NOTES ON THE CARIBBEAN ESSAY FROM AN ARCHIPELAGIC PERSPECTIVE (KAMAU BRATHWAITE, ÉDOUARD GLISSANT AND ANTONIO BENÍTEZ ROJO)

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Abstract

The article analyzes the construction of a Caribbeanist discourse in the region's cultural essay by looking at the work of three recognized authors from three different linguistic blocs: Édouard Glissant (1928-2011), Antonio Benítez Rojo (1931-2005) and Kamau Brathwaite (1930-). According to the drive for symbolic integration that their essays on Caribbean culture show, the region's literature constitutes itself as a complex weave of shared symbols, figures and notions and a dense network of intellectual relations which crosses linguistic and national barriers. It is the production of an essay "in a certain kind of way" that the writers share: an "archipelagic" kind of way in which the recurrence of aquatic metaphors—a legacy from founders of Caribbeanness like Aimé Césaire—allow writers to inscribe a regional (decolonizing) imprint in postmodern thought, affiliating themselves—even when the revolutionary spirit is long gone—with the decolonizing thrust of "the long sixties."

Keywords: Caribbean essay, Brathwaite, Benítez Rojo, Glissant, intellectual networks

Resumen

El artículo analiza la construcción de un discurso caribeñista en el ensayo cultural de la región a partir de la obra de tres reconocidos autores provenientes de tres diversos bloques lingüísticos: Édouard Glissant (1928-2011), Antonio Benítez Rojo (1931-2005) y Kamau Brathwaite (1930-). De acuerdo con el impulso de integración simbólica que sus ensayos sobre la cultura caribeña manifiestan, la literatura de la región se constituye como un complejo entramado de símbolos, figuras y nociones compartidas, una densa red de relaciones intelectuales que atraviesa barreras lingüísticas y nacionales. Es la producción de un ensayo "de cierta manera" lo que los escritores comparten: una manera "archipiélica" en la cual la recurrencia de metáforas acuáticas —legado de los fundadores del caribeñismo como Aimé Césaire— permite a los autores inscribir una marca regional (descolonizadora) en el pensamiento posmoderno, afiliándose —incluso pasado ya el espíritu revolucionario— con el impulso descolonizador de los "largos sesenta."

Palabras clave: ensayo caribeño, Brathwaite, Benítez Rojo, Glissant, redes intelectuales

RÉSUMÉ

L'article vise à analyser la construction d'un discours caribéen dans les essais culturels de la région à partir de la lecture des œuvres de trois auteurs reconnus des trois grandes ères linguistiques de la Caraïbe : Édouard Glissant (1928-2011), Antonio Benítez Rojo (1931-2005) et Kamau Brathwaite (1930-). Selon l'idée d'intégration symbolique manifestée dans ces essais, la littérature de la région se constitue comme une trame complexe de symboles, de figures et des notions partagées et d'un dense réseau de relations intellectuelles qui dépassent les barrières linguistiques et nationales. C'est la production d'un essai « d'une certaine manière » que les auteurs partagent. Une manière « d'archipel » dans laquelle la récurrence des métaphores aquatiques, légat des fondateurs de l'idéologie caribéenne comme Aimé Césaire a permis aux écrivains d'inscrire une marque régionale (décolonisatrice) dans la pensée postmoderne en s'affiliant avec l'élan décolonisateur des années 60, dont l'esprit révolutionnaire était depuis longtemps manifeste.

Mots-clés : essai des Caraïbes, Brathwaite, Benítez Rojo, Glissant, réseaux intellectuels

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Briser la boue.
Briser.
Dire d'un délire alliant l'univers entier
à la surrection d'un rocher !

Aimé Césaire, « Configurations ».

Archipelagic overture

From his Martinican rock, Aimé Césaire (1913-2008), whose centennial was recently celebrated, always cared to ally his voice with the whole world—*le Tout-Monde*, Édouard Glissant would later say. It was, to follow the latter's *Philosophie de la relation*, the dialectic between detail and totality: "le scheme de l'appartenance et de la relation, en même temps" (Glissant 2009:47), a scheme which never disregards the fact that "the place is unavoidable" ["Le lieu est incontournable" (Glissant 2009:46)]. On the occasion of Léon-Gontran Damas' death in 1978, in his poem "Léon G. Damas feu

sombre toujours… (*in memoriam*)," Césaire emphasized his particular viewpoint, that of "les négritudes obstinées/ les fidélités fraternelles" (1994:391). Beyond the well-known distinction between roots and rhizomatic identity politics—i.e., Glissant's critical reading of Césaire's *Negritude* and his conscious deviation from it—, there seems to be more of Césaire's legacy on Glissant's anti-essentialist regional consciousness (his *archipelagic* consciousness) than one might at first note. It could be simply a case of creative misreadings or, to refashion Borges' reading of Kafka and his precursors, it might still be possible to read (the neglected) Césaire as a predecessor of Glissant's alleged deviations.[1]

Following in Glissant's archipelagic footsteps, I aim to argue, moreover, that Glissant's *poetics of relation*—as a poetics of affiliation inherited from Césaire—not only proves to be a politics of writing in Glissant's essays; it can also be traced in most contemporary essays on Caribbean culture produced in the different linguistic blocs, and particularly in the work of Cuban Antonio Benítez Rojo and Barbadian Kamau Brathwaite, to take two other important authors from the multilingual archipelago. The poetics of affiliation governing the essay production of Édouard Glissant (1928-2011), Antonio Benítez Rojo (1931-2005) and Kamau Brathwaite (1930-) continues, in fact, the communal anti-colonialist and anti-imperialist thrust of the founders of Negritude and the revolutionary spirit of the 1960s and '70s (decolonization movements, Cuban revolution, Black Power), albeit its adjustments with postmodern thought and post-nationalist paradigms. My aim here will be, then, to look at how such poetics translates into a common language, common interests and what we might traditionally call a common "worldview" which is assumed, sometimes militantly, from an inalienable Caribbeanist stance: the writers' own place/locus of discourse.

It is perhaps by resorting to a common geographical (aquatic) imaginary that the contemporary Caribbean essay makes its poetics of affiliation most visible. The key point concerning the metaphorical system displayed in the essays, however, is that it derives from a common politics of decolonization: a conscious effort to build an autonomous *Caribbean discourse* as a system of writing independent from its "mother" literatures/Euro-North-American hegemonic paradigms. In this sense, and taking again Glissant's own affiliative method, the Caribbean essay can be related with the decolonizing thrust characteristic of Latin American or—to borrow formulas from the 1960s and '70s—"Third world" writing in general. (It was Césaire, in fact, who at the time used the expression in a poem dedicated to his Senegalese friend Léopold Sédar Senghor: "Pour saluer le Tiers Monde").

Thus, upon the centennial of Césaire's birth and in memory of Glissant, I would like to start these notes by honoring not only the latter's

regional consciousness (Glissant's immense legacy), but also Césaire's relinking poetics (that of *fraternal fidelities*). Assuming both from a Latin Americanist (my own) stance, which invites us also to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the novel *Rayuela* by Argentinian Julio Cortázar and his own centennial anniversary in 2014, the following lines will focus on the poetics of affiliation of the Caribbean essay.

The Caribbean as a *common-place*

> If poetry is an attempt to reunite what was splintered, the study of literatures is a second effort, a meta-attempt, to assemble, discover, or confront the creations produced in the most disparate and dispersed places and moments: the one and the many.
>
> Claudio Guillén, *The Challenge of Comparative Literature.*

A reflection on the Caribbean essay might first need to start specifying its object. This is, already, a problem, which certainly derives not from the generic category but from the gentilic "Caribbean." As we know, the constitution and frontiers of the region are not unequivocal, and, as a consequence, even less unequivocal are the constitution and frontiers of its literature. Maryse Condé asks herself in her "Notes" on Césaire: "Est-ce qu'un écrivain doit avoir un pays natal?" (1987:23) and Cuban Antonio Benítez Rojo's late 'meta-archipelagic' imaginings of the Antilles relink the islands with an ever-expanding archipelago of "New Atlantis": other Atlantic corners of the world connecting, in turn, with continental forces from Europe/Africa/America (cfr. Benítez Rojo 2010:87-99). What are, in fact, the frontiers of a literature? Most times, and usually for practical reasons, we tend to accept the totalizing categories imposed by literary historiography and criticism. In the case of the Caribbean, besides, the suspicion against such totalizations seems to be countered by a very frequent reaction against the historical balkanization of "Caribbean literature": its compartmentalization into diverse linguistic blocs, lack of communication and exchange between producers, etc. A reaction against disintegrating factors which has also been well-known among Latin American writers and intellectuals since the XIXth century, especially since consciousness was raised about the artificial boundaries created by colonial circuits.

Many critics have approached the constitution of a "Caribbean literature" and arrived at conclusions very similar indeed to the ones historically asserting the existence of a Latin American literature as a whole. In his *Caribbean Poetics. Toward an Aesthetic of West Indian*

Literature (1997), Silvio Torres-Saillant adopts an integrating perspective akin to the spirit of Latin American comparatism—see, for instance, Ana Pizarro's *La literatura latinoamericana como proceso* (1985)—by also assuming "the one and the many" of the region, in this case: the unity in the cultural and socio-historical diversity of the Caribbean. While explicitly defending the autonomy of Caribbean literature, especially in relation to the Latin American literary system,[2] he proposes the search for "parallelisms" and "typological affinities" and recognizes unifying factors—paradigmatic topoi—in the texts produced in the different linguistic areas (1997:14-92). Concerned with giving visibility to the existence of a "common Caribbean essence" (1997:55), Torres-Saillant does not incorporate, however, the study of contacts and effective relations established between writers, texts and figures. Cuban Margarita Mateo Palmer, on the contrary, by explicitly following the guidelines given by Latin American comparatists in the already cited *La literatura latinoamericana como proceso*, has stressed the importance of inquiring into "interliterary contacts" in the region, only partly studied in the Hispanic area. The analysis of "parallelisms and filiations" must include, according to Mateo Palmer, the influence of translations, the interdependence of Caribbean authors and texts, the literary references and mutual interpretations they make of one another (allusion, polemics, citation, parody, etc.) (1990:10).

Taking into account the importance of common unifying elements in the texts as well as the intellectual affiliations thus established, it is probably the conscious efforts at cultural integration made by the main writers in the region which enable us to consider the existence of a "Caribbean essay" as such: a multilingual, transnational (even diasporic) discourse whose object is Caribbean culture, theorized and defined by the essay itself. Again, a parallel can be drawn with the Latin American literary system, as the "Caribbean essay" relates, as Latin Americanists well know, with the more traditional continental 'essay of interpretation'.[3] In fact, rather than the sum of productions written in different languages by essayists belonging to the various territories which would make up the region (according to conventional geo-historiographical criteria), the "Caribbean essay" functions as a sub-genre in itself: a label appropriate for the motivated intention of its producers to interconnect their cultural areas, reassemble their literary traditions and strengthen their intellectual circuits, in a reaction against the divisions and restrictions imposed by colonial/national histories. Besides the well-praised *Le Discours antillais* (1981) by Édouard Glissant, good examples of such Caribbean relinking discourses are George Lamming's *The Pleasures of Exile* (1960); Wilson Harris' *History, Fable and Myth in the Caribbean and Guianas* (1970); *Caliban* (1971) by Cuban Roberto Fernández Retamar; the *Éloge*

de la creolité (1993) by Martinicans Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant; and the more recent *Caribeños* (2002) by Puerto Rican Edgardo Rodríguez Juliá. Through such discourses, among many others—and as it delves into its identity marks—, Caribbean literature constitutes itself as a complex weave of shared symbols, figures and myths, a dense network of intellectual relations which crosses linguistic and national barriers, an object even more heterogeneous than Latin American literature which, like the latter, must be considered a discursive construction: a desire as real as its actual productions.

It is certainly the region itself which is thereby imaginatively shared and projected. In his reading of *La isla que se repite* (1989) by Cuban Benítez Rojo, Puerto Rican critic Arcadio Díaz Quiñones states:

> Su Caribe tiene espesor historiográfico, y abarca desde la llegada de los europeos y los comienzos de la esclavitud hasta episodios de la historia contemporánea. Pero *es ante todo un territorio de la imaginación literaria*. Quizás de ahí la preferencia de Benítez Rojo por la soltura del ensayo, ese género que, según Adorno, es siempre fragmentario y tiene mucho de juego inventivo… (2007:3, my italics).

As a literary territory which links and interconnects insular experiences, opened up, dissected, each time reinvented (repeated) in the free-flowing form of an essay, the Caribbean becomes one of those "*lieux-communs*" in Édouard Glissant's terms: 'similar accordances' ["*semblables accordances*"] illuminated by writers through which a *poétique de la relation* comes into play (2009:35). This, of course, does not exclude the fact that the Caribbean, as a cultural region, shares important material traits, "common places" due to geographic, historical, socioeconomic factors which the authors in question also carefully approach in their essays. From a more 'scientific' perspective, it is Jamaican Edward Baugh who reminds us that the theorization of the Caribbean, like any "design" of the world, is "a projection of the theorist's belief, and belief is a function of desire" (2006:57).

Decades ago, faced with the task of projecting a history of Latin American Literature,[4] Uruguayan Ángel Rama expressed the integrating zeal which encouraged critics to build a "minimum canvas" ["cañamazo mínimo"] that would enable them to unify the region's heterogeneous literary production, in the belief that "although criticism does not construct literary works, it does construct a literature" ["Si la crítica no construye obras, sí construye una literatura"] (Pizarro 1985:18). Literary criticism, at the time, was up to the task of joining the process of emancipation of Latin American letters, celebrating the evolution of the region's narrative. This development did not only manifest itself in an editorial "boom," but also in the confidence felt by critics and especially literary producers in the independence achieved by the system. In

such a context, Julio Cortázar's novel *Rayuela* (1963) (*Hopscotch* in its English translation) was a great example of the maturity gained by Latin American narrative. As Cortázar himself put it in a letter in response to Cuban Roberto Fernández Retamar over *Rayuela*, what the novel made clear was that writers had reached "an American time": an autonomous writing. In Fernández Retamar's intuition, Cortázar had simply managed to write 'so' ["escribir así"], as the novelist later refers:

> lo que hayas podido encontrar de bueno en el libro me hace muy feliz; pero creo que en el fondo lo que más me ha estremecido es esa maravillosa frase, esa pregunta que resume tantas frustraciones y tantas esperanzas: "¿De modo que se puede escribir así por uno de nosotros?" Créeme, no tiene ninguna importancia que haya sido yo el que escribiera así, quizá por primera vez. Lo único que importa es que estemos llegando a un tiempo americano en el que se pueda empezar a escribir así (o de otro modo, pero así, es decir con todo lo que tú connotas al subrayar la palabra). (Cortázar, Carta a Fernández Retamar [1964], Fernández Retamar 1993:68)

Not surprisingly close to Fernández Retamar's opinion of Cortázar's achievement—his writing "so"—, acting (writing as well as walking, dancing, singing) "in a certain kind of way" becomes, as we know, the ruling idea in *La isla que se repite* (1989), the essay by Antonio Benítez Rojo which, translated into English as *The Repeating Island* in 1992, has certainly become a classic among Caribbeanists. Benítez Rojo's "certain kind of way" turns out to be almost indescribable but it expresses, in any case, the same differentiating zeal: it points to the autonomy of a system just like Latin American literature, from the time of the "Boom" narrative, had been recognized for its originality from metropolitan models. Since the revolutionary and decolonizing sixties, in fact, and encouraged by Cuban efforts at intellectual and political coalitions, the construction of a Caribbeanist discourse becomes of paramount importance both in the Hispanic and the non-Hispanic Antilles,[5] and especially for a politically committed intellectual formed in the "Casa de las Américas": Benítez Rojo, even as an exile in the United States, would continue building a Caribbean discourse.[6] Clearly indicating the author's Caribbeanist regional consciousness, in *La isla que se repite* it is precisely the "desire"—concept and word—*which repeats*, as Jamaican Edward Baugh well observes to support his argument that the theorization of the Caribbean is, as already quoted, a projection of belief—a projection of desire.

The repeating essay and its beginnings

Ecoutez :
de mon île lointaine
de mon île veilleuse
je vous dis Hoo !
Et vos voix me répondent

Aimé Césaire,
"Pour saluers le Tiers Monde"

Following Edward Said's formula for *Beginnings* (1975), I would now like to explore the "intention and method" of the Caribbean essay by focusing on some affiliative aspects of the work of Glissant, Benítez Rojo and Brathwaite. Contemporary with one another, the three of them have practiced various genres (novel, short-story, poetry, drama) and constructed a strongly Caribbeanist essayist discourse.[7] From a comparative perspective, it is the production of an essay "in a certain kind of way" that the writers share: a certain kind of way so stated and exposed, as we know, by Benítez Rojo's in his *Repeating Island*:

> Se ha dicho muchas veces que el Caribe es la unión de lo diverso, y tal vez sea cierto. En todo caso, mis propias relecturas me han ido llevando por otros rumbos, y ya no me es posible alcanzar reducciones de tan recta abstracción.
>
> En la relectura que ofrezco a debate en este libro propongo partir de una premisa más concreta, de algo fácilmente comprobable: un hecho geográfico. Específicamente, el hecho de que las Antillas constituyen un puente de islas que conecta de "cierta manera", es decir, de una manera asimétrica, Sudamérica con Norteamérica. Este curioso accidente geográfico le confiere a todo el área, incluso a sus focos continentales, un carácter de archipiélago, es decir, un conjunto discontinuo (¿de qué?): condensaciones inestables, turbulencias, remolinos, racimos de burbujas, algas deshilachadas, galeones hundidos, ruidos de rompientes, peces voladores, graznidos de gaviotas, aguaceros, fosforescencias nocturnas, mareas y resacas, inciertos viajes de la significación; en resumen, un campo de observación muy a tono con los objetivos de Caos (1998:16).[8]

In the same "kind of way" that geography leaves its mark on Benítez Rojo's text, it is the preeminence of landscape in Édouard Glissant's work that critics have usually emphasized. The importance of landscape is, besides, supported by a profound theoretical reflection on the topic in Glissant's essays—in which, incidentally, the concept of *desire* [*vœu*] is also recurrent. For the Martinican writer, landscape determines poetics: opposed to the idea of a picturesque regionalism or touristic exoticism, his concern for landscape is in fact a historical concern, resulting from the impact of geography on Antillean history. Whereas the flat plantation

is the place of slavery, the forest mountain is the place of revolt (even the Cuban revolutionaries from the Granma marooned in the Sierra Maestra). The sea, in turn, with its immense possibilities, is the gateway to interrelation, independence and freedom. But also, as Derek Walcott's famous verse reads, *the sea is history*,[9] and this, in the Caribbean, is laden with pain and death. This is why for Glissant, "la forêt, le paysage, la configuration ne sont pas des éléments disons épisodiques, ce sont des élements fondamentaux non seulement de notre histoire mais aussi de notre manière de dire" (Bader 1984:93).

By delving into the idea of a mode of expression particular to the Caribbean (*notre manière de dire*), in his interview with Wolfgang Bader the Martinican author connects his position with that of his predecessor Aimé Césaire, who in the context of a debate over national poetry with Haitian René Depestre in the fifties, emphasized that Antillean writers did not carry in them the sonnet form or the spring and the prairie, but "proliferating vegetation" ("la végétation qui prolifère sur elle-même" [Bader, *ibid.*]). In turn, Barbadian poet Kamau Brathwaite in his seminal *History of the Voice. The Development of Anglophone Caribbean Poetry* (1984) provides a wonderful *dictum* in the same (decolonizing) direction: "the hurricane does not roar in pentameters" (1986:265). Geographic excess, climatic chaos, irregularities repeating all over the islands and an expression which "in a certain kind of way" responds to the Caribbean perspective, as Benítez Rojo's, Glissant's and Brathwaite's Antillean discourses show; a certain kind of writing whose symbolic value, moreover, becomes proportional to its strangeness and *opaqueness* (Glissant's *opacité* as a strategy of resistance) to the reader.

In "Routes and Roots: Tidalectics in Caribbean Literature," Elizabeth DeLoughrey points to the convergence of theoretical perspectives in the three authors in question, related to the recurrence of a "trans-oceanic imaginary" in their texts, in particular, the use of the sea as "a trope for Caribbean regionalism" (2007:168), with two important implications: "the Caribbean Sea is an element 'in flux' which highlights migrancy, but it is also a space which seems unoccupied by colonial presence and could unite the region in ways that offer an alternative to colonial fragmentation" (2007:169).

Along similar lines, in a previous contribution ("Libre sous la mer-Submarine Identities in the work of Kamau Brathwaite and Edouard Glissant"), Trinidadian J. Michael Dash (Glissant's translator and specialist) had in fact related the presence of a "maritime imaginary" in both Glissant and Brathwaite with the theorization of Caribbean identity. Dash contended, however, that even though both writers employed similar figures, their perspectives on creolization diverged: whereas Brathwaite aims at the resolution of conflicts and contradictory impulses

by resorting (in an essentialist, ethnocentric fashion) to the possibility of a legitimizing Genesis, Glissant's "exemplary relationality" leads away from the fallacies of primordial, original senses ("aboriginal inner space," "paradisal wilderness") and the guarantees of lineage (Dash 2001:197). For Dash, the distance between Brathwaite's and Glissant's views (which he relates to the distance existing between a modern and a postmodern approach to the issue of identity) is blurred by Glissant himself, who more than once quotes Brathwaite's key statement: *the unity is submarine*. But according to the critic, it is only due to Glissant's surpassing theorizations that we can now reread Brathwaite's Caribbean/archipelagic discourse deconstructively (Dash 2001: *ibid.*).

Notwithstanding the possible disagreement with Dash's ideas on Brathwaite's identitarian perspective (which in my view is less "modern" than Dash thinks),[10] it is interesting to look into the reasons why Glissant might want to quote Brathwaite even when their theoretical stances differed. As Dash well observes, Glissant binds his essential *Poétique de la Relation* (1990) with Brathwaite's dictum "The unity is sub-marine," included as an epigraph together with the already mentioned verse "Sea is History" by Walcott. Dedicated to the dub Jamaican poet Michael Smith, "assassiné aux archipels, comblés de mort patente," Glissant's book, open to the Relation with what he will later call the "*Tout-monde*," adopts, nevertheless, a definitely 'rooted' Caribbean perspective: that of an archipelago suffering the burden of history, a *tortured geography* searching for allies,[11] a 'transoceanic imaginary' whose figures and tropes recall, in fact, Aimé Césaire's foundational *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (1939):

> Ce qui est à moi, ces quelques milliers de mortiférés qui tournent en rond dans la calebasse d'une île et ce qui est à moi aussi, l'archipel arqué comme le désir inquiet de se nier, on dirait une anxiété maternelle pour protéger la ténuité plus délicate qui sépare l'une de l'autre Amérique; et ses flancs qui sécrètent pour l'Europe la bonne liqueur d'un Gulf Stream, et l'un des deux versants d'incandescence entre quoi l'Equateur funambule vers l'Afrique. Et mon île non-clôture, sa claire audace debout à l'arrière de cette polynésie, devant elle, la Guadeloupe fendue en deux de sa raie dorsale et de même misère que nous, Haïti où la négritude se mit debout pour la première fois et dit qu'elle croyait à son humanité et la comique petite queue de la Floride où d'un nègre s'achève la strangulation, et l'Afrique gigantesquement chenillant jusqu'au pied hispanique de l'Europe, sa nudité où la Mort fauche à larges andains.
>
> Et je me dis Bordeaux et Nantes et Liverpool et New York et San Francisco… (Césaire 1969:52)

In an effort to "rethink the links that bind pre and postmodernism

in Caribbean thought," as Dash proposes (2001:200), it is perhaps necessary not only to reread Césaire as a precursor of archipelagic thinking and beyond the well-known shortcomings of 'essentialist' *Négritude*, but also to revise both Brathwaite's and Glissant's 'creolization' poetics in the light of Césaire. On the one hand, because the work of Brathwaite and Glissant (and that of Benítez Rojo as well) indeed testifies to the tensions of that "crucial transitional moment in Caribbean literature" Dash refers to, when Caribbean thought veers away from 'nationalist' models to hybrid paradigms (2001:200). On the other hand, because Césaire's poetics surpasses its own *Négritude* by privileging the logic of coalitions over the legitimation on lineage. Césaire's salutation to the "Third World" (and especially to Africa) has a clear motivation: they are *the damned of the earth*, as his other disciple Frantz Fanon wrote. Césaire's concern was always also a historical and political one:

> Ah!
> mon demi-sommeil d'île si trouble
> sur la mer !
> Et voici de tous les points du péril
> l'histoire qui me fait le signe que j'attendais,
> Je vois pousser des nations.
> Vertes et rouges, je vous salue, bannières, gorges du vent ancien, […]
>
> (Césaire 1994:373)

It is in fact this *tortured* or *drowned geography*—in Césaire's poem, the nations, like slave ships or islands, seem to emerge from water—which will be echoed in the Caribbean essay. Significantly, in Glissant's last great book, which was also his last great essay on Relation, the author himself affiliates with Césaire's legacy more openly, as he includes two highly emotional essays on the First Congress of Black Writers and Artists (Paris, 1956) and in memory of Césaire. Negritude's solidarities and their "sortes de rassemblement" (2009:127) become thus part of Glissant's *philosophie de la relation*, since they gave rise to "ce lieu commun qui serait bientôt fameux autant que trop usé peut-être: l'unité dans la diversité" (Glissant 2009:124). From this perspective, it is clear that Césaire's affiliations with the Black world at large ("les fidélités fraternelles": from the African 'originals' to the North American, Brazilian, Caribbean blacks of the diaspora) was certainly a strategic response to Eurocentric "Assimilation" and the balkanization resulting from colonial circuits—and "balkaniser" is, for Glissant, "un des verbes les plus négatifs du monde de la Relation" (2009:49). Rather than "closed" insularity, Césaire's poetics favored "open" relations: "Toute île appelle, toute île est veuve," he once said (Sieger 1961), and we could even think that such relinking spirit also accounts for his heterodox poetic language, whose

neologisms help to 'break the mud' [*briser la boue*] of French insularity—again, a lesson that Glissant resolutely takes up.

Coming back to Dash's comments, it is true that Glissant problematizes where Brathwaite (as well as Césaire, we here add) dramatizes (2001:198). But in any case, Glissant's 'relational' *Antillanité* (or *pensée archipélique*), like Brathwaite's *submarine unity* and the aquatic (chaotic, postmodern) figures which also flood Benítez Rojo's essays resort to the Caribbean archive of geographic metaphors, manifesting thus their strong drive for a symbolic cultural integration as they develop a theoretical discourse on the Caribbean. In the same way that Césaire's poetics was intensely marked by 'Black Marxism' and the internationalist spirit of Communism (the Proletarian internationalism of "Workers of all countries, unite!" which particularly attracted the Blacks and Fanon's "*damnés de la terre*"), the work of Glissant, Brathwaite and Benítez Rojo shows the imprint of 'the long sixties', especially the cultural atmosphere and political engagement fostered by decolonization movements and the Cuban revolution. Even when the revolutionary spirit is long gone in the Caribbean, and as neoliberal, conservative politics prevail (from the 80s onwards), the authors manifest a clear will to engage their discourses and activities with collective efforts of cultural decolonization and regional integration.

Together with the imagination of the Caribbean as a "common place" and the exploration and legitimation of that opaque "kind of way" which does not limit itself to one particular language ("quelle que soit la langue que nos employons dans la Caraïbe, il me semble que nous avons le même langage," Glissant states [Bader 1984:91]), there exists a voluntary affiliation of the authors with one another, made visible through multiple shared references, the mutual appropriation of ideas, the establishment of explicit dialogues as their texts spread (and get translated) in the different linguistic areas. In a significant gesture, because the text constitutes the Preface to an anthology called *Facing the Sea*, published in English "from the Caribbean region for secondary schools" and including authors from the archipelago and Latin America, Brathwaite integrates the work of various Caribbean writers (Glissant among them) into "the Caribbean imagination" which, as he posits, "uses landscape, nature, the environment, as a founding metaphor for all our rites of passage, for all our celebrations, cerebrations, all our stations of the cross & crossings" (Brathwaite 1992:v).

The Caribbean is thus 'collectively' written, produced by a multilingual network of writers. Such intraregional functioning is in turn accompanied by the (also voluntary) construction of literary systems in each linguistic bloc. In the French Caribbean (Antilles-Guyane) and the Anglophone "West Indies"—including the (former British) Guyana—,

the late and slow institutionalization of literature has also been a result of the *desire* (sometimes no more than that) of its producers to work collectively. A good example of such intercommunication is the comment made by Trinidadian C.L.R. James around Wilson Harris' ideas on language in a text written back in 1964:[12]

> Whom Harris had been reading I don't know. I sent him at once a copy of my Heidegger and he rapidly replied that he agreed with Heidegger entirely. I have talked with George Lamming on this question of language in the West Indies and he has very definite views on it. These he will, I hope, make clear (and popular) one day. Derek Walcott I know is grappling practically with this problem… (1973:71)

If collectivism and the fight against bourgeois individualism (its opponent) have left their mark on the first generations of Anglophone and French Caribbean writers (from the foundational Césaire and C.L.R. James onwards), and particularly on Cuban intellectuals experiencing the advent of the Revolution, the construction of a communal subject becomes a profession of faith for the three writers here under discussion, and especially for Brathwaite and Glissant, who throughout their careers—at home and abroad—actively engaged in various cultural projects, among the most relevant ones: the Caribbean Artists Movement (founded in London in 1966) and the publishing house and journal *Savacou* directed by Brathwaite in Jamaica in subsequent years; the Institut Martiniquais d'Études and the review *Acoma* (1971-1973) created by Glissant, as well as the more recent Institut du Tout-Monde—with its Prix Carbet de la Caraïbe—launched by the Martinican writer and associated with la Maison de l'Amérique Latine and Cuban Casa de las Américas among other important institutions.

The attraction these writers experience (as they manifest on various occasions) for a collective event of Caribbean integration such as the Carifesta (Caribbean Festival of the Arts)[13] might indeed derive from their 'communal' background. Significantly, the Carifesta celebrations produce interesting intraregional connections and strong affiliations which leave their imprint on the essays. The festival celebrated in Havanna in 1979 becomes a "Cultural hurricane" for Benítez Rojo and it even inspires a text on Carnival in his *Repeating Island* and later meditations on the importance of the festival in his posthumous essays (cfr. 2010:87-90). Glissant, who considers Carifesta a political and cultural phenomenon and—together with the increasing contacts established between the islands—a concrete manifestation of *Antillanité* (Bader 1984:98), includes his intervention in the 1976 festival celebrated in Kingston in *Le Discours antillais*. There, in what he calls "La querelle avec l'histoire," he explicitly allies himself with his Anglophone colleagues (George Lamming, Derek Walcott, V. S. Naipaul, Edward

Baugh) in the task of rescuing the Caribbean memory and past.

Even though Glissant will maintain that "les rencontres entre les littératures antillaises (…) ne proviennent pas d'une décision des producteurs de texte: ce sont les effets encore camouflés d'un même mouvement historique, d'une même appartenance culturelle" (1981:130), there is a conscious drive in his writing for building a *common Caribbean discourse*. In his text, Glissant not only *quotes* Brathwaite—as Dash points out—, he also affiliates strongly with him: Glissant's idea of "Relation"—a concept explored already in his early *Les Indes* (1956)—becomes a creative assimilation of Brathwaite's notion of "submarine unity." Upon evoking the Africans of the Middle Passage "lestés de boulets et jetés par-dessus bord," sowing in the depths "les boulets de l'invisible," Glissant adds:

> C'est ainsi que nous avons appris, non la transcendance ni l'universel sublimé, mais la transversalité. (...) Nous sommes les racines de la Relation.
>
> Des racines sous-marines: c'est-à-dire dérivées, non implantées d'un seul mât dans un seul limon, mais prolongées dans tous les sens de notre univers par leur réseau de branches. (1981:134)

In this "early meditation on the image of the rhizome," as Dash justly calls it (2001:197), Glissant veers away from the *Négritude* tradition which Brathwaite actually re-edits with a less essentialist vision than his precursors, but still mainly oriented towards the quest for the African identity. Nevertheless, it is Glissant's relinking spirit which determines his affiliation with the Barbadian "historian as poet," as he characterizes Brathwaite (1981:130). As already mentioned, Brathwaite's formula will become the epigraph of his *Poétique de la Relation*, where Glissant appropriates Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's ideas on rhizome as an identitarian figure, undoubtfully due to their political meaning, summed up in the following statement from *Mille Plateaux*: "le rhizome est alliance" (1980:36). In a "Dialogue" held between Brathwaite and Glissant in 1992 at the University of Maryland, the Martinican writer will further explain: "You have filiation not by legitimation but by adoption. This is the creolization that is working all around the world and what I call the *Poétique de la Relation*" (1996:27-28).

Significantly, at the same Jamaican Carifesta of 1976 Brathwaite presented for the first time his sociology of "nation language" which would later become his capital *History of the Voice* (1984) and there, *nation language* as a strategy of linguistic resistance and cultural decolonization was linked to Glissant's "Free and Forced Poetics" (1976), theorization which Brathwaite had read in a "remarkable article" Glissant had published in English.[14] As Brathwaite explained, nation language:

> is the language of enslaved persons. For him [Glisssant], nation

> language is a strategy: the slave is forced to use *a certain kind of language* in order to disguise himself, to disguise his personality, and to retain his culture. And he defines that language as "forced poetics" because it is a kind of prison language, if you want to call it that. (1986:270, my italics)

Glissant's "forced poetics" could not be so simply equated with Brathwaite's nation language, nor could it be celebrated—as Brathwaite actually did—in the direction of a "free language." Considered by Glissant a "counter-poetics," this rather *invented* a collective expression, which implied that, at present, there only existed an impossibility of expression (Cfr. Glissant 1981:237). But Brathwaite minimized the differences: the will for integration prevailed, and this "certain kind of language" connected in *a certain kind of (submarine) way* with Africa, the rest of the Caribbean islands and, more generally, with all those 'submerged' popular forms, heterodox voices in counter current with official languages. Even in the cited "Preface" to the school anthology *Facing the Sea* Brathwaite would recur to the tidal style typical of his essay writing: "utterly involved with African Atlantic: its engines, energies, exhilirations, its memories & whispers & rumours of Atlantis on my face, my history, my body, facing the sea…" (1992:v). Brathwaite's expression has always been consistent, in fact, with the ideal desired by Glissant according to the opposition he established in his more early *L'Intention poétique* between *langue* et *langage*: "Dans toute langue autorisée, tu bâtiras ton langage" (1969:45). For Benítez Rojo, in turn, such language would express the particular rhythms of the "Peoples of the Sea": internal rhythms distinct from those of other places, "estructuras secretas que todos llevamos dentro en calidad de implantes socioculturales" (2010:99). There is probably no need to quote here the exemplary image of the two old black women passing "in a certain kind of way" beneath the essayist's balcony during the Cuban missile crisis, since it is one of the most-cited passages from his *Repeating Island* (cfr. 1992:10); in his last reflections, as already mentioned, Benítez Rojo further connects the Caribbean tidal rhythm with that of the whole Atlantic: "¿Existen ritmos insulares que nos acerquen, ritmos que recojan el juego de las olas con el horizonte atlántico?" (2010:99).

Judging from the interventions made by the Caribbean authors in their essays, the Glissantian imperative could also be interpreted as a call to build a Caribbean language on a theoretical, epistemological level. The goal (the construction of a regional, self-determined discursive tradition) seems to be met when Benítez Rojo, in the second English edition (1996) of his *Repeating Island*, not only dedicates his book to "Fernando Ortiz, the distant master, on the half-century of his *Contrapunteo*" but also adds a regional list of interpreters of *Caribbeanness* to his "Acknowledgements":

> I owe to my predecessors –from Fernando Ortiz to C. L. R. James, from Aimé Césaire to Kamau Brathwaite, from Wilson Harris to Édouard Glissant– a great lesson, and it is that every intellectual venture directed toward investigating Caribbeanness is destined to become an unending search… (1996:xi)[15]

Edward Baugh, who in his brief, but very insightful article on literary theory in the Caribbean (2006),[16] devotes his analysis to the authors under discussion here, maintains that the congruence in their perspectives allows considering "the emergence of a native tradition of Theory" (2006:58). Baugh, however, does not stress the fact that it is the essayists themselves who call for the integration of their discourses, making visible common borrowings and mutual appropriations. As we have seen, in addition to the explicit reciprocal quoting Brathwaite-Glissant, Benítez Rojo affiliates his *Repeating Island* with Brathwaite and Glissant, among others, and Brathwaite relates his own ideas with those of Benítez Rojo on many occasions, at least since his *Barabajan Poems* (1994), where Benítez Rojo appears in Brathwaite's definition of "Poet": "a craftperson, oral or literary, ideally both, who deals in metrical and/or rhythmical—sometimes *riddmical* wordsongs, wordsounds, wordwounds & meanings, within a certain code of order or dis/order—what Antonio Benítez-Rojo calls *creative chaos...*" (1994:21).[17]

Not incidentally, it is the concept of *relation*, a key category in Glissant's theorizations, which best summarizes the primary intention of the Caribbean essay. On the one hand, the authors converge in the elaboration of strong theoretical notions which interrelate with one another (besides the reflections around language, a long series of contiguous concepts: *mestizaje*, creolization, interculturation, hybridization, supersyncretism, interplay, cultural shock); on the other hand, they make use of the geographic imaginary of the islands as a poetic means of discursive integration, against the cultural fragmentation that they also analyze from a socio-historical perspective. The Caribbean essay, thus, enables us to think of the existence of what Amalia Boyer (2009), in a reflection on Glissant, calls a "geoaesthetics."

Boyer, in fact, looks at how geography—an ally of State, war, and commercial interests (of preservation/expansion)—supplies theoreticians and artists with metaphors, and stresses its relevance as "rationality *principle* or ontological *model* for philosophical, aesthetic or artistic activity itself," due to its spatializing, critical and political effects on other discourses (2009:14, my translation). For Boyer, it is necessary to replace transcendental reason for a geographic one, which implies assuming a geopolitical point of view as a result of the impact of the "spatial turn" on the humanities—even though Caribbean, as other "peripheral" theoretical systems of thought formed under conditions of dependence,

has been marked by a strong spatial and geopolitical conscience since its very beginnings.

The fact that the geographic imaginary present in Glissant's, Brathwaite's and Benítez Rojo's essays has a political motivation which continues the anti-colonialist, anti-imperialist drive of the Caribbean discursive tradition (legacy of Césaire, Fanon, C.L.R. James, among its most important antecedents) becomes evident in Glissant's proposal of an "archipelagic" thinking *in opposition to* continental thought, in Brathwaite's "tidalectics" *against* Hegelian dialectics,[18] and in Benítez Rojo's posthumous reflections on the necessity to think the Caribbean (or "New Atlantis") simultaneously from three integrated paradigms of thought: the modern, the postmodern and, *last but not least*, that of the "Peoples of the Sea" (cfr. 2010:97). In connection with this, Baugh has emphasized not only what other critics—as already pointed out—have also remarked, that is: the convergence in the use of metaphor, and especially the fact that "the sea becomes matrix-metaphor" (2006:59), but also the way in which "Caribbeanness" is defined "in contrast, explicit or implicit, with imputed Eurocentric biases." Baugh, in turn, draws two conclusions from the latter: first, that Caribbean thought continues to be trapped in the Western logic of binary oppositions, and second, that the resort to metaphor, which helps to avoid rigidity and fixed positions, "in its eschewing of pretension to scientific precision, [it] runs the risk of vagueness" (Cfr. Baugh 2006:58).

In my view, the recurrence of sea metaphors in the Caribbean essay, with its aquatic—unstable, changeable, relational—tropes, which allow writers to figuratively represent the 'postmodern' identity concepts they endorse, becomes a (certain kind of) way to inscribe their "Caribbean" hallmark in postmodern thought—the hegemonic philosophical paradigm creatively appropriated by the authors in a typical transculturating gesture. Such regional imprint (the "geoaesthetics" of the essay) can be understood as the will to update Caribbean discourse, traditionally characterized by the search for cultural identity, to post-essentialist paradigms and postmodern philosophies (Derrida, Lyotard, Deleuze and Guattari, especially in the case of Benítez Rojo and Glissant). The essays would thus testify to a tension constitutive to Caribbean thought: the fluctuation between modernization and identity resulting from conditions of dependence on external models (and consequent drives for independence), a fluctuation which has also marked Latin American thought throughout its history. Without contradicting the latter, however, in the increasing circulation of 'Caribbean' ideas against the traditional hegemony of Euro-American/metropolitan theoretical models, and in the progressive efforts made by Caribbean producers to decenter those models and establish a regional theoretical discussion, it is possible

to see a greater degree of intellectual autonomy and a stronger will to authorize a *Caribbean discourse*.

In fact, more recent critical readings of such Caribbean discursive tradition, far from diminishing the symbolic power of its geoaesthetics, confirm and consolidate it. Even to question, reject or rewrite the tradition, Caribbean writing has to deal with its register, figures and codes. In a bold reading of black queerness in the Caribbean or—what she calls—the "black, queer Atlantic," for instance, Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley has criticized postcolonial uses of oceanic metaphors and conceptual geographies devoid of real, concrete historical presences, and especially their "unqueered sexual politics": Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* (1993) is, according to Tinsley, frigid, while "Benítez Rojo's Caribbean overflows with hyperfeeling female sexuality" (2008:196). Interestingly enough, however, the author must acknowledge the relevance of such antecedents:

> These tropes of the Black Atlantic, of Peoples of the Sea, do call to me as powerful enunciations of crosscurrents of African diaspora identity, and I evoke them in respect and solidarity. And yet as Gilroy, Benítez Rojo, Edouard Glissant and others call on maritime metaphors without maritime histories and evoke sexualized bodies as figures rather than experiences, their writing out of materiality stops short of the most radical potential of such oceanic imaginations. (…) Not at all an opening to infinite possibilities, the sea was initially a site of painful fluidities for many Africans. (Tinsley 2008:197)

With a specific critical interest, Tinsley reads for Black Atlantic same-sex eroticism in the Middle Passage (fragmentarily recorded, she admits) as "neither metaphors not sources of disempowerment" (2008:199). But she actually continues, rather than discards, the historiographical search started by Caribbean antecedents, especially when we consider that her historical imagination (chronicles and records do not abound) understands *queer* in the sense of a *creative practice of resistance*: queer relationships between shipmates "connecting in ways that commodified flesh was never supposed to…," "interpersonal connections that counteract imperial desires…" (2008:199). Suffice it to remember the interest of Caribbean authors like Glissant, Brathwaite and Benítez Rojo in the figure of the maroon and of marooning also as a *creative practice of resistance*: in Benítez Rojo's imagination (in turn incited by his affiliative reading of Rodríguez Juliá's novel *La noche oscura del niño Avilés*) the defensive codes, "la complejísima y enrevesada arquitectura de rutas secretas, trincheras, trampas, cuevas, respiraderos y ríos subterráneos que constituye el *rizoma* de la psiquis caribeña" (Benítez Rojo 1998:302).[19]

Even though in Gilroy's and Benítez Rojo's maritime metaphors

Tinsley stresses the movement "toward a kind of closure, the Atlantic transmuting into a horizon of hybridity and the cunnic Caribbean healing orgasmically in order to become the vehicles these authors desire for diasporic and regional identities" (2008:202), her reading also imagines 'aquatic' bonds of resistance. Tinsley's idea that there is a "temporal and cultural gap that cannot be dissolved" by any connection (2008:202) and her rejection of restorative unions does not stop her from seeing the black Atlantic's potential for (erotic) linkages counteracting imperial desires, fragmentation and dismemberment. In accordance with the aquatic figurations of the Caribbean discursive tradition: the black queer Atlantic is a crosscurrent or a *desire* against the brutal currents of history.

(A certain kind of) conclusion

As Raphael Dalleo (2004) points out in an interesting reading of Glissant and Brathwaite that we could also apply to Benítez Rojo, Caribbean discourse in the last decades aims to veer away from essentialist, totalitarian paradigms of thought without renouncing the drive for cultural decolonization. Nor does such discourse renounce, as we have seen, the impulse toward the resacralization of experience as a response to the violent advance of modernity and the process of secularization in the Caribbean. In this direction, Baugh well asserts that "All the theoretical models these writers advance grapple, in different ways, and perhaps to different degrees of success, with the fact of violence and the challenge of how not to perpetuate it" (2006:60). In Benítez Rojo's expression, writing 'so' or 'in a certain kind of way' means:

> hablar de cultura tradicional y de su impacto en el Ser caribeño, no de conocimiento tecnológico ni de prácticas capitalistas de consumo, y en términos culturales hacer algo "de cierta manera" es siempre un asunto de importancia, puesto que intenta conjurar violencia. (...)
>
> Así, para lo único que sirve caminar, bailar, tocar un instrumento, cantar o escribir "de cierta manera" es para desplazar a los participantes hacia un territorio poético marcado por una estética de placer, o mejor, por una estética de no violencia. (1998:36, 37)[20]

While Tinsley warns us of the importance of returning to the materiality of a bloody Atlantic, its slave ships and the black body waters (menstrual fluids, urine, tears), the figures and metaphors that flood the Caribbean essay and Caribbean thought in general (whose preoccupation with collective memory—the past submerged in the Middle Passage—is a *common place*), take on a special dimension. As Gaston Bachelard wrote decades ago, when liquids acquire value, they resemble organic liquids, and "there is therefore a poetics of blood. It is a poetics of tragedy and pain, for blood is never happy" (1942:84, my translation).[21] Against the

exotic view of the islands as a tourist playground, Caribbean writing may turn bloody and opaque. If water, and especially the sea, according to Bachelard's phenomenology of imagination, is a melancholic element *par excellence* which incites memory and remembrance, recalling in the Caribbean can in turn lead to *re-membering* (re-assembling) the archipelagic fragments.[22]

Most importantly, as exemplified in Glissant's, Benítez Rojo's and Brathwaite's essays, the aquatic metaphorizes that "certain kind of way" in which the Caribbean expresses itself as it searches for locally 'rooted', decolonizing visions. Following Bachelard: "murmuring waters teach birds and men to sing, speak, recount; […] there is, in sum, continuity between the speech of water and human speech" (1942:22, my translation).[23] The language of the essays, with its strong regionalist thrust, gives voice to the authors' resistance projecting their discourses as sounds in accordance with the landscape, a landscape always threatened by external forces. In Glissant's *Philosophie de la relation*, this is translated into the dialectic between (*archipelagic*) detail and totality mentioned at the beginning of these notes. While diversity and regional affiliations become threatened by continental thought—the old paradigm of *Assimilation*—, it is by virtue of *archipelagic thinking* and the defense of one's own place that Glissant's tiny river rocks and *zabitans*/*ouassous* are preserved:

> Par la pensé archipélique, nous connaissons les roches de rivières, les plus petites assurément, roches et rivières, nous envisageons les trous d'ombre qu'elles ouvrent et recouvrent, où les zabitans (d'eau douce, il s'agit de ces écrevisses bleues et grises menacées de pollution), en Martinique, et qui sont appelées ouassous en Guadelupe (noms de fonds, noms d'appartenance), (je les désigne par résolu plaisir, chacun connaît leur succulence), s'abritent encore. (2009:45)

What the preservation of the *zabitans*/*ouassous* metaphorizes is, in fact, the Caribbean expression, the resistance of the archipelago's voices and noises. Glissant's *murmuring waters* can be heard between the lines, ready to constitute a possible poem:

> les roches de rivières,
> les plus petites assurément,
> roches et rivières,
> nous envisageons
> les trous d'ombre
> qu'elles ouvrent et recouvrent,
> où
> les *zabitans* (d'eau douce,
> il s'agit de ces écrevisses
> bleues et grises

menacées de pollution),
en Martinique,
et qui sont appelées
ouassous
en Guadelupe
(noms de fonds, noms d'appartenance),
(je les désigne par résolu plaisir, chacun connaît leur succulence),
s'abritent
encore

It is the authors' *appartenance* that the Caribbean essay, having reached its "American time," modulates *so*, in that *certain kind of way* in which the islands dialogue and relink with one another.

Notes

[1] Such a reading would probably imply a revision of the questions J. Michael Dash poses in the Introduction to his *Édouard Glissant*: "What does one make of a writer whose literary ancestors do not appear to come from his own cultural past? In particular, what does one do with a black francophone writer who invokes neither Marx, Breton, Sartre nor Césaire?" It is worth pointing out that the reception of Glissant's work, as Dash well explains, was slow and difficult until the 1970s, when it was incorporated within the context of Caribbean writing "as distinct from negritude or *francophonie*" (Dash 1995:2-3).

[2] In his *Caribbean Poetics*, Torres-Saillant explicitly criticizes Latin Americanists' tendency "to visualize the region through a strong Hispanic prism" without recognizing the cultural autonomy of the Caribbean. Following Cuban Margarita Mateo Palmer, the author stresses the importance of attending the peculiarities and pace proper to the evolution of Caribbean literature (1997:20-21).

[3] In Latin American literary historiography, the "ensayo de interpretación (nacional)" is considered a subgenre of the essay, whose main goal is to interpret the main traits of a region/nation exploring sociological, historical, economic and cultural issues, generally as a sort of diagnosis of the region's/nation's structural problems. Some examples of it are the Argentinian *Facundo* by Domingo Faustino Sarmiento (as an early antecedent from the XIXth century), *Siete ensayos de interpretación de la realidad peruana* (1928) by José Carlos Mariátegui, *Casa grande e senzala* by Brazilian Gilberto Freyre (1933) and the well-known *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar* by Fernando Ortiz (1940) in the Hispanic Caribbean.

[4] The results of the project (the Latin Americanists' meeting held at the University of Campinas, Brazil, in 1983) were published in the already cited volume *La literatura latinoamericana como proceso* (1985) edited by Ana Pizarro. The main literary critics in the region took part in it: (besides Ángel Rama and Pizarro) Antonio Cândido, Roberto Schwarz, José Luis Martínez, Domingo Miliani, Jacques Leenhardt, Carlos Pacheco, Beatriz Sarlo and Rafael Gutiérrez Girardot. This "Reunion of experts" continued the historiographical discussion initiated in Caracas the previous year (26-29 November 1982), which aimed to project (with the support of the International Association of Comparative Literature and UNESCO and directed by Ana Pizarro), a history of Latin American literature.

[5] Various writers and intellectuals from the different linguistic blocs in the Caribbean had been trying to create independent and anti-colonialist discourses since the nineteenth century. Due to the lack of development of intellectual life and literary systems in the French, British and Dutch Caribbean, it was mainly in the Hispanic "lettered cities" of the archipelago—in Santo Domingo, Puerto Rico, Cuba—and in independent Haiti that a more consistent regional/pan-Caribbeanist/anti-imperialist/(Latin)Americanist discourse was developed (Gregorio Luperón, Ramón Emeterio Betances, José Martí, Anténor Firmin, to mention but the most relevant thinkers). Still, it was only in the XXth century, especially after the Second World War and from the 1960s onwards, when most Caribbean islands changed their political status—achieving independence, autonomy or better conditions—that a Caribbeanist discourse truly emerged as a regional system of texts and that its decolonizing impulses were manifested in the Caribbean essay throughout the multiple linguistic areas of the region, simultaneously and even in an interconnected way. Along similar lines, in his posthumous "Reflexiones sobre un archipiélago posible," Benítez Rojo summarizes as follows the evolution of a regional, multilingual Caribbean discourse: "al principio solo existían discursos que habían pasado de ser criollos a nacionales, es decir, un discurso haitiano, otro cubano, otro jamaiquino, y así. A finales del siglo XIX, estos discursos empezaron a agruparse por bloques lingüísticos; esto es, apareció un discurso antillano hispánico, un discurso de las West Indies, etc. Ya en nuestro siglo surgió un discurso antillano global que, rompiendo la vieja concepción colonial, reparó en ciertos patrones que se repetían dentro del archipiélago" (2010:89-90).

[6] Such discourse, as we know, is (historically, paradoxically) mostly constructed by its diaspora: as in the case of Palestine—Edward

Said reminds us—, not only can the diasporic population exceed the non-diasporic population in number, exile also stimulates the reaffirmation of culture and continuity (Said in Bracho 2000:127).

[7] My reflection is mostly based on the following texts: Benítez Rojo's *La isla que se repite. El Caribe en la perspectiva posmoderna* (1989) (later reeditions in English (1992, 1996) as well as its last Spanish *Edición definitiva* from 1998) and his posthumous *Archivo de los pueblos del mar* (2010); Kamau Brathwaite's essays included in *Roots* (1986) (especially *History of the Voice. The Development of Anglophone Caribbean Poetry*) and *MR*/*Magical Realism* (2002); Glissant's *Le Discours antillais* (1981), *Poétique de la Relation* (1990) and the more recent *Philosophie de la relation* (2009).

[8] "It has been said many times that the Caribbean is the union of the diverse, and maybe that is true. In any case, my own rereading has taken me along different paths, and I can no longer arrive at such admirably precise reductions.

In this (today's) rereading, I propose, for example, to start with something concrete and easily demonstrated, a geographical fact: that the Antilles are an island bridge connecting, in "another way," North and South America. This geographical accident gives the entire area, including its continental foci, the character of an archipelago, that is, a discontinuous conjunction (of what?): unstable condensations, turbulences, whirlpools, clumps of bubbles, frayed seaweed, sunken galleons, crashing breakers, flying fish, seagull squawks, downpours, nighttime phosphorescences, eddies and pools, uncertain voyages of signification; in short, a field of observation quite in tune with the objectives of chaos" (Benítez Rojo 1992:2).

[9] "The Sea is History" is the title verse of the poem included in Walcott's *The Star-Apple Kingdom*, 1979.

[10] The problem here (a still current debate) is, in fact, what notion of modernity we imply when we say "modern" (or "postmodern," for that matter): is it possible to speak of the "modern" as a "Universal"? Shouldn't we speak of different modernities and, as many have theorized, peripheral/dislocated/alternative modernities? In any case, if we relate being "modern" with resorting to "original senses," then Brathwaite would still answer from a "post" modern perspective, without contradicting his concern for Africa. In his well-praised trilogy *The Arrivants*, and especially in *Masks* [1968], where Brathwaite's poetic voice searches for his African 'origins', the fallacies of primordial senses are clearly deconstructed. Upon

his "Arrival" (the last section in the poem), the 'pilgrim' faces the breaking of filiations and the burden of history: "Beginnings end here/ in this guetto," the verses read (1973 [1968]:149).

[11] As the dedication in his early book of poems *Le sang rivé* (1961) reads: « *À toute géographie torturée* ».

[12] James' text—an "Introduction" to Harris' lecture "Tradition and the West Indian Novel"—is included as an "Appendix" to Harris' collection of critical pieces *Tradition, the Writer and Society* (1967).

[13] The Carifesta was launched in Guyana in 1972 and celebrated in different Caribbean islands in the following years.

[14] Glissant's text appeared in *Alcheringa*, New Series 2:2 and was later included in *Le Discours antillais*. "Poétique naturelle, poétique forcée" is, no doubt, one of the most remarkable essays in the book.

[15] In the second Spanish edition of *La isla que se repite* (1998)—the "*Edición definitiva*" which appeared after the second English edition—these "Acknowledgements" become the book's dedication ("*Debo al trabajo de muchos —de Fernando Ortiz a C.L.R. James, de Aimé Césaire a Kamau Brathwaite, de Wilson Harris a Edouard Glissant— una gran lección, y ésta es que toda aventura intelectual dirigida a investigar lo Caribeño está destinada a ser una continua búsqueda. A ellos va dedicado este libro*").

[16] The article "Literary Theory and the Caribbean: Theory, Belief and Desire, or Designing Theory" was originally one of the keynote addresses at the Conference "*(Re)Thinking Caribbean Culture*" (University of the West Indies, Barbados, 2001).

[17] In *MR/Magical Realism* (2002), the Cuban writer will even appear with the abbreviation "B-R" among the Caribbean 'Authorities.'

[18] "Tidalectics" is defined by the poet as "dialectics with my difference," and figured as "the movement of the water backwards and forwards as a kind of cyclic, I suppose, motion, rather than linear" (Mackey 1995:14).

[19] "The extremely complex and difficult architecture of secret routes, trenches, traps, caves, breathing holes, and underground rivers that constitute the *rhizome* of the Caribbean psyche" (Benítez Rojo 1992:255).

[20] "(…) we are speaking about traditional culture and its impact on Caribbean beings, not about technological knowledge or capitalist consuming practices, and in cultural terms to do something "in a

certain kind of way" is always an important matter, since it is an attempt to sublimate violence. (…)

Thus the only thing that walking, dancing, playing an instrument, singing, or writing "in a certain kind of way" are good for is to displace the participants toward a poetic territory marked by an aesthetic of pleasure, or better, an aesthetic whose desire is nonviolence" (Benítez Rojo 1992:20, 21).

[21] "Il y a donc une poétique du sang. C'est une poétique du drame et de la douleur, car le sang n'est jamais heureux."

[22] J. Michael Dash, punning on English, will refer to Glissant's narrative writing as "a poetics of re-membering" (See his "Writing the Body: Edouard Glissant Poetics of Re-membering," in Maryse Condé (dir.), *L'héritage de Caliban*, Pointe-à-Pitre, Éditions Jasor, 75-83).

[23] "les eaux bruissantes apprennent aux oiseaux et aux hommes à chanter, à parler, à redire, […] il'y a en somme continuité entre la parole de l'eau et la parole humaine."

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