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“Common Place: Common-Place”

A Presentation of Édouard Glissant’s Poetics of the Compounding of Places – Part 1

At the end of *Poétique de la Relation*, a list of “binarities” constitutes what Glissant’s philosophy of Relation sets out to reshuffle. Among them, the pair “Lieu commun: lieu-commun” is what will be analysed here. Beyond enabling us to survey a vast area of Glissant’s œuvre, it will also lead to the analysis of one of Glissant’s most operative metaphors: the “common-place,” advancing toward the configuration of an alternative, ever compounding reality.

To Start With: The Common

At the end of the original *Poétique de la Relation*, we reach a small archipelago of “Commonplace notes” (“Notes en lieux communs”) (227-36), on the far side of which appears what Glissant calls a “litany,” a list of “binarities, whether or not they can be transcended” (Wing 224).¹ These binarities constitute what his poetics of Relation – throughout his œuvre, philosophical and political – sets out to reshuffle. Among them, the pair “Lieu commun: lieu-commun” (236) is what will be analysed here. Indeed, the construction of this phrase enables us not just to survey a vast area of Glissant’s œuvre, but to progress tentatively with it, as it unfolds, following its metaphorical ground in its multifarious processes of displacement. The poetics of the “common-place” manifested in the pair “Lieu commun: lieu-commun” opens an access not only to Glissant’s work, but also to our own creative collaboration with it, by which we get to see the role we have, too, in the configuration of a truly common world.

Following the pace set by Glissant’s elliptic aphorism, in an essay also composed of two distinct and related parts, we will first, here, approach the “common place” that grounds Glissant’s œuvre, and which has inspired its characteristic gesture of relation. We will see, in turns, to what extent Glissant’s appreciation of Martinique as a place that is common, common ground, far from the clichés of exoticism, has shaped his philosophy, his poetics and his aesthetics – three domains which his writing sets to work all together. In such conjunction, old partitions start atrembling and enclosed fields open and spread: “a new region of the world” takes shape. The forged compound “common-place” announces it in its formation as a word. Combining what is already here (what is common, places and commonplaces), with this transgressive hyphen at its heart, it points to what does not exist. We will no more find “lieux-communs” or “common-places” in dictionaries, than we will ever be able to pinpoint any actual place corresponding to it on the maps of the world.

Later, another piece of this presentation of Édouard Glissant’s poetics of the compounding of places will track the diverse unsettlements that lead to the configuration of such a “place in progress” (as we speak of a “work in progress”). We will then expand (on) the colon around which the binarity “Lieu commun: lieu-commun” is constructed and see how it diagrammatizes the procedure of Glissant’s poetics. It will take us

1. In this essay, I will quote Betsy Wing’s brave translation of *Poetics of Relation* (1997) whenever my reading of Glissant can agree with it. Wing will then be referred to in the parentheses following the quotations I make of her text. But when my interpretation of the Glissantian original text in French diverges from Wing’s English translation, I will provide my own formulation of Glissant’s original French. The French title of the original volume will then signal it.

beyond what can be easily recognized and visibly apprehended, the “common place” that comes first. We will then have to try and follow the course of this obscure hyphen which Glissant has inserted within his compound, by which what is evoked is always made anew.

This is the reason why I chose to coin this compound word, which Betsy Wing’s translation presents unhyphenated. In my reading of Glissant, and hence in my translation, the “common place” in two words will specifically refer to place as common in different ways (shared, ordinary, repeated here and there ...); “commonplace” in one word will correspond to its dictionary definitions of common and trite, “trivial, hackneyed,” as stated in the *OED*. The neologism “common-place,” besides its sticking as closely as possible to Glissant’s French, preserves the obscurity of the coinage, and presents itself as creation that consists in taking into account what already exists, and combining it so as to produce something utterly new and unexpected. This is precisely what the “common-place,” as poetics and philosophy is all about, as this essay will show.

Place is the frame, the motif and the structure of Édouard Glissant’s language. In *Philosophie de la Relation*, he calls place his “source reality” (47), thus paradigmatically merging the metaphorical and the actual, the referred-to and the referring-to, the phrase and the act. Glissant’s “place of birth and continuity” (101) is the island of Martinique. It is a common place, a very common place: not just a touristy exotic spot, but the ordinary living place of a people struggling against economic deprivation and a double – intellectual and agricultural – a-culturation (*Poetics of Relation* 148-53). The people living on the island of Martinique not only claim and develop links with populations living on the other islands of the Caribbean archipelago, and even farther, with those living in the countries on the edge of the Caribbean sea, but they also constitute an incredible mixture of peoples from all over the world. So many, brought there by brutal force, found themselves alive, there, in an incredible all-entanglement of their diversities. And they mixed, then, per force but also with love: they were changed and still change in these exchanges (154). This produced both the Caribbean people as they are and, as Garraway rightly writes, a foundation myth modelizing “present and future trends of global (post)modernity, in which peoples and cultures are brought together and engage in relations of increasing proximity and exchange” (Garraway 164). Through the gathering and mixing of a good number of the peoples of the earth, the Caribbean people, unspectacularly, displays its constitutive commonness. In other words, the Caribbean people manifests its creation, as a people, through an ordinary life lived all together, in common, in an ordinary place of the world. But to some it also sometimes appears “common” in another sense. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines such commonness as: “[o]ccasionally *contemptuous*: Of inferior quality or value, mean; vulgar, as persons; Undistinguished.” Because of their black skin, some were decidedly considered too “common” to have any value, apart from, at best, a commercial one. They were deemed “common” to the point of being made even more common still, brought down, diminished, beaten down, sold, and reduced to the abominable condition of slaves. And then, in this infinitely low condition, they were shipped to those faraway specks of islands, in the invisible, hardly reachable confines of the Western world. Places so far and so small – so “common” then – that the refinements of the Enlightenment, the fashions, lifestyles and all those practices produced during the process which Chaunu

calls the “Northernization” of the eighteenth century (50) could not reach them. This also contributes to their “commonness” and complements it.

Édouard Glissant painstakingly considers each of the diverse aspects of the commonplace characteristics of his birthplace, his common place indeed, in order to start from there and launch the politically imaginative configuration of that other place – the “common-place.” One with the place, of which he and his poetics partake, just as they, reciprocally, do, Glissant writes himself as one of the common people, the “undistinguished,” the lower class. This is what we can gather from the description of his first home – a house so small, so unobtrusive and so dilapidated that he can hardly find it when he physically comes back to it many years later, and looks for it with one of his sons:

Where is this primordial home, our islet, whose earthen walls and branch structure had, over the years, made room for rusted sheet steel in such a way that in the end it looked less like a hut than a lumber-room? (*Philosophie de la Relation* 17)²

And all this leaves out yet other aspects of what is common / banal / trivial / considered with contempt by some and shared by many, on these tiny islands at the far end of the western world. Glissant calls the latter “dust of the earth” (*Philosophie de la Relation* 48), by which he transcribes both their geographical presence, objectively apprehended in relation to the rest of the universe, and the subjectivity of their very disappointed discoverers. The other aspects of what is seen as common about Glissant’s birthplace, the island of Martinique, concern its culture, folklorized, caricaturized, packaged for holidays; and its language, Creole French, which is alive, ever changing, hybridizing, popular – joyously impure.

The commonplace, with its multiple mixed meanings, so manifest in diverse aspects of the life in Martinique which Glissant chooses to pay homage to, is the stuff of which Glissant’s œuvre is built: it is what it is about and what shapes it, what gives it its orientation and moving force. It comes from the very place and goes toward the making of that other place beyond it – the common-place. As the neologism makes clear, especially in French where the word “lieu” has pride of place and its attached commonness comes next, in its wake, the common comes from the place. It grows from it, as it were. It is drawn from it. Place functions as a model for a practice of the common – or should I say the commoning?³ – a practice which necessarily is an elaboration, a work in progress, a collaboration in trust:

I lay hope in the language of landscapes. The rims of our forests dissolve into the cultivated grounds that reach into the sands. Here is an abridged thumb-index notebook. (*Traité du Tout-Monde* 232)

2. *Philosophie de la Relation* has not been translated into English yet, so all the translations of the quotes from this book are mine.

3. The gerund serves to express the voluntary act of collaboration. We see here already Glissant’s “common-place” trans-rooting (Oakley 16) into other practices of the common over the world. *Commoning* refers to current practices diversely unifying people(s) unsatisfied with the actual world order (Dardot and Laval 455). They tend to preserve the common resources of the planet – water, air, landscapes, ideas, science, the Internet, but also education and civic action – and develop innovative social practices to configure new – that is human, political, ecological – ways of relating to the world (104-5). In the words of David Bollier, commoning “asks us to consider a different paradigm of social and moral order,” (104) before implementing it. This is what Glissant’s poetics does, as one of the many different instances currently at work in the world.

As we can read here, the common place of Glissant's Martinique immediately presents itself as a language. As both "language" ("parole" in the French original) and "thumb-index notebook" indicate, the common place is of the order of language, but it is neither an accomplished language, a text, nor does it have force of law, the way a dictionary does. It presents itself to Glissant and to us as a gathering of well-trying words, bound together in their diversity, preserved and made ready for new uses: the landscape constitutes a "thumb-index notebook," already forming a bridge and bridging in its being "abridged." Besides, in the naming itself as well as in what the name unfolds, this "thumb-index notebook" is full of compound words, compounds like the very place they evoke, where "The rims of our forests dissolve into the cultivated grounds that reach into the sands," in one long and slow unbroken breath, or sight, or stride. Forests-cultivated grounds-sands, together and in common, in their very manifestation together, but also in their distinct succession, compose the place by always taking it beyond itself. Such a composition of the place by de-composition, atomization even, dis-places it, always, and renders impossible its apprehension as, in any way, a possible form of "monoity."⁴ The layout of this place constitutes the mould in which Glissant casts all his alloys: his words, sentences, and books.

Published by the French publisher Gallimard, each of Glissant's books has a label attached to it, identifying it as a "Novel," as "Poetry," "Drama," or as an "Essay," in abeyance with the commonly-accepted, preconceived generic categories that put works in a neat literary fold. But Glissant's books cross generic boundaries and combine affiliations. Thus each of his books is the locus of their commoning. In this respect they emulate the example set by the landscape – or rather, unset by it. Glissant's writing follows the movement towards the other beyond itself which is incipient in the landscape, ever reaching forward and unfolding in its apposition of various specific places. This, for one, has determined that striking figure of speech, apposition, by which, Oakley shows, Glissant thinks difference, against (meaning both counter to and taking into account) the Western tradition represented by Heidegger (2). At another level, such a vision of his landscape has informed the surprising combination of dramatic dialogue, essayistic prose, poems, fragments of diaries, quotations from novels, to be found in each item of the series of the allegedly prose works the publisher identified as "Poetics," "Philosophy," or again "Aesthetics." In Glissant's work, generic hybridization does not produce yet another volume to be displayed in the "New Literatures" section. The adjective gathering the works under such an epithet says more about their late consideration by Western or Westernized readers, than about their actual newness. Glissant's daring and baffling transgenerization inaugurates a new literature, a new state of literature where "state" should not be confused with stasis.⁵

4. The noun and the notion of "monoity" appear in *Une nouvelle région du monde* (88) as the reduction of what has been made diverse, luxuriant, unpredictable, untamable ... into essential purity. As this reduction to the single unit that the root of the Glissantian coinage indicates (reduction, unit and root being quite inauspicious to Glissantian philosophy), "monoity" is what, finite and complete, can be seized and possessed.

5. "Transgenerization" is part of the "transrhetorics" which Glissant's writing practices. Both play a fundamental part in developing the common, transnational, space which its various languages already bear. Through such "transrhetorics" (*Traité du Tout-Monde* 112), "Transhistory extends" (113), too, and leaves no gaps between eras and areas, no occurrence untold, outside history, a "nonhistory" (*Caribbean Discourse* 62-3). Even though a number of other words exist to name an existing practice, the new compound, "transgenerization", coined after Glissant's own extant coinages, clearly manifests in its construction the process of creation which he relies on to set up the principle of this New Region of the World he envisages on bases of commoning. A continuous crossing of boundaries of all kinds, which, at the same

In this new state of literature, maybe the old and so fecund division into literary genres no longer rules. What is the novel and what is poetry? (*Traité du Tout-Monde* 121)

Partaking of poetry, the novel, the essay, and drama, Glissant's writing is also always and simultaneously philosophical, aesthetic and poetic. He claims: “The poetics of Relation is thus a philosophy, and conversely: poetry and philosophy mutually protect each other against false finalities” (*Philosophie de la Relation* 87). We shall soon expand on how the Glissantian Relation operates, analysing the aesthetics which shapes the “common-place,” the philosophy it conveys and the poetics which carries it forward. But before we come to that, both the field of poetics and the scope of aesthetics, in Glissant's work, will have to be surveyed. First of all, the frame within which his philosophy develops must be considered.

Everything in Glissant always starts with the place and its inhabitants. Hence the political – in the broad sense of the conscious and purposeful organization of interactions with what surrounds us – lies at the basis of all his enterprise. We have seen, for instance, how the landscape is made to set the example for compounding. The apposing trait and the transgeneric writing which the ordinary lay-out of the ground has inspired, terrain combining with terrain to create a commonplace common place run counter to another state of affairs imposed from elsewhere:

Whereas the Western nation is first of all an “opposite,” for colonized peoples identity will be primarily “opposed to” — that is, a limitation from the beginning. Decolonization will have done its real work when it goes beyond this limit. (Wing 17)

In order to go beyond the limit that posits one thing as “opposed to” another, it is necessary to step outside the great system of thought which “governs occidental philosophies,” (*Traité du Tout-Monde* 179) and which develops by feeding on the confrontation it sets up between Being and being. In *Une nouvelle région du monde*, Glissant writes:

So, it is from the point of view of this naïve way of thinking that I would like to question the notions that the occidental philosophies have sanctioned under the name of Being and being (*l'Être et l'Étant*), where Being appears as absolute, unreachable, transcendent and sublime [...]. (178)

Glissant also attempts to strip *l'Étant* of its initial capital – what the English translation has always already done with a lower-case “being” in order to stress its difference from “Being” – as he wishes to resist mimicking both the masterful, all-commanding Being, and a thought that has started to settle and gel into a dogma. Besides, being (*l'étant*) does not fall from the sky, as it were. It is decidedly non ontological. So Glissant conceives this decapitalized being – hence lessened, made commonplace – in relation to Western philosophy, which his own marginal philosophy is going to question. The Glissantian being (*étant*) is convoked and configured from the Western philosophy which constitutes its ground. It thus proves its organic force, and its capacity to move forward and beyond, along the lines which the landscape draws. Consequently, it certainly does not aim at erasing Being: it reckons with it, counts on it to proceed on solid ground, and then transgress it. The Glissantian being is a process of commoning in all senses of

time, insists on them and overpasses them, these coinages opening on the prefix “trans”, stage, as word formations, this arch-Glissantian gesture of construction of the imaginary of something new by taking in as much of the old as possible and going as far ahead beyond it as possible. The coinage as coinage appears as a form of this “errant root” (*Philosophie de la Relation* 36), by which Glissant images the hyphen between common and place: both signs present something new composed out of historically-settled elements.

the word, which is also manifest in the philosopher's "disinclination to cite or annotate his sources" (Oakley 6). Gradually wrought from a long tradition of thought, which it absorbs and repeats and displaces, Glissant's philosophy of being is "truly common and therefore exempt from copyright" (6). But in the French original, being (*l'étant*) calls for the combined action of both the intellect and the sense of hearing for the compounding power of the concept to be understood. *Étant* is perfectly homophonous with both *étang*, a pond, a diminutive sea; and also *étend(s)*, the conjugated form of the verb *étendre*: maybe an imperative, or a present in the indicative mood, bespeaking stretching, spreading out, extension. The homophony secretes homonymies rich in meaning as regards Glissant's philosophy. Inseparable from the lay-out of his native ground, which gives it its orientation, as we have seen, Glissant's philosophy stretches the domain of the philosophical by enriching it with procedures and considerations sometimes deemed exterior to it. The process of extension, as this intellectual play on sounds and images suggests, is dependent on poetics. The perfect equilibrium which the compound title of his 2009 *opus*: *Philosophie de la Relation. Poésie en étendue* (*Philosophy of Relation. Poetry in Extension*) displays, stages the setting up of bridges, the creation of passages, the establishment of correspondences, which is the purport of all his œuvre. "Philosophy" and "Poetry" answer each other symmetrically on either side of the punctuation mark, which places "Relation" and "in extension" in a similar relationship, each defining the other, redrawing the contours, extending them.

Baroque motifs are paradigmatic of Glissant's poetics of extension-and-combination. Indeed, Baroque art reached the confines of the world, the Caribbean archipelago and its continental outskirts, where its motifs mixed with indigenous art forms. The works of art on the surface of which they proliferate, provide, in both hemispheres, an art form which runs counter to a classicism that deemed itself pure, rational and so, universal. In the essay "Concerning a Baroque Abroad in the World," Glissant delights in evoking "Latin American religious art, so close to Flemish or Iberian baroque but so closely intermingled with autochthonous tones" (Wing 78). Baroque art could well be viewed historically as the first artistic instance of creolization. Glissant sees it as an "art of extension"⁶ (*Poétique de la Relation* 92) that has come to question a certain idea of Nature then prevailing in the West, and according to which all was "harmonious, homogeneous, and knowable in depth" (91).

As soon as the questioning of Being and being (*l'Être et l'étant*) is laid down as the ground for Glissant's entire enterprise – a questioning which could have passed for solely philosophical is reconfigured. It runs from philosophical matter into poetical texture (and *vice versa*) via the homophony between *étant* and *étend* which initiates a correspondence between being and extension. Bold and humorous as it is, this play on sounds could not be more serious at the same time. Indeed the way Glissant's work proceeds – its manner and its orientation – is revealed here: this aural repetition propagates the extension that comes into the configuration of the common-place. It also makes us experience the intellectual notion of the relativity of all conventions, through the slight confusion and the accompanying vertigo which the sound echo, appealing

6. Wing chose to translate Glissant's "art de l'extension" by "the art of expansion" (Wing 78). Because "expansion" is used to refer to conquest and imperialism in all of Glissant's texts, it seems utterly misplaced in this context. Likewise, translating Glissant's "connaissable en profondeur" by "thoroughly knowable" upsets the fine balance between depth and superficial extension achieved in the original, and the decisive change of direction it initiates.

to the senses, induces. The immediately perceptible links that stretch (between) Being and being as well as being and extending are also activated through the living, sensitive body of the reader. A relationship is manifested in this way of telling which stresses extension and connection, involves action. All is a question of Relation with Glissant's Poetics / aesthetics / philosophy. And here again, the French “*Relation*” (sometimes capitalized, sometimes not, unpredictably so) conjoins the three significations of “link,” “relationship” and “narrative” in its meaning. Polysemy destabilizes the word, sends semantic tremors through it that upset congealed significations and pushes them beyond their conventional limits, extending or stretching them further. The Glissantian Relation (what *relays* by instituting the *relative* through a *relating* process) sets into motion the “real work” of decolonization (Wing 17), one that aims to go beyond the limits set by a dialectical system of thought. Glissant's œuvre, in its rhetoric, in its poetical choices, pays homage to what was and what is, imagining what may be yet: it relays, intransitively. His writing makes us feel and experience the relationships that each of its elements develops with any other and, through those, the change that affects any thing coming into contact with another. An important passage from the essay “Poetics,” reprinted in *Poetics of Relation*, presents Relation. It retraces the process which, in the same gesture and along the same lines, repeats, prolongs, and goes beyond:

We have already said that Relation informs not simply what is relayed but also the relative and the related. Its always approximate truth is given in a narrative. For, though the world is not a book, it is nonetheless true that the silence of the world would, in turn, make us deaf. Relation, driving humanities chaotically onward, needs words to publish itself, to continue. But because what it relates, in reality, proceeds from no absolute, it proves to be the totality of relatives, put in touch and told. (Wing 27-8)

Relation – relayed – relative – related: a root burgeons and spreads. It moves onward by repeating itself, tracing a relation, extended on the surface of the page as of the world it evokes. Such roots propagating on the surface are rhizomes. Glissant's œuvre moves like a rhizome.

Its poetical character is not only secreted by its language, which is just beautiful and remains dazzlingly exact even as it proliferates and irradiates, as we have only begun to see. Neither is it merely due to its rhetoric, however finely wrought it proves to be, or apparent in the way the texts are variously laid out on the pages. Its poetical character comes forth in the fact that Glissant's writing actually creates what it writes about. It does not just reflect it, it leaves it to our senses and our emotions to give it actual life, while at the same time not grounding or settling anything in any definite place because it activates the process of Relation through the imaginative links the latter makes possible.⁷ Unexpectedly, from the faraway margins of the allegedly civilized world, Glissant thereby actualizes and reinvigorates the great poetic tradition, the high classicism of ancient Greece expressed in the verb *poiëin* through the telling of a poetry that makes, does, produces – and what it creates is “the world as yet not created,” as one of the titles of his books proclaims: *Le Monde Incréé. Poésie*. The second part of this twofold title redoubles the content of the first, and expresses its formation in its writing. *Poésie*

7. Oakley notes how, “from the perspective of Glissant, Heidegger's rhetoric neutralizes the semantic content, which is inescapably anchored to a uniform syntax” (3). Her article painstakingly shows how, in contrast, “tropes in Glissant are rarely incidental” (14) and stage the ideas conveyed semantically. Language is thereby not reduced to a communicational function but it is employed dramatically, as it constantly and variously draws the reader's attention not only to the written statement but also to its writing.

is a blend-word, what the French call a *mot-valise*, which, translated literally, would be: a “suitcase word.” It compounds *poésie* and *patrie* (poetry and fatherland), and thus, by literary means, creates a new type of place the foundation of which is poetical. Altogether, the blending, the adventurous journey which the valise signals, the word creation through the obvious relation to a word quite common in English elicit a practice: the very practice of Glissantian Relation. It is in such a practice that poetics reveals itself: “Poetics, whatever their fields of application, are thus practices,” Glissant states in his essay on aesthetics, *Une nouvelle région du monde* (182).

Glissant’s texts take us travelling. But at no time can the journeys on which they take us be mistaken with holidaying. At no moment do we reach the locus of a vacation abroad, or enjoy lazily a restful sojourn on transparent Caribbean seas. Beautiful as their language is – it partakes of the beauty of the world to which it returns – it is also a difficult language. The pages of his first book most specifically identified as dealing with aesthetics, *Une nouvelle région du monde. Esthétique I*, are particularly exacting. There is hardly any marked chapter division to let us situate ourselves confidently. Some sentences are very long. One of them, for example, starts with the gently ironic encouragement “paddle hard!” (16) and goes on for thirty-one lines. It constitutes the end of a paragraph that runs over more than four pages – it is the second paragraph of the book – leading to a section called “Obscure Languages” (19). And the language is obscure, indeed, obscure with a vengeance, coming as it does from a people supposedly deprived of culture, mixing Creole and classical French, technical terms from various crafts, glissantianisms and unmarked quotes. This sentence (but it is just one among many like it) produces an intricate entanglement, just as it moves on and on from one place to another – from Tierra del Fuego to Norway, Siberia, Brazil, Brittany and Martinique, all in four lines – juxtaposing them, establishing a dizzying proximity which obliges us to take a step back from everything we assumed we knew about the world ... And all the while, along with these changes exerted on the actual geography of the world, on top of them, considerations on art, aesthetics and chaos, self-references and cross-references to Glissant’s conceptual world through clusters of words that echo one another but not quite, make all solid and definitive ground tremble and turn this sentence into a maze. And yet the reader is not lost, or drowned, as so many slaves once were. It is just difficult for us to find our bearings and our balance, to accept and trust the opacity created by the stylistic and thematic entanglement. We know we must get to the full stop. The sentence drags us on, all its commas signalling like the markers on a trail: if they do not give us rest, they nevertheless give us confidence by providing orientation. They also go on pointing to somewhere else, over there, always farther.

So not only does the sentence bewilder us, but it pulls us forward. It exerts a force of traction which redefines beauty and displaces it. Beauty, according to Glissant, cannot be left untouched, lying inert, objectified by fixed criteria of the order of Being. Because it is of the world, and from the world, beauty partakes of obscure entanglements and is recognizable through them. Any language tending to manifest beauty must find a way to display and constitute in itself the forces, combined, of traction, attraction and tractation. This is its aesthetic condition.

Is beauty at the same time the reflection, the sign in the work of art, and the intuition in us, the premonition, of the tractation of a difference that ascertained itself as it opened to the probable and of the attraction of a difference which will go beyond its own limits

by offering itself thus, the traction turns into attraction, this is the great circus of the world, of Being, we have divined it and repeated it [...]. (*Une nouvelle région du monde* 45-6)⁸

The beauty of the world inspires in Glissant the force of his aesthetics. Relayed by the poetics which the world, this world, presents to us, aesthetics will reveal how relative all things are. In the above quotation, an aesthetic effect is produced by the poetical figure of the polyptoton traction / attraction / tractation as it combines with the structural repetition of the phrase which it pulls forward within a sentence in which the syntax is rendered adventurous by both the insertion of a number of assertions within an interrogative frame and the juxtaposition, as if in passing, of successive main clauses without any subordination. Such an aesthetics disrupts the old order of the world, its commanding grammar and clear classical rhetoric. Con-fusion and opacity spread as the process of relation operates and advances the cause of emotion. This aesthetic effect has a strong political bias to it. With the old order of the world reflected in its commanding grammar, the grounds of geography start trembling too and, under the influence of such poetical plate tectonics, territories are brought closer, and start being con-fused. Then, « the Archipelago conjoins any Switzerland » (*Traité du Tout-Monde* 237).

We have now brought to the surface the orientation of Glissant's œuvre. We have traced its foundational movement of Relation that comes with relaying to all the fragmentary relativeness of the multifarious existences on Earth, to which homage is paid by its being related in a work of art. Place that, Glissant insists on it, shapes the written form which it is given in his volumes on poetics and aesthetics, surprisingly frees itself from geographic determinism. It does so by the myriad repetitions which extend its range and make it proliferate – from the ordinarily lived place to the common locus of history to a philosophical paradigm and eventually to a poetics from which the principle of another way of conceiving the world is formulated. We will henceforward have to take into consideration how place spreads in an organicist writing that keeps on dis-placing it, propelling it from common place to common-place. This will lead us to track the strange meanderings of an elusive hyphen which does not draw the contours of the New Region of the World it institutes, but insinuates neverending motion and transgression at its heart.

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8. I chose to keep the ambiguity and preserve the repeated structure of the sentence by opting against translating more clearly than with "of" the phrase "*d'une différence*." In Glissant's French, the partitive article can and must convey the reverse movements of derivation and agglutination.

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