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In Spring 2022, the Theory Center Reading Group at Indiana University-Bloomington was devoted to the work of Martinican writer and thinker Édouard Glissant. We focused on his *Poetics of Relation* (*Poétique de la Relation* 1990, English tr. 1997), while also engaging with the recently translated *Treatise on the Whole-World* (*Traité du Tout-Monde*, 1996, English tr. 2020). An award-winning fiction and poetry writer, Glissant (1928-2011) is arguably the most influential Caribbean thinker of the 20th century, who over the course of his career developed a unique aesthetic and philosophical lexicon that has shaped the language and perspectives of successive generations of theorists in poststructuralism, postcolonialism, and globalization. His works cover virtually all genres and forms, from lyrical poetry to scholarly studies, from historical and experimental fiction to philosophical essays and political manifestos on topics as enduring and as urgent as slavery, racism, (neo)colonialism, creolization, and the “chaos-world.” Concepts such as opacity, Relation, “archipelagic” and “trembling” thinking, rhizomatic identity, and the “Whole-World” generated conversations with thinkers like Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida, Derek Walcott, Abdelkebir Khatibi, Achille Mbembe and others. Moreover, Glissant and his late idea of the “entour” have also influenced a younger generation of scholars in environmental humanities, intermediality and visual arts, and alter-globalization. In 2020, the Glissant Translation Project started publishing Glissant’s works in English in a comprehensive manner, attesting to the growing interest in his work far beyond the confines of his native Antilles and a Francophone audience to readers across the globe.

As scholars of literature with interests in Francophone Caribbean and Latin American studies, Philosophy and Literary Theory, we had known Glissant’s work for some time but found that *Poetics of Relation* warranted a slowing down in our pace of reading. We found that the book is, beginning with its evocative title, often cited in fragments, but little studied in its entirety, a work full of ideas that many claim as theirs, but few pause to contemplate. We wanted to consider more carefully how Glissant’s way of

connecting poetic image and philosophical thought, his radicalization of unmoored thinking, and his attention to that which is barely registered, the voice, the trace, the sand, makes us think differently, and forces us to reposition ourselves in the world. *Poetics of Relation* presented to us a threshold work within Glissant's *œuvre*, and an essay inaugurating a more worldly approach to poetic thought, as it dwelled on themes similar to *Le Discours antillais* (1981; *Caribbean Discourse*, 1989), but in a key that was not conceived as inherently Caribbean anymore, articulating instead an intellectual universe that could be thought of as reverberating around the world.

We were curious to discover how readers of different backgrounds would respond to this text. Our group of humanist scholars and graduate students met once weekly during the spring semester of 2022, making our way section by section through Glissant's astoundingly rich work. We had participants from a wide array of fields, including Philosophy, Religious Studies, Comparative Literature, Anthropology, East Asian Studies, English, French, Musicology, and Political Science, allowing us to become immersed in Glissant's world in truly surprising ways. The culmination of our semester together was a symposium of four invited guests who helped us to engage with Glissant based on their prior scholarship. This event was completed by a roundtable in which some of the reading group attendees shared the discoveries they had made during our communal reading exercise.

This special issue on "Thinking with Glissant" consists of three longform essays, some of which had been presented at our Glissant Colloquium, and three shorter interventions in the style of a spontaneous, free flowing response to Glissant's thought, coming out of the roundtable discussion held at the same Colloquium. As such, these shorter essays not only complement but echo the tone and tenor of many of the pieces in *Poetics of Relation*, and we have assembled them in a separate Forum section.

All the contributors speak to the timeliness and urgency of Glissant's work, over thirteen years after his passing. For Adlai Murdoch, this extends to Glissant's politics as expressed in his political statements made over the last years of his life, exposing neocolonial policies and attitudes still extant in France. In Murdoch's view, Glissant continues to offer a methodology for destabilizing the world's (post)colonial hierarchies and temporalities and has produced a Caribbean discursive subject that is fundamentally independent. In turn, Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel speaks of her own practice of thinking the archipelagic as a form of relationality. She expands this reflection and studies two political projects, the Antillean Confederation and the West Indies Federation, invoking forms of community beyond the nation. Similarly, she also conceives of the erotic in Glissantian terms as relational beyond monogamy and marriage. Nicolas Noé and Oana Panaité finally discuss a section of *Poetics of Relation* that most easily would warrant an accusation of being *démodé* or *passé*. Glissant's section on the "Information of Poetry"

focuses on how the rise of the computer --foreshadowing the advent of the internet age-- has changed or not the writing of poetry. Here, too, Noé and Panaïté find that Glissant's unexpected approach to the co-presence and mutual illumination of poetry and informatics leads us to a new understanding of the opacity of speech while prompting us to reflect on our own interpretive assumptions and reading practices.

The authors assembled in our Forum in turn relocate concepts in their dialogue with Glissant's work that readers schooled in his literature or philosophy might not have associated with it. Constance Furey, in her contribution, reveals to us a new dimension of the sacred in the famous opening passage of *Poetics of Relation*, "The Open Boat," by reading it as a reflection on the biblical story of Noah's Ark. In doing so, she enables a deeper understanding of Glissant's turn toward the sacred in *Poetics of Relation*, as a turn toward errantry, rather than redemption. In Furey's words, "This is the old newly told, the endurance of the sacred presented anew to those who think modernity is defined by its absence." For Ilana Gershon, in turn, Glissant's work is about different ways of thinking about cultural identity, not so much in the line of contemporary "politics of recognition" (Patchell Markell), but rather acknowledging the shifting nature of any form of selfhood. Gershon parses out both the contextual and co-textual determination of modern notions of selfhood and offers us a new reading of "The Black Beach" in *Poetics of Relation*. She recasts the refusal to speak of a man encountered when walking on a beach, along with his small hand gesture, as an exemplar of the "the politics of coordination," that is, an acknowledgment of ways of existing and communicating that may arise in the immediacy of a situation. Finally, Edgar Illas approaches Glissant's thinking on Relation and difference as a disagreement, a possibly inherent contradiction. He finds in Glissant's image of magma a way of productively addressing this "ontological imbalance." For Illas, magma, thought of as a "mixture of air, solid and liquid," helps to better understand an emerging world where neither modern states nor postcolonial territories follow accepted logics of power anymore, and where we have to learn to live with a globalized sense of permanent instability.

Reading Glissant's *Poetics of Relation* almost a quarter century after its first publication compels us to ponder anew the epistemological and experiential entanglements of history and memory, the human and the nonhuman, abyssal trauma and open futurity. It invites us to recast our current environment as a Burning Beach: an errant landscape that cannot be reduced to a mere backdrop to human action but a shared place where our thinking meets the boundless, opaque, and inescapable reality of the world.