

Of Exteriority: Between Kierkegaard, Derrida, and Glissant

We dream of what we will cultivate in the future, and we wonder vaguely what the new hybrid that is already being prepared for us will look like, since in any case we will not rediscover them as they were, the magnolias of former times.
- Édouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*.

*A Depiction of a Lover's Sentiments caught in Oblivion, or an Introduction which has
Surrendered to Imitating Kierkegaard's Young Man*

(Here, I write as I found myself before I had written this essay. The end writes its beginning, or to say, I am 'beginning backwards.'¹ This sort of thing, of starting backwards, feels unavoidable as much as it feels embarrassingly overdone; it was the way in which I introduced my previous endeavor. Perhaps I would do better to not acknowledge it going further. Regardless, this introduction deals with a passing event which I had read as an instant, relegated it to an enclosed moment no longer accessible. Shortly after reading *Repetition*, I could not help but figure myself as Kierkegaard's young man; I *imitated* the young man of his mental conception! Evidently the imitation was a failure, since I still could not find myself twice over by the end of things; who can find themselves if they insist on imitating?)

I reflect on it often, that instant in which I felt the enormity of it, that gift I swore I felt as I relented myself unto you. I want it to repeat so desperately, that point, that flicker that warmed my core; it becomes my point of origin in my imagination, where I got my name, but I have forgotten myself to it in recollection. I was in recollection, I gave into it, reimagining it a thousand times over. Yet when I was met with what any 'young man' would conclude to be 'the thunderstorm,' nothing changed. I felt no relief, I did not feel myself doubled, I feigned it,

¹ Søren Kierkegaard, "Repetition: A Venture in Experimenting Psychology," in *Kierkegaard's Writings vol. 6: Fear and Trembling/Repetition*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton University Press, 1983), 194.

feigned progression. I felt *unsatisfied*, beyond unsatisfied. I returned to *nothing*, not myself, not my spirit seen double; what was my name, or what is my name? What was I recalling again? The island? Myself? Him? Wait, now I cannot trace anything anymore, what is there to return to? What is this ‘instant’ I just spoke of? Perhaps I made no decision—did I really ‘give?’—perhaps it all merely *passed through me!*

Oh God, where am I? Why can I not speak of myself? Why can I not remember? Shadow, shadow, shadow! I am wandering, I keep wandering. Endless oblivion!

A Poetic Faith in Giving, A Poetic Faith in a Return to Oneself, or the European Poetics of the Moment²

A discussion of the instance or moment may begin by pointing it out as terribly delicate. That is, that it has already taken place and yet has only just been initiated, always-already taking place, unable to be contemplated as it is playing out, it only appears to be tangible as an afterward. God tells Abraham to cease his knife’s advance on Isaac “*at the very instant when there is no more time, where no more time is given.*”³ God’s release of Abraham is the afterward, the release of the consequential instant only *readable* as an *afterw(o)rd*, it is God’s acknowledging remarks regarding Abraham’s performance of an absolute duty or responsibility towards Himself, the uniquely Other; the Other has recognized the culmination of the instant as a fierce, unyielding dedication. He has written his afterword, retrospective notes on Abraham’s dedication.

² Édouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, trans. and ed. J. Michael Dash (University Press of Virginia, 1999), 140.

³ Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Wills (The University of Chicago Press: 1995), 72. Emphasis in original.

Yet, what does it mean for the instance to ‘take place’ if it appears so unstable? Derrida remarks that the instances’ temporality is an atemporality: contradictory, paradoxical, “a duration that cannot be grasped: something one can neither stabilize, establish, *grasp* [*prendre*], *apprehend*, or *comprehend*;” a suspension in the faculty of time-sense for the ethically abhorrent (Abraham embodies not only a murderer, but a filicidal one, one willing to erase a singularity for the absolute Other) but absolutely responsible (in the act of filicide emerges an homage to God whose gaze is unbreakable, it incites fear).⁴ The instant is characterized by an instability containing an act, an absolute, ethically transgressive but absolutely responsible decision towards the Other. One endures a pressure so critical in the instant, so *absurd*, yet it is only in the acknowledgment of the Other, the afterword, that a suggestion of having ‘crossed through’ can be formed.

Taking Derrida’s account of the instant, every instant is a sacrifice. One cannot possibly attend to every other other in every instance; every instance is a finite response to a singularity (infinite love in the form of the finite; one is only a singularity in the sense that one can only experience death for themselves) and thus one of infinite sacrifice across an immense field:

I cannot respond to the call, the request, the obligation, or even the love of another without sacrificing the other other, the other others. *Every other (one) is every (bit) other* [*tout autre est tout autre*], everyone else is completely or wholly other. The simple concepts of alterity and of singularity constitute the concept of duty as much as that of responsibility. As a result, the concepts of responsibility, of decision, or of duty, are condemned a priori to paradox, scandal, and aporia. Paradox, scandal, and aporia are themselves nothing other than sacrifice, the revelation of conceptual thinking at its limit, at its death and finitude. As soon as I enter into a relation with the other, with the gaze, look, request, love, command, or call of the other, I know that I can respond only by sacrificing ethics, that is by sacrificing whatever obliges me to also respond, in the same way, in the same instant, to all the others. I offer a gift of death, I betray, I don’t need to raise my knife over my son on Mount Moriah for that. Day and night, at every instant, on all the Mount Moriahs of this world, I am doing that, raising my knife over what I love and must love, over those whom I owe absolute fidelity, incommensurably.⁵

⁴ Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, 65. Emphasis in original.

⁵ Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, 68. Emphasis in original.

I attend to one, in absolute duty, fealty, love, in the same instance as I transgress, betray all other others. It is here, that as one crosses through the instance, one cannot return to it to provide a different response, to attend to another other in that particular instance that has already culminated. All crossed through instances appear *sealed* as that written afterword whose interpretation is uncertain. The afterword is laden with doubt after the striking of noon's bell, "we sometimes rub our ears *afterward* and ask, utterly surprised and disconcerted, 'what really was that which we have just experienced?' and moreover: 'who are we really? and afterward as aforesaid, count the twelve trembling bell-strokes of our experience, our life, our *being*—and alas! miscount them;" here is the uncertain afterword.⁶

While the instance appears to contain an element of sprawling contingency, that the decision cast within it could meet the request of *any* other, that it could write *any number of afterwords afterward*—the instant is fertile so long as the holy force of action, the force of absolute duty carries through, the moment gives birth to the afterward, and therefore its written afterwords; praise for Genesis, as it all began here!⁷—it appears as though one cannot do away with the element of sacrifice, and this sacrifice cannot be undone, betraying innumerable singularities. As you feed one cat, you starve many others; Derrida remarks that one cannot feasibly justify this kind of sacrifice, it is simply something that must be held in interiority.⁸ "Abraham can neither speak nor commiserate, neither weep nor wail. He is kept in absolute secret. He feels torn, he would like to console the whole world... he would like to embrace them

⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, "On the Genealogy of Morals," trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale, in *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, ed. Walter Kaufmann (Vintage Books, 1989), 15.

⁷ Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 140-141.

⁸ Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, 71.

before taking the final step.”⁹ There is a dissatisfaction here. The “speck of something,” “a bit of dust” hits the eye, and “in the same instant” one is “plunged down almost into the abyss of despair.”¹⁰ The whole world cannot be consoled in the instant, and one must deal with the afterword, with the sacrifices made in the act of crossing through.

In the confrontation with the impossibility of the repetition of a particular instance emerges a desire for repetition in a certain way, in sameness. Thus, *recollection*, a longing for the repetition of an instance.¹¹ The instance in the view of recollection appears as *origin* or Genesis; such an origin is only a momentary origin, yet desire fixes it. A gap which cannot be reconciled forms, that one cannot get close enough to the particularity of an already occurred and always-already occurring instance. It is, as to say, the gap between word and meaning, word and the deed, the written and the visual.¹² At hand then, is the following aporia: how does one avoid the mass sacrifice of every other other, how does one put an end to the perpetuation of mass sacrifice, to dedicate oneself to a *collectivity* (all other others), and ease the desire for the repetition of an instance which we cannot come back to but a sacrifice has already been made, or ease recollection?

First, on the issue of sacrifice. There is, perhaps, no greater grief than being unable to hold a lover’s hand in quite the same way as when it was *first* held. *The first instance, the first obligation, the first gaze*. What a gift (cliché, cliché, cliché)! The instance, at the same time as it is a sacrifice (you could not hold another other, you could not oblige yourself to another other, etc.), it is a gift of life: Isaac’s life is taken at the same time as it is given back by God without

⁹ Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, 73.

¹⁰ Kierkegaard, “Repetition,” 174.

¹¹ Edward Said, “On Repetition,” in *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Harvard University Press, 1983), 121.

¹² Edward Said, “Conrad: The Presentation of Narrative,” in *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Harvard University Press, 1983), 95.

Abraham's expectation that it would be.¹³ It is along this point that Derrida suggests Abraham had "renounced calculation," a thesis for the "*aneconomy*" emerges: to give without expectation of a return, an anti-economy or rejection of exchange which is invisible to flesh and located in the celestial.¹⁴ A particular arrangement of a secretive interiority is described by Derrida which allows for such an economic renunciation, one which carries a blazing interior light in the spirit and projects outward. A new economy of sacrifice is suggested which is beyond the body, beyond equivalence; it sacrifices "sacrifice understood as commerce occurring within finite bounds."¹⁵ A sacrifice of a particular kind of sacrifice, a sacrifice *of* economy. Sacrifice is displaced here into a different realm, a celestial realm. Thus, a giving without reciprocity, debt, or vengeance, a disruption of exchange's parity, offering simply to *offer*; it is "infinite and dissymmetrical" by answering a call to give without condition, without the expectation of recognition from the Other (God) whom one hears but cannot see, who others cannot see and cannot be described to others in the instance of decision. It is an intimate secret relationship which Derrida remarks is really a relationship with *oneself* (God).¹⁶ "God is in me, he is the absolute 'me' or 'self,' he is that *structure of invisible interiority* that is called, in Kierkegaard's sense, subjectivity."¹⁷ Here we have both an obligation to oneself and towards the Other, that which is different from oneself, the one which gazes at you, but also *knows you* (!) more than you as yourself. It is in this *new* celestial economy of sacrifice—which leans on *this sense of (European) interiority*, and this must be emphasized—where this secret, this light now borne in the celestial heart, must be infinitely shared in the instance. This is perhaps a suggestion towards

¹³ Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, 96.

¹⁴ Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, 96-98.

¹⁵ Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, 102.

¹⁶ Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, 107, 108-109.

¹⁷ Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, 109. Emphasis mine.

a dedication to all other others, a collectivity to be bathed in this light projected from the singularity.¹⁸ Therefore the sacrifice of all other others has transformed into a sacrifice of economy, into a celestial economy, gift beyond body and finite calculations, all thanks to a peculiar figuration of the interior, a subjectivity. It is to act as the Son of Yourself (God).

Second, on the issue of repetition. Kierkegaard addresses this stagnating desire of repetition for the same, or recollection, with a certain construction of an interiority. He *writes* into existence—splits out of himself—an exteriority within the interior, the forward facing element of the interior, a young man afflicted with an immense desire kept unsaid (unsayable such that he may keep his *dignity*¹⁹) to the desired which forces him to lead a poetic life to nurse his grief; at the deepest point resides an observer or a kind of ventriloquist of the young man who brings him “into being,” a “ministering spirit,” Constantin Constantius.²⁰ The young poet writes out desperate letters to the silent, watchful innards which gave birth to him and his poetics. He is in passive wait of a repetition which will break him free of the overwhelming recollections of the young girl he has distanced himself from; the young man: “I would like very much to gaze upon you [Constantius] all day long and listen to you all night, and *yet if I were to take some action*, I would not do it in your presence for anything. One word from you would confuse everything. ... Thus do you hold me captive with an indescribable power...”²¹ All the while, Constantius attempts to repeat past experience by intentionally revisiting the places in which they occurred, yet he finds that “it was a repetition of the wrong kind,” in other words of stifling recollection; split in two, in a sort of recollective madness, is the character of this disturbed interior thus far.²²

¹⁸ Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, 115.

¹⁹ Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 137.

²⁰ Kierkegaard, “Repetition,” 228.

²¹ Kierkegaard, “Repetition,” 189.

²² Kierkegaard, “Repetition,” 169, 189.

The young man's obsessive thoughts of return to the unforgettable girl which relates to him at "the border of his being" is that instant which has passed but in thought retains its infinite potentials as it is constantly imagined, reimagined, and refigured in thought, distant from actuality.²³ The young man, in preoccupation with recollection, has given himself up to it, "I never speak her name, and I thank fate for having acquired a false name by mistake. A name, my name—after all, it actually belongs to her. Would that I could get rid of it. My own name is enough to remind me of everything, and all life seems to contain only allusions to this past."²⁴ Pleading inwardly towards the observer, losing oneself *to the point of ceasing to be*—"I am at the end of my rope. I am nauseated by life; it is insipid—without salt and meaning. ... One sticks a finger into the ground to smell what country one is in; I stick my finger into the world—it has no smell. Where am I? ... Who am I? How did I get into the world?"—like Job who cries out for God's reply, just at that *instant* of losing everything, is when revelation comes upon him, a thunderstorm.²⁵ The *ordeal*—an eternal stasis in the inward act of recollection—has transcended itself as it is revealed that the young girl is married, he is empowered to *forget* the girl, the past moment, and he *returns* to himself: "I am myself again. ... The split that was in my being is healed; I am unified again. ... Is there not, then, a repetition? Did I not get everything double? Did I not get myself again and precisely in such a way that I might have a double sense of its meaning? ... Here only *repetition of the spirit* is possible, even though it is never so perfect in time as in eternity, which is the true repetition."²⁶ On the other hand, the observer of the interior celebrates the coach horn, played upon arrivals and departures, repetitious but always different; "a coach horn has infinite possibilities," as the coach can go anywhere, even in a return to the

²³ Kierkegaard, "Repetition," 185, 193-194.

²⁴ Kierkegaard, "Repetition," 194.

²⁵ Kierkegaard, "Repetition," 200. Emphasis mine.

²⁶ Kierkegaard, "Repetition," 221.

same place it will be different.²⁷ Thus, a movement, thus, a kind of observed narrative of the interior which finds itself again, resolving its mad split, it regains its name yet knows it now in a different way as it has seen itself twice; we might say that for Kierkegaard Genesis is within as spirit repeatedly returning to itself *differently* in a rebirth. In other words, repetition is a forward movement—a transcendence—what is repeated is the act of return however the return produces difference (a different state, attitude, internal accumulation and generosity) not sameness or what is expected and has been previously experienced.²⁸

Taken together, between Kierkegaard and Derrida, we might say that the aporias of the instant and repetition are perhaps not totally ‘resolved’ but can be illuminated by, eased by—as Glissant named it—a *poetics of the moment*, a poetics which simultaneously writes and narrates particular configuration of interiority into existence.²⁹ In these poetics, one must be prepared in the instant to give infinitely, sacrifice infinitely, secretively, impossibly, beyond an exchange economy to receive back without expectation a gift of life, and at the same time, break the desire for repetition of the same in that instant; the afterword is but an acknowledgement, or indeed an affirmation, of oneself now different following an open obligation to the world. It is perhaps an infinite form of Genesis at every instance, every return finds oneself in a new and different way, it is to find satisfaction in the moment and not absolutely. It is to say that every point is Genesis in such a way that strict ‘origin’ is jettisoned; origin is every moment.

This is all good and affirming news for this singular interior. Now, we must address a thorny quality of this structure (enter Glissant!). It is not discreet that Derrida’s *The Gift of Death* is of a *European* flavor; note its opening chapter, “Secrets of European Responsibility”! Thus

²⁷ Kierkegaard, “Repetition,” 175.

²⁸ Kierkegaard, “Repetition,” 186.

²⁹ Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 136-137.

from its *first page*, it is the story of a European responsibility towards the different, the Other, including the non-European; it is a responsibility against what has been established as traditional, both an “unconditional openness” as well as a certain responsibility towards the “*oneself*.”³⁰ Similarly, Kierkegaard’s narrative of a return to oneself as difference can only be conceived within that same structure of a secretive interiority. These are, on the one hand, poetics which are fulfilled with an interiority, a subjectivity, which can both *name* itself and *extend* itself as light in the instance to transcend recollection and sacrifice and on the other hand, the poetics *express* the interior’s composition. This structure of gift and repetition perhaps offers an outstretched hand to the non-European, but it cannot say anything about what the non-European offers to collectivity, if it can at all. It is as if now, we must start from scratch again from somewhere quite hidden, obscure (*why can I not speak of myself?*).

La face cachée de la Terre [The Earth’s Hidden Face]

As discussed, the existence of interiority and singularity has thus far been spoken of as kind of European one. This European interiority *expresses* itself in the written poetics of the moment: its singularity and secretive interior stressed in the relations of light, gift, death, and repetition as difference. In a word, it has an outlet, a face (the young man) as these poetics, and it is in the act of writing where the face, the outline, becomes transparent enough to view an interior; the European writes themselves transparently whilst maintaining a secret of self. This interior has access to a certain chronology or a narrative which it can make of itself (though this access does not guarantee the certainty that interiority can *absolutely understand* itself, there is an encouragement towards forgetting and recreating here (afterward/afterword); with the aid of

³⁰ Rodolphe Gasché, “European Memories: Jan Patočka and Jacques Derrida on Responsibility,” in *Derrida and the time of the political*, ed. Pheng Cheah and Suzanne Guerlac (Duke University Press, 2009), 154. Emphasis mine.

Derrida, it is neither an absolute narrative) such that it can have a way to both respond to a collectivity to which it is responsible to through the celestial economy (sacrifice of economy) and its responsibility to itself in its constant (re)activation of Genesis through repetition; it attains a kind of inner responsibility in its (re)construction and thus eases the desires generated in the grounds of recollection.

Glissant however, interrupts this conception of interiority and singularity. Indeed, it would be appropriate to say that he finds this kind of interiority to be an impossibility for the non-European; for those who the question of “who am I?” cannot even register due to “the process of total dislocation;” impossible for peoples who have been displaced, forced into lands which are kept unfamiliar and unarticulatable thus feeling always foreign; impossible for those who imitation of the Other is the mode of movement, of survival (for imitation cannot be a mode of *existence*); impossible for those who have faced a complete destruction of a collective memory.³¹ This is an imperial imposition of nonhistory, nonexistence; this nonexistence must recourse to imitation and assimilation, it is forced to as it has been denied its own poetic, denied the ability to express an interior unique to itself. A sense of singularity is also denied through the process of enslavement and its long-standing effect on the unconscious: one is figured replaceable, thus not singular, one can die for another; concern for the death of a nonexistence would be nonsensical. For the imitator, the Other is now a God which stands *from the far outside* (recall Derrida: “God is in me, he is the absolute ‘me’ or ‘self’”) not within. He is encountered for example, when the “migrant French Caribbean people *discover* they are *different*, become aware of their Caribbeanness;” now difference is staged not in a kind of within or from the action of return to oneself, but from escape, diversion, from the collision of bodies, from the

³¹ Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 45, 65.

observational gaze of Other bodies in a kind of total outside. God is not within me, but His gaze still feels just as unbreakable, forced, a command of an Other quite visible, quite large; He is concealed within an authoritative, external, oppressive body—in the European! This is what Glissant referred to as the effects of an imposition of Sameness, forced imitation and the other made consumable.³²

Thus, Glissant reveals that this interiority described by Derrida and Kierkegaard is an exclusivity to the visible face of the world.³³ Such a constitution is inconceivable for “the earth’s hidden face,” indeed, “we have here the embattled, nonexistent group that consequently makes the emergence of the individual impossible.”³⁴ There are entities—drowned bits in the expanse of the sea—that have been set adrift by “depersonalization” and mental dislocation.³⁵ To Glissant, the Americas are in a *condition* of atemporality—that atemporality is not a moment, an instant, but an unending (*wandering, wandering!*) that cannot be apprehended, that the Americas *seek out* the feeling of duration—unable to witness an afterward, read or write an afterword, or recollect the instant, therefore only able to speak unsure of a series of events which pass through them. It can be figured as a ceaseless incomprehension of time, “a tortured sense of time.”³⁶ Glissant: “We have seen that the poetics of the American continent, which I characterize as being *in search for temporal duration*, is opposed in particular to European poetics, which are characterized by the inspiration or the sudden burst of a single moment.”³⁷ The Americas swirl themselves sick in an attempt to repossess time through the creation of an origin, a way to write Genesis, a narrative of self.

³² Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 98.

³³ Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*,

³⁴ J. Michael Dash, “Introduction,” in *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, xxx. Dash is quoting Glissant here; Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 86.

³⁵ Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 202.

³⁶ Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 145.

³⁷ Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 145. Emphasis mine.

The hidden face of the world sees that interior light of the Other across the sea: “the only *source of light* ultimately was that of the transcendental presence of the Other, of his Visibility—colonizer or administrator—of his transparency fatally proposed as a model, because of which we have acquired a taste for obscurity, and for me the need to seek out obscurity, that which is not obvious, to assert for each community the right a shared obscurity.”³⁸ The cruelty of this atemporality suggests that no *singular* act is enough to cross over as there is no ‘moment,’ no ‘point’ that the nonexistent is caught in but rather they find themselves in an endless stretch, a wandering or meandering. Really, no singular act can be produced or recalled! Thus, this element of obscurity and a kind of scrounging around which accompanies it. This is a body without the clear glass eyes to project light, a body that stands opaque to the world and to the collectivity which surrounds it; a body not hollowed to house God, too opaque. This atemporal space presents as potential as much as stagnation, a perpetuation of nothing, a nonproductivity, or what Glissant referred to as “fields of oblivion.”³⁹

Oh, why is God outside of me! How can I become Him?

Denied access to interiority, how can one narrate or figure a responsibility towards a collectivity? What is an instant to a nonexistence, a figure which wallows in the atemporal? How is one to *express* a response to the other other, to give to the collectivity? What are the means towards which one can speak of collectivity and obligation? The nonexistent seems to be embroiled in an ordeal particular to the condition of atemporality. While the young man and

³⁸ Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 161. Emphasis mine.

³⁹ Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 145.

Constantius are in the stupor of recollection (Europe has a tradition, a narrative, it can reject!), the nonexistent attempts, repeatedly, to recollect *anything* about itself, to hear anything about itself, to read anything about itself (again: *why can I not speak of myself?*). Origin becomes enticing in a way that is particular to the nonexistent, as that “coiled” atemporal swirl or spiral alluded to above.⁴⁰ The sea refracts origin, and the land, the density of the forests, obscures the “primordial tree.” Indeed, the sea refracts the origin in such a way that when one reaches out to grasp it, it dodges them as its image is not its place, and further, the current carries it elsewhere. The land offers no “transparency” as “there is no clear path, no *way forward*, in this destiny. You turn in obscure circles until you find the primordial tree. The formulation of history’s yearned for ideal, so tied up with its difficulty,”—that of securing a narrative, an end point, a chronology, an exposition that can be laid over a land instead of coming out of it—“introduces us to the dilemma of peoples today still oppressed by dominant cultures.”⁴¹ This repetitive spiral is exhaustive, a movement to nowhere.

Recall that Derrida and Kierkegaard have written the instance as an atemporality in which time is suspended; it appears as eternity yet must be absolved to become momentary, thus the moment transcends itself once “knowledge enters” it, once revelation enters it.⁴² The instance is the space where God has abandoned the singularity, as with Job on the verge of perishing, He has not replied, as with Abraham He allows a murder, a death of the most precious. In the poetics of the moment, this infinite stasis collapses in revelation, a moment of transcendence for the singularity and a multi-relational openness towards the world emerges, one of gift and of return to self, actuality. Presumably, all *without making a sound*, unsaid, in secrecy, as it was written.

⁴⁰ Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 80.

⁴¹ Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 83.

⁴² Kierkegaard, “Repetition,” 210.

God speaks to one internally, one negotiates with God internally. Yet, for the nonexistent, it seems as though one must decry God who sits on the outside, to yell, to *scream*.⁴³ *I swipe at you! Exterior!* Thus, language becomes an indispensable component of a motion towards articulating not interior privations in writing, but outward relations in sound, orality rather than a projection of a quiet inner light.

Contrary to Abraham's absolute secrecy (he who has sworn to not tell a another about his duty to sacrifice Isaac) here sonic tendrils appear in an unconscious renunciation of the Other and resonates between the 'small' others, those bits in the sea; an opaqueness resonates with another opaqueness; indeed the sound resonates between them, across the whole swath of other others, the collectivity. We may figure these resonances as roots, roots coming from a ball in the lacerated throat. Here is the initial emergence of a kind of forced gesture (forced because it resists the imposition of imitation, of the Same) to which its expression is denied or what Glissant has termed a *forced poetics* that embodies a defensive outwardness: "forced poetics exist where a need for expression confronts an inability to achieve expression."⁴⁴ In a word, it is an oral gesture *for* the expression of a collectivity which has been *denied* expression, it is not yet genuine expression. Creole (francophone Creole is the example in Glissant's work, yet the term still encompasses all of its variations. It is meant to convey a crossing, a thought-medium produced by convergence), a cross-cultural form of speech, and Caribbean folktales which illustrate the world's harms, told tall but not rectified, are understood as such forced poetics for Glissant. Language becomes the space for an articulation of not 'who am I' but "who are we?;" it is the medium through which a genuine expression of a collectivity can emerge, a *cross-cultural*

⁴³ Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 123.

⁴⁴ Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 120.

poetics. It is in fact, an urgency towards *naming a 'we,'* as opposed to Kierkegaard's young man regaining and renaming himself.

What Glissant asks us to consider is the differential repetition of an exteriority and how a collectivity may give to itself, be obliged to itself, hear its name as a whole; “what is the Caribbean in fact? A multiple series of relationships. We all feel it, we express it in all kinds of hidden or twisted ways, or we fiercely deny it. But we sense that this sea exists within *us* with its weight of now revealed *islands*.”⁴⁵ Being that the nonexistent cannot amass itself inwardly—it cannot interiorize itself, rather it spirals downward in the atemporal, deeper into neurosis—it must exteriorize to say something about itself and know itself to be different *consciously*, doing away with the imitation of the Other. This is a suggestion towards an external construction of a massive constitution of a many such that each may come to know itself, particularly to know itself as a part of it, a whole. It is, in a word, a thesis of *anti-interiority* paired with a renegotiation of time. A self as an island, or the revelation of an island in the medium of orality. It is to not know an interiority but to know a people, an entirety as an entity. Perhaps it is to say that *one* is not God, and in fact that one cannot be and should not be God, but that God is in *us*, a collective obligation to move as God, we must move as God.

The Subterranean, The Theater of a Thousand Shadows, or Anti-Interiority and the Repossession of Time

Let us return to the immense volume of the sea. We have noted that this sound resonance alluded to above occurs in the subterranean, within the sea, in a kind of “subterranean convergence” of the “histories” of the Caribbean; it is a notion of transversality, a multiplanar

⁴⁵ Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 139. Emphasis mine.

conjunction.⁴⁶ Glissant: “the depths are not only the abyss of neurosis but primarily the site of multiple converging paths.”⁴⁷ African slaves which were “thrown overboard” ships “sowed in the depths the seeds of an invisible presence” giving rise to the perpetuation of “submarine roots: that is floating free, not fixed in one position in some primordial spot, but extending in all directions in our world through its network of branches.”⁴⁸ We return to this notion of a floating expanse of ‘bits’ now tying itself together: the means to collectivity and obligation to the collectivity are within this figuration of a subterranean rootless mass. It is not that opaque bodies, these seeds, simply collide with each other in the sea, rather they entangle with each other through shooting roots—sound, language, Creole which constitutes a bridge across opaque bodies—they tie themselves into knots wound around each other, *doubling* over each other *repeatedly*. It is a rhythmic doubling of the voice, “repetition in speech is a response to the group.”⁴⁹ Creole (the shot off roots now entangled) is notably unstable and ambiguous, to Glissant it remains a seized “concession made by the Other for his own purposes in his dealings with our world,” thus seized in the smallest sense of the word in that it has been adopted but not made “into a means of self-expression.”⁵⁰ Yet its instability and ambiguity allows for a gap, for an improvisation of the collective’s possible expression, a space to “forge” a ‘we’ “based on the defective grasp of two languages [French and Creole] whose control was never collectively mastered, a form of expression through which we could consciously face out ambiguities and fix ourselves firmly in the uncertain possibilities of the world made ours.”⁵¹ It allows the collectivity to float towards the surface, or perhaps even swim. At the surface appears a floating island of

⁴⁶ Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 66.

⁴⁷ Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 66.

⁴⁸ Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 67. Emphasis in original.

⁴⁹ Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 140.

⁵⁰ Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 166-167.

⁵¹ Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 168.

these bundled roots. This convergence, or *creolization*, eases out the repetitive compulsion of seeking the coordinates of an origin, indeed “the idea of creolization demonstrates that henceforth it is no longer valid to glorify ‘unique’ origins that the race safeguards and prolongs.”⁵² Yet we still have not come to the point of how the self-expression of a collectivity is to be achieved as we have only prepared a kind of staging for it, a staging for its own self-representation. For this genuine expression, Glissant argues we must turn towards theater as an active self-expression of a community.

Kierkegaard in *Repetition* presents a theater of a thousand shadows, a figuration of the singularity where in its theatrical imagination, an “artificial actuality,” it splits itself “into every possible variation of himself, and nevertheless in such a way that every variation is himself,” as if seeing oneself as various possible stage characters, various possibilities. The singularity has thus cast a shadow of itself, “invisibly present,” but unsatisfied with just one possible variation, it conjures thousands of shadows. On the floor are cast thousands of unsatisfied shadow-existences that go unrealized.⁵³ These shadow-existences are *heard* by the singularity but not made visible, and certainly cannot be made visible all at once by the singularity; the singularity “wanders about in its own possibility, discovering now one possibility, now another,” yet it’s shadow-existences, possibilities, all equally *want* to become visible.⁵⁴ This conceptual metaphor of the

⁵² Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 140.

⁵³ Kierkegaard, “Repetition,” 154.

⁵⁴ Kierkegaard, “Repetition,” 155. “But the individual’s possibility does not want only to be heard; it is not like the mere passing of the wind. It is also *gestaltende* [configuring] and therefore wants to be visible at the same time. That is why each of its possibilities is an audible shadow.”

shadow-existence in the theatrical imaginary is perhaps analogous to a nonexistence, an entity heard but not seen, that hidden face, an “audible shadow” invisibly present.⁵⁵ It is a potential, a possibility to be expressed, to be made visible. The unexpressed collectivity is composed of thousands of shadow-existences, shadow characters which can only be realized, satisfied, as a community because it has been denied an interior that it can call, name, its own. Satisfaction then cannot be attained at ‘every moment’ or every instant in this composition; it is not a singularity which has divided itself into shadows, here it is the other way around, a mass of entangled shadows seeking a collective satisfaction, collective visibility as an entity. It cannot be a momentous revelation of the self twice over, or a projected gift from the singular to the other other, it must be expressed in a duration, it must play out; the repossession of time is to become lucid out of atemporal oblivion, to see on the rhythmic surface of the water, the island that has been created out of entanglement. The real expression of a collectivity is a cross-cultural poetic *theater*, an island-sized play of Creole language expression such that a collectivity may gain a sense of self-consciousness, a becoming of a visible entity in the water’s rhythmic duration such that a collectivity may represent itself, name itself as a visible community; as God contained within a community, *it visibly presents all of its possibilities in interconnection with itself*.⁵⁶ I am obligated to God, God as a community; I have found Him within myself from the *outside* in connection to other others, the *small* other. God is in *us*, he is the absolute ‘us’ or ‘community.’

It is now apparent that in order to release oneself from a tortured sense of time, the atemporality of the shadowy nonexistent, one must be resolutely anti-interior, extensive, facing outward, creating theatrical oral resonances between other others, roots which tie a collectivity together. Glissant once more: “the language of the Caribbean artist does not originate in the

⁵⁵ Kierkegaard, “Repetition,” 155.

⁵⁶ Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 216-219.

obsession with celebrating his inner self; this inner self is inseparable from the future evolution of his community.”⁵⁷ In this way, the inner is the outer, the outer sea comes to occupy us all, filling the innards. The desire for narrative through a first point of origin, or an instant, fades in the winding mass playing itself out, it is an embrace of it all as the collectivity fusses further into a community. In a certain way, this exterior conception still carries a Kierkegaardian element; yes, even in its reversal it contains a certain agreement with Kierkegaard’s insistence on difference: it achieves infinite points, *infinite Genesis* but not of a singularity, rather an infinite Genesis of a community rhythmically returning to itself differently. The community repeats itself differently, that is, it ousts Sameness or imitation and comes to know itself and knows itself as different through Diversity; “if it was necessary for Sameness to be revealed in the solitude of individual Being, it is now imperative that Diversity should ‘pass’ through whole communities and peoples.”⁵⁸

Time is the *repetitive rhythms of the sea* as in the repetitive rhythm of the voice (recall the sea being contained in us), as in the repetitive rhythms of return. Like the forward undulations of the sea, like the retractions of its water slipping away from the shore and back into its immense infinite volume—the uncertainty and bountiful contingency of the voice!—it is in this *duration*, in this time-water-medium, where the collectivity repeats itself differently; on the surface of the water, the floating island-knot-of-roots reties itself, entangles itself further in some places, detaches slightly in others, forms new connections when tendrils (orality) begin to pass over each other with the aid of the sea’s (time) movements. Time is thus renegotiated and repossessed in this form, “undated” as the sea.⁵⁹ Here is a cross-cultural poetic theater, genuine expression,

⁵⁷ Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 236.

⁵⁸ Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 98.

⁵⁹ Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 162.

played out in the durational rhythms of the sea; we remember ourselves, name ourselves repetitively.

Finally, what of the issue of sacrifice? The community is absolutely obliged to itself lest it cease to exist as a whole entity, cease continual becoming. Sacrifice is in this sense displaced in a certain way, as Derrida displaced sacrifice into a sacrifice of economy in his configuration of singularity and interiority. Sacrifice in exteriority becomes unnecessary as gift, now exteriorized interconnection, becomes a kind of continuity in the rhythms of the sea. Contained within this conception of exteriority, as with Kierkegaard, a Derridean element still resides. The sacrifice of economy, that celestial economy, appears in a new sense, as that continuity of the gift. The *expectation* of reciprocity does not enter this conception as how Derrida sacrifices parity and calculation. In exteriority, reciprocity without expectation is fulfilled without an instance which declares the gift due to the tying of cross-cultural poetic knots. It is a kind of continuous generous, rhythmic mutuality, still an anti-economy in this way.

The subtle remnants of Kierkegaard and Derrida, persisting even in their reversal and displacement by way of Glissant, is perhaps a demonstration of the force of cross-cultural entanglement.

Conclusion: Exteriority, Surrendering to the Sea, or Osmosis

Now, a new rhythm moves me. Its repetitive feeling, a joy; its sprawling contingency is everywhere before me, not enclosed in a particular moment, not to be relegated to the misery of contemplating the written afterword. Origin is at every connection, every relation before me, every knot, every entanglement and reentanglement, every partial detachment. Multi-relational openness by working ‘backwards,’ indeed forced to work backwards from the exterior; I

renounce nonexistence, I embrace difference. Time endures as the rhythmic sea; we repossess time as the sea. The narrative is these rhythms, the community engages in its theatrical expression, and we becomes I as I am filled with it, with time, with rhythm, through osmosis, all of its intricate connections. I become responsible in this osmosis. I surrender to the sea, we make ourselves anew, and anew, and anew, and anew. I am the island, as horizontal, as deep.

Oh God (island, sea, us), what a joy it is to move with you!

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