

Glissant and the Middle Passage

Philosophy, Beginning, Abyss

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University of Minnesota Press
Minneapolis
London

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Preface

THIS BOOK IS A LONG MEDITATION on and philosophical treatment of the work of Édouard Glissant, with special attention to the poetics developed in his nonfiction writings. A bit has been written recently on Glissant and philosophy in French, but English-language commentary has been of a decidedly different character. This is a critical gap in the literature.

Glissant's work is profoundly philosophical. There can be no doubt about this, and it makes the gap all the more noteworthy. As well, Glissant's sustained engagement with the central trends of Atlantic thought—from Négritude to various kind of existentialism to ethical-political critiques of modernity to the poststructuralist moment—places him at the center of many debates. I want to argue in part across this book that Glissant's conscious and deeply critical movement across both the north and south Atlantic intellectual worlds makes him a uniquely important figure. The engagements are always critical; central, for Glissant, will always be Caribbeanness considered on its own terms. But the terms of the Caribbean are always unstable, chaotic, and fractal in character, which delinks Glissant from any number of iterations of intellectual nationalism around region, race, history, or memory.¹ Rather, and this is Glissant's final and most emphatic concept, the Caribbean is simultaneously local—hemispheric, specifically historical, particular in its memories—and global—the crossroads of the world, from the beginning. That is, Caribbeanness is *tout-monde*, not as an aesthetic or ethical idea or ideal, but as a direct description of the material histories and memories of the archipelago. Contact is beginning, however violent, and the aftermath is the ambivalent mixture of unthinkable sadness and world-changing depth of meaningfulness. The shoreline of the Caribbean. Landscape of pain, landscape of beauty. *Black salt*.

In terms of the trajectory of Glissant's thought, it is worth noting that my own reading of his poetics works from the insight into *tout-monde*, something largely elaborated in and after *Poetics of Relation*, backward to and through his notion of Caribbeanness. The early treatment of the

Caribbean as a rhizome, most clearly described in the essays collected in *Caribbean Discourse* and further refined in a creolization of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in *Poetics of Relation* and *Introduction à une poétique du divers*, is on my reading akin to a metaphysics of Antillanité that later becomes and ethics, politics, and aesthetics of globalized cultural contact. As a site of irreducible mixture and creolizing work, Caribbeaness is not strictly speaking a theory of global cultural contact, Relation, and fecundity. And yet it is. So, in what follows I most surely mix vocabularies that are not contemporaneous. For a certain kind of scholar, I imagine that will warrant a pause or two, but ultimately the argument of this book, however quietly so (let me announce it here), is for a continuity across Glissant's work—a continuity we see when reading with the frame of loss, trauma, memory, and ruins. Thinking in ruins, which is productive rather than (solely) melancholic, is already thinking the archipelago as a geography of the globe and the geography of thought. The archipelago is already the crossroads of the world, so the Caribbean of Caribbeaness is already *tout-monde* in memory, history, and experience, if not word and concept.

But that is to have-thought. There is first the question of beginning. We start with the abyss. This is Glissant's founding thought. And the abyss is an irretrievable sense of loss. The Middle Passage has no representation. Rather, the Middle Passage is simultaneously the evacuation of meaning and the beginning of being, becoming, knowing, and thinking.

How does philosophy think in this space, which is neither simply paradoxical (it resolves in Caribbeaness) nor ambivalent (Caribbeaness is neither backward nor truncated)? I think this is Glissant's most challenging question to us, and it is not one that, to my mind, has been systematically treated in a philosophical register. I want to move the question of the Middle Passage to the center of philosophical thinking about language, time, history, memory, embodiment, subjectivity, aesthetics, and the very idea of the task of thinking itself. Glissant's poetry and poetics comprise decades of testimony to the centrality of the Middle Passage and demonstrate how thinking at the shoreline, the site of arrival and memory and futurity, makes Caribbeaness a distinctive intellectual force. For philosophical thinking, in the context of the Americas and more broadly across the globe, this motif and Glissant's work generally remain a relatively new proposal. While questions of race and racism have slowly moved into the horizons of white European and American philosophy, we have not seen the experience of mass displacement, death, and forced migration taken

seriously as founding philosophical moments, concepts, and revolutionary reconstructions and deconstructions of meaning. That is the global context. But beginning with the Middle Passage is also a revision of the anticolonial and postcolonial prerogative of so much midcentury francophone thought in the Caribbean and Africa—Frantz Fanon, Léopold Senghor, and Aimé Césaire, in particular. Rather than resistance to domination and visions of futurity that flow from anti- and postcolonial visions, abyssal beginning is a story about the intersection of traumatic loss and world-making. Creolization rather than new humanism, as it were. Afro-Caribbean world-making, rather than genealogies of ideas of race and their decimating after-effects. There is already beginning and world. Here, Glissant breaks from the midcentury moment. Here, creolization makes *créolité* possible.

In a certain sense, and broadly speaking, we could say that philosophy as such—understood as engagement with the conditions of knowing, being, and creating in the mode of the interrogative²—has not yet fully reckoned with the transformative experience of trauma and its disruption of all conventional understandings of history, memory, and language. No matter the geography, the character of philosophy, especially in its white Western register, has in many ways aspired to be outside the vicissitudes of cultural and political life. That purity, which is its own kind of imperial cultural imagination and political conservatism, insulates much of philosophy from one of thought's greatest enigmas: How do we come to terms with the wreckage of history, as Benjamin put it, and how do we think responsibly and attentively after catastrophe? Postwar Jewish philosophy has of course taken just this question seriously. After the Shoah, what remained for thinking? How do we think the remains, such as they are, of disaster? This is the question of trauma. But what is the philosophical significance of traumatic beginning in other geographies? For, every reason, every thinking, is geographic. We begin *in place*. Caribbeanness names beginning in the archipelago, a site of traumatic beginning and life after. What is the Middle Passage, thought as traumatic memory and traumatic after-affect/-effect, to philosophical thinking?

The emergence of trauma studies in the late 1990s changed so much about how we understand memory and history in the Western context. Fantasies of transparency, iterability, and cohesion in representation were halted by reflection on the historical experience of catastrophe. Coming to presence in representation, the argument begins, bears an important rela-

tion to memory. When memory functions, representation functions. But when memory is confounded, dissociated, and disoriented by traumatic experience—catastrophic historical events being exemplary cases—we can no longer conceive representation on the conventional model or models. Perhaps representation itself poses the wrong question, labors with the wrong logic and the wrong aspiration. Thus, the problem of the unrepresentable, saturated with so many ethical, epistemological, and aesthetic enigmas, quickly becomes the central problem not just of memory studies but of an ethics of historical study and historiography. What, indeed, is the West's long twentieth century if not a long story about trauma? Altering the meaning of memory, history, and representation alters the very significance of thinking and culture—*meaning itself*. Perhaps the fantasy of “conventional” memory is the problem. Perhaps traumatic memory is the convention, the common, and the shared.

In the white European tradition, there was of course a ready-made audience and seat for the interpretation and extrapolation of traumatic memory. Not only the Shoah but also the frenzy of trench warfare in World War I had already prepared European sensibilities for rather bleak figures of memory and history. This is reflected in a cluster of intellectual trends concerned with authoritarianism, eliminationist violence, and the complicated work of mourning. Indeed, beginning with the early Frankfurt School—Walter Benjamin's essays in particular, but also Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's groundbreaking work on anti-Semitism—white European philosophy discovered how deeply transformative and destructive the transmission of historical pain proves to be for notions of time, space, subjectivity, and community. This is no philosophical niche or special science. Philosophy as such can never be the same after registering this sense of historical experience, an experience in which the ethereal character of theoretical reflection and rhetoric about “the tradition” is put in question by the other or Other's history of cultural and political practices. Since tradition is historical, and history bequeaths, in an essential pairing, pain with its ideas, the very notion of a tradition is implicated in traumatic experience. So, to put it wholly immanent to “the tradition,” the passage of ideas and values—so prized by intellectual communities concerned with reproducing themselves—is suddenly disrupted by alternative, even absolutely contradictory experiences of the lifeworld. These experiences are the sorts of individual and collective experiences that comprise the foundations of philosophical discourse. One can see here how so much

of the work of Emmanuel Levinas, Maurice Blanchot, Jacques Derrida, Jean-François Lyotard, and others reflects a post-traumatic reinvention of European philosophy. And one can also see how such critical interventions, rooted as they are in the pain and loss of historical violence and exclusion, might claim to have upended the loftiest pretensions of the white West and exposed its central myths of presence, transparency, and, in the end, *universality*.

Two features of this discourse stand out for me. First, such discourse has rarely, if ever, displayed humility around, or even qualification of, claims regarding singularity, “history and memory,” and related problems of coming to terms with traumatic experience in theoretical study. Even as works on melancholia, loss, failure of representation, and the like were posed as contestations of white Western delusions of presence, Hegelian history, Platonic forms of knowing, and the troubling hegemonic functions of language, many of the same motifs were smuggled in quietly, functioning still in the foundations of the conclusions drawn. Are we really talking about the end of *history* as such? Or are we talking about the end of a certain conceptions of history, and therefore certain forms and figures of ethno-racialized historical experience and transmission that, in the end, are bound by a specific geography? These questions, even if rarely asked, are crucial for the sincerity of philosophical work. In fact, they place issues of colonialism and imperial habits of thinking at the center of philosophy. Second, broadly philosophical writing on traumatic experience and its destructive and deconstructive power has rarely taken the history of the Americas seriously, but have instead been content to universalize white European experiences. In this way, the Americas, particularly in the Afro-Caribbean tradition, have functioned as a kind of counter-modernity, to use Paul Gilroy’s characterization of black Atlantic thinking. This narrow resonance in trauma studies, its failure to turn close attention to the Americas, is surely peculiar (to put it generously), for even just the name of the continent and its archipelago carries (or outright says) loss, trauma, and all of those challenges to thinking. And it is not as if the Americas lack such discourse. In fact, in the Caribbean context, thinkers from the middle of the twentieth century (and certainly before) initiated a long and varied meditation on the meaning of the Middle Passage, colonialism, and the postcolonial moment for all the very same issues and others: space, time, subjectivity, memory, history, and, perhaps most decisively, the meaning of a future forged without deep and long-held roots. Forced migration

(the Middle Passage) and enslavement (the plantation) radically alter all senses of relation to the past, and so to any senses of future. This experience demands exploration on its own terms. The radical alteration enacted by forced migration, then the centuries of experience of plantation slavery, carries both figures and claims of loss that are particular to the Middle Passage. One of the lessons of trauma studies generally is that interventions in the problem of memory cast a long shadow, transforming foundational concepts of the human and its possibilities, then realities. What sort of theoretical leisure, intellectual imperialism, or philosophical conservatism has white Western philosophy won for itself by turning away from, in willful ignorance of, the traumatic experiences embedded in the terms *Americas* and *the New World*? And so, too, in that turning away, embedded itself in the whiteness of the West and “the West” as (in Glissant’s turn of phrase) not a place but a *project*?

This question already asks so much. Indeed, the very idea of Europe is in question—namely, whether or not one can conceive this peculiar entity “Europe” without ethically, epistemologically, and metaphysically accounting for its global entanglements. It seems plain to me that the name “Europe” is inextricably woven into the pains and pleasures of global histories, not just as a victim of its own internal violent frenzies or beneficiary of profound intellectual traditions but, at least with the emergence of modernity (and arguably well before), also (if not firstly) as the perpetrator of global violence and participant in destructive, genocidal, and world-changing cultural contact.³ Perhaps this sort of questioning is unwittingly another case of Eurocentrism, where even the effort to “call European ideas into question” ends up reifying the centrality of the European experience of language and history. In that respect, I would say, trauma studies and companion discourses join a long list of allegedly radical critiques that fail to abandon what is so conservative about the institutions of white Western philosophy and related theoretical disciplines: a deep, often unconscious reliance on European models of experience and presumption of their universality. Against this, I argue throughout the present work that traumatic experience must be thought in relation to a *geography of reason*. Trauma, like all constitutive concepts, and indeed the concepts that flow from traumatic beginnings, must be thought in terms of the specificity of *place*. Beginning with and from specificity means reading and rendering

ideas (*reason* in the widest sense) in relation to the contexts in which they emerge. Historicity as *this* history, rather than history *as such*.

I came to this project in response to this question of models of experience and how they quietly reify colonial habits of measure. In particular, I am thinking of how Glissant's notion of archipelagic thinking, a figure and metaphysics of Caribbeanness, shifts our theoretical vocabulary and reveals, in one swift motion, how important it is to break with the figure and metaphysics of continental thinking—a movement, essentially, from unity to fragments. With this notion and all of its attendant shifts, Glissant marks a decisive and genuinely singular postmodern turn in Caribbean theory. It is decisive because he upsets so many habits of thought in the Atlantic world with an embrace of fragmentation, and genuinely singular because the origins of this embrace of fragmentation, unlike the sorts found in poststructuralist theory in the United States and France, lie in the specificity of the Caribbean experience of the Americas. Glissant's point of contrast with *archipelagic thinking*, what he calls *continental thinking*, initiates a distinction that, as I hope to show in the pages that follow, fundamentally overturns the meaning of philosophical thinking. Michael Wiedorn has demonstrated how this figure of the archipelago structures Glissant's later work, and especially how we can read his literary production as a deep rendering of the archipelago.⁴ Wiedorn's notion of the paradox is important here, too: Glissant's figure of the archipelago is a contradiction—a unity out of difference that becomes difference and disunity, then unity, or what Antonio Benítez-Rojo called a “repeating island”—that nevertheless produces a world. What are the ontological, epistemological, and aesthetic implications of this paradox? And what are its origins in the abyss? From memory to philosophy, the genesis of a paradoxical sense of paradox.

Again, Glissant's shift from the continent to the archipelago as a condition and figure of thinking marks his work with a quick, decisive decolonization of thought. With this distinction, Glissant is able to produce a figure of thought that explains what is to my mind a nascent conservatism in so much “radical” theory coming out of Europe and parts of the United States, as well as much of the midcentury Caribbean tradition. Perhaps, to say it again, in critiquing the pretensions of the European tradition, critics—postcolonial, decolonial, or anti-racist—have (at times, at least) unwittingly reified the idea of Europe with an oblique, even unconscious

fidelity to *pensée continentale*. Fragmentation means loss of meaning. Critique proceeds from there. Glissant's fidelity to Caribbean specificity, however, exploring all of the consequences of thinking the New World on its own terms, operates largely outside the internal logic of the Western tradition. The anti-reification of *pensée archipélique*. Fragmentation means creation of meaning. Critique proceeds from there.

And yet Glissant's critical transformation of what we might mean by "philosophy" and its central categories is also immanently engaged with Europe, the United States, and the white Western tradition *at the very same time* that he interprets and puts himself in dialogue with fellow Caribbean writers. This engagement happens at two levels. At a first, and at a largely philological level, close readings of Glissant's texts reveal long-standing and complex critical conversations with Caribbean intellectuals from Aimé Césaire to Frantz Fanon to Derek Walcott to Linton Kwesi Johnson and others alongside a whole cluster of white European theorists, most prominently the work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, but also more quietly with Martin Heidegger, Jacques Derrida, and others. This subtler engagement is a second level at which we must read Glissant's transformation of philosophy. In his elaborate and complicated critique of various ideas of Being, time, and the Other, Glissant forges an implicit but utterly crucial relation to those philosophers at the forefront of so-called postmodernism and its poetic and ethical manifestations. Glissant's explicit and implicit engagements with philosophers and philosophical ideas demonstrate one of his greatest innovations as a thinker: creolization as a first principle of reading and interpretation. The first position of creolization eliminates the terms that usually haunt the study of such cross-Atlantic relationships, namely, the colonial specters of *comparison* and *measure*. The concern, even anxiety, is that white European thought either overwhelms or is used as a way of justifying the legitimacy of black Atlantic thought. Anticolonial reading, of course, jettisons this kind of relation and affirms the legitimacy of black Atlantic thought on its own terms. And this is surely Glissant's starting point as a thinker. The Caribbean tradition needs no outside co-sign. At the same time, his relation to cross-Atlantic thought, crossing old colonial boundaries, is anything but anxious, for creolization is always already a method of *appropriation* in the best and most fecund sense. In place of measure, creolization puts excess. Glissant's relation to white Western philosophers, and indeed philosophy more broadly, is precisely that: the movement from measure to excess, a

writerly embodiment of what he comes to call the thought of *tout-monde*. Excessive thought, excessive relation and Relation, is not threatened by its Other, even the colonial Other. I think Hugues Azéradt gets it right when he writes that “Glissant does not reject the principle of influence, he turns it into a principle of relation.”⁵ This is Glissant’s second wave of decolonization, I would argue, a wave that re-addresses what had, in the first wave, been jettisoned in the name of self-authorization and self-authoring. Paradox can only begin to describe this relation. Paradox produces abundance, rather than paralyzing or confounding contradiction. As Wiedorn’s title has it, Glissant calls us to *think* like an archipelago, not just frame thought *as* an archipelago. Relation is therefore dynamic, productive, dangerous, and alive with fecund engagement and appropriation. It is the sort of eventfulness, the sort of excessive excess, that underlines Alexandre Leupin’s argument that Glissantian philosophical thinking gives way, or ought to give way, to poetry—the language of *tout-monde*, the language of archipelagic thinking, the language of paradox that resolves and dissolves.⁶ Anxious relations become relations of Chaos. The *monde* of *tout-monde*. Critical Atlantic relations are transformed.

In this context, we can begin to understand why, in *Introduction à une poétique du divers*, Glissant characterizes his work as a *para-philosophy* (IPD, 82), a characterization noted and expanded upon by Georges Desportes in his short book on Glissant.⁷ Much of the meaning of that sense of philosophy—the logic and economy of *para-* as a decisive supplement and hyphen—will be demonstrated as the chapters below unfold, but a word or two can be said here. To begin, Glissant’s self-articulation and self-portrait, which get even more explicit and compelling treatment in *Philosophie de la relation*, give important textual credence to my claim in the present project that Glissant ought to be read as a philosopher. In *Introduction à une poétique du divers*, for example, Glissant defines the philosophical sense of his work in terms of his dedication to the science of Chaos and its mergence with *tout-monde*. I take this programmatic—or even summary—statement as a broad claim that *pensée archipélique* intervenes in the meaning of metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, and aesthetics—and even logic, if one reads Glissant’s reflections on contradiction and paradox in that context. Put another way, a poetics of *tout-monde* changes everything about philosophy. As well, and this is one of the interesting effects of the mixture of opacity and creolization in the poetics of Relation, the addition of *para-* to *philosophy* loops the term back into

itself. So much is at stake in this loop. With the Caribbean and experience of the New World as an interpretative frame and stage for thinking, one can read para-philosophy as a defense of a poetics of Relation and other of Glissant's motifs *against* white Western philosophy and its pretensions or efforts to neutralize the geography and universalization of historical experience. *Para-philosophy as an anticolonial defense of place.* Or, in a second moment of a double reading of the term, para-philosophy can (also) be read as warding off those temptations precisely insofar as para-philosophy *becomes* philosophy. Rather than warding off philosophy with a poetics, then, para-philosophy becomes philosophical in the distance it gains from the currency of *pensée continentale*, that stock-in-trade of the white West's "love of wisdom." *Para-philosophy as a postcolonial articulation of place.*

These are promissory notes, of course.

The introduction and chapters that follow are nearly exclusively concerned with Glissant's theoretical work, an interpretative choice that both brings out the philosophical nuances of his thought most clearly and limits the scope of my claims. Much has been written about Glissant's literary work by authors such as J. Michael Dash, Celia Britton, Bernadette Callier, Valérie Loichot, and others. My debt to those careful studies of Glissant cannot be overstated, and I do not pretend to advance their interpretations of his creative output. In drawing attention to his theoretical work, my work here offers a philosophical interpretation, treatment, and appreciation of Glissant's work on time, space, subjectivity, aesthetics, and the nature of intellectual responsibility. In taking up these issues, Glissant's metaphysical and epistemological sensibilities emerge as foundational to his claims about history, the poetic word, and so many other ideas that cluster to the poetics of Relation. My strategy for demonstrating this philosophical dimension of Glissant's work is rooted in textual exposition and close reading of crucial passages from his theoretical writings. This is a modest aim, really: render the theoretical implications and foundations of Glissant's claims from the texts themselves. Such a commitment to primary texts means that critical assessment is largely set aside in favor of the clarification of ideas. A systematic treatment of Glissant's philosophical dimension, to my mind, warrants such a commitment; the texts are that complicated and need exactly this sort of careful interpretative attention. At the same time, the hermeneutic exercises undertaken in each chapter frame a reading of Glissant with companion discourses,

discourses that are often in instructive tension with his work. Juxtaposition clarifies. Thus, figures such as Heidegger, Césaire, Fanon, Deleuze, Benjamin, and others function below as interlocutors whose ideas either clarify by way of contrast, are explicitly present in the text, or are evoked, often quietly, in the course of Glissant's slow development of ideas. In that sense, I want my interpretative frames to make the creative dimension of reading of Glissant's theoretical work clear and evident, the part of interpretation that engages from particular, explicitly articulated critical angles, and with, one hopes, incisive queries. Glissant's articulation of the process of cultural contact—which in this context is another name for reading and interpretation—requires, at the very least, the hermeneutic honesty of making the conditions of that reading and interpretation explicit.

In all, this book moves back and forth across its own title. The Middle Passage and the abyss are problems of beginning. Beginning is perhaps philosophy's most persistent and enigmatic question. How do we commence thinking? How is the commencement of thinking related to historical experience and complicated intellectual geographies? These questions have dominated much of post-World War II white European philosophy, to be sure, but are also constitutive of the very meaning of Caribbean theory since that same period. The difference between these sites of resonance marks the very meaning of philosophy. *Glissant, Philosophy, and the Middle Passage*—if historical experience initiates and structures the movement of thought, movement in and from *beginning*, then Glissant's beginning, as with any sense of beginning in the Americas, begins with the trauma of arrival and the Middle Passage. This arrival, as we will see, builds an abyss into beginning, an abyss that is further doubled in what I call a *shoreline thinking* that is sited, cited, and caught sight of between the Middle Passage and the composition of composite cultural forms. The Middle Passage renders beginning abyssal. Glissant's poetics makes philosophy out of this beginning. It is witness to water, sand, sun, death, and life.

Notes

Preface

1. For this reason, I think Eric Prieto's characterization of Glissant as a post-postcolonial thinker is both intriguing and largely accurate—though I would categorize much of what he names as “postcolonial” (characterized by militancy and nationalist politics) as “anticolonial.” But that is a small terminological matter, and Prieto is right in this naming, then renaming, of Glissant's work in the context of what “postcolonial” means in our academic idiom. See Eric Prieto, “Édouard Glissant, *Littérature-monde*, and *Tout-monde*,” *Small Axe* 33, no. 3 (November 2010): 111–20. As well, on the distinction in Glissant's work between anticolonial and postcolonial in terms of language and the people, see the short but insightful remarks by Florian Alix, “Je, tu, nous et les autres: Le ‘versant subjectif’ des essais d'Édouard Glissant,” *Presence Africaine* 184, no. 2 (2011): 37.

2. The meaning of the term “philosophy” and its mode of thinking is simultaneously the crucial and the impossible question here. It is crucial because this book is an argument about the possibilities of philosophical thinking after the Middle Passage, which suggests that we ought to know what “philosophy” means before beginning reflection. And of course the meaning of philosophy as an approach or term will inevitably be entangled with histories of colonialism, violence, and specters of white Eurocentrism. I let this issue settle here, in the preface, as “engagement with the conditions of knowing, being, and creating in the mode of the interrogative” in order to keep the boundaries of philosophy open. Non-white Eurocentric engagement with philosophy is for me about two shifts. First, *away* from philosophy as an inherent characteristic of a given text (rational argumentation, adherence to contemporaneous conventions of formal and informal logic—something, by the way, that has never strictly applied to even the foundations of “Western” thought in the Presocratics and Plato) and toward philosophy as a method of reading. Philosophy is a way of discerning conceptual moves in a given text, which is of course what philosophers in the Eurocentric traditions have always done (while often calling it something different, then deploying that difference as a form of intellectual imperialism). Second, *toward* multiple genres of texts and traditions of rendering thought public, from poetry to drama to language innovation to vernacular culture to cuisine and fashion. These are all

interventions in questions of knowing, being, and creating, every bit as philosophical as a Kantian deduction or formal argument in Searle, and they ought to be read as such.

At the same time, while saying at least that much about what “philosophy” means, we cannot know what is meant by philosophical thinking outside the experience of reading the text (thought broadly, beyond the written word to encompass mediums of meaning-making) itself. That is, the readings of Glissant that follow demonstrate philosophical significance inside the readings themselves; only the most general shape of their meaning can be described ahead of time. This is what it means to say that philosophy is not an inherent characteristic of a text, but rather a method of reading. Philosophy is *displayed in the act of reading*, drawn out in a philosophical *treatment* of a text, as staining a piece of wood makes otherwise hidden or subtle grains bold and striking. Reading philosophically—with an eye for questions of knowing, being, and creating—discerns the philosophical dimension. Intertwining the frame of reading with the innovations of the text—therein lies the transformation of what is meant by philosophy and how notions of knowing, being, and creating emerge as new, provocative, capable of altering how we think about thinking.

3. This is a centerpiece of my *Levinas and the Postcolonial: Race, Nation, Other* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), asking how Europe is thought after entangling it in its entanglements.

4. Michael Wiedorn, *Think Like an Archipelago: Paradox in the Work of Édouard Glissant* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2017). Wiedorn’s book draws out the notion of paradox in Glissant’s work, but in many ways I think it does not think hard enough about the paradoxical function of paradox. Glissant employs paradox as a deconstructive method; it halts the movement of arrow-like thinking. But the halt is always surpassed by the fecundity of Chaos—the paradoxical function of paradox is that it makes perfect sense, rather than simply confounding sense. My argument here is thus an extension and modification of Wiedorn’s motif, neither a critique nor an affirmation.

5. Hugues Azérad, “Édouard Glissant and the Test of Faulkner’s Modernism,” in *American Creoles: The Francophone Caribbean and the American South*, ed. Celia Britton and Martin Munro (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012), 204.

6. Alexandre Leupin, *Édouard Glissant, philosophe: Héraclite et Hegel dans le Tout-Monde* (Paris: Hartmann, 2016).

7. See also Georges Desportes, *La paraphilosophie d’Édouard Glissant* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2008). While largely impressionistic and suggestive, Desportes offers an interesting and convincing sketch of both how Glissant’s work is philosophical and how para-philosophy is not, as he says, “philosophy *tout court*” (8). Part of my argument in the present work, however, is that Glissant’s theoretical

writings are more broadly philosophical than Desportes allows in the programmatic passages from his book, even as the content of *La paraphilosophie d'Édouard Glissant* seems to make a case for a wide-ranging resonance of Glissant's work as philosophy.

Introduction

1. It is noteworthy here both how Glissant's nonfiction writings move between Europe and the Americas, with little attention to Africa or Africanness (his fiction and poetry are a bit different, in particular his novel *The Fourth Century*), and how my own hermeneutic throughout brackets the question of Africa. This is an interpretative decision, one that, I would note, sets aside the important question of the meaning of Africa and Africanness for theorizing creolization in Glissant's work—a limit to my project, no question, and really a matter of focus.

On the place of Africa in Glissant's poetry, see the short and insightful essay by Michel Bernier, "L'Afrique dans la poésie d'Édouard Glissant," in *Horizons d'Édouard Glissant*, ed. Yves-Alain Favre and Antonio Ferreira de Brito (Biarritz: J&D Editions, 1992), 255–64.

2. I have argued for the necessity of decolonizing Europe in a number of contexts, most systematically in *Levinas and the Postcolonial: Race, Nation, Other* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011)—see especially the introduction and chapter 5.

3. See my "Elsewhere of Home" in *Between Levinas and Heidegger*, ed. John E. Drabinski and Eric Nelson (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2015), 245–60, where I explore the important notions of home and homelessness in European theory and the New World context, with special emphasis on the problem of language.

4. Celia Britton's *Édouard Glissant and Postcolonial Theory: Strategies of Language and Resistance* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1999) makes a long and convincing argument for the centrality of language to questions of identity in Glissant's work, and is also sensitive to the shifts and nuances in his engagement with those issues across the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s.

5. Martin Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, trans. and intro. Joan Stambaugh (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 48.

6. Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," trans. Albert Hofstadter, in *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), 42.

7. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography," in *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1988), 209.

8. Walter D. Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin America* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 2005), 119.

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