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INTERROGATING HYBRIDITY SUBALTERN AGENCY AND TOTALITY IN POSTCOLONIAL THEORY

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Édouard Glissant's vast writings have entered postcolonial theory in rather tentative ways.¹ Throughout his work, he develops a poetics of *Relation* that is presented more specifically in the work so titled. Much of the difficulty that is now commonly associated with Glissant's œuvre lies in what I read to be a Marxian attempt to inscribe a functional-instrumental version of culture as well as to fulfill its more utopian ideals. In privileging this double aspect, I will be formulating a reading, against the grain, of Glissant's *Poétique de la Relation*. My central interest is to follow how it seeks to satisfy the deepest Marxist impulses while fleeing a Marxist idiom. In tracing the large theoretical sweeps it shares with Marxism, I see many fruitful connections between Glissant's thought and Western Marxism, which was heavily influenced by a resuscitation of the Hegelian sub-text of Marx and Engels's writing.²

Glissant's poetics of *Relation* is primarily concerned with the ways in which different cultures encountering one another in contingent historical circumstances transform themselves and each other into new and unforeseeable entities. Such a concern is central to other theories that abound in postcolonial studies as expressed in terms such as *creolization*, *métissage*, *hybridity*, and even *diaspora*.³ In my view, Glissant's departure from the strategy identifiable in many of these theories arises, essentially, from the attention he pays to the notion of totality. This reorientation has consequences for the way in which specific encounters in history can be theorized from Glissant's hybridity.

This essay is for Fredric Jameson.

1. In the francophone context, both Chris Bongie and H. Adlai Murdoch draw substantially from Glissant's work. In tracking primarily Glissant's fiction but also his theoretical texts, Celia Britton, more recently, provides us with various points of contact between this Caribbean and French theorist and other influential theorists of postcoloniality. The authoritative work of Glissant's first translator, J. Michael Dash, addresses the difficulty of Glissant's early reception and the coming of his later accolades in a historical view of this intellectual's long career. Few working outside the field of French Studies turn to his work in much detail.

2. Nick Nesbitt makes a cogent connection between historical experience and dialectical relation in Glissant [see 175], concentrating on Glissant's novel *Malemort* and citing his *Traité du tout-monde*. I am interested in pursuing, here, the definition and processes quite specific to *Relation*, which are laid out in *Poétique*. In the end, I find Nesbitt's conclusion that Glissant's call for biological ecologism for Martinique is really based in the logic of the Enlightenment [186] less convincing (at least as he presents it) in that this logic is not really pursued or explicated in the analyses of Glissant's work. If a specific reference were being made to Horkheimer and Adorno's Dialectic of Enlightenment, it did not become obvious to me.

3. Although there are various differences amongst these theories, I will restrict my comparison to Homi K. Bhabha's theory of hybridity, the most influential and frequently cited one in postcolonial studies. For more detailed discussion of some of these other theories see the introduction to my forthcoming *Hybridity: Transformations, Limits, Prospects*.

In his novels Glissant consistently seeks to dethrone the authoritative narrator. But I am not inclined to see this aesthetic move to be indicative of the author's more modest approach to narrative. Michael Dash suggests such an interpretation for Glissant's avoidance of an authoritative narrator, attributing it to the author's belief that "poetic discoveries" are after all likely to suffer the same fate as "historical discoveries" [53]. While the idea that knowledge is provisional and often revised by subsequent discoveries is not objectionable in the framework of Glissant's work, the latter's coining of the terms *Relation* with a capital "R," which informs much else he produces, and *Tout-monde*, which becomes the title of a novel, suggests something more ambitious. The narrative tactics contain fairly large aspirations that can be better understood alongside Glissant's theoretical stance toward language and subjectivity, which we shall examine in this paper. For me, there is no doubt that Glissant is interested in a type of grand-scale theorizing that seeks to transform/realize the large reality/utopia his thought posits and envisions. Glissant's thought, in this reading, has tremendous significance for privileging the notion of agency while understanding hybridity in the contemporary world.

Dialectics of Relation

Glissant provides three terms that work together within his theory of hybridity: métissage, creolization, and *Relation*.⁴ If métissage is the initial shock ("choc") or encounter ("rencontre") that anticipates a synthesis ("synthèse"), creolization is the more active (altering, differentiating) process that diffracts ("diffracte") [see *Poetics* 34/*Poétique* 46]. Métissage refers to an encounter that is recorded as a cognitive shock, which can then allow us to track difference; it is also identifiable as a moment in reality that opens up the possibility of the process of creolization. While métissage could lead toward a process that privileges synthesis by the erasure, or at least the recuperation, of difference, in it also resides the possibility for the complex process of creolization that Glissant describes and admires. Creolization entails a dynamic process in which difference continues to function and proliferate as a constitutive reality and as a basis for thought and action [see Prabhu and Quayson 226–27]. So the significance of métissage is always to be understood retroactively, tracking back to a moment when radically defined difference is identifiable as preceding the encounter. The greater the success of the ensuing process as synthesis accompanied by the erasure of differences, the more the moment of métissage "fades" ("s'en efface") [*Poetics* 91/*Poétique* 106].

Marxist thinkers have, likewise, differentially privileged the relationship between action and understanding, or practice and theory, according to the exigencies at hand. Métissage in Glissant speaks directly to this issue in that it is a retroactive understanding, which can privilege the revolutionary potential of a moment. Glissant's desire to bring together action and thought can be seen as continuing the efforts of a long history of Marxist-informed thought regarding the relationship of theory and practice. Such a move is enabled by his umbrella concept, *Relation*. According to Glissant's description:

Relation is not to be confused with the cultures we are discussing nor with the economy of their internal relationships nor even the intangible results of the intricate involvement of all internal relationships with all possible external relationships. Nor is it to be confused with some marvelous accident that might suddenly occur apart from any relationship, the known unknown, in which chance would be the magnet. Relation is all these things at once. [Poetics 170–71]

4. See Prabhu and Quayson for a discussion of these Glissantian terms.

This description is a performance of the idea of *Relation* itself. The reader is put under pressure to hold the ideas of what it is *not* before being instructed that it is all those things at the same time. In this manner Glissant approaches what Fredric Jameson calls dialectical writing, where it is “as though you could not say any one thing until you had first said everything; as though with each new idea you were bound to recapitulate the entire system” [*Marxism and Form* 306]. There is no space for a passive consumer of Glissant’s writing given the way the reader is drawn into the text. *Relation* requires an explicit engagement of the intellect and, as we will see, Glissant demands of each individual an ethical engagement in encountering otherness. Still, it is clear that Glissant grounds his work in the Caribbean culture he discusses, engages the specificities within it (drawing also from his earlier discussion in *Caribbean Discourse*), and envisages relationships that exceed those within the Caribbean. At the same time, he makes room for unforeseeable contacts, which preclude a completely rational predictability.

A fuller appreciation of the complexity that Glissant wants to preserve emerges upon close examination of his elaboration of *Relation* itself: “[W]hen we speak of a poetics of Relation, we no longer need to add: relation between what and what? This is why the French word Relation, which functions somewhat like an intransitive verb, could not correspond, for example, to the English term relationship” [*Poetics* 27]. Here, a Hegelian-Marxist idiom is suggested through a similarity with Hegel’s rejection of pre-Kantian thought, which relied on understanding and functioned by attributing predicates that could keep categories separate and mutually exclusive. Glissant’s reticence to allow a one-to-one relationship and his preference for the more complex notion of Relation can be seen as the espousal of dialectical thought privileged by Hegel and taken up as a central feature of analyses by Marx and Engels. *Relation* requires a constant figuring of the entire totality within which specific concepts and interactions become coherent. While discrete moments are privileged as in postcolonial theories of hybridity, which focus on the contact of otherness, such moments cannot be left as discrete and isolated in the act of understanding.⁵ Likewise, for a Marxist critic: “There is no content for dialectical thought, but total content” [Jameson, *Marxism and Form* 306].

Specifically in unearthing the Hegelian subtext of Glissant’s theory of *Relation*, we could see the progression in Glissant from métissage to creolization and then *Relation* as carrying the flavor of Hegel’s three “moments”: understanding, dialectical thought, and positive or speculative reason. It is of course to be understood here that for Hegel, reality implies that which we can speak about in the sense of a totality: it is the unity of the subject that can know the object and the object that can be known by the subject. Métissage and Hegel’s understanding rest upon the heterogeneity of real objects, which are given in their specific difference. Creolization and dialectical thought involve an acknowledgment of the fact that every characteristic is self-contradictory. For Hegel, everything contains its negation and in being linked with its opposite must, in a sense, become what it is not. The tendency in creolization to seek out opposition and privilege a process in which each element does not remain the same but approaches its opposite, with which it is confronted in the moment of métissage, contains the spirit of Hegelian dialectics. In its final stage

5. When Chris Bongie writes that he will be (even if “strategically”) “isolating some of [Glissant’s] political conjectures in ‘Discours antillais’ from the context of his work as a whole and putting them into question from the perspective of a postmodernism that can no longer credit the imperative of self-possession that undergrids them” [354], it is to undo the basic characteristic of his writing—the circularity, the nonexplosive quality, the repetitiveness . . . the whole story of his work, which I believe, at this point, cannot be understood outside the postcolonial. What I am pointing to as the inscription of the functional/instrumental and utopian impulses in Glissant’s work is rendered impossible within Bongie’s assessment of so-called progressive and regressive tendencies. A similar type of separation is suggested by Peter Hallward’s reading of Glissant.

of Reason, for Hegel, thought transcends “the ‘either-or’ mode of thinking and [. . .] recognize[s] the unity, the difference, and the identity of opposites which, according to the Understanding are incompatible with each other” [Jordan 102]. In *Relation*, likewise, this idea of opposites is not collapsed but rather embraced, just as it is “recognized” in Reason. Hegel characterizes this final stage of speculative reason by “the grasping of opposites in their unity or of the positive in the negative” [Hegel 56].

Glissant preserves this sense of opposition in processes of relationality with his idea that every people has the right to opacity. But he also, like Hegel, links this sense of contradiction not simply to the objective world but also to subjective cognition. The suggestion of some kind of resistance in opacity has deep resonance, in this comparison, with Marx’s explanation of the seemingly consensual relationship between the capitalist and the worker: “that relationship only constitutes itself *within* the process of production, and the capitalist, who exists only as a potential purchaser of labour, becomes a real capitalist only when the worker, who can be turned into a *wage-labourer* only through the sale of his capacity for labour, *really* does submit to the commands of capital” [*Capital* 989, original emphasis]. The suggestion right through this passage is that breaking out of this process of production and delinking from this relationship with the capitalist are truly in the hands of the worker, who makes the entire system “real.” Such a relationship is only conceivable within the established system of capitalism. In *Poétique* opacity protects the sanctity and inaccessibility of “poetic intention” throughout the successful process of writing and reading themselves [see 115]. In *Relation*, opacity functions as a corrective to essentializing or reducing the entity behind action without canceling the value of subjectivity, because, as we shall see, its ethical engagement will be called upon to face contradiction. In this sense, for Glissant refusal to fully expose poetic intention through the notion of difference is the authorial refusal to be recuperated by the system of Europeanization, recolonization, canonization, or perhaps even capitalization. But opacity as a concept only functions in this relationship with a/the dominant other(s). The aesthetic task before the writer seeking *Relation* can be seen within the same project as that of the class-conscious proletariat (seeking revolution). In each case, what we find is a theoretical acknowledgment of the power of the worker and the writer, respectively, to short-circuit an entire system.

Glissant suggests the impossibility of grasping *Relation* in terms of anything but itself. “We must [. . .] abandon this apposition of Being and beings: renounce the fruitful maxim whereby Being is relation, to consider that Relation alone is relation” [*Poetics* 170]. For Hegel,

there is not an infinite which is first of all infinite and only subsequently has need to become finite, to go forth into finitude; on the contrary, it is on its own account just as much finite as infinite. [It is therefore erroneous to assume] that the infinite, on the one side, exists by itself, and that the finite which has gone forth from it into a separate existence—or from whatever source it might have come—is in its separation from the infinite truly real; but it should rather be said that this separation is incomprehensible. [153, original emphasis]

Clearly, then, particular instances of being do not somehow all together simply become Being; likewise, in order to understand *Relation*, it is not enough to figure various instances of particular relations. Therefore, while examining *Relation* always implies the relation of all possible things and their interrelations, it is impossible to name that totality, capture it or delimit, once and for all, its boundaries. Here, Glissant activates the Hegelian dialectic of the universal and particular and ends up “siding,” like Hegel in Adorno’s words, with the universal [326]. But this should in no way be seen as sacrificing the par-



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installation, *Feelings*

ticular for the universal. What Adorno noted for Hegel can be seen as a strong tendency in Glissant, for whom “not only particularity but the particular itself is unthinkable without the moment of the universal which differentiates the particular, puts its imprint on it, and in a sense is needed to make a particular of it” [328]. Hegel’s statement is that although Being is indeterminate, it does not become the “opposite of determinate being” [Hegel 153]. Neither métissage nor creolization can be understood without the all-encompassing notion of *Relation*, within whose logic they come to function as the conflictual, productive processes Glissant describes. In this way, we can see that Glissant’s ultimate interest in Caribbean creolization is anchored in a larger totality of processual *Relation*.

Glissant’s writing—both theoretical and fictional or poetic—has the effect of circularity, with characters who reappear, ideas that come back and are repeated, changed, and revised.⁶ While a spiraling repetition that occurs at a higher level is a typically Marxian metaphor, the idea of thought as an integral process of reality itself in Glissant will allow for further development of this parallelism.

Contradiction and Alienation in Glissant

The importance of the moment of métissage in Glissantian thinking is clear. Métissage as a stage in the apprehension of reality has been shown in the comparison with Hegel’s stages of thought. Here, however, I want to show how this idea additionally activates a clearly Marxian concept of contradiction in its strongest terms: contradiction as the essential catalyst of change. In a rather more traditional Marxian formulation, contradiction is registered at various levels in society. But the most salient and pertinent type of contradiction is that between the interests of groups that then, in this formulation, must coalesce into classes in the conscious identification of these contradictory interests. It is most strongly articulated, of course, in the concept of alienation. In the process of production, the relationship between the laborer and product as subject and object becomes reversed when the former loses control over what is produced, resulting in an alienation of the laborer from the product. Further, when what counts is objectified labor itself, the laborer is alienated from both the product of the labor and his/her humanness.

The root of the problem for Marx, as explained in *Capital*, is the distancing or alienation in the sense of divestiture (*Veräußerung*) that accompanies the process of commodification, when these products “strip off every trace of their natural and original use-value, and of the particular kind of useful labour to which they owe their creation” [204]. The process in which the laborer alienates (*entfremdet*) his labor power by treating it as a commodity as s/he enters into its sale to the “buyer” is vividly described in these terms: “He who was previously the money-owner now strides out in front as a capitalist; the possessor of labour-power follows as his worker. The one smirks self-importantly and is intent on business; the other is timid and holds back, like someone who has brought his own hide to market and now has nothing else to expect but—a tanning” [Marx, *Capital* 280]. The alienation of the product of labor from labor, between the objective conditions of labor and subjective labor power is the basis of capitalist production and indeed draws in and creates the capitalist and the worker as such. The worker’s power is transformed not only into commodities but also into capital, an alien power that dominates the worker [see Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* 71]. The capitalist produces labor power abstracted from the laborer. In this way the worker as a wage laborer is reproduced or perpetuated and becomes the necessary condition for capitalist production [see *Capital* 716]. The awakening of the laborer’s consciousness and his realization of the scope of his

6. This aspect is eloquently considered in Cailler [esp. 104].

own agency in the process are crucial to Marx's conception of revolutionary change, as we have already noted.

For Glissant, on the other hand, métissage is a moment of a brutal shock, or an encounter of radical and irreconcilable difference. As we saw, it is in tracking backwards from a diffracting process of creolization that métissage is restored in all its fullness. The idea of class consciousness involves awareness of a particular relationship of an exploited group to a larger reality and also has to be anchored in a historical consciousness. We may recall Glissant's call upon the ethical subjectivity to bring together the theoretical and the social through his notion of opacity. Such a desire is also recognizable in Fredric Jameson's writing, which shares many of the same impulses as Glissant's work. In fact the frequent inscription of the problematic of the distance between thought and reality becomes fertile ground for much of Jameson's investigative energy.⁷ From Lucien Goldmann to Raymond Williams to Fredric Jameson, Marxists in different guises have struggled to bring together the aesthetic and the social in the context of their projects. The processes ensuing from métissage construct it as a cognitive shock in Glissant's theory and participate in progressive consciousness of reality, as we have seen.⁸ For Glissant, differences and their encounter do not work toward homogenizing difference upon the resolution of contradiction. Still, when difference is historicized, the challenge is to preserve it while simultaneously maintaining equality across differences that have, most often, been predicated upon inequality.

If a Marxian idea of contradiction is understood as the precondition for a productive antagonism that creates social upheaval, Glissant's refusal to abandon radical difference provides a revised view of this idea. It indicates that even in a utopian mode, it is now impossible to envisage a classless or at least a nonhierarchical society. Furthermore, it is also unproductive to do so, for this would be to endorse a static configuration, which can today be made to suggest a negative hegemony. Such a view is not incompatible with contemporary post-Marxist theories. For Laclau and Mouffe, "there cannot be a radical politics without the definition of an adversary. That is to say, it requires the acceptance of the ineradicability of antagonism" [xvii]. Similarly, for Jameson, it is essential to conceive of a "perpetual cultural revolution, [which] can be apprehended and read as the deeper and more permanent constitutive structure in which the empirical textual objects know intelligibility" [*Political Unconscious* 97]. Glissant's thought, then, in this respect, makes similar moves to those of more recognizable, even if diverse, contemporary Marxists and post-Marxists.

Glissant approaches contradiction in his study of the dissociation between language and subjectivity in the Martinican psyche as a particular historical fact that he considers and develops. French was imposed on vast, different, non-French, and then Creole speaking classes. At the same time, Glissant incisively argues that Creole is not tied to any form of real production and hence has become a sort of folklore. Language for Glissant is the privileged site for Relation, but his treatment of language is intricately linked to the actual language situation in Martinique. With Martinique's departmental status, there is no authentic self-generated production in the island. Creole language has not

7. See, for example, the early Marxism and Form 383, 385. Jameson's writing consistently seeks to chart the theoretical with and through the social. This is evident in his ideas about the national allegory in third world literary texts through to his analyses of cinema or architecture.

8. One cannot fail to be struck by the similarity between progression from métissage to Relation with the following formulation: "When we turn now to a properly Marxist literary criticism, it will be through a similar epistemological shock that we will be able to identify its presence: for such a shock is constitutive of and inseparable from dialectical thinking, as the mark of an abrupt shift to a higher level of consciousness, to a larger context of being" [Jameson, Marxism and Form 375].

been allowed to develop with and through the creative production of a people and this is the case particularly after departmentalization.⁹ Therefore, Glissant's opposition to an accelerated and institutional development of Creole was informed by his belief that until we can claim a language develops from within a process of productivity, to promote it in any artificial manner is to encourage a folkloric space of inauthenticity. Still, French has functioned, like much else in Martinican culture, as an import. It does not carry the inflection of a sustained history, remains spoken with unease, and cannot, therefore, be the site of forging effective *Relation* until it is appropriated through a process of production in which it participates and is embedded. The arising alienation from language in Martinique separates the individual from society and from a process of production (or a lack of it).¹⁰

I believe Glissant's concept of alienation is a development of and from the Marxian account of it. What is innovative here is the fact that it is not only "work" but also a distance and isolation from it and from the production of what is simply *consumed* (French culture, language, education, images) that can bring about alienation. Glissant's critique of the lack of consciousness of this alienation from language in the adoption of French and an inability to see the need for the centrality of Martinicans' engagement with their production, culture, and language calls up the way in which Marx explains the distortion operated by the capitalist mode of production. In this context, "it is not only things—the products of labour, both use-values and exchange-values—that rise up on their hind legs and face the worker and confront him as '*Capital*.'" But even the social form of labour appears as a form of development of capital, and hence the productive forces of social labour so developed appear as the productive forces of capitalism" [Marx, *Capital* 1054]. Conversely, Martinicans' adoption of French and their command of it give them a self-satisfied appearance of success or progress whereas, as Glissant explains, their inability to participate in the process of creating and shaping the language (an inability that has far-reaching significance for its perpetuation in every aspect of their existence within a French Overseas Department) is neglected. In capitalist production "the development of the *social* productive forces of labour and the conditions of that development come to appear as the *achievement of capital*, an achievement which the individual worker endures passively, and which progresses at his expense" [Marx, *Capital* 1055]. In a reversed situation, Martinicans believe they are fully participating in French culture when in fact they are only passive consumers of it. On the other hand, the achievements of the worker in capitalist production are presented as the achievement of capital. This not only obscures his contribution but also does not materially recompense it, thus stripping the laborer of the means to participate in the fruits of such achievements.

I have suggested earlier a more ambitious project in the narrative of Glissant's novels than might be evident. His narrative structure delivers the type of dissociation he envisages between authoritative speakers and language. Many other postcolonial authors experiment with the narrative authority of a singular, speaking subject as part of a strategy to posit collective, disjunctive voices in their fiction. Here, this historically marked split between language and subjectivity ensues from the alienation of Martinicans from their

9. See Caribbean Discourse 187–91. When the push to standardize and make official Creole language as a more authentic alternative to French for Martinique came from Martinican intellectuals, Glissant was strongly opposed to it. The créolité movement, spearheaded by Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Confiant, had its own influential manifesto, entitled *Éloge de la créolité* [In Praise of Creoleness].

10. On the other hand, for one critic, "Glissant's work is, from start to finish, committed to any number of ideological errors made in the name of structuring resistance; these errors stem, for instance, from a questionable (which is certainly not to say wrongheaded) belief in the reality of such things as national identity and cultural alienation" [Bongie 143].

labor in a particular way. In understanding Martinicans' relationship with French, Glissant activates the senses of alienation (especially as *Entäusserung*) Marx uses in describing the ways in which the laborer is alienated: the idea of alienation in the sense of selling something and renouncing that which is intrinsically yours (for Martinicans we might say their identity or more poetically, their "soul") such as your own relationship with a culture and history you create; as well as alienation in the sense of making external to oneself; here by adopting and living in a language in which the self that is created cannot be annexed to the creator, much as labor gets separated from the one who labors. As Karin Barber has shown, such an engagement with "real" indigenous languages is woefully lacking in postcolonial studies of all persuasions. Postcolonial theories of hybridity in their most sophisticated (generalized) guise are unable to embrace and explicate concrete language politics as elements of the hybrid. Instead they opt to strategically engage with language in a metaphorical sense.

Glissant Historicized

Glissant's innovative accomplishments can be seen against at least two contexts. The first is the properly Martinican context where Glissant's two compatriots automatically become interlocutors of his thought: Frantz Fanon, proclaimed Marxist in his early association with François Tosquelles as well as with his revolutionary work in Algeria; and Aimé Césaire, representative in the French Constituent Assembly on the Communist Party ticket. Both figures have mythical status within Martinique as well as in the postcolonial world. Césaire resigned from the French Communist Party in 1956 to form the Parti Progressiste Martiniquais. It was around this time that Glissant would be expelled from Martinique for his work with the Algerians. If Glissant, in his public persona, resisted the type of huge monumental "arrival" that the revolutionary figures of both Fanon and Césaire evoke, this gesture can also be read as an attempt to differentiate his career and image from those of these figures.¹¹ Glissant's own style is adapted to one who will linger and stay and whose career would be more easily characterized by the rhythms of a long relationship between himself and a reading public than by the love at first sight of a brilliant but short affair.

The second context I wish to evoke includes two significant moments in French intellectual history, the first being Alexandre Kojève's Hegel seminars between 1933 and 1939 at the École Pratique des Hautes Études. These seminars were, as is well known, a clearly Marxist rendering of Hegel in which the master-slave dialectic was privileged to propel the image of the proletariat as the emancipator of mankind [see Kojève, esp. 227–33]. While the seminar itself was attended by such figures as Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Jacques Lacan, the full impact of these lectures can be said to have hit the intellectual scene in 1947, when Raymond Queneau published the students' notebooks and other articles by Kojève. The second moment is Jean Hyppolite's seminars at the Sorbonne and the École Normale Supérieure in 1949. Between 1939 and 1941, he translated the *Phenomenology of the Spirit* into French, and his lectures were attended by the likes of Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Louis Althusser, and of course, Jacques Derrida. He privileged, for his part, the unhappy consciousness as man's recognition of the absolute and his awareness, at the same time, that this absolute is beyond humanity. Hyppolite's

11. Dash notes that Glissant, early on, identified Césaire's work as being of a particular moment and therefore foresaw a datedness that it was bound to acquire [Dash 31, 36]. In fact, Dash remarks that "already one has the feeling in Glissant's work that negritude would one day be little more than a period style" [38], recording the distance he explicitly takes from his Martinican compatriots and other African francophone poets.

lectures were very much concerned with the individual as a subject of history as well as a product of it. The self-other relationship became pertinent in conjunction with the importance accorded to dialectical thinking, in which life could not be separated from thought. These ideas were making their indelible mark on French intellectual thought in the 1960s when Glissant was forced out of Martinique for subversive activities. By this time, Fanon was already a notorious figure, with his untimely death in 1961 adding to the mythic status of his revolutionary life.¹² Glissant's investment in thought as revolutionary suggests his own preparation of a revolutionary moment for and from his writing.

I believe that Glissant's work is further illuminated when seen in the long view of his career of some six decades of theoretical and artistic production. While Glissant might not "invok[e] [. . .] Marx, Breton, Sartre, nor Césaire" [Dash 2], there is no doubt that the thought of these and other recognizable figures is deeply entwined with his own—our task here is restricted to the Marxian subtext. From my reading, Glissant submits a transformed Marxism, in which there is a less restrictive vocabulary that can account for the contradictions arising with and beyond class or colonialism. He works away from a simplistic instrumental vision that rests upon one-to-one correspondence between theory and society. He also demonstrates an original and radical way of linking the individual and society, the enunciative and the historical, the cognitive and social. These moves are suggestive of a creative, forward-looking thinker whose very elusiveness works resolutely toward productive meaningfulness. Dash writes: "The political thrust of earlier ideologies such as cultural universality, negritude, indigenism, Marxism was clear. It would however be impossible to derive a systematic politics from Glissant's poetic and generously open-ended ideal of irreducible plurality and diversity for the Caribbean" [24]. While Dash is quite right that Glissant's work resists neat categorization, the substructure of his entire thought rests on what we can identify as the Marxian dialectic. Contra Dash, then (and polemically here), Marxism is not an "ideology" in the sense that a particular (or even distorted) way of thinking gains hegemony by influencing how people view important aspects of reality as natural: Martinicans from Frantz Fanon to Raphaël Confiant describe a deep-seated feeling of inferiority in their culture's relationship with France, a situation that does not accord with a real dominance of Marxian thought. The euphoria associated with Césaire's early politics, even if self-proclaimedly Marxist, was, by general consensus, unsuccessful in forging the type of collectivity any version of Marxism would envisage; it culminated in departmentalization for Martinique. In fact, the way in which Glissant frames the most urgent problems faced by Martinique are based in clearly Marxian terms: alienation and a lack of productivity. Also, while the word "systematic" might intuitively be counter to Glissant's impulses, plurality and diversity do not preclude a notion of totality, as we have seen. Glissant's utopian vision is fiercely committed to a political agenda for *Relation*, which aims at changing the world.

12. Glissant himself comments that "[i]t is difficult for a French Caribbean individual to be the brother, the friend, or quite simply the associate or fellow countryman of Fanon. Because, of all the French Caribbean intellectuals, he is the only one to have acted on his ideas, through his involvement in the Algerian struggle" [Caribbean Discourse 25]. Glissant sees both Fanon's revolutionary work and Césaire's revolution in/through poetry as forms of "diversion" which for him are "versions of the return to Africa" [Caribbean Discourse 24]. But for him, this act of diversion is necessary before a return to what he calls "the point of entanglement" [Caribbean Discourse 26], which perhaps neither of his compatriots accomplished—Fanon owing to his early death, and Césaire because of the decisions made in his political career.

That the language, structure, and processes of Marxian (inseparable from Hegelian) thought are an essential part of Glissant's, whether they are in opposition, disguised, or overtly present, is what I have indicated and shall further argue. In the process described by Glissant, it is essential to first identify the significant moment of (most often violent) contact: this is *métissage*, although it cannot be recognized as such in the present of its appearance. As we have seen, the moment of *métissage* has to be retroactively constructed. When *métissage* is followed by a diffracting process rather than one of synthesis it is possible to track back to this moment and call it up as *métissage*: this difference occurs in the moment of enunciation. We might bring together Bhabha's notion of difference (as opposed to diversity) and the kind of alterity within creolization that Glissant advocates as a move toward *Relation*.¹³ A process of synthesis would have rendered such a move impossible because the moment of *métissage* is then (retroactively) figured as "weak," as we have seen earlier. Here, contingency in both its spatial and temporal dimensions becomes clear. Bhabha's rather abstract idea that "the contingent is contiguity, metonymy, the touching of spatial boundaries at a tangent, and, at the same time, the contingent is the temporality of the indeterminate and the undecidable" [186] is explicitly figured in Glissant's description of the process of creolization. The contingency of the moment is seen in time because one cannot tell if a moment is *métissage* until the diffraction has been witnessed; it is also recorded in space in that the moment of shock functions to identify a border between differences.

More interestingly, Bhabha's notion of active difference versus a more passive diversity goes further in Glissant, who describes the "other of thought" and "thought of the other" in much the same way. The most basic thrust of Glissant's thought and his theorizing impulse come from the *encounter* (and not the parallel and incommensurable existence) of radical difference. For Glissant, a reality, when under analytical consideration, becomes a theoretical process, which transforms the thinker into an agent.

Thought of the Other is the moral generosity disposing me to accept the principle of alterity, to conceive of the world as not simple and straightforward, with only one truth—mine. But thought of the Other can dwell within me without making me alter course, without "prizing me open," without changing me within myself. As an ethical principle, it is enough that I not violate it.

The other of Thought is precisely this altering. Then I have to act. That is the moment I change my thought, without renouncing its contribution. I change, and I exchange. This is an aesthetics of turbulence whose corresponding ethics is not provided in advance. [Glissant, Poetics 154–55]

13. "Cultural diversity is an epistemological object—culture as an object of empirical knowledge—whereas cultural difference is the process of the enunciation of culture as 'knowledgeable' authoritative, adequate to the construction of systems of cultural identification. If cultural diversity is a category of comparative ethics, aesthetics or ethnology, cultural difference is a process of signification through which statements of culture or on culture differentiate, discriminate and authorize the production of fields of force, reference, applicability and capacity. Cultural diversity is the recognition of pre-given cultural contents and customs; held in a time-frame of relativism it gives rise to liberal notions of multiculturalism, cultural exchange or the culture of humanity. Cultural diversity is also the representation of a radical rhetoric of the separation of totalized cultures that live unsullied by the intertextuality of their historical locations, safe in the Utopianism of a mythic memory of a unique collective identity. Cultural diversity may even emerge as a system of the articulation and exchange of cultural signs in certain early structuralist accounts of anthropology" [Bhabha 34].

The act of “thinking” (with the specifications made for it) propels action in Glissant’s bid for collective reflection. Glissant’s métissage and creolization startlingly privilege a conception of *qualitative* difference being articulated in an encounter in the *first* place, rather than the classic Marxian notion (also present in Hegel) of quantity being cumulatively transformed into qualitative difference. It is perhaps in pushing this point further that the central task (of privileging subaltern agency) identified by postcolonial theories of hybridity could be better clarified. Rejecting, at the same time, an unrealistic idea of happily coexisting otherness, radical otherness for Glissant, through the cognitive process, requires change.¹⁴ While such a requirement of “deep” transformation proceeding from antagonism forms the basis of a Marxian view of historical change for Glissant, the encounter of otherness itself transforms people into agents by their experience of this otherness. He pays greater attention, in this way, to agents in the process than does the Marxian rendering of “the people,” as central in the revolution. If the energies of Marxism are in many ways directed toward prediction, Glissant rejects this predictability for the unforeseeable, but only within his total concept of *Relation*. This vision disallows any kind of essentializing or even reduction of an acting individual or agent or group (in terms of class, but also gender, race, or any other such category) without restricting, as in Bhabha’s enunciative moment, any and all possibility of coherence to that immediately available in the moment.

The other of Thought for Glissant and difference (as opposed to diversity) for Bhabha are both prerequisites for pressing agency. In both cases they lead to an active role of differentiation, which, for Bhabha, questions the limits of sameness while for Glissant it explodes the cognitive into a social act. In Bhabha’s proposal, agency becomes visible after the fact in particular enunciative moments, and, in this way, it ends up privileging a linearly defined textuality. This results from the necessary though implicit theoretical distinction of the hybrid from the nonhybrid, which privileges interpretation as the realm in which that past action enters the present. In Glissant, the moment of contact leads to action in the present, which is accomplished by registering contradiction as being uncontainable within textuality (within the particular mode of its inscription). In the sense of the “Other of thought” signification cannot continue without *change* that necessarily breaks out of this modality (representation). Introducing, in this manner, a definitive break in progression for any kind of signifying chain, such a moment is worked into Glissant’s conception of an aesthetics of turbulence in which the ethical acting subject is produced through the encounter of difference. Seen as an ongoing process, métissage at different points (*from* different points) makes of *Relation* a “chaos-world” that cannot be understood within a linear inscription. Glissant clearly indicates the extent to which relativizing difference is insufficient just as predictability allows an easy morality that this poet wants to surpass: his insistence therefore that there can be no pre-given ethics but rather one that has to be constantly reinvented through the act of changing/exchanging/relating.

Otherness in Bhabha’s version of hybridity first challenges the coherence of hegemonic (unitary) discourses. The notion of *Nachträglichkeit* draws heavily from psychoanalysis and the telling process the latter involves. The fact that social realities and their processes are closely connected with processes of cognition in Glissant’s view of hybridity places the latter close to psychoanalytic anamnesis. Regarding this, Lacan writes that “it is not a question of reality, but of truth, because the effect of full speech is to reor-

14. Glissant’s belief in, indeed requirement of, an ethical engagement at the level of the individual echoes Sartre’s call for responsibility. The idea that a productive encounter with otherness implies action, and that the terms of such action cannot be given in advance, would certainly be in keeping with Sartre’s notion of existence preceding essence, even if Glissant does not cite Sartre. These moments in Glissant reveal him to be a radical thinker who nevertheless drew heavily from the tendencies and intellectual climate of his formative years.

der past contingencies by conferring on them the sense of necessities to come, such as they are constituted by the little freedom through which the subject makes them present” [Écrits 48]. If the limits of *Relation* are not so easy to describe or represent in the *Tout-monde* of absolute *Relation*, the same difficulty is evident in the psychoanalytic process with which Lacan is concerned. In a more idealistic (early) moment, Lacan comes close to the utopian element in *Relation*, when he anticipates that the “omnipresence of human discourse will perhaps one day be embraced under the open sky of an omniconmunication of its text” [56]. The chaos (not disorder) that Glissant identifies in this totality is also instinctively suggested by Lacan: “This is not to say that human discourse will be any more harmonious than now” [56], but it will be no less meaningful. Most significantly for us in Lacan, the inadequacy of the intersubjective is indicated even if it is the soil for anchoring agency: “But this is the field that our experience polarizes in a relation that is only apparently two-way, for any positing of its structure in merely dual terms is as inadequate to it in theory as it is ruinous for its technique” [56]. Glissant’s interest begins with social realities and their processes only to move inward to the most basic processes of individual recognition and construction. While his theory begins with the wide historical sweeps of his earlier work, *Relation* itself often returns to the language of the self. In the end, it shares much with the more primeval knowing of the self through otherness with which psychoanalysis is concerned. In Lacan, the direction is reversed in the sense that the truth of the subject in the analysis lies beyond it: in the structuring realities of the self that necessarily expand outward. This truth, following Freud, is to be found in monuments (the body), archival documents (memories), semantic evolution (the individual vocabulary), traditions (legends of the past), and the distortions arising from the links of the traumatic moment to others around it [see Lacan 50]. While each of these pertains to the individual in question, it is easy to see how they all implicate without fail, in their very vocabulary, a larger societal reference. It is quite remarkable how this eminently subject-driven theory meticulously connects to notions of collectivity. In Glissant the question of who I am is insignificant when compared to the question of who we are [Caribbean Discourse 86]. In these ways, the insistent pull of the process of knowing beyond a self-other dialectic is suggestive of an implicit totality in both Lacan and Glissant. On the other hand, while Bhabha strongly identifies with Lacanian psychoanalysis, he rejects any discussion of totality: “[t]he postcolonial perspective resists the attempt at holistic forms of social explanation” [173].

Disjunctive experience forms the very basis of the Caribbean world-view for Glissant, whereas for Bhabha, it is the hybrid that, when sought out, can disrupt what is otherwise known and knowable in a linear modality. The Caribbean experience of resistance and agency has necessarily led its creative agents to resort to a type of disjuncture from narrative and language by lengthening the terms of its “moment” and thus altering the “time” of judgment (or representation). One might say that in Glissant’s conception the labor of the maroon (runaway slave) and storyteller to “disjoin” is an activation of alienation that cuts across the entire production and its social actants.¹⁵ The creative production involved in breaking away from the plantation economy by the maroon and from the bequeathed narrative of History by the storyteller respectively, while recording a form of alienation, is insufficient until action proceeding from it is turned into social upheaval that can lead to *Relation*. In its dialectical movement between thought and reality, the particular and

15. Murdoch notes the parallel discontinuity Glissant “draws between the verbal act of expression and the physical act of marronnage,” and which “demonstrates the simultaneous importance of rupture and of the transmission and transformation of tradition” [202] characteristic of the Caribbean from its very conception on the slave ship. Such discontinuity transforms the time itself of political action that cannot, then, be pinpointed in a narrative moment precisely because its time is not linear.

totality, cognition and action, *Relation* aspires to nothing short of perpetual revolution. In the moment of métissage, as in Jameson's epistemological shock in dialectical thinking, lies the utopian possibility for change that is both objective and subjective but necessarily beyond the realm of interpretation.

To be sure, the full possibility of the sign is not accounted for if we do not acknowledge that it "itself faces simultaneously in two directions: it faces toward the object in a 'passive' relation of being determined, and it faces toward the interpretant in an 'active' relation of determining" [Peirce, qtd. in Parmentier 29]. Most postcolonial theories of hybridity, in their eagerness to privilege agency, seem quick to validate the active relation and prove less enthusiastic about acknowledging the other direction. It is in this sense that critics such as Benita Parry have questioned the disengagement of much postcolonial theory from material reality. Glissant's work readily embraces both and transforms the signifying process in pursuing contradiction and engaging an ethics in its resolution, which necessarily exceeds the particular interaction. One might see in his work "the simultaneous recognition and transcendence of immediate appearances [which] is precisely the dialectical nexus" [Lukács 8].

Following Glissant, we can state that no social explanation is adequate that does not itself seek (to be) change within a conception of totality. Glissant's hybridity, in its meticulous movement from one stage to the next in *Relation* and in its bid for an ethical engagement called upon by contradiction, accomplishes precisely this aim. His theory of *Relation* establishes a dialectical relation between heterogeneous entities and of these entities with themselves. It engages the relationship between them by also enlarging it to encompass all other possible relationships.

Hybridity and Totality

With the many changes in the twentieth century, the Lukácsian idea of an expressive totality and its essentializing of class became less possible to maintain in Marxian analyses alongside too many constituencies competing for a central and nameable collective agent. Althusser's interpretation of totality as a structure of structures made of it a theoretical form for understanding with less concern for a corresponding referent in reality. For Jameson, if totality is mode of production, in his work, capitalism forms the ultimate structuring force within which actions and events of all kinds occur and are understood. Now, in a postmodernist vocabulary, to refuse totality also questions the very representability of reality. While the question is interesting in and of itself, some locations, and here I wish to specify the postcolonial, have a vested interest in the ways in which oppression is carried out and expressed in reality. In Bhabha's theory, the immediacy of the enunciate does not allow the kind of abstraction and distance that is required to think a totality. It is in this way that differentiation in the immediate is anomalous with respect to the concept (or ideology, if one wishes) of totality. The crux of the differences between much postcolonial theory on hybridity and more robustly Marxist thought comes to rest in the position within each of them of the concept of totality.

We might say that, in such a Marxian framing, Glissant's version of hybridity, through the idea of *Relation*— necessarily and always with a capital "R"—implicates "the world space of multinational capital," while at the same time "it achieves a breakthrough to some as yet unimaginable new mode of representing this last, in which we may again begin to grasp our positioning as individual and collective subjects and regain a capacity to act and struggle which is at present neutralized by our spatial as well as our social confusion" [Jameson, "The Cultural Logic" 54]. In this sense of "cognitive mapping" any individual or collective act of political will necessarily engages with its situation

and struggles to project its imprint outward to this vast but interconnected space. As we have seen, Glissant is equally concerned with what has remained a central Marxian problematic of the particular and the general (what in Jameson's formulation above contains the echo of class consciousness). This process of anchoring the enunciative moment in something other than itself is what is explicitly neglected (or rejected) by Bhabha, who stubbornly fixes the idea of totality as static, foreclosing any discussion of an enlargement or expansion out from the particular: "The epistemological is locked into the hermeneutic circle, in the description of cultural elements as they tend towards a totality" [177].

For the enunciative, Bhabha figures a more fluid space: "The enunciative is a more dialogic process that attempts to track displacements and realignments that are the effects of cultural antagonisms and articulations—subverting the rationale of the hegemonic moment and relocating alternative, hybrid sites of cultural negotiation" [178]. It is less clear how subverting the rationale of the hegemonic moment translates into action for the subaltern from alternative locations. Subalternity is experienced, even in the enunciative moment, in the relationship of the subaltern with the hegemonic. While the rationale of such hegemony might be shown to be "irrational," or at least contingent, any theoretical project purporting to empower subalterns should somehow address the question of undoing this hegemony—a project that necessarily exceeds the (immediate) textual at some point. The point at which the hybrid moment enables the move between a particular representative mode and the "outside" of such a provisionally sutured whole, which is presumed and whose dominant logic maintains the subalternity of the subaltern would be crucial. The method ends for Bhabha where, for us, it must begin.¹⁶ Endless relocation to alternative sites of negotiation which would once again reveal the irrationality of hegemony at that point, only to revert to relocation once more, can be somewhat reductively named as the postmodernist idea of endless textuality as process. It allows no way to connect discrete "illogics" of hegemony.

The association of *Relation* to "chaos-monde" and "tout-monde" in Glissant is a reckoning with totality. Creolization is, for him, the earthly approximation of his idea of total *Relation* (of everything to everything else, simultaneously and equally): "What took place in the Caribbean, which could be summed up in the word creolization, approximates the idea of Relation for us as nearly as possible" [*Poetics* 34]. In evoking the comparison made with Hegel earlier in this piece, the confusion here of moving one stage of thought to the next reflects a more consequential tendency in Glissant to blur totality and Utopia. If *Relation* is a totality that is required for métissage and creolization to gain coherence, without the complex process of creolization as a model (which depends on the encounter in métissage), *Relation* would be unthinkable. But *Relation* contains within it the Utopian element of Glissant's thought as a world in which there is total ongoing creolization without exception. We can theorize further from Glissant *Relation* as totality and *Relation* as Utopia. However, in *Relation*, we find a complex linking of analytical totality to an original theorization of agency, guided by an impulse to move that totality toward Utopia. The lack of a proper intervention of any idea of totality to accompany the privileged agency of the subaltern, noted in Bhabha's enunciative present and characteristic of most postcolonial understandings of hybridity, is what marks the incommensurability between these theories and Glissant's more particularly Marxian rendering of the same. In this, we might say with Neil Lazarus, at least with specific reference to hybridity in postcolonial studies, that "the conceptual reach of Marxism is superior to that of the problematics prevalent in the field" [15]. Glissant's *Relation* is predicated upon a more

16. Young defends Bhabha against critics who find the latter's theory to be nonmaterialist. When he asserts that Bhabha's work is not incompatible with a less restrictively "textual" criticism [163], in effect he affirms that the theory itself remains most appropriate for textual criticism despite its more ambitious aims.

immediate connection between thought and reality than even a Marxian-derived formulation of dialectics, while it simultaneously addresses the idea of the subject mediating between them.

Glissant's poetics of *Relation* has begun a most provocative reframing of Marxism for a world where the idea of "difference" could simply collapse into incoherence, or worse, lead to complacency. The challenge that difference poses for a conception of revolution is seen in the maneuvers of postcolonial hybridity, which resist according a more consequential place to true contradiction and its potential for restructuring as well as conceiving of an analytical category of totality within which this might be theorized. Utopian longings for revolutionary agency without these concepts become meaningless. Because Glissant's writing, under the aegis of *Relation*, rethinks the notion of revolution and responds to inexhaustible claims or branding of "difference," all those interested in theorizing difference in the contemporary world (and Marxist-minded thinkers in particular) would find reason to pause and consider his thought.

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