# Writing in the Presence of the Languages of the World: Language, Literature and World in Edouard Glissant's Late Theoretical Works

**Jane Hiddleston**

Glissant's assertion that 'j'écris en présence de toutes les langues du monde' ('I write in the presence of the languages of the world') is repeated multiple times in his later theoretical essays, in particular in *Traité du tout-monde* (Treatise on the Totality-World), published in 1997. The statement announces his ongoing commitment to multilingualism and his insistence that language is always defined by Relation, by which he means that our idioms are created out of the dynamic global network of languages and are not necessarily determined by a single linguistic system. Yet if Glissant so insistently celebrates this creative multilingual expression, the dominant language of his prose appears on first glance to be French. He occasionally incorporates creole terms, particularly in his poetry, and often uses the specific lexicon of the local Martinican landscape in all his writing, but his theorisation of a creolised, multilingual writing nevertheless for the most part appears to take place in literary French, even if this French is lexically wide-ranging and contains evidence of his engagement with multiple cultures. The notion that the writer writes in the presence of the languages of the world, then, implies something different from a bilingual writing that stages a confrontation between languages by consistently inserting words or sentences from one language into another.

This chapter takes Glissant's statement as a starting-point for a conception of multilingualism in 'world literature' that does not rest on the assumption that separate languages can be juxtaposed with one another, but that is constructed out of a more expansive and relational understanding of language usage. Glissant's assertion notes the presence in his writing of multiple languages 'dans la nostalgie poignante de leur devenir menacé' ('in the poignant nostalgia of their threatened becoming'), and announces a commitment to the preservation of minority languages as a principled response to global linguistic diversity and as a challenge to the repressiveness behind any insistence on linguistic hierarchy or segregation.[1] Yet the statement also announces a deep-seated ethics of writing, an approach to language whereby the writer seeks deliberately to exhibit the contingency of his usage and signals an awareness of the myriad potentially unfamiliar languages that surround and shape his writing. Glissant's conception of language itself, and of the 'world' in which it is

immersed, indicates that it is possible to transcend the putative opposition between monolingualism and multilingualism and to understand language and writing in ways that are ultimately both more creative and more ethical. 'World literature', from this point of view, would be an arena for performing the creation of idiom from a dynamic world of languages and for continually testing and expanding our assumed linguistic systems.

A number of critics have in recent years attempted to come up with ways of imagining literary creativity so as to reflect the complex activity and interpenetration of languages in ways that provide a starting point for Glissant's more thoroughgoing theoretical intervention. Rebecca Walkowitz's *Born Translated* examines novels that 'have been written for translation from the start', that is, novels that stage their own indebtedness to languages other than the one in which they are written.[2] This might include works written in a second language, for example, or texts that have been translated by their authors, or that are manifestly the product of a translation process at some point. In this sense they are on some level written 'in the presence of' other languages, as Glissant would suggest, as these languages are referenced through the staging of the translation process. The difficulty with Walkowitz's model, however, is that although she insists that her readings demonstrate that 'anglophone writing operates in many languages, even when it appears to be operating only in English', her analyses do not particularly exhibit linguistic diversity and experimentalism, and her model still relies on a notion of translation from one language into another.[3] The other languages to which her chosen texts refer may be present but they are also latent, and do not necessarily generate linguistic invention.

Other critics have examined more fully the presence of other languages in literary texts by foregrounding not just 'multilingualism' in the sense of the juxtaposition of several monolingual systems, but more developed forms of linguistic interpenetration. In his *In Babel's Shadow*, for example, Brian Lennon, denounces the constraints on language usage applied by the publishing industry, and proposes a notion of 'strong plurilingualism', that is 'the interpolation into English of significant quantities of a language or languages other than English', usually only permitted by small independent publishing houses.[4] This 'strong plurilingualism' is theorised by Lennon as an alternative to 'multilingualism' because it describes both the mixing of linguistic systems and, importantly for my reading of Glissant, the presence of combinations of idiom within a single linguistic system. As a further alternative to 'multilingualism', moreover, Paul Bandia has examined what he calls the 'heterolingualism' of postcolonial literature, choosing this term to reflect the 'heterogeneity' of postcolonial society as well as the creative ways in which a range of postcolonial writers

challenge the hegemonic language of colonisation.[5] Bandia's 'heterolingualism' is reminiscent of Glissant's embrace of 'creolisation', a process rather than a dialect, and one by which hegemonic languages are continually remodelled through their contact with multiple and dynamic local languages or creoles. Bandia shows how works by writers such as the Ivorian Ahmadou Kourouma, for example, offer a vision of literary heterolingualism, where 'language mixing and hybridity occur without any regard for linguistic hierarchy, in a context where languages coexist in a rhizomatic relationship'.[6] Lennon's 'plurilingualism' and Bandia's 'heterolingualism' may, then, offer viable alternatives to 'multilingualism' in their more convincing description of non-hierarchical forms of linguistic plurality in literary works.

Édouard Glissant's highly creative poetic theory, however, is less focused on finding a new 'lingualism' and more concerned with the ways in which literary writing might challenge our notions of what a language is and of its activity in the world. Glissant proposes to think of language not in terms of monolingualism and multilingualism but in terms of a form of relational expressivity. Language can be construed, perhaps, not as a defined system but as the infinitely multiple forms of expression we create out of our varying contacts with particular systems, each conceived as more dynamic than the 'myth' of monolingualism assumes. Language is comprised by the singular idioms we put together on the basis of our dialogue with other people, cultures, languages, and environments. As the critic Celia Britton has shown, the root of Glissant's linguistic theory as it evolves through his œuvre is the distinction he makes between 'langage' and 'langue'.[7] Clearly developed out of Saussure's distinction between 'langue' and 'parole', Glissant nevertheless undermines Saussure's privileging of identifiable linguistic systems to emphasize how individual inventions of 'langage' continually extend and reshape the 'langue' or 'langues' out of which they emerge. Rather than assuming that language is a signifier of national identity, moreover, Glissant insists instead on the dynamism of 'langage' as the trace of the speaker or writer's contact both with a specific place in the world, and with the multiple other places and cultures that infiltrate that place as well as his or her expression of it: 'un langage, c'est cela d'abord: la fréquentation insensée de l'organique, des spécifiques d'une langue et, en même temps, son ouverture sévère à la Relation' ('a language is above all the senseless frequenting of the organic, of the specificity of a language, and at the same time its severe opening out to Relation').[8] A 'langue', then, should not be construed as fixed and standardized, but is constantly stretched and altered by the dynamic movement of 'langages'. Literary writing, moreover, with its creative energy is particularly well placed to drive this movement forward,

as Glissant argues in a manner reminiscent of Bakhtin's 'dialogic imagination' in the novel, 'la langue ne grandit que par le langage, cette frappe du poète, et le langage a besoin de toutes les langues, qui sont l'imaginaire du monde' ('language only grows through individual usages of language, the force of the poet, and individual usages of language need all languages, which are the imaginary of the world').[9] No longer a question of either monolingualism or multilingualism, literary writing is rather the inventive pursuit of ever new 'langages': idioms or forms of expression that test and push the limits of what we conceive as the existing frameworks of 'langue'.

As Celia Britton has astutely argued, Glissant's conception of 'langage' also implies an ethical stance. His insistence on the importance of inventive 'langages' stems in part from an embrace of unintelligibility: my awareness of the opacity of a language I do not understand demonstrates to me the contingency of my own language and counters dangerously reductive and exclusive notions of cultural identity. In this sense Glissant goes beyond Bakhtin in his insistence not only on the multilingual imagination but also on the ethical significance of our encounter with idioms or cultural forms we cannot necessarily assimilate, and that call upon us in turn to co-create in our reading. Glissant's linguistic theory has, since *Le Discours antillais* (Caribbean Discourse) published in 1981, brought with it a claim for 'le droit à l'opacité' ('the right to opacity'), which implies both respect for unfamiliar forms of expression and a capacity to write or create in ways that might not produce meaning in predictable and established forms. The 'droit à l'opacité' challenges the demand for false clarity associated with reductive universalisms and invites a more open, risky but constructive form of complicity, as Glissant asserts: 'il ne m'est pas nécessaire de «comprendre» qui que ce soit, individu, communauté, peuple, de le «prendre avec moi» au prix de l'étouffer, de le perdre ainsi dans une totalité assommante que je gérerais, pour accepter de vivre avec lui, de bâtir avec lui, de risquer avec lui' ('in order to live, build, and take a risk with an individual, a community, a people, it is not necessary for me to "understand" them, to "take them with me" at the cost of stifling them, of losing them in an oppressive totality that I would manage').[10] In addition, this encounter with opacity is again a driver for the creation of new and composite forms of expression, as the poet, for example, according to Glissant also recreates foreign idioms in a different form in his or her own 'langage': 'je te parle dans ta langue, et c'est dans mon langage que je t'entends' ('I speak to you in your language, and it's in my language that I understand you').[11] Britton explains that this respect for opacity is also a necessary correlation of Glissant's concept of 'langage' as a singular form of expression created out of the speaker's relation with the world: '*langage*,

that is, also opens up the possibility of a different mode of understanding the other's speech which does not depend either upon the reductive transparency he is opposing or upon ordinary linguistic knowledge'.[12] 'Langage' designates a form of expression that is not constrained by the rules of a standardized system, but may speak to listeners and readers in more open-ended and transformative ways. Some degree of unintelligibility is indeed in itself a trigger for discovery and invention.

Glissant's conception of the contact and blurring between 'langues' created by 'langages' is bound up, moreover, with his notion of 'mondialité' ('worldliness'), not in the sense of the universalizing force of globalization, but as a catalyst for creolization, hybridization, and Relation. 'Tout monde' (Totality-World) precisely names not so much the world itself as the imagination of a dynamic, evolving interconnectedness across the world, the embrace of 'métissage' and the rejection of 'les absolus de l'Histoire' ('the absolutes of History'). 'Mondialité' in no way implies homogenization, then, but rather, as Eric Prieto puts it, a 'theory of interdependence' demonstrating the connections between particular forms of oppression across the capitalist world.[13] The apparently utopian quality of Glissant's celebration of 'mondialité', then, is offset by his repeated evocations of suffering in different parts of the world, where hierarchical and exclusivist thinking has led to violence, expressed precisely as 'le cri du monde' ('the cry of the world').[14] In the face of this violence, Glissant emphatically affirms the potentially salutary effects of a world literary form of writing, the inventive 'langages' of which would contest oppressive systems of thinking. The writer's linguistic imaginary cannot be constricted by an atavistic identity but precisely requires immersion in the dynamic multiplicity of the world, and writing records the trace of this process.[15] Important for Glissant too is this contact between writing and orality, as it is oral cultures that best perform the dynamic creativity of 'langage', and that, 'conviennent tant à la diversité de toutes choses, la répétition, le ressassement, la parole circulaire, le cri en spirale, les cassures de la voix' ('are so well suited to the diversity of all things, repetition, returning to, circular discourse, the cry in the form of a spiral, the breaking of voices').[16] Glissant's vision of worldly literature rejects any putative claim to encompass globality, as he suggests that the Anglophone conception of 'world literature' risks implying, but again, is the product of a more fundamentally ethical and creative approach to the inventiveness of 'langage'.[17] It is also a way of writing that does not aspire to universalism, but that deliberately displays its idiosyncrasies, its particular locality, while conceiving that locality itself as necessarily plural and interactive. Against the world literary marketplace shaped and constrained by the global

publishing market, then, Glissant imagines a different worldly aesthetic energized by the relationality of its idiom and form.

It is against this background of a renewed conceptualization of both language and world that Glissant intermittently affirms, 'j'écris en présence de toutes les langues du monde' ('I write in the presence of the languages of the world'). The statement suggests that he composes out of an imaginary that acknowledges and embraces the vast and sprawling network of languages that jostle against one another. He may, as we have seen, not be familiar with these multiple languages, and yet, 'dans la langue qui me sert à exprimer, et quand même je ne me réclamerais que d'elle seule, je n'écris plus de manière monolingue' ('in the language I use to express myself, and even though I claim only this one, I no longer write in a monolingual way').[18] To write in the presence of other languages is not necessarily to write by incorporating borrowings, but rather to foreground the work's contingent place in the global linguistic arena. Glissant's initial description of his own writing practice is also later reiterated in the plural and in italics – '*nous écrivons en présence de toutes les langues du monde*' ('*we write in the presence of all the languages in the world*') – as if to describe literary production itself rather than his own particular poetics. Whatever relationship we think we might have with a language, 'nous les partageons sans les connaître, nous les convions à la langue dont nous usons. La langue n'est plus le miroir d'aucun être. Les langues sont nos paysages, que la poussée du jour change en nous' ('we share them without knowing them, we invite them into the language that we use. Language is no longer the mirror of being. Languages are our landscapes, which the advancement of the day changes within us').[19] As experience alters and shifts, so too does the form of our self-expression, so that we cannot conceive ourselves as purely and securely represented in a single linguistic framework connoting a specified identity. To write in the presence of other languages means to write not in order to provide a copy of what we think we are and know, but in order to invent singular forms of expression exhibiting their situation in a world of languages in continual transit.

The creative activity of writing also gives rise to the invention of 'langages' whose form is necessarily unpredictable. The writer's interaction with existing cultures and heritages leads to unforeseen combinations of idiom, melding the old with the new: 'l'écriture, qui nous mène à des intuitions imprévisibles, nous fait découvrir les constantes cachées de la diversité du monde, et nous éprouvons bienheureusement que ces invariants nous parlent à leur tour' ('writing, which leads us to unpredictable intuitions, makes us discover the hidden constants of the diversity of the world, and we happily feel that these invariants speak to us in

turn').[20] The writer patches together his or her composition by drawing on the languages of his or her locality, of those speaking around him, and these languages are in turn always shaped by his or her previous and ongoing interactions. Writing necessarily builds on a linguistic heritage but combines these 'invariants' in unforeseen configurations. This patchwork creation is precisely the starting-point, moreover, for the discovery of spontaneous and unanticipated idioms and forms of expression. Glissant's ethics of respect for opacity in this way also issues an assertive call for creative endeavour, again as a form of resistance to oppressive hierarchies and reductive categorizations. The unpredictable results of creolization 'nous gardent d'être persuadés d'une essence ou d'être raidis dans des exclusives' ('keep us from being persuaded by an essence or from being hardened into exclusivities').[21]

Glissant's conception of the openness of writing to the unpredictable offers a compelling development of Derek Attridge's more introspective conception of creation, as he too suggests that writing resurges unplanned, not necessarily transcribing a pre-existing idea, but generating new thinking or 'otherness', as its idioms take shape.[22] Attridge's view of literary creation stresses how a creative work can emerge in ways that are mysterious to the writer, as he or she experiments with combinations of words on the page without knowing where these arrangements will take the text. Creation, for Attridge, is 'a handling of language whereby something we might call "otherness", or "alterity", or "the other" is made, or allowed, to impact upon the existing configurations of an individual's mental world – which is to say, upon a particular cultural field as it is embodied in a single subjectivity'.[23] Attridge goes on to discuss the ways in which 'idioculture' provides the backdrop for this process, and he defines this 'idioculture' as a 'changing array of interlocking, overlapping, and often contradictory cultural systems absorbed in the course of his or her previous experience, a complex matrix of habits, cognitive models, representations, beliefs, expectations, prejudices, and preferences'.[24] Attridge's model implies a sort of coherence within any particular individual's 'idioculture', and yet it is significant that his theory is based on the contribution of potentially contradictory cultures to a unique 'event' of creation that is not predetermined. Read in conjunction with Glissant, this creation can also be conceived to occur through the writer's contacts with locality and Relation in a more active, plural, and worldly way than Attridge's model seems to emphasize. Writing evolves unplanned from traces of idioms captured, translated, and reinvented by the writer in ways that generate their own momentum. The spontaneous inventions of the writer's 'langage' come not only from his or her solipsistic introspection but from his immersion in the languages of the world.

Although Glissant's theorization of language, literature, and relationality is itself not explicitly multilingual, his own use of form offers one way to imagine what it means to 'write in the presence of the languages of the world'. In his reflection on the relationship between writing and orality quoted earlier, Glisant also associated worldly writing with the spontaneous characteristics of oral storytelling, with repetition and reworking, circularity and fragmentation. It is also through structure, then, that the writer emphasizes the contingency of his or her usage, its provisional form among other languages, and its resistance to established grammatical and syntactical structures or lexicons. Glissant's *Traité du tout-monde* is importantly itself a hybrid text, part 'theory' and part narrative, combining different sorts of prose (and some occasional verse), while also juxtaposing Glissant's analytical voice with that of the character Mathieu Béluse from his novels. This mixed and fragmented form is itself a performance of writing made up of different 'langages', and some of the theoretical sections contain poetic imagery, or convoluted syntax, or intersperse conceptual analysis with lyricism. A rich and surprising passage, for example, opens the section made up of reflections on other writers 'Ce qui nous fut, ce qui nous est', and is worth quoting in full:

> … Les feux des lys sauvages, les clairs fourrés d'oiseaux du paradis, les maisons rousses assoupies qui veillent sur des marais semés de roses-de-porcelaine, et tout ce que la totalité-monde amasse de rires et de malheurs en une seule favela, puis les sables – Brésil – cascadant entre les murailles des fleuves-serpents, et l'évohé des chœurs d'Afrique mêlés de flûte indienne, d'où va sourdre bientôt la bossa-nova, et le jappement des usines venu lécher les mosaïques des trottoirs, toutes ces images convenues qui entrent en démesure, et les paons amazoniens qui engloutissent dans la ténèbre de leurs roues les familles de la forêt, et l'odeur rêche des cocos et des oranges amères…[25]
>
> (The fires of wild lilies, the light areas lined with birds of paradise, the sleepy red houses that watch over marshes planted with porcelain roses, and all that the totality-world amasses with laughter and misfortune in a single favela (shanty-town), then the sands – Brazil – cascading between the walls of the rivers-serpents, and the frenzy of African choirs mingled with Indian flute, from which the bossa nova will soon dull, and the barking of factories come to lick the mosaics of sidewalks, all these images together in disproportion, and the Amazonian peacocks which engulf in the darkness of their wheels the families of the forest, and the rough smell of coconuts and bitter oranges…)

The passage piles on top of one another a series of composite images, enumerating flora and fauna, natural and cultural phenomena, local biological and cultural terms as well as colours, textures, sounds and smells, to emphasize both proliferation and incompletion. The ellipses at the beginning and end of the passage present the description as a fragment in a greater network, and the absence of full stops too foregrounds continuity. The images at the same time are themselves richly expressive and capture hints of local 'langages' in their noisy and vibrant diversity. The colours of the lilies and the birds of paradise are juxtaposed with those of the houses, for example, and sounds of the Indian flute or the bossa-nova compete with the yelping of the factories. Each of these images represents a form of expression drawing on multiple senses, rubbing against one another in the 'totalité-monde', while the passage as a whole flouts grammatical and syntactical rules so as to situate itself outside any determined linguistic system.

Most striking in Glissant's *Traité* is the incursion of the voice of Mathieu Béluse from the novels, whose interjections both offer an additional set of 'langages' to those of Glissant and at times challenge the philosopher's arguments so as to situate them within a relational framework. Mathieu Béluse's narrative foregrounds its situation in relation to multiple histories and geographies, and sets his own experience and that of his wife Marie Celat alongside the stories of other characters. He too emphasizes incompletion and provisonality, as narratives exist alongside other narratives, just as 'langages' jostle against one another, to undermine any definitive version: 'nos récits sont des mélopées, des traités de joyeux parler, et des cartes de géographie, et de plaisantes prophéties, qui n'ont pas souci d'être vérifiés' ('our narratives are chants, treatises of joyful speech, geographical maps, pleasing prophecies, which do not need to be checked').[26] Béluse's objections to the *Traité* also underline Glissant's resistance to constructing his theory as a definitive truth, and the dialogic structure again constitutes another way to perform a notion of writing in the presence of other languages: Glissant writes his *Traité* so as to display its relativity, its encounter with other points of view. The objections list conflicts and injustices across the world, the non-recognition of migrant communities and the all-consuming sweep of global capitalist culture, for example, so that it is clear that the acceptance of relationality is figured as an ongoing effort rather than a completed statement. The *Traité*'s status as a sort of supplement to the main event of the novel, *Tout-monde,* itself the result of a long and complex sequence, also underlines its provisionality and its participation in an ongoing series of narratives.

Glissant's vision of writing in the presence of the languages of the world is presented by the time of *Traité du tout-monde* as a practice not necessarily grounded in the Caribbean, though it emerges out of his earlier conception of 'Antillanité' as an intensified experience of Relation. The shifting and ambiguous status of Caribbean specificity in Glissant's thought has generated some controversy, as thinkers such as Peter Hallward and Nick Nesbitt lament the depoliticisation of his work as it shifts attention away from colonialism and the history of slavery in the Caribbean to the less grounded aesthetics of the tout-monde.[27] Yet Glissant repeatedly argues that it is the archipelagic form of the islands, both connected with one another and distinct, as well as the region's rapid history of migration and confluence, that creates a particularly apt example of relationality, even if this has developed more slowly and in different ways elsewhere. Glissant's dynamic 'langage' is also comparable to the conceptions of language invented by other Caribbean writers similarly capturing the dynamic movement and development of local languages as they mix influences and create rhythms, sounds and structures that resist the monolingual system. Edward Kamau Brathwaite's concept of the 'nation language' in Anglophone Caribbean poetry, for example, describes the 'language-energy' of the combination of English with traces of ancestral languages, Hindi and Chinese, and African languages. This 'nation language' may ostensibly appear to be English, 'but in its contours, its rhythm and timbre, its sound explosions, it is not English'.[28] Like Glissant's writing in the presence of the languages of the world, it uses flexible and inventive structures, and in addition, captures local sounds potentially unfamiliar to speakers of hegemonic, standardized English. Glissant too reflects on the blending of the oral and written languages, emphasizing for the most part the spontaneity and structural malleability of oral forms, yet Brathwaite's 'nation language' also further expands the consistency of language in its foregrounding of the grain of the voice, of nonverbal sounds accompanying the words. The 'nation language' of poetry incorporates the nonverbal as a form of expression, 'often it is English which is like a howl, or a shout, or a machine-gun or the wind or a wave'. In a discussion with Brathwaite, Glissant clearly distinguishes the former's 'nation language' from Martinican creole, and yet the theory of language invention implied by Brathwaite's model also adds to Glissant's championing of hybridisation and dynamic invention a salutary attention to the expressiveness of vocal sound.[29]

In addition to this attention to the materiality of the voice, both Brathwaite and Glissant stress in their dialogue, as well as throughout their work, the active role of the physical landscape in Caribbean cultural expression. For both, the Caribbean landscape is not merely a décor or frame, but an active force whose materiality bears an expressiveness that

also impacts on their conceptions of poetic language. As the Guadeloupian writer Daniel Maximin also elaborates in detail in *Les Fruits du cyclone: une géopoétique de la Caraïbe* (The Fruits of the Cyclone: A Geopoetics of the Caribbean), the poetics of Relation also names the connection between slave and island. Local geography and geology also contributed to the slave's dream of liberation and rerooting in a way that contests the colonial attempt to dominate and control the natural world.[30] A further dimension, then, to Glissant's writing in the presence of the languages of the world is this conception of world also as the nonhuman world, as if writing might also capture or at least dialogue with the language of the landscape that surrounds the writer and by which he is shaped. As J. Michael Dash has argued, Glissant's immersion in the language of landscape has been evident from the beginning, and Jana Evans Braziel has shown, in her contribution to Deloughrey, Gossan and Handley's volume on *Caribbean Literature and the Environment,* how *Le Discours antillais* already strove to give agency back to the Caribbean landscape.[31] In *La Cohée du Lamentin* (The Cohée of the Lamentin), published in 2005, moreover, the language of place was evidently foregrounded in part in the singular reference to Martinican geography in the title (which refers to a part of the beach in the Lamentin, the region of Martinique where Glissant was born), as well as through Glissant's evocations of natural phenomena, and through his commentaries on poetry, such as that of Césaire, giving voice and form to the material features of local territory. And in Glissant's own novels and poetry, the character of Marie Celat (Mycéa) represents a unique form of communication with the land. In *Pays rêvé, pays reel* (Dream Country, Real Country), for example, she repeatedly figures the expressivity of the landscape as a form of textuality, at the same time as she imagines that her own language might somehow achieve a renewed bonding beyond the rupture caused by slave history.[32]

Glissant's late volume, *Une nouvelle région du monde* (A New Region of the World), however, offers a particularly rich and aesthetically complex theorisation of the writer's immersion in the 'langages' of the physical world. This challenging text, with its subtitle 'Esthétique I' (Aesthetics I), promises a new genre of aesthetic thought in Glissant's œuvre, hovering somewhere between philosophy and prose poetry, and provides a particularly compelling example of writing in the presence of the languages of the world in its attempt to converse with the Martinican landscape. This idea of the expressiveness of the nonhuman environment generates a renewed conceptualization of artistic representation and its invocation of the 'real'. Glissant's theory here rests on a rejection of a concept of representation reliant on the human creation of a form subsequently imposed upon the landscape. He explores a history of various forms of depiction, including the 'tableau', which

fixes the movement of a scene, as well as the shift from a form of painting that claims to possess the real to one that seeks fusion with it. Yet in the face of this, Glissant asserts, 'chaque paysage s'obstine, tous coloriés et monotones et nuancés et nus et échevelés, vivants enfin, il ne suffit pas de les photographier ni de calculer à la fin leurs dispositions, il faudra exprimer aussi pourquoi leurs couleurs font un langage, qui révèle quoi?' ('each landscape persists, all coloured and monotonous and nuanced and naked and dishevelled, finally alive, it is not enough to photograph them or in the end to calculate their position, it will be necessary to express also why their colours make a language, what reveals what?')[33] Rather than grafting a created form onto the landscape, then, Glissant suggests we should be aware of how the landscape itself creates its own art form and its own language; its shapes, colours, movements and forces are themselves a form of expression to which we need to attend. 'La Nature, quand elle est née, a fait ses propres installations' ('when it was born, Nature made its own installations'), argues Glissant, as the rocks of the shoreline, for example, punctuate the surface of the sand as if with exclamation and question marks.[34] Similarly, the sound of the sea, the flow of the rivers, the shapes of the mountains, can be conceived as actively contributing to the aesthetic sense we have of the landscapes around us. Glissant suggests that oral cultures have been better able to achieve this expressive dialogue, as they 'invoke' rather than 'represent' the world, and live alongside it rather than attempting to imitate it. This aesthetics that is able also to listen to and capture the expression of the world is the starting point, for Glissant, for a 'nouvelle région du monde'.

The opening pages of this treatise on aesthetics constitute a compelling performance of Glissant's conception of writing not only in the presence of multiple human languages, but also with the echo of those of land and sea. The conceptualization of representation and worldliness undertaken in *Une nouvelle région du monde* is prefaced with an extraordinary piece of evocative prose describing Diamond Rock, a steep, uninhabited basalt island situated to the south of Martinique's Fort-de-France and visible from Glissant's home. On the one hand, as Carine Mardorossian argues in her astute analysis of the passage, the rock is a figure for the ways in which history and geography mutually shape one another.[35] The rock is both the result of geological forces, a shape moulded by its volcanic composition and by the sea, and at the same time historically significant in that it played a crucial role in the Napoleonic wars. On the other hand, Glissant captures its vitality here by evoking both the expressiveness of its form, its shape, light, and colours, and the ways in which the human eye, and his own description, reinterprets this aesthetics. Importantly, then, he is not so much seeking to capture a pure, untouched and unmediated natural landscape in this passage, but rather

showing how our apprehension of the rock must be alive to the nonhuman forces and patterns that fashion and shape it even as we create our own aesthetic vision. His description weaves together elements of light and shade, the shaping and patterning of the rock, with references to its irreducibility and obscurity, as if to suggest that he can be sensitive to its aesthetic form without claiming to frame and possess it. Formerly attached to the mainland, for example, the rock is:

> à lui seul un vrai archipel, et tellement irréductible dans sa fragilité sculptée, les matins sourds et les nuits évaporées le creusent et le mangent sans tarir, et il maintient le lien, d'interrogation et d'exclamation, et il jette l'inquiétude et l'émerveillement au travers de toute la structure, qui vous saisissent comme un flot roulant.[36]
>
> ('the rock alone a veritable archipelago, and so irreducible in its carved fragility, the quiet mornings and evaporated nights dig it and eat it without drying up, and it keeps the link, interrogation and exclamation, and it throws worry and wonder through the whole structure, which seize you like a rolling stream.')

The imagery here at once conjures the expressiveness of the geological formation and betrays an awareness of the obscurity of its history, while also displaying the writer's own interpretation of its shape (using the figures, for example, of the question marks and exclamation marks). Glissant's proliferating sentences, moreover, again foreground incompletion, as if the passage can capture elements of the rock's form while showing that the text's own language will necessarily also be relative and partial.

Glissant's evocation foregrounds at the same time the ways in which we seek to translate and make sense of the shape of the rock as we try to attend to its hidden languages: 'nous observons que le corps de terre qui ainsi projette vers sa chute ou sa conclusion est d'une dame couchée, le menton très volontaire et le nez fort et rélevé, le Rocher derrière est comme la tête d'un peigne accroché à quelque natte de cheveux sous-marins' ('we see that the body of earth leaning towards its own fall or end is like a reclining woman, the chin very determined and nose strong and raised, the Rock behind is like a head with a comb attached to a plait on underwater hair').[37] Despite these anthropomorphic forms that the viewer might create out of the landscape, however, 'c'est la mer en vérité qui domine' ('in truth it's the sea that dominates'), as water continually reshapes the shoreline and muddles the 'text' that it simultaneously serves to create.[38] Glissant's aim is to remain open to this muddling, to the

dynamic movement of the landscape, to its shifting expression at different moments and in the varying modulations of light and weather, and he seeks to eschew the fixity and completion he associated with the 'tableau' or painting. His own challenging, rich, and evocative prose in this section points, then, to the language of the rock, of the geological environment, even as it necessarily weaves and translates that language into his own.

Glissant in this way stretches the boundaries of his writing so that it listens not only to other cultural idioms but also to the earth's own manifold, layered, and interlocking forms of expression. This attentiveness to the aesthetics of the landscape can be conceived as a way to expand our understanding of language beyond the frameworks of monolingualism and multilingualism to include more fully the mutual shaping of human and nonhuman forms of expression. Glissant's arguments here can also be read in conjunction with those of Brian Massumi, who has asserted, through readings of Deleuze and Guattari, that we need to imagine expression not just as a message conveyed and determined by a speaker, but as part of a system involving nonverbal and material forces. Expression is not a process of transferring meaning but an event or a movement; it combines both linguistic and extralinguistic forces, and the subject is a conduit for it rather than its owner. The philosophical background to Massumi's argument is far broader than Glissant's focus on the landscape and physical environment, and yet his uncoupling of expression and human agency nevertheless sheds light on the latter's vision of nonhuman expressivity. Massumi insists:

> Expression is not in a language-using mind, or in a speaking subject *vis-à-vis* its objects. Nor is it rooted in an individual body. It is not even in a particular institution, because it is precisely the institutional system that is in flux. Expression is abroad in the world – where the potential is for what may become. It is non-local, scattered across a myriad struggles over what manner of life-defining nets will capture and contain that potential in reproducible articulations, or actual functions.[39]

Expression is not, therefore, the intended message created by any given subject, but a much more dynamic process weaving together subject and environment; it is 'always on the move, always engrossed in its own course, overspilling individual experience, nomadically evading responsibility'.[40] Glissant's attempt to conceptualise the expressiveness of the landscape similarly opens language up through this vision of its formation in and continual interaction with the world, with materiality and the structures within which it moves. Expression as Glissant conceptualises it also specifically perceives in landscape and environment a set of

forces, shapes and patterns, and constructs the material world as the producer of an aesthetics that moulds and impacts on what we conceive as our cultural, human languages.

Glissant's affirmation that he writes in the presence of the languages of the world offers in this way a refreshing challenge not only to narrow forms of association between language, culture and identity, but also to our conception of the interface between language and the world. No longer a series of systems divided up by the dominant concepts of monolingualism and multilingualism, 'langues' are seen rather as the backdrop for creative 'langages' immersed in and created out of the relational expressivity of both the cultural and the material world. Writing in the presence of the languages of the world, then, is a way both to foreground the creativity and ethical importance of 'langages' in relation to 'langues', and to show how our utterances are formed through our contacts not only with other peoples and cultures but also with the physical environment. Glissant's aesthetics, moreover, not only champions creativity in its call for innovation and unpredictability, but also recommends ethical respect for linguistic diversity in its preservation of opacity and calls for attentiveness to environmental forces as they too might escape our attempts at understanding and possession. The endeavour to gesture towards this relational expressivity in the writer's own oeuvre serves as a statement of resistance to the reductive exigencies of the dominant monolingual model of the globalized market. It also obliquely contests thoughtless forms of human imposition on the environment and constructs a poetics open to dialogue with the physical world as an active expressive force.

[1] Édouard Glissant, *Traité du tout-monde* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997) 26.
[2] Rebecca Walkowitz, *Born Translated: The Contemporary Novel in an Age of World Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015) 4.
[3] Ibid., 24.
[4] Brian Lennon, *In Babel's Shadow: Multilingual Literatures, Monolingual States* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 9.

[5] Paul Bandia, 'Postcolonial Literary Heteroglossia: A Challenge for Homogenizing Translation', *Perspectives: Studies in Translatology* 20.4 (2012): 419-431.
[6] Ibid., 423.
[7] Celia Britton, *Language and Literary Form in French Caribbean Writing* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2014).
[8] Édouard Glissant, *Traité du tout-monde* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), 86.
[9] Ibid., p. 163. See also Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1981).
[10] Ibid., p. 29. A number of critics have produced lucid commentaries on Glissant's concept of opacity. See for example, Hédi Adlai Murdoch, 'Édouard Glissant's Creolized World Vision: From Resistance and Relation to *Opacité*', *Callaloo* 36.4 (2013): 875-890; Patrick Crowley, 'Édouard Glissant: Resistance and *Opacité*', *Romance Studies* 24.2 (2006): 105-115.
[11] Édouard Glissant, *Traité du tout-monde*, 122.
[12] Celia Britton, *Language and Literary Form in French Caribbean Writing*, 152.
[13] See Eric Prieto, 'Édouard Glissant: *littérature-monde* and *tout-monde', Small Axe* 14.3 (2010): 111-120.
[14] 'Le cri du monde' is the title of the first chapter of *Traité du tout-monde*. Critics such as Peter Hallward and Christopher Miller have criticised Glissant's thinking on the 'tout monde' for its abstract universalism and insufficient attention to specific struggles and conflicts. See Peter Hallward, *Absolutely Postcolonial: Writing between the Singular and the Specific* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001) and Christopher Miller, *The French Atlantic Triangle: Literature and Culture of the Slave Trade* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).
[15] Édouard Glissant, *Traité du tout-monde*, 119.
[16] Ibid., 121.
[17] Ibid., 120.
[18] Ibid., 26.
[19] Ibid., 85.
[20] Ibid., 119.
[21] Ibid., 26.
[22] Derek Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature* (London: Routledge, 2004).
[23] Ibid., 19.
[24] Ibid., 21.
[25] Édouard Glissant, *Traité du tout-monde*, 127.
[26] Ibid., 63.
[27] See Peter Hallward, *Absolutely Postcolonial: Writing between the Singular and the Specific* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001); Nick Nesbitt, *Caribbean Critique: Antillean Theory from Toussaint to Glissant* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2014).
[28] Edward Kamau Brathwaite, *History of the Voice: The Development of Nation Language in Anglophone Caribbean Poetry* (London: New Beacon, 1984).
[29] Edward Kamau Brathwaite and Édouard Glissant, 'A Dialogue: Nation Language and the Poetics of Creolization', in *Caribbean Cultural Thought: From Plantation to Diaspora*, ed. Yanique Hume and Aaron Kamugisha (Miami: Ian Roundle Publishers, 2013), 290-300.
[30] Daniel Maximin, *Les Fruits du cyclone: une géopoétique de la Caraïbe* (Paris: Seuil, 2006).
[31] J.Michael Dash, *Édouard Glissant* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Jana Evans Braziel, 'Caribbean Genesis: Language, Gardens, Worlds (Jamaica Kincaid, Derek Walcott, Édouard Glissant)', in *Caribbean Literature and the Environment*, ed. Elizabeth Deloughrey, Rénée K. Gossan and George B. Handley (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 2005), 110-126.
[32] For more on the place of landscape and environment in Glissant's poetry, see for example Mildred Mortimer, 'Conquest and Resistance in Édouard Glissant's Poetry', *Esprit Créateur* 32.2 (1992): 65-76; Carrie Noland, 'Édouard Glissant: A Poetics of the *Entour*', in *Poetry After Cultural Studies*, ed. Heidi R. Bean and Mike Chasar (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2011), 143-172.
[33] Édouard Glissant, *Une nouvelle région du monde* (Paris: Gallimard, 2006) 33.
[34] Ibid., 53.
[35] See Carine Mardorossian, '"Poetics of Landscape": Édouard Glissant's Creolized Ecologies', *Callaloo* 36.4 (2013): 983-994.
[36] Édouard Glissant, *Une nouvelle région du monde*, 13.
[37] Ibid., 16.
[38] Ibid., 16.
[39] Brian Massumi, *A Shock to Thought: Expression after Deleuze and Guattari* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002) xxi.
[40] Ibid., xxi.