turns, the dehumanising and determining experience of the racialising gaze denies him acceptance. As Fanon goes on to tell his reader, even as he tries to reach the other side, he stumbles, for the 'movements, attitudes, and glances of the other' immutably fix him.[21]

9 This phenomenological experience places a certain *ontological dissonance* for Fanon, making every ontology 'unattainable in a colonized and civilized society'.[22] For Fanon, in the white world, the Black man's body is surrounded by an 'atmosphere of certain uncertainty', at once threatening its existence and certifying its dismemberment.[23] In Fanon's vision, race is central to subjectivity, its framing so decisive that it *fixes* the lived experience of the Black man as always already formed by the gaze of the white. As Fanon's sense of colonial crises unfolds, there is another intriguing development in the chapter, this time cast by the disorientation induced in Fanon by the gaze of a child. The gaze of the child represents how a white world fixes Fanon, turning his body into something that is already formed in and through the racial matrix of the colonial world. The child cries out to his mother,

> 'Mama, see the Negro! I'm frightened! Frightened! Frightened! Now they were beginning to be afraid of me. I made up my mind to laugh myself to tears, but laughter had become impossible.'[24]

10 Even as Fanon attempts to meet the gaze of the child, trying to unweave the colonial elements that determine his self-understanding, he encounters 'legends, stories, and histories' that *precede and exceed* him.[25] The impossibility of laughter that Fanon experiences soon discursively spirals into a sense of nausea. Fanon finds that he exists triply, responsible at the same time for his body, his race and his ancestors. Interpellated as a Negro by the child, Fanon's colonised self is determined from the outside, contained by the language of the coloniser who tethers his existence to colonial stereotypes that Fanon can't find a way out of. For Fanon, the question of identification for the Black man is never, as Homi Bhabha puts it, the 'affirmation of a pre-given identity, a self-fulfilling prophecy', but rather 'entails the representation of the subject in the differentiating order of otherness.'[26] In other words, the Black body is made Black *before* it encounters the white gaze. It is in this sense that to understand the experience of the Black man, as Fanon implies with this example, we have to grasp at

what lies beyond the surface, *beneath* the bodily schema, for as Fanon goes on to write, below the 'corporeal schema' lies a 'historico-racial schema'.[27] By asking us to think what lies below, Fanon directs us to the racial and historical dimensions beneath the surface of the body that are shaped by the histories of colonialism.

11 But unlike his predecessor and teacher Césaire who ultimately found possibilities for reconciliation beyond the impasse created by colonial racism in the Negritude movement, when Fanon tries to reclaim his Negritude, he finds that it was already snatched from him. As Gary Wilder argues, for Fanon, 'Negritude's failure was over-determined insofar as it could not overcome the refractory racism so deeply embedded in European colonial and social relations.'[28] And yet, Fanon does not foreclose the possibility of an anti-racist position beyond coloniality. Ending his *Black Skin* more optimistically, Fanon concludes by arguing that it is only through an 'effort to recapture the self and scrutinize the self' that it will be possible to 'create the ideal conditions of existence for a human world'.[29] While *Black Skin* treats the pain of colonialism in a more introspective manner, in his more polemic *The Wretched of the Earth* (written around ten years after *Black Skin*), Fanon fully develops the conditions for the existence of this more humane world that *Black Skin* concludes with, outlining a theory of cultural nationalism and decolonization that calls for a radical break with the colonial past to forge a decolonial future.

12 It is in *The Wretched of the Earth* that Fanon most defiantly brings out the historical violence that lies at the heart of colonialism. Where in *Black Skin* Fanon had analysed colonial alienation at a metaphysical and psychological scale, in *The Wretched of the Earth*, he focuses on the concrete material situation underpinning the relationship of the coloniser to the colonised. Famously describing the colonial world as a Manichean world, Fanon provocatively introduces his theory of decolonisation, arguing that 'decolonization is always a violent event'.[30] For Fanon, in this compartmentalised (or Manichean) colonial world, the colonial master and the colonised servant live and confront each other in mutually exclusive ways. Like the juxtaposition of white and Black bodies in *Black Skin*, Fanon opposes the 'native sector' to the European sector here. But Fanon places these opposing entities 'not in the service of a higher unity', for in the colonial world there can be no reconciliation.[31] Fanon's central insight here is that challenging the colonial world isn't a 'rational confrontation of viewpoints', but requires above all that the colonised 'blow the colonial world to smithereens'.[32] For Fanon then, both colonialism and decolonisation are *always* violent processes. In Fanon's account, violence becomes *formative* for ending and upturning the original violence that created the colonial world, and it is the force of this violence that subsequently liberates the subjugated. And yet Fanon goes on to submit this violence to question, for violence in Fanon is never simply something that is already pre-formed and thus imminently graspable. As the colonised effect a violent and revolutionary break, they soon realise that national independence brings to light multiple (and contradictory) realities.

> 'The people who in the early days of the struggle had adopted the primitive Manichaeanism of the colonizer- Black versus White, Arab versus Infidel- realize en-route that some blacks can be whiter than the whites, and that the prospect of a national flag or independence does not automatically result in certain segments of the population giving up their privileges and their interests'[33]

13 As Manichean dualities start to unravel, and it is realised that 'some blacks can be whiter than the whites', the colonised are confronted with the struggle of realising and

clarifying how they are to imagine themselves. The moment of violence for Fanon is a rupture not only in a physical-material sense, but also represents a *radical moment* for the colonised to critically work through the complexities of national liberation. Fanon's violence, more than a redemptive upheaval of colonial structures and institutions, also constitutes a particular historical juncture where constraints of identity, culture and language are questioned for a new, and always indeterminate form of politics. As Anna Agathangelou argues, in Fanon's project, violence always involves 'work' to imagine the 'potential for another world emerging out of colonialism'.[34] The shape that this work needs to take is addressed by Fanon in his chapter 'On National Culture'. Grappling with the new symbolic form and order of the postcolonial world, Fanon concedes that the 'passionate quest for a national culture prior to the colonial era' can be justified on account of it providing the colonised with a sense of 'psycho affective equilibrium'.[35] But even as Fanon recognises nativism as a reasonable response to colonial racism he simultaneously remains wary of the cultural implications of this turn to towards a nostalgic past. Taking issue with the concept of Negritude more directly here, for Fanon the unconditional affirmation of an African culture eventually leads to a dead end, its biggest limitation being that it ends up negating difference. By beginning with the idea of a unified diasporic culture, Negritude, as Kris Sealey in his reading of Fanon describes, 'flattens the real and significant differences' between heterogeneous African cultures.[36] In other words, a diasporic notion of cultural identity cuts off the political and cultural struggle for decolonisation and independence from the pulse of the national struggle.

Relation

14 Confronting the world-breaking capacities of colonial violence, Fanon highlights his project of decolonisation as a violent and revolutionary rupture which necessitates, in his words, 'quite simply the substitution of one "species" of mankind for another.'[37] But importantly, Fanon does this by *stretching* violence beyond the realm of physical-material violence. Violence is never sustained by 'unmediated physical strength alone'.[38] That is, the 'substitution of one species of mankind for another' isn't just an act of physical violence alone, but requires above all that the colonised *fundamentally* alter and re-structure their ways of imagining the world.[39]Fanon's decolonisation project then, requires not just the ontological disinvestment of the colonial subject from the colonial world, but also rests upon the colonised claiming a new symbolic and national form that takes its place. For Fanon, this claiming is realised by the development of a national consciousness that neither turns inwards towards a supposedly uncontaminated past, nor outward, by looking for fables of unity and homogeneity. It is in this regard that Fanon saw both efforts to reclaim a native past and the Pan-Africanist approach of the Negritude movement as inherently flawed. Instead, in Fanon's project, it would be the 'crystallization of the national consciousness' that would radically open up new and unlimited horizons for the hitherto colonised subject.[40] Teeming with life and perpetually in motion, it is the national consciousness alone for Fanon that 'satisfies all those indispensable requirements for culture which alone can give it credibility, validity, dynamism, and creativity.'[41] This movement beyond stable and homogenous categories then does not stand upon an essence but flows from a decolonial vision that envisages a *complete and radical break* with the colonial past.

15 Setting up a conversation with Frantz Fanon, Anna Agathangelou has read Fanon's account of colonial violence as providing a productive imaginary for a radical and revolutionary politics. Reading Fanon as effecting an ethical re-positioning, Agathangelou locates the critical import of Fanon's project of violence in what it 'allows us to imagine'.[42] For Agathangelou, it is in the leap; the radical moment of violence that Fanon articulates, that it becomes possible to 'overthrow the sources of violence to make political institutions more responsive to what will cultivate national growth.'[43] However, and what Agathangelou does not consider here is that while Fanon is able to productively unknot the binds of colonial racism, by offering only a complete break from the colonial past he retreats from his own critique of colonial racism. In other words, by envisaging a violent break as the only solution to colonial racism, Fanon transcends the inexorable and fundamental *link* that he himself identifies between race, reason and freedom. My point here is not to criticise Fanon but to question his claim that if coloniality is fundamental to social existence then *how can violence effect a clean break from the lived experiences of coloniality*.[44] The problem is not that Fanon is too abstract and doesn't provide a solid grounding for theorising the political ramifications of his account of violence, but that Fanon is not abstract enough to fully grasp the intellectual and existential despair experienced by the dispossessed colonial imagination. It is also at this point however, that in contrast to Fanon's project of violence, Glissant's displacement of Fanon's violence with his account of relation can be recognised. In many ways Fanon's work provides the crucial subtext to Glissant's development of 'relation'. Glissant's relation begins from a similar discussion of colonial alienation that Fanon (and Césaire) articulates. But contra Fanon, the postcolonial moment in Glissant demands not a violent rupture, but instead opens up a problem space that works from the very unequal premise that the legacy of colonial alienation imposed on the colonised.

16 What I propose to do here is to extend Fanon's decolonial praxis by considering the ways in which Fanon's contributions to race and colonial discourse are translated by Glissant through his account of relation. Importantly, the sense of translation that Glissant pursues with relation is not a mere transfer of ideas, but rather entails a radical reworking and retrieval of colonial life that Fanon describes by reading Fanon from within the geographic specificity of the Caribbean. It is in this sense that I situate Glissant as responding to and building on an intellectual and political genealogy that links his notion of 'relation' to Fanon's project of 'violence'. As Andrew Daily has noted, for Glissant, Fanon's work formed a 'central theoretical and practical touchstone', and in many ways Glissant sought to develop and carry forward Fanon's project for the 'total overthrow of colonization'.[45] A student at Lycée Schoelcher, Glissant, like Fanon was also exposed early to Césaire's work on Black consciousness. Although Glissant participated in the Negro Writers Conference in 1959, along with Fanon, as Michael Dash notes, he had already begun to look 'beyond the simplifications of the Negritude movement', albeit from different perspectives.[46] Thus, while Glissant then ultimately deviates from both Césaire and Fanon, he shares with both an important Caribbean inheritance.

17 As Robbie Shilliam has noted, Glissant grounds his inquiry within the dispossession forced upon the various people by the European colonisation of the Caribbean archipelago.[47] For Glissant, the situation of the Caribbean is characterised foremost by a set of enduring colonial relations that consistently over-determine the ways in which

dispossessed populations can meaningfully pursue self-determination outside the colonial order. According to Glissant, one of the most virulent legacies of this situation has been the 'visible abandonment of a collective spirit, of the common will that alone allows a people to survive as a people'.[48] This is a context in which dispossession is not caused by visible material domination alone, but by a form of suppression that completely absorbs Caribbean culture within the French colonial economy without any alternative. In his work, Glissant offers a historical perspective on this process of psychic disintegration, naming the final stage of this process the 'mimetic trap'. A process of insidious violence, colonisation imposes an irresistible way of identification with the colonial order, aggravating in the colonised mind, an 'impulse towards imitation', such that the coloniser's model of social existence appears as the 'only guarantee of social status' for the colonised.[49]

18 With this diagnosis, Glissant moves to consider history as neurosis. Similar to Fanon who identified a profound phenomenological alienation that renders a pathological dissonance upon the colonised, Glissant does not think it ridiculous to characterise the lived experience of Caribbean dislocation as causing a 'steadily advancing neurosis'.[50] As Carine Mardorossian observes, like Fanon, Glissant thus believes that the disorientation of the world experienced by the colonised doesn't pre-exist colonialism, but actually derives from it.[51] Indeed, Glissant is explicit about these links with Fanon. In *Caribbean Discourse* for instance, Glissant lauds Fanon, arguing for the importance of his work in leading 'somewhere'.[52] And yet, Glissant quickly argues for a 'return to the point where our problems lay in wait for us', indicating the *incompleteness* of the project undertaken by his predecessor.[53] As Glissant writes,

> 'However, the works that followed negritude and the revolutionary theory of Wretched of The Earth are universal. They follow the historical curve of the decline of decolonization in the world. They illustrate and establish the landscape of a zone shared elsewhere. We must return to the point from which we started.'[54]

19 It is in this return to the 'point from which we started' that Glissant's break from Fanon can most clearly be discerned. Unlike Fanon who argued that it is only through a revolutionary rupture that leads elsewhere that a subjugated population could end their domination and claim their freedom, Glissant finds an alternative *within* the very workings of colonial domination that Fanon sought to transcend through violence. Ultimately, for Fanon, there could be no culture without the development of a national consciousness, leading him to disavow and displace his Creole and Caribbean identity, recreating and reinventing a new filiation in the spirit of a revolutionary Algeria.[55] Indeed, as Paul Beckett has argued, while 'Fanon's work is frequently presented in the language of universals', his most important work, *The Wretched of the Earth*, was 'rooted in the circumstances of the Algerian war'.[56] That is, Fanon sees his revolutionary project as connected to a sense of *place.* Violence, while revolutionary and rupturing a break with the colonial past ultimately begins by relocation, where a new national consciousness can subsequently take the place of an erstwhile oppressive colonial order.[57]

20 In contrast to Fanon, who ended up going elsewhere to realise his project of decolonisation, Glissant follows Fanon's historical curve, but instead locates within the regional context of the Caribbean (or what he also terms as the 'Other America') the resources for radically challenging and subverting the colonial order. It is from this rearticulation that Glissant translates the meaning of existential alienation, the very same alienation that Fanon transcends through a violent interruption and eruption of

revolutionary violence. Glissant's distance from Fanon then, begins from a *retrieval* of the meaning of dispossession. While Fanon treats the despair caused by the pain of dispossession as a pathology that requires an assertion that is only realised by a complete break from the land, Glissant finds within this despair not pessimism, 'but the ultimate resource of whoever writes and wishes to fight on his own terrain.'[58] The Caribbean is not only a place where its people were transplanted, but therein also lay the *opportunity* for different dispossessed communities to 'assert a considerable set of possibilities'.[59] Unlike Fanon's national consciousness which locates its foci within the nation, Glissant's Caribbean 'embodies openness', establishing a 'dialectic between the inside and the outside', which is reflected in the 'relationship between the land and the sea'.[60] While Fanon inevitably locates in a national identity the collective agency and economic autonomy needed to wrestle away from colonialism, the Caribbean for Glissant,

> 'tears us free from the intolerable alternative of the need for nationalism and introduces us to the cross-cultural process that modifies but does not undermine the latter.'[61]

21 An immediate consequence of the openness of the Caribbean is that it reveals a series of cross- cultural processes that are neither linear nor hierarchic. No longer embodying the prototypical experience of racialisation, for Glissant the Caribbean becomes 'capable of carrying forward our people to self-renewal and of providing them with renewed ambition.'[62] It should be noted at this point that Glissant is not advocating subsuming difference under the openness of the Caribbean here. Rather, by beginning with the Caribbean, Glissant effects an important reversion of the decolonial prerogatives of Césaire and Fanon that placed questions of difference and alterity at the heart of the political struggle. It is by attending to the specificity of the Caribbean context that Glissant is able to fundamentally translate the language of colonial alienation, reconceiving it around a Caribbean model of relation that places difference and becoming at the heart of politics. Replacing atavistic notions of Africanness (Césaire) without conceding to a radical break from a sense of place (Fanon), Glissant emphasises his notion of relation against the backdrop of the Caribbean region. In more specific terms, through relation, Glissant is able to present a new analysis of the Caribbean, reading its geography as leading to a very different politics of revolt. It is in this sense that in the *Poetics of Relation,* Glissant writes,

> 'Whereas the Western nation is first of all an "opposite", for colonized peoples identity will be primarily "opposed to"– that is, a limitation from the beginning. Decolonization will have done its real work when it goes beyond this limit.'[63]

22 For Glissant, whereas the Western nation distinguishes itself by establishing protocols that define the European Self against a colonised Other, Glissant's relation seeks to go 'beyond this limit', positing relation as that which develops through the flows of a heterogeneous constellation of emergent and unstable entities. As Jacob Kripp has argued, this does not mean that Glissant eschews the 'antagonistic encounter with colonialism', but rather that he explores the 'immanent potentiality of this encounter' to discover something else, or another way.[64] Against the 'conqueror's voyaging act' which exports to the colonies the mono-lingual root, 'relation' in contrast is always 'spoken multi-lingually'.[65] Never atavistic, nor claiming a primordial inheritance, relation proceeds from a renunciation regarding a supposedly stable situation of origin. Ultimately then, relation never strives to know the totality of the world, and instead embraces an unpredictable future, for while totality is subject to immobility, relation

by definition is movement.[66] Grounded in the logic of movement and unpredictability, in other words, the community produced in the flux of relation is always unstable, remaining open to an emergent set of relations that always produce something new and unprecedented. And yet, relation is never without sense. For Glissant, it is within the regional context of the Caribbean that relation finds its most vivid instantiation. The Caribbean for Glissant bears witness to the emergence of the unceasing and unforeseeable linguistic and social formations that Glissant's concept of relation tries to capture.

> 'The Caribbean, as far as I am concerned, may be held up as one of the places in the world where Relation presents itself most visibly, one of the explosive regions where it seems to be gathering strength.'[67]

23 Compared to Césaire whose turn to Negritude exalted the unity and homogeneity of Black identity, or Fanon whose logic of revolutionary violence led him to fix his project within fixed and determinate boundaries, Glissant's relation gathers its strength from being located in the explosive region of the Caribbean. Importantly, as Glissant goes on to convey, as a sea that never concentrates but instead 'diffracts', the Caribbean provides a natural illustration to what relation entails.[68] It is also within the specificity of the Caribbean experience of colonisation that Glissant locates 'creolisation' in the Caribbean as the closest approximation to his idea of relation. While in its most general sense creolisation 'refers to a history of contact and the subsequent processes of indigenisation or nativisation of European settlers', Glissant employs creolisation not to describe a straightforward empirical reality where cultural and linguistic entanglements abound, but as a concept that is simultaneously descriptive and political.[69] Indexing flexibility to the concept, Glissant treats creolisation as a mode of thinking that brings to the fore the politics of relation. As Glissant writes, the idea of creolisation demonstrates that 'henceforth it is no longer valid to glorify unique origins.'[70] Further, creolisation is not merely the meeting and synthesis of two differences, but is an *endless* becoming, its elements consistently diffracting and its consequences unforeseeable, underscoring the impossibility of ever establishing pure lineages or reifying cultural affiliations.

24 Forming a complex mix, the idea of creolisation exceeds suffering, bringing forth the possibilities of a decolonial future through relation. Unlike Césaire's Negritude or Fanon's violence, relation promises a *different* future informed by the immanent openness of the Caribbean. And yet, while with creolisation Glissant is able to bring forth the imaginative strength of relation, he does not subsume relation within a regime of visibility, instead claiming 'everyone's right to opacity'.[71] While both Césaire and Fanon's work ultimately led somewhere, Glissant forcefully turns *away* from charting the path relation is to take. As Glissant sees it, relation does not make everything knowable by making itself immediately understandable or by putting itself at our immediate disposal. The task of progressive action for Glissant then is to be carried out within the ethico-political space afforded by a turn to 'opacity'. Never exempt from critical examination, to see relation ultimately requires assuming a certain *distance.* It involves above all, to borrow from Sara Ahmed, 'getting closer to others to occupy or inhabit the distance between us.'[72] Indeed, the valorisation of opacity that Glissant pursues within relation by no means diminishes his concept's critical import, but rather offers new layers of anti-coloniality that re-invigorate the practice of critical theory. By arguing for the 'right to opacity', Glissant stretches the

decolonial implications of his work beyond the problem space afforded by the political and intellectual lineage of the Caribbean that he draws on and translates.

25 What gives opacity its expression then, and what is its relation to 'relation'?

FOOTNOTES

1. Glissant, 26.

2. Aimé Césaire, *Return to My Native Land*, trans. Anna Bostock and John Berger (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1969), 37.

3. Césaire, 39-40.

4. Césaire, 38-39.

5. Mazisi Kunene, "Introduction," in *Return to My Native Land*, by Aimé Césaire, trans. Anna Bostock and John Berger (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1969), 28.

6. David Macey, *Frantz Fanon: A Biography* (London: Verso, 2012).

7. Tyler Stovall, "Race and the Making of the Nation: Blacks in Modern France," in *Diasporic Africa: A Reader*, ed. Michael A. Gomez (New York: New York University, 2006), 204.

8. Robin Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery: From the Baroque to the Modern, 1492-1800* (London: Verso, 1997), 282.

9. Gary Wilder, "Race, Reason, Impasse: Césaire, Fanon, and the Legacy of Emancipation," *Radical History Review* 2004, no. 90 (October 1, 2004): 37.

10. Kunene, "Introduction", 19.

11. Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, 33.

12. Mbembe, 33-34.

13. Césaire, *Return to My Native Land*, 83.

14. Césaire, 85.

15. On this intellectual filiation see also , Sylvia Wynter, "Beyond the Word of Man: Glissant and the New Discourse of the Antilles," *World Literature Today* 63, no. 4 (1989): 639.

16. I borrow the usage of 'problem space' from David Scott. As Scott explains, a 'problem space' forms an 'ensemble of questions and answers around which a horizon of identifiable stakes (conceptual as well as ideological political stakes) hangs.' David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 4.

17. See here for instance, Neetu Khanna, *The Visceral Logics of Decolonization* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020), 1-13.; Ahmed, "A Phenomenology of Whiteness.". 152-155.

18. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (London: Pluto Press, 2008), 8.

19. Fanon, 82.

20. Fanon.

21. Fanon.

22. Fanon.

23. Fanon, 83.

24. Fanon, 84.

25. Fanon.

26. Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2004), 64.

27. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 84.

28. Wilder, "Race, Reason, Impasse", 49.
29. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 181.
30. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 1.
31. Fanon, 4.
32. Fanon, 6.
33. Fanon, 93.
34. Anna M. Agathangelou, "Fanon on Decolonization and Revolution: Bodies and Dialectics," *Globalizations* 13, no. 1 (January 2, 2016): 121.
35. Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 148.
36. Kris Sealey, "The Composite Community: Thinking Through Fanon's Critique of a Narrow Nationalism," *Critical Philosophy of Race* 6, no. 1 (January 1, 2018): 29.
37. Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 1.
38. Fanon, 88.
39. On the meniangs of violence in Fanon and its links in fundamentally restructuring the world, see Himadeep Muppidi, "Frantz Fanon," in *Critical Theorists and International Relations*, ed. Jenny Edkins and Nick Vaughan WIliams (London: Routledge, 2009), 156-157.
40. Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth.* 193.
41. Fanon, 177.
42. Agathangelou, "Fanon on Decolonization and Revolution", 123.
43. Agathangelou, 125.
44. This retreat has also been observed by Gary Wilder. See here, Wilder, "Race, Reason, Impasse", 51.
45. Andrew M. Daily, "'It Is Too Soon... or Too Late:' Frantz Fanon's Legacy in the French Caribbean," *Karib – Nordic Journal for Caribbean Studies* 2, no. 1 (November 2, 2015): 45.
46. Dash, "Introduction", xv.
47. Shilliam, "Decolonising the Grounds of Ethical Inquiry", 659.
48. Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 5.
49. Glissant, 45.
50. Glissant, 65.
51. Carine Mardorossian, "From Fanon to Glissant: A Martinican Genealogy," *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism* 13, no. 3 (November 1, 2009): 21.
52. Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 25.
53. Glissant.
54. Glissant.
55. Also see here, Françoise Vergès, "Creole Skin, Black Mask: Fanon and Disavowal," *Critical Inquiry* 23, no. 3 (April 1997): 578–595.
56. Paul A. Beckett, "Algeria vs. Fanon: The Theory of Revolutionary Decolonization, and the Algerian Experience," *Western Political Quarterly* 26, no. 1 (March 1973): 5.
57. Also see here, Drabinski, *Glissant and the Middle Passage: Philosophy, Beginning, Abyss*, 200.
58. Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 104.
59. Glissant, 16.
60. Glissant, 139.
61. Glissant.
62. Glissant, 223.
63. Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 17.
64. Kripp, "Arendt and Glissant on the Politics of Beginning", 13.
65. Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 19.
66. Also see here, Headley, "Glissant's Existential Ontology of Difference", 85.
67. Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 33.

68. Glissant, 33-34.

69. Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih, "The Creolization of Theory," in *The Creolization of Theory*, ed. Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 22.

70. Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse,* 140.

71. Glissant, *Introduction to a Poetics of Diversity*, 45.

72. Sara Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (London: Routledge, 2000), 179.

Chapter 4. Poetics

Opacity

'We clamor for the right to opacity for everyone.'[1]

Difference

1 Recent scholarship across the humanities and social sciences has creatively and rigorously acknowledged, confronted and explored the problem of *difference* as a way of unmaking the colonial violence constitutive to the making of the modern world. Revealing the ways in which a self-avowedly particular and Western experience disguises itself as the basis for formulating universal claims to knowledge, these critiques reveal the institutional and epistemic narcissism underpinning these claims. Claiming inspiration from different strands of postcolonial and decolonial critique, much of this push for thinking through/about/beyond difference comes from, as Adom Getachew and Karuna Mantena note, the challenge it poses to different disciplines to 'attend to their implication in histories of imperial domination and racial hierarchy and to reckon with the continuing ideological imprint of this past.'[2] From my own disciplinary vantage point within International Relations and Political Science (IRPS), which once contained intellectual inquiry around the theft of land, slavery, genocide and colonialism through a 'wilful amnesia', one of the most fascinating aspects of this turn has been the uptake of 'decolonisation' as a critical motto across the discipline.[3]

2 Indeed, since Amitav Acharya's call in 2014 for a more 'Global IR' as a way to transcend the discipline's parochial epistemological and ontological foundations in view of a commitment towards a more 'pluralistic universalism', much has been done to better represent hitherto marginalised (and therefore different) voices and experiences.[4] No longer wedded to a singular origin story, nor relegating the memories of slavery, race, sexuality and coloniality to the margins, the erstwhile parochial 'House of IR', if not yet transformed, most definitely finds itself now on rickety legs.[5] Recent literature exploring these revisions has proceeded along two fronts (although not hermetically sealed from each other, and not exhaustible). On an institutional level, greater attention has been paid towards the disciplinary amnesia surrounding the formative role of white supremacy and race relations in the making of the discipline, or what Robert Vitalis calls overturning the 'norm against noticing'.[6] Empire and race have

been shown to provide the guiding context not only for the development of the discipline, but in generating key theories of anarchy, sovereignty and property.[7] A second line of reversion has proceeded by exploring and de-linking the (enduring) epistemic and ontological complicity between race, coloniality and political theory. A generation of IRPS scholars have delineated new forms of inter-subjectivity committed to ethically representing the Other through forms of inquiry that are affective, embodied and particular, rather than rational, disembodied and universal.[8]

3 One dominant rubric that draws these different critiques together, other than their shared commitment to countering and overcoming eurocentrism, is the imperative role of translations in understanding difference across epistemic and ontological divides. In different ways, the critiques that flow from the intellectual pursuit of wrestling with the philosophical and political problems of difference, whether by way of genealogical critique, an interrogation of epistemic biases and occlusions, or through creative re-openings, all rely on their ability to provide the epistemic and ontological space for *enabling* the Other to be finally heard. While throughout human history, colonial and imperial projects of conquest and expropriation have sought to divide, alienate and classify, these works have attempted to ascend the voices and experiences of those erstwhile pathologised and dehumanised by colonial divisions of humanity. While these critiques have been compelling, prompting important conversations around narratives beyond the insular enclosure provided by a hyperreal Europe, I worry that an overriding concern with correcting the problems posed by difference leads them to prematurely reduce difference to that which is *transparent*. Joining these discussions, but in part departing from them, rather than framing the question of difference as a problem of representation and unequal power asymmetries, I want to uphold Glissant's injunction regarding the right to opacity as a crucial ethico-political assertion whose critical force lies in naming and preserving what Michael Wiedorn has termed an 'ethics of alterity'.[9] In turning to Glissant's concept of opacity, I take a cue from Gayatri Spivak, who in The Politics of Translation writes,

> 'In other words, if you are interested in talking about the other, and/or in making a claim to be the other, it is crucial to learn other languages.'[10]

4 Following Spivak, I want to ask if in the rush to understand each other we displace the importance of first learning the Other's language. Extending Spivak, I also want to ask what forms of intellectual and ethical commitments are needed when the Other's language is not ours to learn. To this end, here, I turn to my attention to some of the ways that critical theory has attempted to address the philosophical and political question of difference. In the spirit of the recent anti-colonial openings carved within the intellectual and disciplinary space afforded by the work of scholars working within and beyond IRPS, I draw on a transversal lineage that encounters the problem of difference beyond disciplinary confines. In this regard, and to illustrate the philosophical problem of difference, I compare and contrast two seminal contributions, namely Dipesh Chakrabarty's model of scandalous translations and Marisol de la Cadena's work on connection and conversation.

5 I argue that while salutary, Chakrabarty ends up reducing difference by locating the Other within an ontologically singular framework of translation. In contrast, de la Cadena by upholding the polyvocality of difference is able to provide a productive opening for expressing the complexity and density of the Other. Building on this discussion by way of considering de la Cadena's proposal for thinking difference

ontologically, I outline the importance of thinking at the limits of that which exceeds translation and even at times stops it. However, rather than a politics of ontology as de la Cadena proposes, I make the case for developing a poetics of difference inspired by Glissant's concept of opacity. I follow Audre Lorde here in understanding poetics not as a luxury, but as an illumination which gives 'name to those ideas which are, until the poem, nameless and formless – about to be birthed, but already felt.'[11] Consequently, Glissant's poetics of difference centred around his concept of opacity also has a wider socio-political meaning than through its poetics, and is able to give birth to a very different possibility for meaningful hermeneutic engagement with the lives and experiences of the Other. Offering an alternate imaginary to that proffered by the modern-colonial episteme, Glissant's poetics neither co-opts difference nor surmounts it, but flourishes from a scrutiny of the possibilities and imaginations fuelled by the right to opacity. To further explicate this poetic dimension of Glissant's opacity, I argue that it is the irreducible opacity of difference that Glissant develops through his poetics that keeps his theory of relation in a state of endless becoming and movement.[12]

Untranslatable

6 In his influential book, *Provincializing Europe*, Dipesh Chakrabarty analyses the deep ties that bind purportedly universal concepts to a hyperreal Europe. Problematising the role and politics of what he identifies as historicism, a mode of thought which privileges grand narratives by assuming that any object under investigation retains 'a unity of conception throughout its existence', Chakrabarty works through the ways political modernity systematically marginalises and discounts subaltern experiences.[13] Generating a set of everyday paradoxes for the subaltern, Chakrabarty questions what it is that allows the 'modern European sages to develop with such clairvoyance with regard to societies of which they were empirically ignorant?'.[14] Responding to this asymmetric ignorance that pervades the modern episteme, Chakrabarty argues for the necessity of 'provincializing Europe'. However, for Chakrabarty this idea of 'provincializing Europe' cannot be a project of 'cultural relativism'.[15] As Chakrabarty notes, in unravelling the necessary entanglements between Europe and the grand narratives of citizenship, law, human rights, the state, and civil society amongst others, any analysis must work within a framework in which Europe is at once both 'inadequate' and 'indispensable'.[16] The task of 'provincializing Europe' then, requires not turning away but *confronting* a European heritage that is now global, and which must be renewed from and for the margins. In other words, for Chakrabarty, however much we develop an incredulity towards certain European metanarratives that disguise themselves as being secular and universal and that in turn neutralise and relegate difference to the margins, our lives remain inevitably embedded within their categories.

7 To this end, a key dilemma confronting postcolonial scholarship in Chakrabarty's account is the important role of translations in narrating non-Western histories. For Chakrabarty, translations across different cultural and semiotic systems afford an important analytical marker through which different subaltern narratives and rituals can be productively extricated. Contrary to Western and secular history, whose own time is godless, empty and homogenous, such that for any span of time, difference can be translated, named and subsumed within a universal language, Chakrabarty proposes

his own model of translation predicated on a proposition of radical untranslatability. Chakrabarty questions the assumption running through modern political thought that the 'human is ontologically singular, and that gods and spirits are in the end "social facts", that the social somehow exists prior to them.'[17] Instead, Chakrabarty starts his inquiry by taking the realm of gods and spirits (the non-modern) to be 'coeval with the human'.[18] Writing into the secular language of history, the presence of gods and spirits, Chakrabarty outlines the *scandalous* aspects of a translation. Taking the example of translating the universal category of 'labour' in South Asia, Chakrabarty elaborates on the issue,

> 'An ambiguity must mark the translation of the tool-worshipping jute worker's labor into the universal category "labor": it must be enough like the secular category "labor" to make sense, yet the presence and plurality of gods and spirits in it must also make it "enough unlike to shock." There remains something of a "scandal"—of the shocking—in every translation, and it is only through a relationship of intimacy to both languages that we are aware of the degree of this scandal.'[19]

8 It is in this sense that 'Europe' presents itself as being both 'indispensable' and 'inadequate' for Chakrabarty. Europe remains indispensable so far that one has to translate the 'tool worshipping jute worker's labor into the universal category "labor"', and inadequate in that the 'presence and plurality of gods and spirits' sets limits on the ways in which the category can be historically narrated. What comes in the way of the smooth translation of 'labour' in the subaltern context is the constant generation of narratives of incommensurable difference, or as Chakrabarty avers to in the above quote, the 'presence and plurality of gods and spirits'. It is in this disjuncture, when a translation produces neither an equivalent nor a higher category to mediate what is different, that Chakrabarty locates the scandal. For Chakrabarty, it is by recognising the shocking aspect of the scandal as being constitutive to the making of sociological and historical categories that it becomes possible to become aware of horizons of human experiences and existences other than those encoded into European political thought. The scandal instituted in the translation pushes thought beyond the limits of the universal and the secular, in turn making it possible for Chakrabarty to reflect on the ontological heterogeneity of historical time. Gods and spirits are no longer relegated to the realm of the non-modern, or the ahistorical, but considered as being fundamentally and existentially coeval with the heterogeneity (and not homogeneity) of historical time. And yet, it is also here that the limits of Chakrabarty's reflections on the problems of difference present themself.

9 While Chakrabarty by attending to what is scandalous about translations is able to extend historical representation, he ends up reading subaltern experiences through the ontological structures provided by the institution of history, thereby legitimatising the regime of historicity that he takes as his initial point of critique. Indeed, Chakrabarty handles the agency claimed by gods, spirits and other supernatural forces by rendering their 'enchanted world' into the 'disenchanted prose' of historical narratives.[20] The moment when Chakrabarty is able to de- secularise the domain of the Universal by discerning the coevalness of gods and spirits, is also the moment he *has* to set up an ontologically singular model of translation. In Chakrabarty's account, this requires, above all subjecting different life-worlds to a *singular* reality, thereby reproducing the logics of colonial segregation and violence that efface alternate worlds. By grounding his model of translation within a framework which ultimately cannot do without a

hyperreal Europe, Chakrabarty ends up reducing the irreducible difference and heterogeneity of the Other to that which can be translated.

10 As Marisol de la Cadena, while lauding Chakrabarty's postcolonial critique in extending history and historical representation to those peoples and worlds otherwise read as being primitive and non-modern, notes, the postcolonial revision 'may still be contained within and even contribute to the coloniality of history.'[21] While being able to attend to the heterogeneity of historical time, Chakrabarty, for de la Cadena, does so by reproducing the existence of an ontology where difference is ultimately contained within a singular reality, consequently endorsing the 'requirement of history's regime of reality'.[22] Questioning the premise and promises of Chakrabarty's model of translation, de la Cadena proceeds to rethink difference in *ontological* terms. While for Chakrabarty difference presents itself as something that can be translated across life-worlds, albeit only by retaining a sense of the scandal, de la Cadena, developing her critique through a co-constituted set of ethnographic narrations stresses not the scandal constituted in a translation, but commences by acknowledging the differences that emerge from a translation. Unlike Chakrabarty, de la Cadena doesn't presume a geocultural affiliation to Europe. Composed through a series of conversations (or what she terms co- labouring practices) with Nazario Turpo (an Andean shaman) and his father Mariano, de la Cadena works at the moment when linguistic and ontological differences *cannot* be translated. Recollecting an event with Nazario wherein he refused to explain to de la Cadena the ways in which a word paired with the names and entities Nazario invoked before starting a conversation, de la Cadena observes,

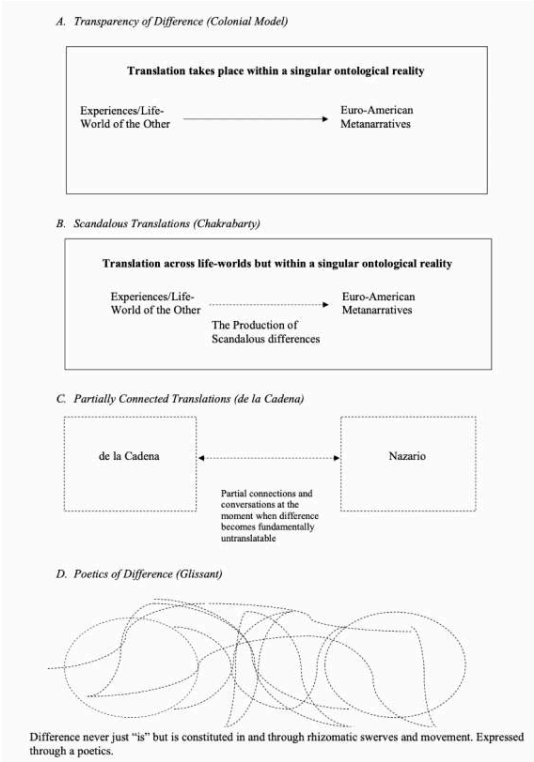
> 'Indeed, we could, insofar as I accepted that I was going to leave something behind, as with any translation—or even better, that our mutual understanding was also going to be full of gaps that would be different for each of us, and would constantly show up, interrupting but not preventing our communication.'[23]

11 For de la Cadena, Nazario's refusal to explain should not be read as a failure of translation but instead as something which highlights the 'inevitable thick, and active mediation of translation' in their relationship.[24] Reading the refusal to explain as a moment which slows down her thoughts and reveals the limits of her understanding towards the Other, for de la Cadena, communication between her and Nazario did not depend on sharing a common life-world. Rather, it was at the very *limits* that translation between the two was interrupted, in the intermittencies, where neither Nazario nor de la Cadena were necessarily aware of where these intermittencies lay that de la Cadena locates the potential for creatively learning and communicating with Nazario. It is in the *frontier* between de la Cadena's world and Nazario's world that Nazario's texts and de la Cadena's texts were connected, albeit partially, the limits of what each could learn from the other already present in what the other revealed. Rather than locating the productive aspects of a translation in the scandal it produces (Chakrabarty), de la Cadena questions the very enterprise of sharing and translating difference across different 'onto-epistemic formations'.[25] For de la Cadena, it is the moment when difference becomes fundamentally untranslatable and multiple that it becomes possible to create a shared space with the Other.

12 To a large extent, Glissant's commitment to the right to opacity draws him into a common theoretical space of discussion with Chakrabarty and de la Cadena. More specifically, the notion of opacity that Glissant uses as an alternative to frameworks which reduce difference to that which is summarily translatable brings Glissant into dialogue with the problem of difference. Like de la Cadena, in place of Chakrabarty's

ontologically reductive and singular model of translation, Glissant with his notion of opacity acknowledges the irreducibility of difference. From this viewpoint, Glissant's demand for the right to opacity coincides and resounds to a large extent with de la Cadena's notion of the untranslatability and the multiplicity of difference. However, it is precisely within this common theoretical space that it also becomes possible to discern important sites of distinction, that consequently shape the frame from which Glissant conceptualises opacity. For Glissant, grappling with the problem of difference does not only mean confronting the untranslatability of difference or crafting a re-conception of politics among and between worlds, but instead requires *transforming* the experience of difference into a poetics. It is in this sense that I read Glissant's notion of opacity as constituting a poetics of difference. Importantly, this poetics proceeds by upholding the untranslatability of difference, but it does so not by treating the moment of untranslatability as constituting a problem of difference (Chakrabarty) or demanding an ontologically sensitive response (de la Cadena) but as an ethico-political stance of *detachment and poetic creation*. What does it mean then, for Glissant, to demand the right to opacity?

Visualising Difference



Difference never just "is" but is constituted in and through rhizomatic swerves and movement. Expressed through a poetics.

Visual Made by Author

Diagram A represents a colonial/transparent/singular translation of difference where the world of the Other is subsumed within an exclusive and overarching Euro-American metanarrative.
Diagram B is Chakrabarty's scandalous model of translation across different life-worlds but which nonetheless ends up setting an ontologically singular reality (thus the closed box). The dashed arrow represents how translating subaltern experiences is not as smooth as the colonial model (transparency of difference) presumes. The move to translate subaltern experiences and rituals encounters the constant generation of incommensurable differences (scandal) which can neither be mediated nor subsumed by a higher category.
Diagram C shows the opportunities and risks which inhere in translating the life-worlds de la Cadena allows us to see by considering translations beyond singular ontologies, and instead, across different onto-epistemic formations. The use of the dashed boxes along with the dashed line that points both ways is meant to indicate the imaginative forms of reciprocity and collaborative practice (albeit partial) that de la Cadena suggests might be made possible by thinking difference across ontological divides.
Diagram D is developed by thinking/imagining/seeing with Glissant. In this visualisation, difference never just 'is' but is envisioned through a poetic swerve of always incomplete and inconclusive movements. Difference is multiplicity, and multiplicity is becoming, to the point where there are no disparate things being related, but different elements continuously twisting into each other.

Movement

13 In his *Caribbean Discourse*, Glissant starts by identifying the particular neo-colonial situation confronting the Caribbean. No longer needing the direct domination of its colonies, the contemporary colonisation of the Caribbean is undertaken by absorbing the economies of the colonies into the French economic system. The erstwhile barter economy of the plantation system is transformed into a system of exchange based on pseudo-production, reducing the economic system to the 'non-dangerous, non-productive zone of the tertiary sector'.[26] As Glissant writes, the tertiarisation of the economy means that public funds are less and less concerned with the production of finished goods and more with developing infrastructural and commercial equipment. This development produces a higher standard of living at the production level while consequently inflicting isolation on what remains of other sectors of productivity. Importantly, Glissant reveals how the development of this economic system results in a corresponding and inexorable degradation and impoverishment of cultural diversity in the colonies. On a collective level, this system leads to the development of an 'artificial social strata' (the elite), whose dynamic is neutralised and determined from the outside (France) and on an individual level, the 'development of a dependent mentality'.[27] On the latter point, Glissant goes on to write that this process of dislocation 'aggravates the impulse towards imitation' for the colonised, imposing identification with a singular model of existence (the French one).[28] The end result is a form of cultural and economic displacement, making the 'emergence of an individual impossible', leading Glissant to argue that the question that needs to be asked from the outset in the Caribbean is not 'Who am I?', but rather 'Who are we?'[29]

14 This is the political moment Glissant begins his *Caribbean Discourse* from. Faced with the task of tracking down the (often invisible) forms of cultural and political domination that have historically ensnared the island and its people within a 'web of nothingness', Glissant argues that the attempt to approach this reality which is often hidden from view 'cannot be organized in terms of a series of clarifications.'[30] Against the ideal of a transparent universality that Glissant sees as being imposed by the West, Glissant demands for the Caribbean and its people the 'right to obscurity'.[31] This demand reverberates throughout his work and later becomes the demand that the Other be

granted the right to opacity. For Glissant, opacity is ultimately that which emphasises the *irreducible otherness* of the Other, or that aspect of the Other, which remains fundamentally untranslatable. As Michael Wiedorn has noted, opacity in Glissant dictates that in the Other, 'an unknowable remainder will always persist.'[32] Situating his notion of opacity against a particularly Western experience of legibility and transparency, in his *Poetics of Relation* Glissant writes,

> 'If we examine the process of "understanding" people and ideas from the perspective of Western thought, we discover that its basis is the requirement for transparency. In order to understand and thus accept you, I have to measure your solidity with the ideal scale providing me with grounds to make comparisons and, perhaps, judgements. I have to reduce.'[33]

15 Transparency for Glissant is characterised by the way in which Western thought, in order to understand and thereby accept the Other, ended up reflecting the world in its own image. While the colonial project of conquest valued universal models and categories, and functioned through a process of assimilating the difference of the Other in its own image, opacity underlines difference as that which *exceeds* the doctrine of universal intelligibility. It is in this context that the critical sense of the phrase the 'right to opacity' emerges for Glissant, its distinctive contribution lying in its *denial* that it is possible to fully know the differences that make up the world. Opacity then, is best characterised as a withdrawal from assimilating the Other within a regime of visibility. In contrast to the illusion of transparency that required reducing the density of the difference that the Other presents, Glissant's defends opacity as an ethico-political stance for and in favour of unknowability. Deriving its anti-colonial force through its resistance to being construed within colonial regimes of visibility, opacity exposes as Zach Blas writes the 'limits of schemas of visibility, representation, and identity, that prevent sufficient understanding of multiple perspectives of the world and its people.'[34]

16 However, Glissant does not posit the right to opacity simply as an alternative to regimes of visibility that have historically reduced difference to that which is transparent. Instead, and in line with Glissant's overall project of 'relation', Glissant highlights the entanglement of opacity with the endless *movement and becoming* of the Caribbean.[35] To this end, while opacity in many ways functions for Glissant as a forceful refusal to consent to a colonial enterprise that renders difference transparent in order to make the Other intelligible, opacity never contains the difference of the Other within either epistemic or ontological silos. To do so, for Glissant, would be to repeat reducing difference to an ontology of oneness and non- relation. For Glissant, although the theory of difference is invaluable, simply acknowledging differences is not enough, for as he writes, 'difference can still contrive to reduce things to the transparent'.[36] Instead Glissant calls for a politics that works through the different ways that the Other is already part of 'relation' without yielding to the Other an uncontaminated purity nor by reproducing colonial logics that base knowledge about the Other around a transparent knowability. As John Drabinski explains, rather than 'closing off or setting limits, opacity opens horizons that are situated at one and the same time inside colonial experience, anti-colonial struggle, and post-colony cultural life.'[37] As Glissant goes on to argue,

> 'Accepting differences does, of course, upset the hierarchy of this scale. I understand your difference, or in other words, without creating a hierarchy, I relate it to my norm. I admit you to existence, within my system. I create you afresh. – But perhaps we need to bring an end to the very notion of a scale. Displace all reduction. Agree not merely to the right to difference but, carrying this further,

> agree also to the right to opacity that is not enclosure within an impenetrable autarchy but subsistence within an irreducible singularity.'[38]

17 The idea that acknowledging differences requires not merely the 'right to difference' is also where Glissant's demand for the 'right to opacity' takes on an important critical dimension. One of Glissant's central claims is that opacity is never just a strategy of ontological self- defence, neither is it a vacuous celebration of cultural diversity. Instead, for Glissant, opacity, more than simply engendering an ethical mode of relation between the Self and the Other, sets the stage for an ethico-political stance of *detachment* that provides the revolutionary impetus for imagining another world. It is also here, that Glissant's demand for opacity should also be read as constituting a poetics. This is a poetics that requires recognising the historic processes of differentiation through which the Other was named, formed, and thus constituted. And yet, this poetics not only names the dispossession through which the Other was formed, but also holds the potential in itself to craft ways to imagine *otherwise*. In Glissant, 'poetics' functions as a process which acquires its poetic force by articulating an imaginary that is always 'latent, open, multilingual in intention, directly in contact with everything possible', while never reducing subsistence within an irreducible singularity.[39]

18 The thrust of this 'poetics' for Glissant lies in simultaneously explicating the entanglements of the structuring violence through which the Other is constituted, while illuminating the potentials for disentangling difference from this constitutive violence by carving a poetic vision of difference. Never one without the other, it is in this sense that Glissant initiates his poetics as a 'presence that concludes (presumes) nothing'.[40] With opacity then, Glissant is able to name both how the Other is constituted through a series of dispossessions that fixes their ways and modes of life within determinate boundaries to render them knowable and transparent (and hence colonisable), but also how these possibilities are exceeded through poetic movement and becoming. The importance for Glissant of this poetics centred around the concept of opacity is most clearly discerned when he affirms his theory of 'relation'. As Glissant writes,

> 'Against this reductive transparency, a force of opacity is at work. No longer the opacity that enveloped and reactivated the mystery of filiation but another, considerate of all the threatened and delicious things joining one another (without conjoining, that is, without merging) in the expanse of Relation.'[41]

19 It is the imaginary fuelled by a 'poetics of opacity' that protects relation from reducing and enveloping the Other within the 'mystery of filiation'. As outlined in the previous chapter, building on an intellectual and political lineage of intellectual critique specific to Martinique, Glissant retrieves the meaning of dispossession to present his theory of relation as a series of cross-cultural processes that places difference and becoming at the heart of a decolonial politics. For Glissant, relation never strives to know the totality of the world, but instead embraces ceaseless movement and becoming. Like opacity then, Glissant also predicates relation on the fundamental unknowability of the world. And yet, it is the right to opacity that ensures that relation remains open to an always unstable and emergent set of possibilities. It is ultimately the opaqueness of the Other when articulated through a poetics of difference that affirms the fluidity of relation. Imagining difference as opening a world of possible becomings, Glissant rejoins opacity with the philosophical motifs of the Caribbean and relation to chart a distinctive poetics of difference. This poetics, by not making the Other totally visible to

the colonial gaze, names opacity as a site of resistance. But importantly, the incomprehension of the Other does not close off access to the Other, but orients opacity as opening an alternative and poetic space of meaning, while recognising the incompleteness of this creative act.

20 I want to conclude by returning to the question of difference that I posed at the beginning of this chapter. Building on the critical and postcolonial interventions of Chakrabarty and de la Cadena, in this chapter I have sought to explore what it might mean to think of difference when it is not summarily translatable, and the forms of intellectual and ethical commitments this disjuncture might demand. Crucially, in bringing Glissant into dialogue with these contemporary interventions, I have deliberately read Glissant in an anachronistic and disloyal manner. I do so with the explicit aim of illuminating the need for thinking difference as something more than instituting a scandal (Chakrabarty) or providing an ontological opening for thinking difference differently (de la Cadena), but as instantiating a poetic movement of difference-without-resolution. However, I do not pretend to argue that Glissant offers a philosophical advance on these interpretations of difference, but rather that with opacity Glissant *contributes* to these contemporary discussions, offering an ethico-political orientation that through its poetics imagines difference not as that 'which is', but in and through its always incomplete, partial, and inconclusive movements.

FOOTNOTES

1. Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 194.

2. Adom Getachew and Karuna Mantena, "Anticolonialism and the Decolonization of Political Theory," *Critical Times* 4, no. 3 (December 1, 2021): 359.

3. See here, Sankaran Krishna, "Race, Amnesia, and the Education of International Relations," *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 26, no. 4 (October 2001): 401–24.

4. Amitav Acharya, "Global International Relations (IR) and Regional Worlds: A New Agenda for International Studies," *International Studies Quarterly* 58, no. 4 (December 2014): 647–59.

5. Anna M. Agathangelou and L. H. M. Ling, "The House of IR: From Family Power Politics to the Poisies of Worldism1," *International Studies Review* 6, no. 4 (December 2004): 21–50.

6. Robert Vitalis, "The Graceful and Generous Liberal Gesture: Making Racism Invisible in American International Relations," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 29, no. 2 (June 2000): 333.; also see here, Vineet Thakur, Alexander E. Davis, and Peter Vale, "Imperial Mission, 'Scientific' Method: An Alternative Account of the Origins of IR," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 46, no. 1 (September 2017): 3–23.

7. See here, Errol A Henderson, "Hidden in Plain Sight: Racism in International Relations Theory," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 26, no. 1 (March 2013): 71–92.

8. For a fine recent intervention within these debates, see Shine Choi, Anna Selmeczi, and Erzsebet Strausz, eds., *Critical Methods for the Study of World Politics: Creativity and Transformation* (New York: Routledge, 2020).

9. Michael Wiedorn, *Think Like an Archipelago: Paradox in the Work of Édouard Glissant* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2018), xxvi.

10. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "The Politics of Translation," in *Translation*, ed. Sophie J Williamson (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2019), 30.
11. Audre Lorde, "Poetry Is Not a Luxury," in *The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle The Master's House* (Penguin Classics, 2018).
12. I have also benefited here from Odysseos' work on the potential of poetic critique here, see here, Odysseos, "Stolen Life's Poetic Revolt."
13. Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, xiv.
14. Chakrabarty, 29.
15. Chakrabarty, 201.
16. Chakrabarty, 16.
17. Chakrabarty.
18. Chakrabarty.
19. Chakrabarty, 89.
20. Chakrabarty, 77.
21. Marisol de la Cadena, *Earth Beings: Ecologies of Practice Across Andean Worlds* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 147.
22. de la Cadena, 148.
23. de la Cadena, xxv.
24. de la Cadena.
25. de la Cadena.
26. Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 40.
27. Glissant, 45.
28. Glissant.
29. Glissant, 86.
30. Glissant, 2.
31. Glissant.
32. Wiedorn, *Think Like an Archipelago: Paradox in the Work of Édouard Glissant*, 36.
33. Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 189-190.
34. Zach Blas, "Opacities: An Introduction," *Camera Obscura: Feminism, Culture, and Media Studies* 31, no. 2 (September 1, 2016): 149.
35. Also see here, Lorna Burns, "Becoming-Postcolonial, Becoming-Caribbean: Édouard Glissant and the Poetics of Creolization," *Textual Practice* 23, no. 1 (February 2009): 114.
36. Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 189.
37. Drabinski, *Glissant and the Middle Passage: Philosophy, Beginning, Abyss*, 14.
38. Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 190.
39. Glissant, 32.
40. Glissant, 183.
41. Glissant, 62.

Coda

Departure

1 Setting out the connections between the disorientations my own arrival in a Museum in Geneva generated to a history of other arrivals, I started this study with an extended mediation on what it means for certain bodies to arrive. As Sara Ahmed observes, we never arrive into this world as self-cohering, ready-made beings, but are made out of the histories and inheritances that are always already there before our arrival.[1] Moving in the Museum, at least partly due to a student visa which extended my arrival to its institutional space, I stray from my assigned position, switching gazes to consider not the celebration of collecting and civilization that the Museum advertised, but the history of classification and racialization that preceded it. More specifically, as I walked through the Museum, my education forced me to remember different arrivals, arrivals constituted in the wake of the disasters wrought by the transatlantic passage of enslaved Africans across the Atlantic Ocean and to the New World. Wrenched from their land, and transported to the complete unknown, these were arrivals that precluded the very possibility of collecting that the Museum valorized.

2 To think of arrival in this context, meant not de-linking the present from this abysmal past, but required considering how the interminable grief engendered by the ruptures of chattel slavery got re-activated in the contemporary present, in turn collapsing the temporal continuity between then and now. Above all, these were arrivals that could not be mended by simply taking these violent histories 'in', but instead called for returning to the imminence of the disaster. Importantly however, this was a return not predicated on a reversal or redemption, but a *journey* which returns to the founding violence that the disaster initiated, not to recover but to *discover* new ways of arriving which are always open, multiple and relational. While I started by positioning this work as a response to discovering arrivals in excess of the violent histories of stratifications that originally constituted them, I want to end by reflecting on what departures these arrivals make possible. Crossing conventions that usually presume that a departure is necessarily followed by an arrival, the sense of departure I want to pursue here *proceeds after and through* a sustained reckoning with the histories and inheritances that make (im)possible certain arrivals. Put another way, to know departure first requires knowing arrival, for to know where we are going requires first knowing how we have arrived.

3 In this paper, I have set out to explore these arrivals. However, I have not done so alone, but through a series of philosophies co-constituted in dialogue and relation with Édouard Glissant. In many ways, rather than a paper about Glissant, I have written this paper *with* Glissant. With this positioning, which places me in deep relation with Glissant, I have attempted to trouble redemptive narratives which reduce these arrivals to either happy stories of diversity or promises of roots wedded to fantasies of inviolable origins. Instead, working with the immanent potentiality that the spatiotemporal configuration of the Caribbean with its attendant history and legacy of slavery, the abysmal aporia of loss, and irreparability affords, with Glissant I have sought to cultivate and centre analytical attention towards a counter-poetics in perpetual arrival. This is a poetics which while proceeding from the fragmentation informed by abysmal loss, simultaneously affirms the multiplicity and inconclusiveness of its own poetics. In other words, this poetics functions not only in its capacity to decentre and deconstruct, but in its potential to open the future to a revolutionary becoming. And yet, before we move to consider the departures these becomings make possible, let us return once more to where we have arrived on this journey with Glissant.

4 Obligating us to think otherwise, Glissant shifts the terrain of thinking from the continuity and systematicity associated with Euro-America to the rush, unpredictability and non- systematicity of the Caribbean. Fundamentally altering how we understand and relate to loss and dispossession in the context of New World slavery, Glissant draws on the creative, conceptual and material geographies of the Caribbean. With this interplay of sources, Glissant enables a way of thinking that rewrites histories of dispossession and loss to produce new beginnings *within* the abysmal presence of the Middle Passage. For Glissant, the memory of the pain associated with the abyss of the Middle Passage was constitutive not only of abysmal loss, but also formed the beginning of a new world one. Rising from the shorelines of the Caribbean Archipelago, Glissant crafts an enigmatic and compelling vocabulary of and for the Caribbean. This is a theoretical and poetic vocabulary that rather than folding identity within roots or lines of descent, produces a rhizomatic and creolised ontology of the subject that is best characterised by multiplicity and becomings. It is a vocabulary that although shared with other thinkers of Caribbean self-formation, is able to take their work into new dimensions by anchoring itself within the spatiotemporal location of the Caribbean. And yet, while Glissant draws the imaginative strength of his vocabulary from the openness of the Caribbean, he constantly subjects his work to that which is opaque. Opacity not only supplements his theories with a crucial qualifier, but also contributes to contemporary conversations around the philosophical question of difference. With his notion or rather his demand that the Other be granted the right to opacity, Glissant encounters Otherness without folding the difference of the Other into colonial regimes of visibility. Instead working with a poetics of difference, he imagines difference not as that 'which is', but in and through its always incomplete, partial, and inconclusive movements.

5 As I write these paragraphs, sketching a representation of Glissant's work while attempting to extend where Glissant might lead us, I feel the heaviness of the impossibility of untangling the two, questioning if there is a strong need or even the possibility of doing so. John Drabinski in a piece written in memory of Glissant writes that the main challenge Glissant poses to us, 'no matter our location or cultural milieu,

is to think, live, and create in this incredibly complicated, entangled, and intertwined intellectual space' that Glissant lays out throughout his work. [2]Indeed, this complicated intellectual space Glissant writes from doesn't heed to easy clarifications, for reading Glissant is foremost a visceral encounter, an exhilarating experience that disassembles language as it simultaneously awakens it. I first read Glissant by chance, glancing upon his reference in a footnote. Although this quote that introduced me to Glissant was produced in his *Caribbean Discourse*, my introduction to Glissant was through the reading of *Poetics of Relation.* bell hooks in her essay 'Theory as a Liberatory Practice' starts with a remarkable line that captures to a large extent the joys and desperation I felt when I first encountered Glissant in the pages of *Poetics of Relation.* hooks starts her essay by writing,

> 'I came to theory because I was hurting—the pain within me was so intense that I could not go on living. I came to theory desperate, wanting to comprehend—to grasp what was happening around and within me. Most importantly, I wanted to make the hurt go away. I saw in theory then a location for healing.'[3]

6 Reading Glissant was to read what theory *can* do, what theory *should* do, what theory *must* strive to do. Most importantly, reading Glissant, I learned that theory could be a location not only of critique, but also of *healing*, a way as bell hooks writes to 'make the hurt go away'. Across the opening pages of his *Poetics of Relation*, Glissant writes some of the most moving, provocative and melancholic lines detailing the suffering, drama and experience of slavery. Glissant offered me the words to speak that which was already implicit in the texts I read, but never fully said. At the first moment I encountered Glissant, I didn't care how and why the academic literature positioned him, or what critics thought of him. I didn't care if he was a uniquely Caribbean thinker, a postcolonial critic or a poet. All that mattered was that his words gathered up to find me, in a different place and time from his own, making at that moment his life and work coeval with mine. I want to acknowledge this extraordinary archive Glissant left for us to read, write, and imagine from.

7 Glissant took me travelling, but at no point during our travels was I a tourist. Instead, as Glissant took me across the Caribbean Archipelago, each moment, each evocation of space, time and place was saturated by the dislocation, dispossession, and historical disaster of slavery. And yet, these travels were always more than that. Combining his lyrical prose with the insistent and searing force of his poetics, Glissant makes use of a boundless imaginary, an imaginary that allowed me to see new ways of thinking/inhabiting/narrating/feeling in the world. But to partake in this imaginary also required grappling with a difficult language. Employing a form of writing that Neal Allar very appropriately terms as being quite often 'opaque to itself', Glissant takes his reader on an extended exploration without ever offering a destination.[4] While the first effect of this wandering might be resistance and frustration, one soon understands that it is these apparent obstacles that keep open the force of Glissant's critique. To read Glissant productively is not to give in to these frustrations, but to walk the shorelines of the Caribbean with Glissant, slowly apprehending the meanings of these meanderings to imagine new travels. The poet Octavia Paz once remarked that the difference between a critic and a poet is that while the critic 'must reproduce the poem he has before him', the poet 'does not know where his poem will lead him.'[5] Following Paz, I want to end with saying that we must not become merely critics of Glissant, but poets of Glissant, immersing ourselves within the vast weave of relations he leaves us with, re-constellating his concepts and casting them for our own travels...

FOOTNOTES

1. Ahmed, "A Phenomenology of Whiteness", 154.

2. John E. Drabinski, "Shorelines: In Memory of Édouard Glissant," *Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy* 19, no. 1 (June 13, 2011): 2.

3. bell hooks, *Outlaw Culture: Resisting Representations* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 59.

4. Neal Allar, "The Case for Incomprehension," *Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy* 23, no. 1 (August 5, 2015): 55

5. Octavio Paz, "Translation: Literature and Letters," in *Theories of Translation: An Anthology of Essays, from Dryden to Derrida*, ed. Rainer Schulte and John Biguenet (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 159.

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4 And finally, for words are never enough, to Anisha, whose presence I find in all I read and write.

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