

# Introduction

The countries that I inhabit spread out like stars, in archipelagoes.

—Glissant, *Traité du Tout-Monde*

“*Nothing is True, all is living.*” That gnostic proclamation provided the title of Édouard Glissant’s last public lecture at his beloved Institut du Tout-Monde in Paris. It also, in something of a ludic gesture, served as the epitaph on his tomb at the Diamant Cemetery in Martinique. Among the last of the long suite of aphorisms that Glissant spent a considerable part of his creative life generating and repeating, that declaration is of course an echo of the classic “liar’s paradox”: if it is the case that nothing is true, then what are we to make of that proposition itself, or for that matter of the one that immediately follows it? Are they true, or false, or both, or rather something else entirely? Glissant’s puzzling, final formulation indicates just how far his thought had come in nearly sixty years of intellectual production. It also creates a dilemma for critical reception of his vast body of work today.

The late twentieth century would hear a near-unanimous chorus of praise for Glissant emanating from academics working in the Anglo-American academy. “A leading French public intellectual,” Glissant had, in Charles Forsdick’s words, “emerged, beyond the French-speaking world, as an internationally recognizable, some would say ‘Nobel-ready,’ intellectual” (“Late Glissant” 124). For J. Michael Dash, Glissant was “the major writer and theorist from the French West Indies”; he had, for Françoise Lionnet, “outlined the task of the postcolonial intellectual” (Dash, *Glissant* 5; Lionnet, *Autobiographical Voices* 245). By the time of his passing in 2011 he had become, and rather despite himself, “an ideological founding father, the precursor of a national renaissance” (Dash, “The Poetics of Risk” 104).

In his *Caliban's Reason: Introducing Afro-Caribbean Philosophy*, Paget Henry's endorsement of Glissant's "project" of creolization proclaims it to be "the context in which we can envision the reenfranchising of African and Afro-Caribbean philosophies, the reestablishing of their ability to accumulate authority and their capacity for ontological resistance" (88). Nick Nesbitt, in turn, found Glissant to be "the foremost postcolonial thinker in the Francophone world" ("The Postcolonial Event" 103). And Nesbitt would later use Glissant's name as a bookend to mark the end of an episteme, opposite the name of a very different sort of Antillean icon, in his *Caribbean Critique: Antillean Critical Theory from Toussaint to Glissant* (2013). There, Nesbitt would hold that "Glissant's corpus is the single most developed and philosophically sophisticated body of work in the tradition of Caribbean Critique" (238).

The argument that binds together the impressive array of ideas in Nesbitt's study bears repeating, however, as it is far from self-evident. Nesbitt shows that there indeed exists a way of theorizing and undertaking critique that can be cogently aligned with the last two hundred years of history in that particular region of the Caribbean basin. There *is*, in short, a Caribbean critique, or Theory, even a Caribbean Philosophy. But Nesbitt's decision to pair Glissant with Toussaint Louverture, the Haitian revolutionary leader who joined philosophical critique with praxis to the utmost degree, is something of a tricky one. What, in the last analysis, do the two really have in common?

Chris Bongie's work on Glissant affords us a possible answer to that question, one that is remarkable for its cynicism. As he breaks from the enraptured masses that make up the majority of Glissant's readers, Bongie sums up the sentiment that has led a small yet vocal group of critics to rethink their estimation of Glissant.

An increasing number of academic readers of Glissant have, in line with Hallward, understandably registered a certain unease, and even distress, when it comes to his later writings, which, in their espousal of the 'fecund exaltation of the sense of uncertainty' (2005, 219). . . . clearly align themselves with a non-adversarial 'post-political vision' that has no grounds for 'challenging existing power relations' (Mouffe, 2005, 51). Those who wish to continue representing the writings of Glissant as 'a postcolonial intervention, an insurgent discourse with an alternative sense of nationhood and spatial connection' (Hitchcock, 2003, 43), and to speak

of him as being a ‘revolutionary writer[] in situ’ (59), certainly have their work cut out for them. (*Friends and Enemies* 339)

If we are to follow Bongie, then, it would seem that by the time of his “later writings” there remained little or nothing at all of Toussaint in Glissant. A turn in Glissant’s thought, in other words, would later lead his more scrupulously politicized academic readers to turn away from him. Their disappointment when faced with what Bongie labels Glissant’s “indisputably ‘highbrow’ theory” is to some degree understandable (Bongie, *Friends and Enemies* 340). How, after all, are we to reconcile the youthful Glissant of the 1950s, a hot-blooded partisan of Martinican independence, or the fierce critic of neocolonialism and imperialism in his monumental collection *Le discours antillais* (1981), with the increasingly abstruse and even utopian essayist who could meaningfully, and quite literally *finally*, assert in 2010 that “nothing is true, all is living”?

This book will argue that the increasing prominence of paradox in Glissant’s thought from roughly the early 1990s until his passing in 2011 can help to account for that supposed disjunction. Rather than constituting a weakness, paradox proves to play a key role in Glissant’s political and aesthetic ambitions. It allows Glissant to pursue his—arguably quite political—goal of using art to breathe new life into thought. In the pages to follow, I will argue that a set of the core ideas in the vast and multifarious corpus of Glissant’s writing can best be understood in terms of the author’s long-term objective of using paradox to reformulate some of the fundamental categories of Western thought. That undertaking, ambitious enough in itself, was part of a greater goal: Glissant sought to elicit radical change in the world, whether in large-scale political institutions or in human beings’ most basic ways of interacting with one another in their daily lives. Plainly put, for Glissant, our world was desperately in need of a colossal transformation, and one that only the philosopher-poet could bring about. As he campaigned for what he called an “enormous insurrection of the imaginary faculties” or for a “new category of literature,” his ultimate, utopian aim was to bring about political change, nothing short of the birth of a new world (CL 24–25; NR 96).<sup>1</sup>

The Caribbean was, for Glissant, a wellspring of potential for launching that insurrection. For him, engaging with and coming to understand, if not fully *grasp* (a key distinction in Glissantian parlance), Caribbean cultures and landscapes could elicit change in humankind’s ways of imagining and acting. Implicit, then, in Glissant’s larger project of *rethinking* basic

categories of thought, or of rethinking even thought itself, is the sense that the Caribbean cultural zone can serve as a source of inspiration and at times as an archetype for that enterprise of rethinking. Glissant's reason for according such primacy to the Caribbean lies in what he believed to be that region's unmistakable particularities. A list of them might begin with the geographical form of the archipelago, and move on to cultural and linguistic creolization, or open with Caribbean subjects' search for origins, haunted as it is by the lingering presence-absence of the transatlantic slave trade, going on to the necessarily paradoxical modes of artistic representation engendered by the plantation system's downfall.

In another instance of Caribbean particularity that Glissant cites, the play of rootedness and relation that the tiny countries of the Caribbean have long known so well looks very much like the radical interconnection within difference that is (for him) the hallmark of the (post)modern condition. In other words, Glissant believes that a way of being inherent to the whole of the Caribbean in all of its many linguistic and political forms—a fundamental unity within the context of diversity that is reflected in the title of Van Haesendonck and D'Haen's scholarly collection titled *Caribbeing* (2015)—has much to teach the rest of the world. But if we are to learn from the Caribbean, we must first change our way of imagining (in) the world. If we do not make that change, Glissant repeatedly admonishes, we will no doubt repeat the historical horrors of the twentieth century (cf. IDP 90–91).

Key to Glissant's strategy of bringing about such a cognitive upheaval is an emphasis on ways of thinking that, while they are no strangers to the Western intellectual tradition, have often proved problematic, if not anathema, to that tradition: namely paradox, and in particular paradox grounded in contradiction. As the *Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology* explains, *paradox*, derived from the Greek *parádoxos*, has in modern English come to refer to a “statement or tenet contrary to received opinion; [a] proposition on the face of it . . . [that is] self-contradictory.” That bipartite definition communicates two different things, both of which are entirely pertinent to Glissant's thought: a paradox will first and foremost break with preconceived and widely shared ideas, and it may also contradict itself. Contradiction, in turn, likewise proves to be altogether germane to what Glissant has set about doing with a set of his core ideas. From the Latin *contra dicere*, contra-diction quite literally signifies “to speak against.” A contradiction is a statement where (at least) two arguments are articulated against one another, or spoken in opposition to one another.

Contradictions lie at the heart of many a paradox, and Glissant's penchant for phrasings such as "saying the unsayable" is impossible to overlook (cf. FM 190, et passim). Furthermore, the modern world has, for Glissant, become a "non-systematic system," one that is most properly understood as an "immobile movement" (TTM 248, 12). But what is it about the Caribbean per se that inclines that region, its cultures, and its peoples, toward paradox? In a number of ways, the Caribbean exemplifies the paradoxical, modern zeitgeist for Glissant: there, subjects are at once rooted and adrift, deeply connected to a place that they inhabit, but also profoundly aware that there is much more to the world than their island. In other words, they are both conscious of the entire world as one, a totality, *and* firmly anchored in the particularity of their own place, which is but one among many. In yet another manifestation of paradox, the Glissantian model of the self truly knows the other precisely through *not* knowing him or her, through acknowledging, even rejoicing in, what Glissant calls the other's opacity. Glissant found that particular mode of relating to the other to be exemplified in the curious intermingling of intimate knowledge and inexorable ignorance that defined William Faulkner's portrayal of his black characters. And Faulkner's literary representations of the postplantation societies of the US Gulf South demonstrated, in Glissant's eyes, that region's fundamental kinship with what he saw as the other creole societies of the Caribbean or Brazil.

Like Faulkner's, Glissant's own novels can offer a staging ground for a paradoxical approach to quest narratives. In a repeated schema, Glissant shows the Caribbean subject's desire for his or her cultural origins, or for a clear and undisputable family tree, to be just as impossible as it is inevitable. The novelistic genre allowed Glissant to present his idea that the *search* for such objects of desire itself holds more creative, aesthetic potential than true attainment ever could. That very process, in other words, proves to be more productive than the product it seeks.<sup>2</sup> Elsewhere, in yet another manipulation of paradox, Glissant's vision of philosophy as manifested in his 2009 book *Philosophie de la Relation (Philosophy of Relation)* frames the Mother of all Disciplines as being at its most powerful when it undoes itself, which is to say, when it is non- or other-than-philosophical—in other words, when the philosophical discipline is rewritten from what Glissant frames as a Caribbean perspective.

Those instances of paradox can be crystallized into four ideas that have, to varying degrees, played key roles in the Western philosophical tradition: totality, alterity, teleology, and philosophy itself. Those categories

are reflected in the four thematic axes of this book, with each accorded one chapter. As Glissant works to rewrite those philosophemes, now well-worn with age and use, he imbues each with Caribbean-derived paradoxes, gradually developing his own approach to them over the decades. Glissant's rethinkings of totality, alterity, teleology, and philosophy form a conceptual archipelago, a cluster of interrelated, key terms that relate and relay to one another. They do so as his many, and many-voiced, narrators relate the story of his thought's unfolding.

The strategy of taking up ideas that are central to the Western intellectual tradition and reformulating them with a Caribbean inflection is, moreover, central to Glissant's long-term critique of the West. By the "West" Glissant does not mean the physical space occupied by the nation-states that have collectively come to be known by that name, but rather what those countries have done and, at times, continue to do. In his apt phrasing, "The West does not lie to the west. It's not a place, it's a project" (DA 14). That "project" has taken on a host of forms, from slavery and colonial expansion to neocolonialism and what Glissant saw as today's pernicious globalization. What is more, those military and economic moves have their reflections in the depredations of colonial and neocolonial reason in the epistemological register. A, perhaps *the*, example for Glissant of the West-as-project is the French *mission civilisatrice*, the banner under which the French colonial project unfolded. The "civilizing mission" brought about the eliding of the other's difference, via a forceful assimilation into modes of governance, education, and jurisprudence that were somehow very French but also purportedly "universal." If we are to avoid repeating and prolonging history's errors, Glissant tells us, we need to find alternatives to the West-as-project. But in order to do that, it is incumbent on us to work up a different way of imagining our world.

On the other hand, it is crucial to note that the West was not a simple and unadulterated evil for Glissant. As if in response to Audre Lorde's oft-misquoted admonition to the effect that the "master's tools will never dismantle the master's house," Glissant has taken a markedly different tack in his critique of the Western tradition. In fact, he is not concerned only or even principally with tearing down the "house" with respect to which he, and Francophone Caribbean writers more generally, occupies a position of simultaneous interiority and exteriority. Glissant's critical mission, in other words, is not mired in the stage of negation. On the contrary, it is deeply and abidingly concerned with creation, with bringing new ideas into the world, with crafting new literary genres and means of expression, and with

striving to open up a space for an unabashedly utopian politics. The tools that Glissant has taken up for that task are paradox and contradiction, and he has begun his own dismantling—and rebuilding—using materials from his own particular place: the place, at once (and paradoxically) one and multiple, that is the Caribbean.

## Postcolonial Paradoxes, Caribbean Contradictions

The appreciation that there is something of the paradoxical in the very fabric of Caribbean reality is made manifest in scholarly titles such as Jeannie Suk's *Postcolonial Paradoxes in French Caribbean Writing* (2001) or Natasha K. Barnes's *Cultural Conundrums: Gender, Race, Nation and the Making of Caribbean Cultural Politics* (2006), both of which foreground the idea of culture-as-dilemma. Similarly, in her essay on authorship in the Francophone Caribbean, Dominique Chancé alerts her readers early on that contradiction is germane to the Caribbean condition.

One of the terms that will no doubt return the most often over the course of this essay is perhaps the word “contradiction.” [Contradiction] is, it would seem, at the center of a universe where cultural tensions are extreme, where the shock of cultures and races, of Histories and languages, leads each person to be diglossic, or bilingual, bicephalous, at times schizophrenic, always ambiguous. The Antilles, drawn taught between France and the Caribbean, between their diverse origins and their multiple cultures, cannot but be contradictory. (*L'Auteur en souffrance* 5)

It is not difficult to comprehend why Glissant might consider his own Caribbean island to be an exemplary space of paradox and contradiction when one takes into account the politico-cultural situation of the parts of the French nation-state that lie within the Caribbean basin. Glissant's home of Martinique maintains a peculiar relationship to Europe: it is politically a part of Europe, but of course physically quite distant from Europe. Given that it shares continental France's educational and legal systems and is economically controlled by France, Martinique can of course be said to be *of* the West in various ways. But one need not look far to see all that is other-than-European in Martinique. In short, Martinique finds itself in something of a contradictory *both/and* position with regard to the

West. One might say that it is *in* but not *of* Europe, but the converse is also quite true.

Consequently, if there is to be found on this earth a fetishized space of pure and radical difference with regard to the West, we can be reasonably sure that such a space does not lie within the Francophone Caribbean. The now well-known first lines of the *Éloge de la créolité* (*In Praise of Creoleness* [1990]) point to this contradictory state of being and not-being at once, as they define their “creoleness” through negation. The *créolistes* proclaim that creoleness entails being “Neither Europeans, nor Africans, nor Asians . . .” (13). But by the same token, and given the near-ubiquitous celebration of mixing, blending, hybridity, and/or creolization among a highly visible number of Caribbean authors and their academic critics, those now well-known lines could just as well have been written otherwise, by expunging the “Neither” and substituting an “and” for each “nor.” Creoleness, which Glissant finds himself at pains to distinguish from creolization (to his great chagrin, the *créolistes* had claimed him as their source of inspiration), would therefore constitute something radically new, but also something familiar, at one and the same time (PR 103).

If the Francophone Caribbean is to be taken as contradictory in itself, compelling arguments have been made to the effect that the lived experience of the Caribbean writer is emblematic of that “bicephalous,” “schizophrenic” way of being (Chancé, *L'Auteur en souffrance* 5). The sentiment that the Caribbean writer him- or herself lives and works within a state of suspended contradiction has been shared both by critics and by some of the luminaries of Caribbean literature alike. Chancé, for example, has cast the lived experience of the Caribbean author as being *en souffrance*. *En souffrance* in a literal sense might refer to a body experiencing real, physical suffering, perhaps even mortal agony. But the phrasing is also an official formula used to describe a letter that is still in transit, not having arrived at its destination. Similarly, a debt that is *en souffrance* is an outstanding debt, and by definition one whose nonpayment presents a problem. Hence, the multiple relevance of the phrasing *en souffrance* to Chancé’s fundamental sense that there is something profoundly troubled and unsettling about the state of the Caribbean writer today.

Chancé opens her *L'Auteur en souffrance: Essai sur la position et la représentation de l'auteur dans le roman antillais contemporain (1981–1992)* (*The Author en Souffrance: Essay on the Position and the Representation of the Author in the Contemporary Caribbean Novel (1981–1992)*) by citing a forcefully blunt claim from the *Éloge de la créolité*’s second page: “Caribbean



literature does not yet exist. We are still in a state of pre-literature . . ." (1). Glissant shared that sense of being a writer who somehow did not exist, engaged in the production of literature that was likewise nonexistent, defining himself humbly as a mere "writer of prefaces for a future literature" (Chancé, *L'Auteur en souffrance* 1). Such claims are of course themselves paradoxical. As Chancé quite rightfully points out, Caribbean authors obviously do write and see their work published; it is clear that one can with all reasonableness speak of Caribbean authors who produce Caribbean literature. But those same authors, she illustrates, tend to hold strong views on the dolorous lack of an independent Martinican nation-state and the psychological and political effects thereof, or on the tenuous and historically hierarchical opposition of written and oral language in whose shadow their work unfolds (*L'Auteur en souffrance* 2–3). For that reason, Chancé takes as her point of departure the premise that "the author of works written in the Antilles, and particularly of novels, defines him/herself in a paradoxical manner, as an inadequate, lacking figure" (*L'Auteur en souffrance* 2). There would therefore be, in other words, something always already amiss from the very moment when a Caribbean author sits down to write.

Glissant himself is no exception to this pattern of lived paradox, particularly with regard to his relationship to the "mother country" of France. Again, despite his critiques of the West-as-project throughout his career, Glissant did not, could not, and perhaps never even sought to make anything resembling a clean break with the West. As Glissant acknowledges throughout his work, his intellectual vibrancy channels energy both from his Caribbean home and from the Western intellectual tradition. What is more, some of his readers have gone so far as to imply that Glissant is himself snugly ensconced among the ranks of Western philosophers. For them, Glissant would be the most Deleuzian of Francophone writers today, or even, *pace* Glissant, more Hegelian than Hegel himself (Hallward 441–42; Leupin, "The Slave's Jouissance" 891). And Glissant of course spent the vast majority of his years in the West, publishing in a European language for a primarily European audience, and garnering the laurels offered (down?) to him by Western institutions, beginning with a set of prestigious literary prizes: the Renaudot in 1958 for *La Lézarde*, then the *prix Charles Veillon* for *Le quatrième siècle* in 1964 (Dash, *Glissant* 54).

Symptomatic of that state of ambivalence with regard to the Western tradition is one of the more innovative facets of Glissant's overall project: its conjoining of arguably non-Western, Caribbean elements with genres and ideas familiar to his Western readership. Perhaps the most visible instance

of that juxtaposition is the fact that the crescendo in his self-representation as a philosopher went hand-in-hand with his persistent development of key terms that were immanent to the Caribbean: *creolization*, *archipelagic thought*, or the *Tout-monde*, to take but a few of the most salient examples. As a result, the idea that Glissant's work generated and wielded conceptual tools that he took to be intrinsic to the Caribbean in order to explore alternatives to the Western literary and philosophical traditions underlies the entirety of the present study. And yet, on the other hand, we must be careful to avoid fetishizing "radical difference" (whatever that might mean) as we engage with Glissant. Briefly put, any reader who might open a Glissantian text with an ear straining to perceive a hitherto silenced, subaltern voice, or with a palate yearning to savor a distillation of unadulterated Caribbean authenticity, is bound to be frustrated.

Indeed, one of Glissant's more striking contributions is his emphasis on understanding difference *in* and *as* relation. Rather than holding the Caribbean to be a rarefied space of radical difference, Glissant portrays the Caribbean cultural zone as profoundly and indelibly *in relation* to the West, and also to the rest of the world. Yet further, he inverts traditional hierarchies as he grants the Caribbean a status of primacy within that relationship. Like Glissant, the critic Mary Gallagher accords a position of centrality to the Caribbean in any cogent conceptualization of modernity today. Both she and Glissant posit what might be called a Caribbean ethical imperative. In other words, for Gallagher as for Glissant, the Caribbean is a sort of exemplar for what the world as a whole is becoming, but it is more importantly a model for what the world *ought to be* becoming. Her argumentation is elegant, and merits citing at length.

The contemporary episteme connects in a special way with Caribbean writing, and this congruence explains the privileged place held by francophone Caribbean literature at the turn of the millennium. For this body of writing does not simply illuminate a particular (post)colonial relationship to place, but seems rather to constitute one of the foremost paradigms of diaspora and globalization in the (post)modern world . . . Indeed, writing from this "Other America" is perceived and often, indeed, explicitly represents itself as revealing—prophetically and axiomatically—how humanity inhabits the world today, how we all relate or how we shall shortly relate to space and time, to language and to writing. Moreover, French Caribbean writing,

driven as it is by a hypertrophied theoretical tropism, explicitly claims prophetic status and universal validity, as though the Caribbean were the laboratory of a universal future, in a world compressed by an ever-accelerating approximation of places and cultures. (*Ici-là* xvi–xvii)

The Caribbean is, here, not only exemplary of the *true* nature of the world in modernity; it is also at the vanguard of the world's becoming. Notably, Gallagher shares Glissant's sense that the Caribbean is, as she puts it, the "laboratory of a universal future." That is no small point: simply put, for Gallagher as for Glissant, the Caribbean has served as a proving ground for modernity, and now the entire world is duly coming to resemble the Caribbean in its turn.

They are not alone in holding those beliefs. In Enrico Mario Santí's talk titled "El paradigma, o paradoja, del Caribe" ("The Paradigm, or Paradox of the Caribbean"), given in memory of another Caribbean theorist and reader of Deleuze and Guattari, Antonio Benítez-Rojo, Santí seeks to justify his preconceived point of departure, inspired by Benítez-Rojo's work: that the Caribbean serves as a paradigm for the rest of the world, and for a host of reasons. Santí explains that referring to the Caribbean as a paradigm implies four different things. It means, in Santí's words,

1. that the zone and culture of the Caribbean puts on display, in effect, a paradigm from which we can understand not only these [Caribbean] realities but also other contemporaneous realities, but outside of this zone. Hence [it also means], then,
2. that the existence, the attractiveness and perhaps the predominance of the Caribbean-as-paradigm dictates that, in effect, the entire world is becoming Caribbean. The idea may appear hare-brained to us. But let's think, however, about some facts that tend to confirm it. One is, as we know, global warming. Another, more serious and important, is the [migration of] the Caribbean diaspora towards other developed zones of the globe, principally of the north. That displacement . . . has had the effect of transporting, with the people, their way of being, their vision of the world, and their culture . . . For that reason the relational paradigm of the Caribbean that Édouard Glissant has outlined . . . consists in a foundational encounter—violent, total, traumatic—that today

cannot be avoided. It was not in vain that Benítez-Rojo said, in his essential *The Repeating Island*[,] that the Caribbean, in its lack of a stable cultural origin, contains the seeds of a “postmodern perspective.” . . .

3. Another example that suggests that the world is becoming Caribbean would be this epiphenomenon of postcolonialism and globalization that we once called hybridity [*mestizaje*] and that today, with greater precision, we refer to as creolization. . . .
4. that the Caribbean as paradigm supposes that the world *should become* like the Caribbean; which is to say, the world should take on its paradigm. Because if the Caribbean has managed to survive 500 years of violence and historical and ecological depredation (recall the all-too-recent Haitian earthquake), and has survived thanks to the assimilative mechanisms of creolization, then the rest of the world . . . should learn from it and take on or adopt its paradigm. (58–60)

Creolization has allowed the Caribbean to survive, and it could take on a similarly salubrious role for the rest of the world. Whether we are to agree with Gallagher and Santí or not, the exuberance driving their argumentation is palpable. But if a notable group of Caribbean writers and their academic critics have also, as we have seen, framed Caribbean cultural output as itself paradoxical, a difficulty ensues. How, we are led to ask, might the Caribbean be paradigmatic *and* paradoxical, at one and the same time? After all, Santí additionally points out that a sea separates those two words, given their fundamental semantic contradistinction. As he argues, “*paradigm* signifies pattern, outline, example; *paradox* means ‘contrary to opinion or expectation,’ which is to say, contrary to the pattern, outline or example. Therefore, they are opposed words, and opposed concepts” (58). The kinship suggested by their shared prefix *para* is belied, then, by the fact that the two words have opposite meanings. And a conflicted representation of the Caribbean, as both troublingly paradoxical and exhilaratingly paradigmatic, emerges out of Santí’s conceptual pairing. For Glissant, however, that contradiction proves not to be an obstacle at all; indeed, he seems to draw inspiration from it.

Each of the following four chapters analyzes Glissant’s twofold emphasis on the Caribbean as both paradigm and paradox. Chapter one scrutinizes

one of Glissant's more striking postulates: his idea that the Caribbean can impart to us new ways of thinking the idea of totality, both in an abstract sense and in its concrete reality in our interconnected world today. That Glissantian hypothesis is, moreover, quite anomalous in the contemporary intellectual climate favoring fragmentation and multiplicity over wholeness or oneness. Drawing inspiration from the creole expression *toutt moun*, meaning "everyone," Glissant's idea of the *Tout-monde*, or Whole-world, is all the more relevant when read in the context of the discordant chorus of voices critiquing "globalization" in its various avatars today. Yet more pointedly, Glissant casts his understanding of the contemporary world as *the* example of what a different, post-Hegelian vision of totality might look like. His staunch insistence on a fundamental unity characterizing all existence is all the more noteworthy given that he voices it within the divided house that also shelters the fraught, malleable discourses of World Literature, *Francophonie*, *littérature-monde en français*, or Francophone Postcolonial Studies.

In this as in other things, the Caribbean serves as an archetype for Glissant: as he has repeated for decades, "the entire world is becoming an archipelago and creolizing" (TTM 193–94). That stark assertion is at the center of Glissant's meditations on the relationship of particular places to the totality, and in particular on the role of writing within that place-totality relationship. As we track the unfolding of Glissant's idea of the *Tout-monde* over time, we can see that he contradicts himself as he weaves paradox into that all-encompassing idea. Glissant holds that the *Tout-monde* is our contemporary world at times, and maintains that it is decidedly not that world at others. Elsewhere, he posits that the *Tout-monde* is at once a part of the world and the whole of the world. And the *Tout-monde* may, in the final analysis—if one can properly speak of finality in Glissant's thought—prove to be a *new region of the world*, a world of which one could be forgiven for thinking that there is no corner left unexplored. Glissant's decades-long tinkering with the idea of the *Tout-monde* provides the setting for chapter 1's rereading of Glissantian keywords, such as *Relation*, *creolization*, and *Place*, through the lens of their relationship to paradox.

For Glissant, the globalized state of modernity has brought about, and in fact demands, what he calls a "new category of literature." That new literature yields the backdrop for Glissant's elaboration of his written ethics of alterity. Chapter 2 analyzes Glissant's reading of Faulkner, where Glissant reads the author of the South against the accumulated weight of criticism over the years. That critical tradition has, to Glissant's mind,

become stymied by its focus on Faulkner's racism. Reversing that critical current, Glissant's asseveration is that Faulkner's is in reality a sort of antiracist. As Faulkner's novels fail to develop and breathe life into their black characters, they in fact constitute a testament to a real sincerity on the Southern author's part: painfully aware that the people of African descent who surrounded him would remain forever opaque to him, Faulkner knew them as profoundly unknowable, and so he eschewed representing them. Cognizant that slavery and the plantation system had continued their rot even after their downfall, inexorably poisoning the present, Glissant's Faulkner spoke that unspeakable truth to his white readership. In both of those ways, as Glissant put it, Faulkner "said without saying, saying all the while" (PhR 156).

Whereas Faulkner sought to know the unknowable *as* unknowable (or, better, to un-know the seemingly knowable), and to say the unsayable, Glissant makes visible the invisible in his novel *Sartorius*. *Sartorius*—whose title conspicuously recalls that of Faulkner's novel *Sartoris*—is dedicated to Félix Guattari, and is a visible flirtation with the Deleuzo-Guattarian idea of a minor literature's bringing into being a people who is missing. *Sartorius* also foregrounds a provocative play on the idea of influence, both literary and philosophical: were Faulkner and Deleuze Glissant's intellectual forbears, or was the converse (anachronistically) true? Glissant's literary criticism, when read alongside his own literature, shows us his refiguration of the philosopheme of alterity. In his criticism as in his literature, Glissant highlights the influence of opacity, underscoring in parallel the opacity of influence. Living with(in) the opacity of the other, writing in the shadow of literary and philosophical forefathers (who can at times play the role of antagonists), reaching out to a people that both exists and does not exist: all of these paradoxical yet necessary actions represent Glissant's efforts to set forth an ethics of alterity.

That ethics, both derived from literature and put into practice there, "demand[s] for everyone the right to opacity" (cf. PR 209, et passim). In line with Glissant's overall optimism, his ethics of alterity promises more harmonious ways of being in the world. Glissant is correspondingly Panglossian in his stalwart belief that understanding and living what he calls worldwide *Relation* is as necessary as it is inevitable. Truly embracing what he terms the *imaginary* of Relation is a sine qua non not only of the poetics of Relation but also for a future *politics* of Relation. In the worldwide *polis* that has embraced the imaginary of Relation, there would no longer be even the possibility of repeating the historical aberrations of the twentieth century,

from Stalinism to Sarajevo or the Rwandan genocide (IPD 90–91). This plainly teleological schema of progression toward a positive transformation begs the question of attainment. Otherwise put, how, concretely, might we go about reaching such a clearly desirable state of being?

The goal of chapter 3 is to demonstrate that Glissant has already offered one possible answer to that question, through the peregrinations of his Martinican protagonist Mathieu, in two novels written decades apart: *Le quatrième siècle* (1964) and *Tout-monde* (1995). In the first novel, the young Mathieu seeks to come to terms with the concrete and final truth of his ancestors, those who lived in Africa and those who were brought from there by force across the ocean to Martinique. Mathieu consults Papa Longoué, a *quimboiseur*, or practitioner of a syncretic, Caribbean magico-religious tradition, at the beginning of his quest. What Mathieu learns is that he gains more as he searches than he ever could through obtaining the object of his desire. The novel *Tout-monde*, published a full thirty years later, stages a similar quest narrative as the same Longoué sends Mathieu off into the *Tout-monde* in search of *something*, the nature of which he finally discovers—or not. Insofar as both quest narratives frame attainment as nonattainment, they constitute a rethinking of teleology. Mathieu will never truly and finally arrive at an understanding of a past that is at once lost and lingering on, but his search is valuable in itself. I go on to argue that Glissant's rewriting of the idea of teleology provides a model for our interpretive engagement with his texts as puzzled readers. Like Mathieu, in other words, we readers of Glissant might do well to focus not on the *products* of our engagement with his texts, that is, on what we might grasp in them or get out of them, but rather on the *process* of reading them, of experiencing them and experimenting with them.

Glissant's last book-length essay prolongs that experimentation with the purpose of the interpretive act, and provides the central object of analysis for chapter 4. The very title of *Philosophie de la Relation* (2009) (hereafter *Philosophie*) functions as a performative speech act, affirming its author as a philosopher and his written products as belonging to the philosophical genre. Yet *Philosophie* undermines those moves just as swiftly as it makes them. What would at first glance appear to be a traditional philosophical treatise proves to be a fragmentary text, intermingling definitions of various Glissantian ideas with autobiographical snippets and musings on Martinican landscapes, and ending unpredictably with a paean to William Faulkner. *Philosophie*, I go on to illustrate, amounts to a paradoxical representation of its author's own authority. In *Philosophie* as elsewhere, Glissant

establishes himself as what Foucault called a “universal intellectual,” authorizing himself to pronounce on topics ranging from physics to cosmology, by way of visual art and world history. But *Philosophie* also underscores the book’s authored-ness, illustrating that its arguments emanate from an embodied, fallible individual, as it pauses intermittently to reflect on Glissant’s mother and childhood. In light of *Philosophie*’s recurrent moments of speaking against itself, I ask what we as readers ought to *do* with this excess of quite literal contra-diction in Glissant’s thought. Taking a clue from the confluence of Glissant’s thought with that of Deleuze and Guattari, I propose a new translation of their injunction that is commonly rendered as “Experiment, never interpret” (cf. Deleuze & Parnet 60). The French *expérimenter* means “experiment” but also “experience,” and I argue that the *Philosophie* calls not only for experimenting with the text but also for a particular kind of interpretive experience. The text’s closure, I show, is in the last analysis an opening—and for that reason there can be no last analysis. “[T]he imaginary of the world,” *Philosophie* explains to its readers, refuses to deal in possession or even in knowing. “It concludes nothing. It supposes in an archipelago” (PhR 109).

In conclusion, I return to Glissant’s notion of “archipelagic thinking,” using it as a lens through which to reread the play of paradox and contradiction, both willed and unwilled, in Glissant’s oeuvre. The term *play* is appropriate, as this study’s closing suggests that Glissant consistently embraced the ludic dimension, encouraging and at times even provoking his readers to toy with and use his conceptual tools in order to create ideas and artistic products of their own.

## One Man Was Islands

Glissant, but *which* Glissant? It can be argued without exaggeration that the name *Glissant* points to many authors just as much as it does to one. Glissant wore many hats as a writer, producing poems, novels, essays, pamphlets, anthologies, and theater, in addition to myriad interviews, many of which were later republished as essays. He welcomed playing the role of the engaged, public intellectual in a host of speeches, academic gatherings and interviews, and maintained a pronounced web presence via the websites *edouardglissant.fr* and *tout-monde.com*. Additionally, throughout his nearly sixty years of writing, Glissant metamorphosed recurrently: there was the reflective young student of philosophy and later ethnography, not



incidentally a published poet, from the 1950s on, and later the encyclopedic commentator on virtually all aspects of Caribbean life in the mammoth, 503-page *Le discours antillais* (1981). After *Poétique de la Relation* (*Poetics of Relation*; 1990) Glissant came to write more and more as a theoretician. In 2006 he launched the Institut du Tout-Monde, a center for arts and culture in Paris named for his rethinking of the idea of totality. The Institut would become an institution in itself as it began to grant its own literary prize, the Prix Carbet de la Caraïbe et du Tout-monde.

Glissant's self-positioning with regard to the government and academia also shifted multiply over time. He was at times visibly close to the French government, most notably at the moment of his appointment in 2006 by French President Jacques Chirac to begin work toward the creation of a national center devoted to the memory of slavery and abolition. That project would later mutate into a short book, *Mémoires des esclavages: La fondation d'un centre national pour la mémoire des esclavages et de leurs abolitions* (*Memories of Slavery: The Foundation of a National Center for the Memory of Slavery and their Abolitions* [2007]), and subsequently into a website, [lesmemoiresdesesclavages.com](http://lesmemoiresdesesclavages.com). Dominique de Villepin, then the French Prime Minister and a multifaceted author in his own right, would write the foreword for that text. Previously, Villepin had made approbatory references to Glissant's ideas of Relation and creolization in his 2004 collection of poetry *Le Requin et la mouette* (cf. Bongie, *Friends and Enemies* 56).

At yet other times, however, Glissant played the gadfly. *Quand les murs tombent: l'identité nationale hors-la-loi?* (*When the Walls Fall Down: National Identity Gone Outlaw?* [2007]), a pamphlet that Glissant produced with Patrick Chamoiseau, amounted to a blistering attack on then-President Nicolas Sarkozy. Or rather, it was an assault on Sarkozy's decision to begin his mandate with the creation of a controversial "Ministry of Immigration, Integration, National Identity, and Co-Development." Chamoiseau and Glissant lamented that the very idea of establishing a "Ministry of Identity" betrayed a misunderstanding of what identity meant. Their underlying implication was that Sarkozy and his cohorts had been led astray by the siren song of an all-too-facile ideological (read: right-wing nationalist) inflexibility as they sought to nail down the meaning of French national identity: "One could not know how to establish a ministry of identity. Otherwise the life of the collective would become mechanical, its future sterilized, made infertile . . ." (1). Decades earlier, Glissant had of course also become implicated in the push for Martinican independence well before he was even of voting age. It is just as difficult to assign a stable meaning to his

relationship to the French political establishment as it is to align Glissant with a single genre.

That elusiveness has its auspicious echoes in the author's own surname, which means "sliding" or "slippery" in French. The name *Glissant* was not at first his own, however. Born in 1928 in the commune of Sainte-Marie in Martinique, Glissant shared his mother's legal surname of Godard for the first eight years of his life (Loichot, *Orphan Narratives* 72; cf. TTM 78). Glissant's father would recognize him and pass his surname down to his son after the latter obtained his *Certificat d'études*. Tracing his genealogy back yet further, Glissant has claimed that his father's surname was in fact a phonetic inversion of a slave master's name, "Senglis," one that would have been transferred to one of Glissant's paternal ancestors generations earlier (Loichot, *Orphan Narratives* 73). In light of that once-absent, perhaps forever-deferred *nom du père*, the author's recurring returns to the abstract themes of filiation and obscured origins in both his fiction and his essays prove to be quite personal as well.

Alongside Frantz Fanon, with whom he would later become fast friends in Paris, Glissant went on to study at Martinique's Lycée Schoelcher for the duration of World War II. Although he was enrolled at the same time that Aimé Césaire was teaching there, Glissant would later insist that he never studied directly under the great poet and statesman (Britton, "Souvenirs des années 40" 100). That said, he and the other students inevitably lived in Césaire's ever-expanding shadow, and Glissant pitched in for Césaire's election campaign in 1945 (Britton, "Souvenirs des années 40" 101). Glissant moved to Paris for his studies in 1946, the same year in which Martinique became an overseas French Department. *Soleil de la conscience* (*Sunlight of Consciousness* [1956]), the first of many essays that Glissant would go on to publish, chronicled his experience as a young, Caribbean student in Paris. It testified to Glissant's ambivalent relationship to continental France, where he felt himself to be at once at home and an immigrant.

Glissant worked toward his undergraduate *licence* degree in philosophy at the Sorbonne from 1946 on (Dash, *Glissant* xi). Among his friends at the time were Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, and Glissant studied there under Jean Wahl, the great French interpreter of Hegel. In 1958 Glissant would publish *La Lézarde*, the novel that made his literary name when it won the prestigious Prix Renaudot. And by 1961, at the age of thirty-three, Glissant had added theater to his output in the poetic and the essay genres.

From 1959 to 1960 Glissant found himself in the odd predicament of being forced into exile in what was supposedly his own country. Due to his

outspoken political commitment to Martinican independence, his right to return to Martinique was taken from him and he was ordered to remain within continental France. Finally, and shortly after receiving the Prix Charles Veillon for his novel *Le quatrième siècle* in 1964, Glissant was allowed to return to Martinique, where he took up a position as a professor of philosophy at the Lycée de Jeunes Filles in Fort-de-France in 1965 (Dash, *Glissant* xii). In addition to his no doubt considerably time-consuming work as a teacher, Glissant channeled his abundant energy in other directions. He went on to found the Martinican Studies Institute (Institut Martiniquais d'Etudes) and the literary journal *Acoma*, writing profusely all the while. At roughly the same time he continued to compose poetry, in addition to publishing the dense and markedly theoretical essay *L'intention poétique* (1969) (*The Poetic Intention*), and the novel *Malemort* (1975). His worldwide peregrinations, primarily within the triangulation of France, the United States, and Martinique, began in earnest in 1980 as Glissant left Martinique for Paris to become editor of the *UNESCO Courier* (Dash, *Glissant* xii). His novelistic and poetic output remained strong during his years in Paris, and followed hot on the heels of the publication of the most-cited of Glissantian essays, *Le discours antillais*, shortly after his arrival there. Named Distinguished Professor at Louisiana State University in 1988, Baton Rouge became his base as he put together the essay *Poétique de la Relation* (1990). His time there as well as his travels in the Gulf South region would later inspire his reading of Faulkner in *Faulkner, Mississippi* (1996). Glissant's entrenchment in the Anglo-American academy only intensified with his appointment as Distinguished Professor of French at the City University of New York in 1995. The rest of his productive life would be spent principally between CUNY and Paris. There, he founded an institution of his own, the Institut du Tout-monde (Tout-monde Institute), with the support of the French governmental subdivisions of the Ile-de-France Region and the Overseas Ministry (Ministère de l'Outre-mer) ("edouardglissant.fr/rayonnement"). In April 2010, at the Institut du Tout-monde, Glissant recited there what he described as the "Great poem" that he had long labored over, titled "*Rien n'est Vrai, tout est vivant*" ("Nothing Is True, All Is Living"). It was to be his last public talk at the Institut before his passing in 2011.<sup>3</sup>

Glissant is multiple in yet another sense. Faced with the panoply of genres in which Glissant worked as well as the sheer duration of his productive life, critics have diverged around the periodization of his vast oeuvre. That is, they have disagreed on whether it is appropriate to speak of Glissant as one author with a consistent set of concerns, or rather as an

author who took a “turn” late in life, becoming cleaved into two, an “early” and a “late” Glissant. That division, between those who stress the overall consistency in the long arc of Glissant’s production and those who insist on a scission between the early and the late Glissant, is perhaps the most significant source of debate among Glissant’s readers today. (Celia Britton and Michael Dash are at the center of the former camp, whereas critics such as Chris Bongie and Peter Hallward have staked out their place in the latter.) J. Michael Dash, the first translator of Glissant’s work into English and the author of the first academic monograph on him in English, has maintained that “Since Glissant’s oeuvre does not evolve in the normal sense—in terms of either theme or genre—his major preoccupations are apparent from his earliest writing and return obsessively throughout the various phases of his work” (*Édouard Glissant* 27). Glissant himself corroborates that position, playfully asserting in 1997 that he sees the same “momentum” (“*balan*”) in his work from 1956 on (TMM 20). The analyses in the pages that follow share that conception of Glissant as an author of both multiplicity and repetition, one whose thought was in flux just as much as it manifested consistence in its returns to a cluster of key ideas. There was one Glissant in other words, one who, as Celia Britton phrased it in her tribute to him, was paradoxically “Always Changing, While Still Remaining.”

Others among Glissant’s critics, however, would disagree strongly. Again, Chris Bongie has cited a growing critical consensus that would perceive a worryingly sharp curve in Glissant’s intellectual trajectory in the wake of his *Poétique de la Relation* (1990). For Bongie, such critics approvingly read the work of the early Glissant as being characterized by “partisan position-takings” and “principled politics” (*Friends and Enemies* 339). They see the late Glissant, however, as opting instead (read: disappointingly) for what Bongie calls “utopian poetics,” and his critics have accordingly come to feel an “unease” in light of his post-1990 reorientation (*Friends and Enemies* 338, 339). Bongie goes on to hold that Glissant’s critics have, as their malaise took root, tended to “downplay or ignore the later work” (Bongie, *Friends and Enemies* 338, 339). It is not too much to say that what is evidently a critical aporia with regard to the work of the “late” Glissant has at times teetered on the brink of becoming a critical impasse. Since the pioneering monographs on Glissant by Dash (1995) and Britton (1999), no book-length study in English has been devoted exclusively to Glissant’s writing—a marked contrast with the proliferation of works on Glissant in French during the same period.<sup>4</sup> Bongie is correct, then, in pointing out that in the Anglo-American academy the “late” Glissant’s work has largely been denied critical attention, at least in the form of the traditional academic monograph. That fact is all