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SOUNDINGS IN FRENCH CARIBBEAN WRITING SINCE 1950

THE SHOCK OF SPACE AND TIME

Mary Gallagher

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BERTRAND, OISÍN,
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M.G.

University College Dublin

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Abbreviations

AE	Patrick Chamoiseau, *Antan d'enfance* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990)
C	Patrick Chamoiseau, *Childhood*, tr. Carol Volk (London: Granta, 1999)
Él. | *Pr.*	Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Cconfiant, *Éloge de la créolite* | *In Praise of Creoleness*, bilingual edn., tr. M.B. Taleb-Khyar (Paris: Gallimard, 1993)
ÉOP	Saint-John Perse, *Éloges and Other Poems*, tr. Louise Varèse (New York: Pantheon Books, 1956)
LC	Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant, *Lettres créoles: Tracées antillaises et continentales de la littérature 1635–1975* (Paris: Hatier, 1991)
NT	Paul Ricœur, 'Narrative Time', *Critical Inquiry* (Autumn 1980), 169–90
ŒC	Saint-John Perse, *Œuvres complètes*, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (Paris: Gallimard, 1972)
Pr.	see *Él.* above
RCN	Joseph Zobel, *La Rue Cases-Nègres* (Paris: Présence africaine, 1950)
T	Derek Walcott, *What the Twilight Says* (London: Faber & Faber, 1998)
VN	Hayden White, 'The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality', *Critical Inquiry* (Autumn 1980), 5–28

Introduction

> L'architecture du présent travail se situe dans le temporalité. Tout problème humain demande à être considéré à partir du temps.

The resounding prolificacy of French Caribbean writing during the final half-century of the second millennium prompts many questions. What does this efflorescence mean? For whom is it meaningful? Which urges have driven and sustained it? Is it distinguished by specific concerns or particular paradigms? Such questions might suggest a response framed in terms of time and space, since the passion and the appeal of this literary surge seem to inhere in the forces—reverberations, strains, and stresses—that stretch and even splice Caribbean spatial and temporal consciousness.

My subtitle paraphrases Wilson Harris, who has characterized the Caribbean condition as emerging from the 'shock of place and time'.[2] There is no doubt that an acute temporal anxiety precipitates many Caribbean writers into a preoccupation with loss and discontinuity, and a pressing urge to salvage or to imagine a continuity, an identity, and a legitimacy. However, the fixation on Caribbean historical aporia usually entails a particularly acute and perhaps compensatory attention to space. This highly charged relation to time and space—including the impulse to displace temporality onto

[1] Frantz Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs* (Paris: Seuil, 1952): 10; tr. Charles Lam Markmann, *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967; London: Pluto, 1986): 14–15; 'The architecture of this work is rooted in the temporal. Every human problem must be considered from the standpoint of time.'

[2] In 'History, Fable, and Myth in the Caribbean and Guianas', *Caribbean Quarterly*, 16 (June 1970), 1–32: 21. Harris sees in the Caribbean mind 'a drama of consciousness which reads back through the shock of place and time for omens of capacity that were latent, unrealized, within the clash of cultures and movements of peoples into the South Americas and West Indies'. However, the revised version of this essay (1995) in *Selected Essays of Wilson Harris: The Unfinished Genesis of the Imagination*, ed. Andrew Bundy (London: Routledge, 1999) does not contain this statement.

spatiality—can be seen at work, for example, in the tremors and spasms that ripple through narrative, sometimes seizing it up altogether; in the constant, almost obsessive emphasis on the enunciative here and now; in the deeply analeptic deferral to continental space; in the effort to register within the more permanent space of writing the ephemeral resonance of the spoken word; and in the extraordinary scriptural density of the alternative or supplementary space of writing or 'textuality'.

The expression 'French Caribbean' employed as a label identifying a particular body of writing suggests the demarcation of a certain fixed cultural, linguistic, and geographical area, and it implies, furthermore, that this putative field produces a distinct, identifiable literature. But as J. Michael Dash has noted, the Caribbean is nothing if not disruptive of such territorial presumptions. In Dash's view,

> Including the Caribbean in any survey means ultimately more than simply expanding the literary canon to include new minorities or the heretofore marginalized. It means dismantling those notions of nation, ground, authenticity, and history on which more conventional surveys have been based and exploring concepts of cultural diversity, syncretism, and instability that characterize the island cultures of the Caribbean.[3]

Describing the sea as 'an unstable medium beyond the fixing power of any totalizing discourse',[4] Dash quotes Antonio Benítez-Rojo's suggestion that it is 'the ultimate image of the Caribbean',[5] a postulation apparently echoed in Édouard Glissant's deployment of two gnomic pronouncements from Derek Walcott ('Sea is History') and Edward Kamau Brathwaite ('the unity is submarine') as talismanic epigraphs to his *Poétique de la Relation*.

The Caribbean is held to be unthinkable, then, as a static, demarcated area. Part of the Atlantic continuum, it is first and foremost fluid and, as such, comprises currents, flow, passage, and displacement. For J. Michael Dash, as for Antonio Benítez-Rojo it is '*not a*

[3] J. Michael Dash, *The Other America: Caribbean Literature in a New World Context* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1998), 5. Dash's title is drawn from Édouard Glissant, *Le Discours antillais* (Paris: Seuil, 1981), 256 n. 12; tr. J. Michael Dash as *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays* (Charlottesville: University Virginia Press, 1989), 147 n. 8.

[4] Dash, *The Other America*, 29.

[5] Ibid. 8.

fixed ground, but an open field of signifiers . . . a "meta-Archipelago" with neither a boundary nor a centre'.[6] Since movement is four-dimensional, it follows that the Caribbean is not so much a place as a 'taking place'. Its temporality is further underlined by the fact that, for all its flux, the Caribbean sea is still fraught with phantoms. To begin with, it is named for the Caribs, the displaced, not to say decimated aboriginal inhabitants of its islands (the Arawaks being displaced by this naming to a second level of ghostliness). Moreover, its floor was once littered with the now long-dissolved bones of those Caribs who threw themselves into the sea rather than surrender to the European invaders, and also with the skeletons of deported Africans cast overboard the slaving ships. Even the deep, although usually considered to be devoid of (land)marks or traces, can thus be said, in the case of the Caribbean, to have temporal depth.

My principal motive in choosing the term 'soundings' to signal the nature of this study is precisely to advert to the rather unsound cadastral status of what I am calling the 'French Caribbean'. While 'the Caribbean' is certainly a fluid, volatile space/time, it is not just a sea. Indeed the title of Benítez-Rojo's study is *The Repeating Island*, suggesting that, while the Caribbean as a whole is a fluid, open space, it is also, paradoxically, a space of multiple contained, bounded, terrestrial spaces. The reference of the collocation 'French Caribbean' multiplies this paradox. The term 'French' has, after all, both a linguistic (or cultural) and a territorial or geopolitical extension. Here, I am using it—rather uncomfortably—to name the latter, mindful of the relatively discrete, but nonetheless vexed and revealing questions of whether historically French islands such as Haiti, currently (partly) French-speaking islands like St Lucia, French-controlled spaces washed by the Caribbean, such as Guiana, or indeed literary blow-ins to Martinique such as Salvat Etchart or Jeanne Hyvrard, can be kept outside a perimeter that cannot be regarded as stable. The term 'soundings' is also intended to register respect for the integrity or resistance of the writing approached here. In the words of Walter Ong, 'hearing can register interiority without violating it. I can rap a box to find whether it is empty or full or a wall to find whether it is hollow or solid inside. Or I can ring a coin to learn whether it is silver or

[6] Ibid. Emphasis mine.

lead.'[7] These scruples should not be confused, however, with the coy precaution of a disclaimer. On the contrary, since 'the field of sound is not spread out before me but is all around me',[8] far from renouncing an encounter with depth, approach by sounding should counteract the temptation to remain safely at the surface. In reality, as Ong reminds us, it is vision, not hearing, and surveys, not soundings, that present surfaces ready to be mapped, 'fixed', explored, colonized, and ultimately, dominated.[9] Finally, the notion of 'soundings' registers the transience of the spoken word, whose impact cannot be rendered in graphic patterns. Indeed, the cognitive dissonance in my title between 'soundings' on the one hand, and 'writing' on the other, adverts to the crucial tension between orality and writing in Caribbean culture.

My principal concern in this study is to show that French Caribbean writing involves a uniquely intense confrontation with the intersection of space and time. This restless and insistent emphasis on the articulation of the two dimensions stands out against the context of the general paradigm shift marking the closing decades of the twentieth century, a sea change that has been described as the 'reassertion of space'.[10] Fredric Jameson writes of contemporary culture as being 'increasingly dominated by space and spatial logic'.[11] Certainly, the discourses of both social theory and literary criticism are overrun by spatial metaphors, and indeed critical studies of French Caribbean literature bear witness to this epistemological trend, which is particularly obvious in the predominance of cartographic rhetoric.[12] Confirming Fredric Jameson's diagnosis of the 'spatial turn'[13] that has led to the 'displacement of time, the spatialization of the temporal',[14] as well as Michel Foucault's much earlier recognition that 'the present era seems to

[7] Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London and New York: Methuen, 1982), 71–2.

[8] Ibid. 73.

[9] '(vision presents surfaces) ready to be "explored" ': ibid. 73.

[10] Edward Soja's subtitle is clear in this regard: *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1989).

[11] Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991), 67.

[12] For example, Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant, *Lettres créoles. Tracées antillaises et continentales de la littérature 1635–1975* (Paris: Hatier, 1991), and Sam Haigh, *Mapping a Tradition: Francophone Women's Writing from Guadeloupe* (London: Maney, 2000).

[13] Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 154.

[14] Ibid. 156.

be more the era of space',[15] the historian Fernand Braudel concludes that 'all the social sciences must make room "for an increasingly geographical conception of mankind" '.[16] Yet, even if we accept Braudel's directive as reasonable and Jameson's diagnosis as accurate, many questions remain, most of them concerning the residual importance accorded to history and to memory, questions of burning interest in cultures that suffered the coercive spatialization known as colonization. Those commentators who reject what they see as the hegemony of postmodern thinking over post-colonial thought (essentially an effort to understand colonialism and its legacy) probably welcome recent developments in critical theory, notably the emergence of a more balanced, less schismatic approach to the relation between space and time. Geographers and historians, being especially concerned by such epistemological mutations, have been particularly quick to comment on this shift.

In a recent study, the geographer Doreen Massey argued persuasively for the need for a four-dimensional approach that would challenge the view that space 'is the realm of stasis'.[17] Massey herself opposes Ernesto Laclau's idea that time is a genuine dynamism diametrically opposed to that time internal to a closed system, a time that some would term *durée* or duration, but that Laclau chooses to call 'space'.[18] In Laclau's view, space is representation and, as such, distortion and closure, since the real is ongoing or temporal. But does spatialization necessarily eliminate temporality? One of the objections raised by Henri Lefèbvre to the unthinking use of spatial metaphors is precisely the frequently underlying failure to relate space to time.[19] Another geographer,

[15] 'L'époque actuelle serait peut-être plutôt l'époque de l'espace': Michel Foucault, 'Des espaces autres' in *Dits et écrits, 1954–1988, vol. iv: 1980-88*, ed. Daniel Defont and François Ewald (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), 752.

[16] Fernand Braudel, *On History*, tr. Sarah Matthews (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 52; 1st pub. as *Écrits sur l'histoire* (Paris: Flammarion, 1969). Braudel is quoting here P. Vidal de la Blache, *Revue de synthèse historique* (1903), 239.

[17] Doreen Massey, 'Politics and Space/Time', in Michael Keith and Steve Pile (eds.), *Place and the Politics of Identity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 141–61: 142.

[18] Ernesto Laclau, *New Reflections on the Revolution of our Time* (London: Verso, 1990), 41.

[19] 'Si quelqu'un dit "espace", il doit aussitôt dire ce qui l'occupe et comment: le déploiement de l'énergie autour de "points" et dans un temps. . . . L'espace pris

Nigel Thrift, goes so far as to conclude that 'there is little sense to be had from making distinctions between time and space—there is only *time-space*'.[20] Thrift further believes that this view of a hyphenated 'time-space' resonates with Bergson's notion of a 'permanently moving continuity',[21] and with the emergent structure of feeling of our age, which is dominated by movement or flows. Writing of the 'hum of mobility' that characterizes the postmodern age, he asks 'what is place in this new "in-between" world?' and answers his own question as follows: 'compromised: permanently in a state of enunciation, between addresses, always deferred . . . traces of movement, speed, and circulation'.[22] This view of the 'in-betweenness' of contemporary time-space is reminiscent of Marc Augé's 'non-lieux'[23] and consonant with post-colonial thought—'in-betweenness' is one of Homi Bhabha's mantras, after all. Its emphasis on mobility or displacement re-temporalizes space. Thus Thrift's hyphenated time-space suggests not only hybridity, but also fluidity, just as his largely celebratory ontology contrasts with Jameson's disconsolate conclusion that the ascendancy of space has occasioned a 'crisis of historicity'[24] and an attendant 'sense of loss'.[25]

In *The Other America*, J. Michael Dash argues persuasively for the need to approach 'the Caribbean' in the singular, as it were, as 'the other America'. This study has taken, however, a radically different route that fully confirms the validity of Benítez-Rojo's 'repeating island' model. Certainly, in registering some of the major vibrations and gravitations of French Caribbean writing, we can move closer to a sense of the Caribbean in general. However, my study records above all the importance of ever finer degrees of internal variation and relationality within the already restrictive 'area' of French Caribbean writing. Just as the French

séparément devient une abstraction vide' ('If someone uses the word "space" he should specify at once what fills that space and how: the deployment of energy around 'points' and within time . . . Space considered independently of these considerations is just an empty abstraction'): Lefèbvre, *La Production de l'espace* (1974; Paris: Anthropos, 2000), 20. All translations mine unless otherwise indicated.

[20] Nigel Thrift, *Spatial Formations* (London: Sage, 1996), 285.

[21] Ibid. 286. [22] Ibid. 289.

[23] Marc Augé, *Non-Lieux. Introduction à une anthropologie de la surmodernité* (Paris: Seuil, 1992); tr. as *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (London: Verso, 1995).

[24] Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 157. [25] Ibid. 25.

Caribbean must be seen as part of the wider Caribbean—a fluid, relational field—and as resisting therefore its own separation or restrictive definition, so too a constant tension between differentiation (or separation) and relation (or flow) both structures and limits this study's reach. To begin with, although a body of work in Creole exists, I refer only to French Caribbean writing in French. This restriction increases the strain that must be borne by the expression 'French Caribbean' in my title, reinforcing the tension between its territorial/political and its linguistic/cultural reference. However, in considering the literary dynamic between French and Creole in Chapter 4, I do attempt to discuss some of the implications of that strain for the sounding out of French Caribbean literary space and time. Secondly, prose narrative is given considerably more attention here than either drama or poetry. It is true that the latter two are the least prominent genres in French Caribbean production in the period under consideration here. Furthermore, drama in particular, and poetry to a certain extent, is more likely to be in Creole than in French. And certainly, both genres are more closely associated with voice and performance than with writing—indeed, drama very often does not come into print at all. Nonetheless, the generic and linguistic partiality of this study must be conceded. Thirdly, the 'French Caribbean' with which I am concerned here does not include Guiana. Given its linguistic and cultural isolation or indeed 'insularity' on the South American continent, and its shared historical and cultural status as French colony and then *département d'outre-mer*, it would be misleading to suggest that Guiana is no more 'Caribbean' than Venezuela or Brazil. However, its history as a penal colony, the physical geography that made it unsuitable as a full-scale plantation colony, and its consequent demography, combined with its continental context, are all factors that set Guiana apart from the French Antilles in particular and within the Caribbean cultural economy in general. Haiti, as an independent country, is not, of course, part of the French Caribbean, yet it helps to define the contours of that space. The history of Haiti is unique in the Caribbean: it is unimpeachably different in relation not just to French Caribbean history, but to Caribbean history in general. Haiti has been, indeed, and continues to be for every other Caribbean island, although particularly for the French Caribbean, an over-significant other. Two further factors that

distinguish the Haitian literary context are the extremely low levels of literacy in Haiti, and the fact that Haitian writers are largely and for obvious political, cultural, and economic reasons, writers in exile (chiefly in North America, especially Canada and Florida).

Finally, even if the issue of balance between Martinique and Guadeloupe frequently breaks through in the course of this study, it has not proved possible to address fully the important question of Martinique's higher literary profile. Full treatment of this issue, like that of the language question, the genre question, or the relation to Guiana and Haiti, would have required a full-scale comparative study. However, even popularizing histories, such as Ronald Segal's *The Black Diaspora*, counsel against collapsing the difference between Martinique and Guadeloupe. Segal notes, for example, that 'the two islands resemble each other so much in the ascendancy of French culture, their economic dependence on France, and their isolation from their Caribbean context that the differences between them seem all the sharper'.[26] Most of these differences are due to divergences between Guadeloupean and Martinican history, many of which were undoubtedly part of a policy of 'divide and conquer' and served well the cause of colonialism.

The demarcations or restrictions that we have just noted all raise the more general and complex question of the ethics and politics of difference. To what extent is it critically essential not to elide or erase differences and to what extent is differentiation an instrument of intellectual pre-emption and imperialism? Must differentiation precede relation? Is relation conditional on differentiation? These questions must be addressed in the context of the quite extraordinary intersection in French Caribbean writing between literary and poetic endeavour, on the one hand, and, on the other, the conceptualization or theorization of cultural difference that informs and drives a significant proportion of French Caribbean writing. The fallout from the various ideological debates that have raged around different theories of Caribbean cultural difference (negritude, *antillanité* or Caribbeanness, and *créolité* or Creoleness) has included the levelling literary effect of cultural programmes and the blurring of the boundary between propaganda and literary (or indeed criti-

[26] Ronald Segal, *The Black Diaspora* (London: Faber & Faber, 1995).

cal) exploration. This threat to the integrity of writing suggests that the emphasis of literary criticism should be put on relation rather than on difference: on the relation between various theories of Caribbean identity, for example; on the relation between theory and practice; on the relation between criticism and writing, between one part of the Caribbean and another, between the Caribbean and the rest of the world, and so forth.

To take a concrete example, contemporary French Caribbean writing for many readers and critics begins and ends with the work of three or four writers, all of whom are identified with (or against) certain cultural movements, programmes, or manifestos. Furthermore, the positions that these writers are believed to hold have sometimes attracted much more attention than the subtleties of their writing. In this way, specific theories of Caribbean culture create certain exclusions, polarizing writers into partisans and dissenters, and they also encourage critical derelictions (not just the neglect of writing per se, but also the dismissal of writers who do not seem to engage with particular theories or with any). While this study does not aspire in any sense to the status of a survey, as a sonographic study of depth it should surely attempt to register, along with the more visible or dominant trends, the more hidden or perhaps unfairly forgotten writings. More important still, it should consider what distinguishes the fêted from the forgotten, the mediaphilic from the modest. It is crucial to identify the criteria that ensure that certain types of writing capture the imagination of a wide and admiring readership and others do not. In other words, the fact that the most celebrated and widely publicized writing is underwritten by those theories of difference and identity that it is taken to promote or illustrate is something that must itself be interpreted.

Even if I cannot aspire to elucidate them fully here, I have tried not to elide the differences that fissure even that rather artificially constructed 'space apart' that I am calling here the French Caribbean. However, the divergences that must not be ignored are not just the differing orientations of the two islands, but also the disparate approaches to space and to time taken by individual writers from the same island. And even within a given writer's *œuvre*, time, genre, and the vagaries of inspiration and influence can create variations and relations, differences and dynamics.

My approach aims to complement not only the excellent

thematic and chronological surveys that are now available,[27] but also the illuminating monographs that focus either on specific authors,[28] or on various other important questions (self-reflexive writing,[29] for example, or the myth of 'marronnage',[30] the problematic of gender,[31] the Guadeloupean tradition of writing by women,[32] the question of (Creole) identity,[33] etc.), as well as more ambitious, transverse, or oblique approaches, such as those of J. Michael Dash and Antonio Benítez-Rojo. If my own study sidelines the questions of gender, genre, and language, this is not because I underestimate the light shed and the shadows cast by those issues. Rather, the heuristic reach of the concepts guiding my approach is so daunting that it would be difficult to imagine a study that would exhaust their resonances in recent French Caribbean writing. It is easy, however, to imagine how several vectors, such as the highly suggestive ones just mentioned, could productively cross-fertilize the soundings taken here. Hence, while it would be futile to deny that the latter are limited in scope, my hope is that the readings that they yield may prove useful, nonetheless, for the future study of

[27] See especially Jack Corzani's definitive survey, *La Littérature des Antilles-Guyane françaises* (Fort-de-France: Désormeaux, 1978) and Jack Corzani, Léon-François Hoffmann, and Marie-Lyne Piccione, *Littératures francophones*, vol. ii: *Les Amériques* (Paris: Belin, 1998); two works by Régis Antoine: *La Littérature franco-antillaise: Haïti, Guadeloupe et Martinique* (Paris: Karthala, 1992) and *Rayonnants écrivains des Caraïbes* (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1998); and Sam Haigh (ed.), *An Introduction to Francophone Caribbean Writing: Guadeloupe and Martinique* (Oxford: Berg, 1999).

[28] For example, Celia Britton, *Édouard Glissant and Postcolonial Theory: Strategies of Language and Resistance* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999).

[29] Lydie Moudileno, *L'Écrivain antillais au miroir de sa littérature* (Paris: Karthala, 1997) and Dominique Chancé, *L'Auteur en souffrance. Essai sur la position et la représentation de l'auteur dans le roman antillais contemporain (1981–1992)* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2000).

[30] Richard D. E. Burton, *Le Roman marron. Études sur la littérature martiniquaise contemporaine* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1997).

[31] Maryse Condé, *La Parole des femmes. Essai sur des romancières des Antilles de langue française* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1979).

[32] Haigh, *Mapping a Tradition*.

[33] Mireille Rosello, *Littérature et identité créole aux Antilles* (Paris: Karthala, 1992); Maryse Condé and Madeleine Cottenet-Hage (eds.), *Penser la créolité* (Paris: Karthala, 1995); H. Adlai Murdoch, *Creole Identity in the French Caribbean Novel* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2001); Chris Bongie, *Islands and Exiles: The Creole Identities of Post/Colonial Literatures* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

questions such as gendered space and time, or the time and space of various literary genres.

Broadly, this study falls into two movements. Although its fundamental thesis denies the value and indeed the possibility of holding the two dimensions apart, it is true that the first stresses time and the second space, with an intermediary chapter emphasizing both equally. The first three chapters probe the imagination of time. The first studies the successive secretion of three models of French Caribbean cultural identity. In addition to examining the teleology claimed for these theories, that is, the tidy, evolutionist narrative of Caribbean identity which is said to pass through the three stages of negritude, Caribbeanness, and Creoleness, I also consider the value attached to time and to space within each of these three visions of cultural identity. The dominant genre in French Caribbean writing from 1950 to the present is narrative, a preference that seems to suggest a preoccupation with linear temporality. However, as we shall see in the second chapter, in most French Caribbean narratives sequential time is interrupted, spatialized, and displaced. In other words, succession tends to be projected onto spatiality, with the result that these narratives register a complex, disrupted relation to history. They combine, rather problematically, a desire to represent sequence or succession—a 'désiré historique' ('longing for history'),[34] to use Édouard Glissant's expression—and a sense of loss, lack, or fracture, caused by the dislocation of historical continuity. For, unlike the immediate and local past, the originary Caribbean past lies elsewhere, and its double remoteness—both spatial and temporal—challenges memory. Continuing to probe the writing of time, the third chapter concentrates on the status of memory in writing, that is, on the connection realized in writing between the past and the present, place and displacement, memory and narrative, and on the dynamic of identity as a process of imagination and remembrance, openness and closure.

The chapter that forms the second, bridging section of the book concentrates on the space and time of writing and intertextuality. Intertextuality could be regarded as a deepening by superimposition or overlay, or as a means of injecting the vibration of diversity into the text. But it could also be envisaged as a form of memori-

[34] Glissant, *Le Discours antillais*, 147; *Caribbean Discourse*, 79.

alization—creating or consolidating, that is, a sense of textual tradition. It is also possible, of course, to read the practice as a kind of creolization and thus as the conscious or unconscious actualization of certain cultural theories about Caribbean cultural identity.

The third section turns towards the question of referential space. It opens with a study of the residual memory of the plantation as a seminal space in the French Caribbean imagination. Whereas Aimé Césaire more or less ignored this space and Joseph Zobel highlighted its destructive dimension, Édouard Glissant and his literary heirs are often at pains to emphasize its value as a culturally creative crucible. Issues of memory, nostalgia, and exoticism are raised by this contemporary rehabilitation of a space traditionally viewed as being exclusively coercive and exploitative. The plantation is studied here both as a 'lieu de mémoire' and as a chronotope, more specifically as a (retrospective) projection of temporal and spatial desire. The next chapter in this section follows the rural exodus in contemporary Caribbean writing. We find that the Creole town has taken on in equal measure the aspect of a positive, creative space that takes over from the plantation, keeping alive in its margins the latter's Creole legacy, and the aspect of a fallen domain in comparison with the creative Creole matrix of the plantation. The town as centre, or at least the town's bourgeois centre, is dismissed as being devoid of cultural productivity and centrifugally fixated on importation and imitation: that is, on the consumption of externally sourced models. However, the principal question posed by the Creole town as a whole relates to time: is the 'written' town a site of modernity, change, and dynamism, or of tradition, conservatism, and reproduction?

The fourth and final section of the book studies the reflecting or diffracting mirror held up to the French Caribbean by certain spaces outside it: firstly, the two most decisive source spaces, namely Africa and Metropolitan France. How are these spaces constructed, and how do they configure French Caribbean time? What sorts of displacement are implied by reference to these spaces? Following the consciousness-raising effect of movements such as *négritude*, we might expect Metropolitan France to disappear, or at least to be attenuated as a pole of identification. It would be understandable if writers sought to distance themselves explicitly or implicitly from what came to be widely regarded as a source of alienation. How, then, did writers from the middle of the last

century onwards relate to Metropolitan France? To what extent is there circulation between the Caribbean and Europe? What are the directions and motives of that movement and how did the watershed of 1946 inflect the (post)colonial dynamic?

Much has been written about the over-investment of the *négritude* movement in a mythical and ultimately disabling image of Africa. But how does Africa figure in French Caribbean writing in the wake of that movement? Do succeeding generations of French Caribbean writers simply turn away from the African quest, or do they pursue it in a different manner? How does French Caribbean writing relate to African time, and how does it construct African space? In the final chapter, the focus shifts to French Caribbean imagination of other areas of the so-called New World: that is, other Caribbean islands, Francophone, Hispanophone and Anglophone, as well as continental space: South, Central, and North America. To what extent do successive waves of French Caribbean writing relate to contiguous New World space, and what does that relation reveal about French Caribbean time consciousness and about the level of openness to diversity and to interrelation often held to predominate in the Caribbean worldview? Most crucially, is such openness sufficiently prevalent to call into question the limits of this final section, constrained as it is within the triangular framework of an originary relation to Europe and to Africa and a largely analogical relation to the rest of the Americas?

CHAPTER ONE

Theoretical Generations: Writing Identities

> [Mycéa] déclarait craindre les théories bien plus que les fièvres dont les épidémies (typhoïde ou paludisme) avaient ravagé naguère encore la plaine du Lamentin.[1]

In 1992, when Derek Walcott was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature, it was the second time that a Caribbean-born poet had been thus distinguished. There was, however, one conspicuous difference between the general perception of the tribute to Derek Walcott and that of the honouring in 1960 of the Guadeloupean-born poet Saint-John Perse. Whereas Walcott's prize secured a prestigious place on the world map of literature both for the tiny island of St Lucia and for the Caribbean basin in general, Saint-John Perse's Nobel was widely perceived, not only in 1960 but for about three decades afterwards, as an honour for 'the' French language and Metropolitan French culture rather than for Guadeloupe, much less the Caribbean.[2] We must be careful, of course, not to misconstrue this shift. Undoubtedly, the general reluctance to link the first Caribbean-born laureate with the 'New World' can be explained as much by the apparent absence of Caribbean texture from the greater part of Saint-John Perse's poetry and by the poet's ambiguous, and perhaps ambivalent, relation with the *pays natal*,[3]

[1] Édouard Glissant, *La Case du commandeur* (Paris: Seuil, 1981), 189; '[Mycéa] feared theories more than the typhoid or malarial fever still raging over the Lamentin plain in the recent past'.

[2] Saint-John Perse's Nobel acceptance speech is entitled 'Poésie' ('Poetry'). Derek Walcott, on the other hand, gave his speech the title *The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory* (London: Faber & Faber, 1993). The divergence between the two poetics is accurately registered in the contrast between the two titles, one centred in space and time, the other sublimely remote from both.

[3] See also Mary Gallagher, 'Seminal Praise: The Poetry of Saint-John Perse', in

as by the political status of the French Caribbean or the cultural profile of the Caribbean in general during the period in question. Yet the widespread recognition in 1992 of Derek Walcott as belonging to, and as speaking for, the Caribbean does also reflect a general evolution in the cultural status and identity of the geographical area that the Cuban critic Antonio Benítez-Rojo considers to be 'one of the least known regions of the modern world'.[4] More specifically, it illustrates the hearing that twentieth-century Caribbean voices began to claim as such in international literary consciousness.

AN INTERNATIONAL PROFILE

The Caribbean's international cultural currency is founded in large part on the perceived pertinence of this problematically post-colonial, yet unmistakably post-plantation and post-slavery literature to a globalized/globalizing world, increasingly marked by displacement. Furthermore, the gradual acknowledgement of the region's cultural significance is synergistically linked to the vigour of its literary output. The French Caribbean alone—that is, Martinique and Guadeloupe—could boast during the second half of the twentieth century the prolific literary achievement of a long catalogue of widely esteemed writers, including Aimé Césaire, Édouard Glissant, and Simone Schwarz-Bart; Patrick Chamoiseau, Maryse Condé, Daniel Maximin, and Xavier Orville; Myriam Warner-Vieyra, Raphaël Confiant, and Daniel Boukman; Gisèle Pineau, Ernest Pépin, Roland Brival, and Vincent Placoly. As this incomplete inventory implies, the French Caribbean is exceptional in the wider Francophone world in terms of the volume of this late twentieth-century literary surge, whose potency is so disproportionate to the spatial area involved. However, reservations have been expressed in certain quarters about this flood-tide.[5]

Sam Haigh (ed.), *An Introduction to Francophone Caribbean Writing: Guadeloupe and Martinique* (Oxford: Berg, 1999) 17–33.

[4] Antonio Benítez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective*, tr. James Maraniss (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992), 1.

[5] Jack Corzani considers that many French Caribbean novels are repetitive and formulaic, their authors having been tempted into a certain mould by the promise of 'being a hit with a preconditioned European readership' ('un succès facile auprès d'un public européen déjà conditionné'), in Corzani and Piccione, *Littératures francophones*, 158 and 164.

During roughly the same period, the English- and Spanish-speaking Caribbean also led a striking literary assault on the high ground formerly held by Metropolitan literatures. Derek Walcott, Jean Rhys, Wilson Harris, Edward Kamau Brathwaite, V. S. Naipaul, Paule Marshall, Merle Hodge, Michelle Cliff, and Caryl Phillips, along with numerous Jamaican poets, and Hispanophone writers such as Fernando Ortíz, Nicolás Guillén, and Alejo Carpentier, have all played a significant part in shaping the rhythms and mixing the colours of English- and Spanish-language literature. Some of these writers, particularly Derek Walcott, V. S. Naipaul, Alejo Carpentier, Edward Kamau Brathwaite, and Wilson Harris, have invested much energy in speculative cultural theory, although, with the exception of Brathwaite's work on 'nation language', their exertions have been less systematic and less programmatic than Martinican thinking, and have not wielded such widespread influence over other writers. In the case of Derek Walcott, for example, it is remarkable that, although he has been sporadically mentioned by French Caribbean writers (especially since he was awarded the Nobel Prize),[6] his work has had little or no obvious impact on French Caribbean literature, whereas the work of Édouard Glissant and the writing of Patrick Chamoiseau loom large as points of reference for Walcott.[7] Unlike its Anglophone or Hispanophone counterparts, the greater part of contemporary French Caribbean writing has, in fact, evolved in tandem with or in counterpoint to a vigorous body of endogenous cultural ideation. So trenchant is this self-reflexive edge that it must be credited with having carved out for French Caribbean writing a singularly prominent place both in Metropolitan France and in North America.

[6] See Maryse Condé in conversation with Françoise Pfaff on the subject of Walcott's Nobel Prize in Pfaff, *Entretiens avec Maryse Condé* (Paris: Karthala, 1993), 163.

[7] It is also possible to read this one-way influence as evidence of French Caribbean insularity, or a patent 'non-engagement with both non-French Caribbean and non-francophone scholarship': Richard and Sally Price, 'Shadowboxing in the Mangrove: The Politics of Identity in Post-Colonial Martinique', in Belinda Edmondson (ed.), *Caribbean Romances: The Politics of Regional Representation*, (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999), 123–62: 133.

THEORETICAL FERMENT: MARTINIQUE

Fundamentally, the entire body of theory-driven writing from Martinique and Guadeloupe aims to define and perhaps inflect the cultural specificity of the (French) Caribbean. Jack Corzani is, for his part, suspicious of this trend. He indicts not just the ethnological curiosity and exoticist appetites of the enthusiastic Western readership that would not think of expecting French authors to conduct a similar ontological search for the quintessence of Frenchness, but also those Caribbean authors who play to their (European) gallery.[8] If Corzani were not challenging the more reductive and categorical end of the theoretical spectrum, his censure would be accused of missing the point of the post-colonial dynamic: namely the urge to 'write back' in order to tease out and contest legacies of denial and dispossession. This is, indeed, the dynamic studied by Christopher Miller in his work on the displacement of Europe's historical hegemony as theorizer of Africa by indigenous African self-theorizing.[9] There is a strong tradition of French Metropolitan conceptualization of the French Caribbean: its literary dimension is well documented[10] and its ethnological arm extends from the founding fathers, Du Tertre and Labat, to Michel Leiris and the ongoing work of Francis Affergan.[11] Had French culture been subjected to a proportionally similar barrage of exogenous ethnology, French writers might well have reacted by 'repossessing the gaze'. However, the real question here is whether or not the gaze has, in truth, been 'repossessed': 'the danger faced, predictably enough, is that of control and containment. Authorized marginality means that the production of "difference" can be supervised, hence recuperated, neutralized and depoliticized . . .'.[12]

Whether they are writing inside or outside a specific theoretical movement, most Caribbean authors write about or against the

[8] Corzani, *Littératures francophones*, 163.

[9] Christopher Miller, *Theories of Africans: Francophone Literature and Anthropology in Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

[10] See Régis Antoine, *Les Écrivains français et les Antilles. Des premiers Pères blancs aux surréalistes noirs* (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1978).

[11] See Raphaël Confiant's novel, *Le Nègre et l'amiral* (Paris: Grasset, 1988), 83–105 for a parody of the encounter between the Metropolitan gaze (in the shape of André Breton and Claude Lévi-Strauss) and the realities of Fort-de-France.

[12] Trinh T. Minh-Ha, 'An Acoustic Journey', in John C. Welchman (ed.), *Rethinking Borders* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 1–17: 8–9.

modelling of the collective Caribbean psyche by a shared geography of fragmentation and openness, and by a common colonial history involving genocide, ethnocide, transportation, displacement, slavery, amnesia, assimilation, diversity, contact, economic exploitation, and political marginalization. Layers of relation and creolization (not just between African, Asian, and European cultures, but also amongst Africans, Europeans, or Indians themselves) would alone guarantee a cultural legacy of diversity and variegation and of complexity and complexes with which Caribbean consciousness would somehow have to come to terms. And when the empires exploiting the colonies were several—not just French, British, and Spanish, but also Dutch and Portuguese—the intricacies of the post-colonial scar tissue were guaranteed to be further compounded. Conversely, the already considerable opportunities for creative interrelation were potentially multiplied even further by the linguistic, cultural, and political heterogeneity of the various colonial regimes, although, in practice, such cross-fertilization seems to have been defied if not defeated by geopolitical fragmentation. Culturally and politically, the Caribbean is, then, richly complex or excessively divided, depending on one's perspective. Indeed, despite, or because of this shared inheritance of complexity, division, and diversity, reference to 'the Caribbean' in the singular is often deemed questionable.[13] In this sense, the frequent acknowledgement that the home constituency of Caribbean literature exists only in the virtuality of the future[14] reflects the more

[13] Antonio Benítez-Rojo, in *The Repeating Island*, 37–8, quotes Frank Moya Pons, according to whom 'the Caribbean as a living community, with common interests and aspirations, just does not exist. Practically, it seems more sensible to think of several Caribbeans coexisting alongside one another.' Benítez-Rojo also quotes Sidney W. Mintz, who sees the Caribbean as a 'societal area' without a common culture: 'the cultural panorama of the Caribbean is supremely heterogeneous. How then can one be sure that a Caribbean culture even exists?'

[14] Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Confiant, *Éloge de la créolité/In Praise of Creoleness*, bilingual edn., tr. M. B. Taleb-Khyar (Paris: Gallimard, 1993; 1st edn. (French only) 1989): 'La littérature antillaise n'existe pas encore. Nous sommes encore dans un état de prélittérature: celui d'une production écrite sans audience chez elle, méconnaissant l'interaction auteurs/lecteurs où s'élabore une littérature' (p. 14) ('Caribbean literature does not yet exist. We are still in a state of preliterature: that of a written production without a home audience, ignorant of the authors/readers interaction which is the primary condition of the development of a literature'; p. 76). Of Édouard Glissant, the authors of the *Éloge* write that he is 'persuaded that he is writing for future generations' (p. 84) ('persuadé d'écrire pour des lecteurs futurs'; p. 23), and indeed Glissant stated in 1986: 'je ne

fundamental question as to whether 'the Caribbean' can truly be said to exist (yet) as a distinct and united post-colonial domain. After all, the educated elites of neighbouring islands often do not speak the same language and, furthermore, the political and economic profiles of the islands vary considerably even within individual archipelagos, and are in some cases—in Haiti, for example—highly unstable and in others supremely anomalous: is the latter not the case, for very different reasons, both of Cuba and of the French Caribbean?

Which factors of Caribbean diversity explain the fact that the self-reflexive tropism took hold so vigorously in the French Caribbean, more especially in Martinique? Although some might point to the Haitian *noiriste* or *indigéniste* movements as demonstrating a comparable ideological commitment, Haitian theories of culture and cultural identity were almost exclusively local. Not only did these theories eschew extrapolation from the Haitian condition itself, but they were also circumscribed in time, failing to endure well beyond the first half of the twentieth century, far less to accelerate, as did their French Caribbean counterparts. Arguably, other restrictions have similarly curbed the theoretical ambition of Anglophone Caribbean writers such as the Guianese novelist Wilson Harris, or Derek Walcott. For example, when the Jamaican poet and critic Edward Kamau Brathwaite theorized creolization at the end of the 1960s, the title of his study was *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica 1770–1820*; in other words, his approach was more socio-historical than speculative. The restraint and the constraints of such empiricism would be entirely foreign to Édouard Glissant or Patrick Chamoiseau. Moreover, although Edward Brathwaite himself, and also Wilson Harris and Derek Walcott, have authored important speculative essays,[15] they have not attempted to articulate—much less

crois pas qu'il existe encore une littérature antillaise au sens où une littérature suppose un mouvement d'action et de réaction entre un public et des œuvres . . . un projet commun' ('I do not believe that Caribbean literature exists yet, in so far as literature presupposes a dynamic of action and reaction between literary works and their readership'): 'Édouard Glissant, préfacier d'une littérature future', Édouard Glissant in conversation with Priska Degras and Bernard Magnier, *Notre Librairie*, 74 (1986), 14–20: 14. For an analysis of some of these paradoxical statements, see Rosello, *Littérature et identité créole aux Antilles*, 30–4.

[15] Edward Kamau Brathwaite, *History of the Voice: The Development of Nation Language in Anglophone Caribbean Poetry* (London: New Beacon, 1984); Wilson

prescribe—an overarching, tentacular poetics, that is, a pan-Caribbean (or even global) programme of culture that welds an aesthetics and an ethics to an epistemology and an ontology.

In the charged institutional context where Martinican and Guadeloupean authors write in French, publish with French publishers, win French literary prizes, and frequently attract a largely Metropolitan French readership, the programmatic impulse represents perhaps an effort to pre-empt accusations of a sell-out. It could be seen, in other words, as a compensatory and defensive attempt to repatriate and legitimize a literary project by strategically reinforcing it with a discourse of cultural differentiation and resistance. The particularly acute separation anxiety of Martinican as opposed to Guadeloupean intellectuals is no doubt explained by the degree of perceived political and economic emasculation of the *pays natal,* or what J. Michael Dash calls Martinique's 'overwhelming context of adaption and acquiescence' and its 'culture of consent'.[16] It would be altogether plausible if Martinique, as the more assimilated of the two islands, were more anxious to differentiate itself from the *Métropole.*[17] Metropolitan and international receptiveness to Martinican theory, added to the many, often intangible, indications that the implied reader is not (principally) local or Caribbean, suggest indeed a highly intimate dynamic, and one that is perhaps correspondingly fraught on the Martinican side. Certainly, Martinique appears to have provided even more fertile ground than Guadeloupe for dissemination of the ideational, universalizing tropism widely regarded as characterizing Metropolitan French culture, in contrast, again, to the more empirical spirit of 'Anglo-Saxon' thought. This is precisely the point made by Derek Walcott in his open letter to Patrick Chamoiseau, which first appeared in 1996 in the *New York Review of Books.*[18] Walcott observes that the polemical tone of the co-authored pamphlet *Éloge de la créolité* flaunts that faith in new movements

Harris, *The Womb of Space: The Cross-Cultural Imagination* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1983); Walcott, *What the Twilight Says.*

[16] Dash, *The Other America,* 19.

[17] This is the explanation favoured by J. Michael Dash: 'It is no coincidence that Martinique is a prolific producer of theories of difference. Envisioning opacity at all costs is the only form of resistance open to Martiniquans, and to this extent one is never in doubt as to the political implications of what Glissant is proposing': *The Other America,* 11.

[18] Repr. in *What the Twilight Says,* 213–32.

and theories that marks the history of aesthetic thought in France. He considers the co-authored tract as part of the peculiarly French obsession with 'publishing manifestos', observing that 'nothing is more French than [its] confident rhetoric'. In its 'emphatic isolation' Walcott hears the echo of 'all those pamphlets outlining programs for a new painting, a new poetry, that erupt from metropolitan ferment, and that, reaching out to embrace a public, baffle it by their vehemence'.[19] It should not be forgotten that the *négritude* movement was conceived in Paris, that the seminal moment[20] in Glissant's conceptualization of Caribbean consciousness also took place in France, and that even *Éloge de la créolité* began life as a talk presented in the suburbs north of Paris. Certainly, these 'Metropolitan conceptions' are exceptional given the fact that these writers, with the exception of Glissant,[21] have written almost exclusively in and from Martinique. Yet they reflect the fact that this work was published and promoted primarily in Metropolitan France. The enthusiastic Metropolitan reception of French Caribbean 'theory' does not, however, extend to the two important theoretical works of the Guadeloupean cultural theorist, Creole linguist, and novelist Dany Bébel-Gisler. Whereas this author's works are neither easily available nor widely discussed in Metropolitan France or internationally,[22] Martinican theory

[19] Ibid. 223–4.

[20] See my discussion of Glissant's *Soleil de la conscience* (Paris: Seuil, 1956) in Ch. 7.

[21] Although Glissant has also spent substantial portions of his writing life in Metropolitan France and in the United States, his political involvement in the Caribbean from the late 1950s through to the 1960s and his regular if intermittent presence there from 1965 reflects his philosophy of 'errance' and 'relation'. Significantly, his *Le Discours antillais* includes at the end a long list of the occasions (complete with dates and venues) for which the various pieces comprising that work were composed (a much-abridged list is given in the English translation, since the latter comprises a selection only of Glissant's essays). The locations are almost exclusively Caribbean.

[22] Dany Bébel-Gisler, *Le Défi culturel guadeloupéen. Devenir ce que nous sommes* (Paris: Seghers, 1985) and *La Langue créole, force jugulée. Étude des rapports de force entre le créole et le français aux Antilles* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1976). Sam Haigh, in her study of the specifics of Guadeloupean writing by women (*Mapping a Tradition*), a study that succeeds in its aim of redressing the Martinican imbalance, fittingly does justice both to Bébel-Gisler's thinking on Creole and Creole culture and to her novel, *Léonora. L'histoire enfouie de la Guadeloupe* (Paris: Seghers, 1985), tr. Andrea Leskes as *Leonora: The Buried Story of Guadeloupe* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1994). See also A. James Arnold, 'The Gendering of *Créolité:* The Erotics of Colonialism', in Condé and Cottenet-Hage (eds.), *Penser la créolité* (Paris: Karthala, 1995), 21–40.

bedazzles Paris to such an extent that Gallimard brought out a second, bilingual edition of the *créolité* manifesto, featuring the English translation alongside the French text. The discrepancy in the two receptions is no doubt related to the more empirically and sociologically focused nature of Bébel-Gisler's thinking and to the absence of that poetic charge, that literary tension, which immediately identifies the 'writer' in France.[23]

Bespeaking resistance or assimilation (or both simultaneously), the theoretical tropism tends to configure French Caribbean writing as a closed circuit. The various theories act like magnetic poles, not only attracting and influencing other writers, plotting their preoccupations and steering their styles, but also shaping, or indeed curtailing the expectations of readers and critics, who tend, tautologically, to measure writing against the programmes holding strongest currency.

SPACE AND TIME FOR *NÉGRITUDE*

Considerations of space and time are of great importance in the shaping of the theoretical currents directing much French Caribbean literature over the past half-century. To begin with, the various turns taken by the theoretical tide throughout this period—in particular, of course, the Oedipal moments of its teleology—are themselves deeply inscribed in time. Furthermore, the successive movements or currents vary principally in their configuration of the temporal and spatial dimensions of Caribbean identity. However, what I would like to emphasize here is how, over the last two decades of the twentieth century, that body of French Caribbean writing that won itself a respectful Metropolitan and international hearing sedulously promoted a certain narrative of Caribbean identity. This received narrative has Caribbean identity move from *négritude*, where the chief focus is on essence or being, through *antillanité* or 'Caribbeanness', where concern with the contingencies of existence or 'l'étant' predominates, to 'creoleness' (*créolité/créolisation*) or relationality. Two features of this histori-

[23] 'Dany Bébel-Gisler is not a writer' (n'est pas écrivain'): Chancé, *L'Auteur en souffrance*, 94. This critic suggests that Bébel-Gisler is less committed to 'writing' than to sociological transcription.