

Rhizomatic Influence: The Antigenealogy of Glissant and Deleuze*

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To identify literary influences is, conventionally, to build a genealogy—to, in Salman Rushdie’s words, “name one’s parents.” But can this family-tree view of literary influence hold up in postcolonial literature—a body of work that has so thoroughly deconstructed concepts of genealogy? This article turns to a pivotal case of “influence” in postcolonial Francophone literature and philosophy: among Édouard Glissant and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. The latter two writers are thought to have influenced Glissant’s thinking with their concept of the “rhizome,” but the rhizome directly counters such genealogizing as this “influence” would imply. In fact, this article shows, Glissant develops his own version of the rhizome from his very earliest writings, particularly his first poems. An analysis of them alongside Glissant’s subsequent essays and Deleuze and Guattari’s own writing, allows for a more complicated, multidirectional—that is, rhizomatic—theory of postcolonial influence.

Keywords: rhizome, Relation, influence, poetry, genealogy, postcolonialism, Antilleanness

The rhizome is an antigenealogy.

–Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari¹

To name one’s literary influences is, conventionally, to build a genealogy. If we believe Salman Rushdie, postcolonial writers find themselves, in this regard, both constrained and freed by their exclusion from metropolitan national literatures. With a mix of optimism and wryness, he comments, “It is perhaps one of the more pleasant

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1 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi, vol. 2 (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 21.

freedoms of the literary migrant to be able to choose his parents.”² Rushdie underscores the complexity of a postcolonial writer’s relationship to past writers—the “freedom” to select a literary genealogy comes only after an uprooting from the writer’s cultural, linguistic, or geographic ground. Postcolonial scholarship might well challenge the absoluteness of postcolonial writers’ freedom to “choose”—as does Ankhi Mukherjee when she responds, “What worldly criteria determine th[e] selection [of literary antecedents] or fine-tune their calibrations of choice?”³—but, when speaking of influences and antecedents, the overall temporal structure of the genealogy has gone unchallenged. In a field of study that has thoroughly deconstructed Eurocentric narratives of progress and the linearity of capital-H History, how is it that we still use time-marking words such as *influence* and *antecedent* in a relatively unproblematized way?

In postcolonial Francophone literature and criticism, Édouard Glissant’s work has undoubtedly done the most to challenge existing ideas about genealogy and parentage, and this challenge, though it initially targets the epistemology of origins and purity that underlie racism and rationalize the plantation economy, also extends to the fields of literature and philosophy. Glissant’s chief notion of Relation arises from the severing of genealogies and the absence of what he calls *un arrière-pays culturel* [“a cultural hinterland”] that could anchor a project of cultural recuperation in the postslavery Antilles;⁴ *Relation* describes the process of entanglement and intermixing that results from this irretrievability. Out of hacked-up roots grow the spiraling tendrils of the rhizome. If Relation develops most visibly in the creolized spaces of the Antilles, it also shapes Glissant’s view of history and of the world more broadly. Poetry—an all-encompassing discursive category for Glissant—participates fundamentally in the process of Relation by remaining open to unpredictable encounters across time. In what follows, I will argue that Glissantian Relation, growing out of the loss of genealogy, shifts literary influence to a “pre-individual” level, whereby works are in direct and productive conversation even before one author discovers another. Such a notion of influence opens a space for the very real engagement between metropolitan and postcolonial writers across time and space without inscribing them into the binaries of metropolitan center/colonial margin and origin/derivation that comes with the conventional usage of the term *influence*.

2 Quoted in Ankhi Mukherjee, *What Is a Classic? Postcolonial Rewriting and Invention of the Canon* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014), 7.

3 Mukherjee, *What Is a Classic?*, 7. Mukherjee’s book includes a sustained reflection on the different valences of influence in Anglophone literature today, especially regarding how Derek Walcott, in his poetry and essays, creolizes the modernist practice of allusion. Mukherjee leafs through the layers of Walcott’s references to past works to show how he “chooses ... to prolong ‘the mighty line of Marlowe and Milton.’” In such a practice of allusion, we find the English literary tradition “decaying in the Caribbean climate like other relics of a brutal plantocracy” (108). In this frame, though, Walcott’s creolization of modernist allusion must maintain a temporal structure in which the past texts exist as completed objects, subject more to decay rather than renewal, and later poets treat them as part of a historical or literary landscape that haunts the mind. My argument is less concerned with an author’s choice of parentage and more focused on the multidirectional interaction of texts across time as they encounter one another through reading and criticism.

4 Édouard Glissant, *Le discours antillais* (Paris: Gallimard, Folio, 1997), 333–36.

The rhizome serves as the modality of this pre-individual and potentially anachronistic influence, and its own development as a philosophical-literary category in the work of Glissant and Deleuze and Guattari also serves as my primary example of how this kind of influence might work. Glissant scholarship has, almost without exception, taken for granted that Deleuze and Guattari developed the notion of the rhizome, which subsequently had a profound influence upon Glissant's writing in the latter half of his career. Scholars tend to say that Glissant "adopted" the rhizome,⁵ in a subtle attempt to reverse the genealogy between a French parent and an Antillean descendant, but this wording does not mitigate the implication that Glissant in some way "owes" the central tenant of his thought—Relation—to a philosopher and psychoanalyst from the metropole.⁶ This is not, in fact, the case. The Glissantian rhizome begins developing from Glissant's earliest poems, penned before Deleuze even wrote his first book and well before he began collaborating with Guattari. Instead of being a philosophico-literary category that Glissant "adopted" from or "owes" to Deleuze and Guattari, the rhizome is a striking example of a point of contact between two inter-related but stubbornly independent oeuvres. The nature of this contact, moreover, demonstrates that works of different authors may entangle with and mutually influence each other—that is, enter into Relation—without the author (yet) recognizing what has occurred.

From Autogenealogy to Antigenealogy

Glissant's readers can be forgiven for taking the influence of Deleuze and Guattari at face value. When, in *Poetics of Relation*, Glissant finally defines Relation—after some forty years of developing it as a multivalent term that resisted the closure of definition—he does so in direct reference to Deleuze and Guattari. Turning to their work in *A Thousand Plateaus*, Glissant affirms that Relation rejects all notions of the "totalitarian root" and claims that, instead, "rhizomatic thought is the principle behind what I call the Poetics of Relation, in which each and every identity is extended through a relationship with the Other."⁷ The Deleuzian-Guattarian "rhizome" appears with sudden prominence in this essay of 1990, as if Glissant's discovery of it has prompted him to finally illuminate a term—*Relation*—that had previously maintained the "opacity" that deliberately characterizes so much of his writing.⁸ To some readers, *Poetics of Relation* inaugurates a rich period of explicit philosophical reflection in the

5 See, for example, Celia Britton, *Édouard Glissant and Postcolonial Theory: Strategies of Language and Resistance* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1999), 6.

6 Alexandre Leupin is the only scholar, to my knowledge, to have explicitly suggested reversing the debt of influence between these thinkers, against the grain of time: "The question (and I would leave it to others to map this out) would not be one of Deleuze's influence on Glissant but, inversely, how much Deleuze (and Guattari) owe to Glissant (much, I think)" (*Édouard Glissant, philosophe. Héraclite et Hegel dans le tout-monde* [Paris: Hermann Éditeurs, 2016], 239).

7 Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 1997), 11.

8 Glissant does marginally mention the Deleuzian-Guattarian "rhizome" in a note to the 1981 text *Le discours antillais* (Paris: Gallimard, Folio essais, 1997), 338–40, and he is much more skeptical of the term at this point. Somewhat controversially, this note is among the sections not included in the English translation, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, trans. J. Michael Dash (Charlottesville, VA, The University Press of Virginia, 1989). On opacity, see Neal Allar, "The Case for Incomprehension: Édouard

last two decades of Glissant's life, further developing concepts that his previous essays, moving between literary criticism and sociopolitical critique, had put forth—to the point that he entitles his final essay *Philosophie de la Relation*. To many others, however, *Poetics of Relation* marks a weakening of Glissant's political engagement against the persisting inequalities of (neo)colonialism—a disengagement for which Deleuze and Guattari's "influence" is largely held responsible.

No matter which side of the debate scholars have taken, they almost always have presumed that Glissant "discovered" Deleuze and Guattari's work sometime in the middle of his career, in the late 1970s or early 1980s, and that this discovery had an important influence on his later writing, beginning especially in 1990, with *Poetics of Relation*. For Peter Hallward, the "late" Glissant became "perhaps the most thoroughly Deleuzian writer in the francophone world,"⁹ which he argues coincided with (and, by implication, prompted) Glissant's turn away from a "specific," nation-based politics to a "singular" aesthetics that fails to enact the anticolonial relationality that it names as an objective. Hallward's critique of Glissant—and of the development of postcolonial studies in general, which he says "[m]uch of Glissant's work fits ... to a T"¹⁰—parallels Alain Badiou's appraisal of Deleuze in *The Clamor of Being*, aimed at showing that a thinker so commonly understood to celebrate multiplicity and difference in fact devises a tight ontology of "the univocity of Being";¹¹ Deleuze's talk of *le multiple* is always in service of a greater *Un*. This univocity in Badiou's Deleuze, like the "singularity" of Hallward's Glissant, holds fast against any true disruption in the order of things, any major epoch-breaking "event," that is, any revolution. Hallward's most faithful and also most rigorously critical reader is Nick Nesbitt, who upholds Hallward's periodization of Glissant's career. He emphasizes that *Relation* develops at first "in terms perfectly congruent with the Hegelian model of the specification of beings through their dialectical negative, mediated relation to others," before becoming "increasingly a model of neo-Deleuzian *becoming-singular* ... in which all differentiation occurs on a Deleuzian register of infinitesimal variation and 'infinite change,'"¹² (though Nesbitt goes on to argue that Deleuze's immanent ontology at least contains a covert potential to, in Spinozian terms, return "absolute sovereignty" to the people by placing everything on an egalitarian plane).¹³ Regarding Glissant, Hallward and Nesbitt share the idea that, under the influence of Deleuze, the Martinican writer diluted his previously militant politics in a cultural aesthetics generally unconcerned with or at least useless for combatting neocolonialism.

These periodizations of Glissant's career ignore the extent to which he thought politics *through* poetics—and, most specifically, poetry—from the very beginning of

Glissant's *Poetics of Relation* and the Right to Opacity," *The Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy* 23.1 (2015): 43–58.

9 Peter Hallward, *Absolutely Postcolonial: Writing between the Singular and the Specific* (Manchester, England: Manchester University Press, 2001), 67.

10 *Ibid.*, 66.

11 Alain Badiou, *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being*, trans. Louise Burchill (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

12 Nick Nesbitt, "Deleuze, Hallward and the Transcendental Analytic of Relation," *Postcolonial Literatures and Deleuze: Colonial Pasts, Differential Futures*, eds. Lorna Burns and Birgit M. Kaiser (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 96, 97.

13 *Ibid.*, 98–99.

his work, and a closer look at the largest part of the “early” Glissant’s corpus—his poetry—reveals a relationship with Deleuze that predates the moment when he supposedly discovered him. Glissant’s early poetry conceives itself as a project that does not simply “anticipate” the explicit adoption of Deleuze and Guattari from *Poetics of Relation* onward but exposes more numerous and substantial connections between his thought and that of Deleuze (with and without Guattari) across each thinker’s entire career. This ultimately suggests that the relationship between Glissant and Deleuze is less one of “influence” (in the unidirectional sense) and more something like what Réda Bensmaïa describes as “the encounter,” in which (to borrow Deleuze’s terms) the exchange of “singularities” occurs on a “pre-individual” level,¹⁴ not bound within the subject whose work they affect. Senses, semantic chunks, forms of thought can circulate between works in a way that is virtually untraceable and entirely preconscious.¹⁵ Glissant’s and Deleuze’s works speak to each other so directly, and well before the two writers were themselves engaged in a conversation, that we are forced to develop another theory of transmission between them—one, I would argue, that is available in their own theories of poetics and philosophy.

This theory, which is tied to the two thinkers’ fundamental ontological visions that prioritize dynamic becoming and ongoing relation, would upset any easy notion of metropolitan writers radiating their influence out into the colonial “margins.” This is why, even in this “early,” apparently more militant period, Glissant was a poet foremost (*un poète, avant tout*, in his words),¹⁶ for poetry disrupts the order of conventional discourse and opens itself and others to future encounters that could not have been foreseen at the moment of its writing. Poetry, as Glissant conceives it, is inherently unpredictable, and it is this unpredictability that connects poetry so closely to the linguistic and cultural process of creolization.¹⁷ Poetry thus extends across time and space with the deliberate haphazardness of the rhizome, never seeking a *retour* (return) to a single metaphysical source or original meaning, but instead moving along the winding path of the *détour*,¹⁸ always slightly askew of the source as it contacts others around it and produces multiple and different meanings. The rhizome itself, in order to make any sense as a concept, must have developed along the very pathways and detours that it describes. When Deleuze and Guattari state that “the rhizome is an antigenealogy,” they, in turn, caution us against genealogizing it as a term. The point of the rhizome is precisely to dispute the idea of concepts beginning in one place and spreading to another: “It has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle [*mileu*] from which it grows and which it overspills.”¹⁹ If we take the rhizome seriously, as

14 Réda Bensmaïa, *Gilles Deleuze, Postcolonial Theory, and the Philosophy of Limit* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 1–22.

15 For Deleuze, singularities are the organizing elements of the “event,” as they swarm together in different configurations and create thoughts, actions, and effects. He explains that a singularity is “essentially pre-individual, non-personal, and a-conceptual. It is quite indifferent to the individual and the collective, the personal and the impersonal, the particular and the general.” (Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, ed. Constantin V. Boundras, trans. Mark Lester and Charles Stivale [New York: Columbia University Press, 1990], 52).

16 Quoted in Valérie Loichot, “Édouard Glissant’s Graves,” *Callaloo* 36.4 (2013): 1025.

17 Glissant, *L’imaginaire des langues: entretiens avec Lise Gauvin* (Paris: Gallimard, 2010) 33.

18 For Glissant’s notion of the *détour* in opposition to the *retour*, see *Le Discours antillais*, 47–48.

19 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 21.

antigenealogy, then we must be open to its manifestations in different contexts even before the philosophers gave it a name.

The Rhizomatic *Milieu* of Glissant's First Poems

Glissant arrived in Paris in 1946 to begin his studies at the Sorbonne, part of a scholarship program for excellent Martinican students. He quickly joined the Paris literary scene, befriending poets such as Henri Pichette, Maurice Roche, and the Congolese luminary Tchicaya U Tam'si. Glissant's first poems, written when he was hardly twenty years old, are startlingly consistent with the poetic and philosophical project that he would elaborate until his death at eighty-two. Like all of his poems, the early verse's opacity has kept it almost entirely out of the reach of scholars (not a single book has been written about the poems, and only a small handful of articles tackle them),²⁰ but it is precisely this opacity that creates meaning via the unpredictable proliferation and interconnection of the rhizome. "Opacities," Glissant later reflects, "can coexist and converge, weaving fabrics. To understand these truly one must focus on the texture of the weave and not on the nature of its components."²¹ Reading Glissant's poetry requires being open to the ongoing "weave" of meaning and, indeed, reflecting upon the movement and "texture" of this weave, instead of seeking an originary, unambiguous message beneath the surface. Meaning is not rooted in the author's mind or in the structures of the text; meaning comes into being rhizomatically, as the poem contacts, entangles with, and relates to its readers and to other works. Every poem, Glissant says in one of his final writings, grows within the heterogeneous and unbounded space of the *poème total*.²² What these later works theorize is precisely what the early poems enact: a poetics in which meaning is not given and stable but arises continuously and unpredictably in relation to others.

The first piece in Glissant's volume of complete poems²³ lays out this poetic project not through a prescriptive semantic message but, precisely, through its rhythmic and visual textures. The prefatory poem of *Le sang rivé* [*Riveted Blood*], begun in 1947, is a long, italicized sentence fragment, punctuated by a dozen em dashes. Before attempting to interpret the words, let us first note how these dashes simultaneously fragment and connect the speech. Here is the first third of the poem:

*Non pas l'œuvre tendue, sourde, monotone autant que la mer qu'on sculpte sans fin—mais des éclats, accordés à l'effervescence de la terre—et qui ouvrent au cœur, par-dessus les affres, une stridence de plages—toujours démis, toujours repris, et hors d'achèvement*²⁴

20 For a successful example, see Hughes Azérad, "Poétique/politique de la césure dans la poésie d'Édouard Glissant," *L'Esprit créateur* 55.1 (2015): 152–66.

21 Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 190.

22 Édouard Glissant, *La terre, le feu, l'eau et les vents: une anthologie de la poésie du tout-monde* (Paris: Galaade Éditions, 2010), 15.

23 Édouard Glissant, *Poèmes complets* (Paris: Gallimard, 1994).

In this article, I provide modified versions of *The Collected Poems of Édouard Glissant*, ed. Jeff Humphres, trans. Jeff Humphries and Melissa Manolas (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

24 Glissant, *Poèmes complets*, 10.

[Not the work, taut, deaf, monotonous as a sea, endlessly sculpted—but eruptions yielding to the earth’s effervescence—that expose the heart, beyond worry and anguishes, to a stridency of beaches—always dislocated, always recovered, and beyond completion²⁵]

The dashes give a punctual rhythm to an otherwise breathless phrase. They create “eruptions” and “effervescence” within a language that might first appear smoothly structured (with its copious relative pronouns and subordinating conjunctions). And, visually, as lines that both link together and accentuate distance, they perform the simultaneous differentiation and interconnection that will come to characterize Glissant’s notion of Relation. In a Deleuzian-Guattarian register, we might liken this technique to the “stutter”—not as a deficiency in the expression but as a performance whereby “the writer ... causes language as such to stutter.”²⁶ Taking exilic writers such as Kafka and Beckett as examples, Deleuze argues that this kind of stuttering disrupts the normative order of a “major” language and allows the author to “minorize language,”²⁷ and thereby to free it up for modulation and variation from within a confined structure. Glissant, it appears, desires a similar disruption of conventional language as he rejects *l’oeuvre tendue ... que l’on sculpte sans fin* [the work, taut ... endlessly sculpted] and embraces *éclats* [eruptions] and effervescence. This is not just a disruption in the rhythm and syntax of French but a disruption of the teleology of the sentence. “Creative stuttering,” Deleuze explains, “is what makes language grow from the middle, like grass; it is what makes language a rhizome instead of a tree, what puts language in a state of perpetual disequilibrium.”²⁸ Glissant’s long phrase contains no main clause—no subject and verb—but instead a series of panoramas (the sea, beaches), sounds (cries, rumors), and movements (trembling, wavering). It begins with the negative, *non pas*, as if to negate its own act of beginning, and it ends with a single word set off by a dash, “—*épars*,” [—scattered], entirely contrary to the reunifying gesture of a conclusion. By placing this poem at the front of his poetic oeuvre (and indeed, dating back to 1947, his entire oeuvre), Glissant situates his work as perpetually intermediary, growing out of and entangling with histories and poetics that are both prior and posterior to it. Vital movement characterizes it: *cela qui tremble, vacille et sans cesse devient—comme une terre qu’on ravage—épars* [That which trembles, wavers, and ceaselessly becomes—like a devastated land—scattered]. The verb *devenir* [to become] may be the most crucial word in the poem, foreshadowing Glissant’s later theorization of Relation as an ontology of process-oriented “becoming” rather than static, grounded “Being”: “Relation is a product that in turn produces. What it produces does not take part of Being.”²⁹ The root *is*; the rhizome *becomes*, extends within an ever-growing network. And, as Glissant says in an early essay, “All poetics is a network.”³⁰ That his first poems refuse their own first-ness demonstrates how much Glissant’s writing, even in 1947, was already conceiving of itself as rhizomatic and,

25 Glissant, *The Collected Poems*, 5.

26 Gilles Deleuze, “He Stuttered,” *Gilles Deleuze and the Theater of Philosophy*, eds. Constantin V. Boundas and Dorothea Olkowsi (New York: Routledge, 1994), 23.

27 *Ibid.*, 25.

28 *Ibid.*, 27.

29 Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 160.

30 Édouard Glissant, *L’intention poétique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), 135.

consequently, was developing a rhizomatic ontology well before he could come “under the influence” of Deleuze and Guattari.

The complication of beginnings and endings has a particular significance in Glissant’s work and, indeed, in the work of postcolonial Antillean writers generally. John Drabinski claims, “The postcolonial moment is largely animated by a single question: What does it mean to *begin*?”³¹ A postcolonial future must begin somewhere. But it begins neither from a tabula rasa nor from within a historical continuity. Glissant’s beginning happens in the “abyss”—of the Middle Passage, of historical erasure, of painful shards of memory. Glissant’s great challenge, in this regard, is to think of beginnings without locating origins or attempting a return. As Drabinski explains:

The abyss bequeaths affects of sadness and melancholia, while at the same time releasing the future from a fate of despair ... For Glissant, historical experience discloses a sense of futurity that translates pain, through an engagement with composite cultural forms, into another imaginary ... Pain exiles the imagination, traumatizing its link to roots of various sorts, but with Glissant ... exile produces a different sort of imagination and imaginary. Exile becomes the fecundity of errantry, the rhizomatic character of a detour that refuses return.³²

Drabinski refers most directly here to Glissant’s opening chapter of *Poetics of Relation*, entitled “The Open Boat,” which narrates how the capture and enslavement of African people led them through a series of abysses—the belly of the slave ship, the fatal depths of the Atlantic, and the unfamiliar horizons of exile—the deadly experience of which also acquired a certain fecundity and produced a new kind of culture: “[T]he absolute unknown, projected by the abyss and bearing into eternity the womb abyss and the infinite abyss, in the end became knowledge.”³³ It is on the next page, at the beginning of the subsequent chapter, that Glissant defines Relation with reference to the Deleuzian-Guattarian rhizome. In other words, he turns to the rhizome in response to the question of beginning. But this is not a question that arises only here, at this crucial and widely ready moment in the middle of his career; the beginning has been a key question for Glissant from the beginning of his oeuvre, where he figures poetry as relational, connective, and always intermediary—rhizomatic.

Versions of the Rhizome: A Problem of Roots

The Glissantian rhizome differs markedly from the Deleuzian-Guattarian one, however, precisely on the question of beginnings. Scholarship has tended to take at face value the similarity of these two versions of the concept, undoubtedly because of how Glissant explicitly cites Deleuze and Guattari in *Poetics of Relation* and in

31 John E. Drabinski, “Césaire’s Apocalyptic Word,” *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 115.3 (July 2016): 567.

32 John E. Drabinski, *Levinas and the Postcolonial: Race, Nation, Other* (Edinburgh, Scotland: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 146–47.

33 Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 8.

subsequent talks and interviews.³⁴ In fact, in the same instant that Glissant credits Deleuze and Guattari for the concept, he contradicts their version of it. This is because Glissant already had a concept of the rhizome before his famous “encounter” with those who have been considered its creators. The encounter, in this case, really means two well-conceived discourses coming into relation and producing something new, rather than one discourse borrowing from, or even “adopting,” another.

The difference lies in the status of the “root.” This is a key question for Glissant because roots and trees have a haunting presence from his earliest poems, in which he says, with echoes of Aimé Césaire, “*L’homme a beau faire le cri prend racines*” [“Whatever man does the cry takes root”],³⁵ hinting that cultural roots will be established not through transplantation but through a reckoning with historical trauma and a particular poetics of exile. Roots and trees are, in Glissant’s earliest meditations, receptacles of pain and desire. He offers an apostrophe to “*L’arbre le grand arbre*” [“Tree Great Tree”] in the collection *Le sang rivé*, which begins, “*Tes feuilles le relent des désirs...*” [“Your leaves like the stale smell of desires”] and then moves into the language of rebirth and renewal: “*arbre recommencé*” [“tree begun again”], “*tronc d’épailles renouvelées*” [“trunk of renewed leaves”].³⁶ But, in the context of the poem, these phrases do not imply a simple renewal of the human spirit or a whole transplantation of the before-times to the new land. The tree here is not the baobab. The word *épailles*, translated too simply as “leaves,” often refers specifically to sugar cane. And although the poem, overall, does not give the sense that it speaks exclusively to cane rather than other kinds of trees, it bathes the tree in an atmosphere of ambiguity, ambivalence, and historical pain. When, at the end, the eye shifts to the tree’s roots, it focuses not on the glory of origins or the recuperation of a stable identity but on how roots signify the suffering and contradictions of the past:

*ta gerbe tes racines le feu glacé de tes racines et les masses d’hommes agrippés aux mamelles
de tes douleurs*

la souffrance comme un hiver aux sources des profondeurs.

[your sheaves your roots their frozen fire and the masses of men gripping the teats of
your sorrows

suffering like a winter in the wellspring of profundity.]³⁷

This surrealistic juxtaposition of images and feelings is not haphazard within the context of Glissant’s oeuvre as a whole. The young poet already has a strong sense that the rooted and the arborescent will be central problems in his thinking—trunks have

34 Significantly, though, the argument for a Deleuzian-Guattarian “influence” on Glissant often rests on flimsy scholarship. At the beginning of a chapter on the encounter between Deleuze/Guattari and Glissant that “profoundly influenced” the latter, Nick Nesbitt takes a quotation from François Dosse’s *Gilles Deleuze et Félix Guattari. Biographie croisée* (Paris: La Découverte, 2007), 515, that cites a radio interview in which Glissant compares meeting Guattari, in the early 1980s, to hearing Socrates for the first time. But the interview that Dosse cites, “Philosophie de la mondialité,” July 25, 2003, France Inter, mentions neither Deleuze nor Guattari. My thanks to François Noudelmann, the host of the interview series of which this one was a part, for providing the recording to me.

35 Glissant, *Poèmes complets*, 13, and *The Collected Poems*, 6 (translation modified).

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid.

shifting textures (mangrove, baobab, cane) and roots have open wounds out of which must spring something different. His life's work, the elaboration of Relation, describes what grows from these wounded roots.

When, a half-century later, Glissant cites Deleuze and Guattari to compare the rhizome to Relation, he reroots the rhizome in a way that goes quite against their articulation of it. Deleuze and Guattari are unequivocal about the rhizome's anti-rootedness: "A rhizome as subterranean stem is absolutely different from roots and radicles ... Make rhizomes, not roots, never plant! Don't sow, grow offshoots!"³⁸ The root has no place in the Deleuzian-Guattarian system—if a plant with roots can be rhizomatic, it is only in spite of its roots, not because the roots participate in the movement of the rhizome. Glissant, however, reads the rhizome as "an enmeshed root system, in a network spreading either in the ground or in the air, with no predatory rootstock taking over permanently."³⁹ Glissant (mis)reads Deleuze and Guattari as critiquing the "totalitarian root," but in fact, they unequivocally ("not roots, never plant!") dismiss any and all notion of the root. Indeed, most of their images of the rhizome have little or nothing to do with plants: the orchid's symbiosis with the wasp, the networking activity of rats, the interaction between a puppet's body and the puppeteer's neuro-muscular system. The "totalitarian root," for them, would be a redundancy—the root is inherently totalitarian, the antithesis of multiplicities. For Glissant, though, roots in a certain way must remain—not as markers of origin and exclusion, not as anchors of identity, but as part of the continuous intertwining of histories, languages, cultures, and peoples in creolization.

Glissant had made this difference clearer a decade earlier in *Le Discours antillais*, but the passage on the rhizome is marginal (a short "note") and was not included in the English translation of the book, making it much less visible to Glissant's sizeable Anglophone audience. Here, Glissant critiques the Deleuzian-Guattarian rhizome for its "abstracting" quality that "largely ignores *other situations*": "There is [in this concept] an abstracting *a priori* of which I am wary."⁴⁰ He takes the two thinkers to task for posing the rhizome as a "nomadic" modality because different types of nomadism⁴¹ tend to work at the exclusion of or with ignorance toward the Other.⁴² He specifies, "The rhizome is not nomadic, it is rooted, even in the air (sometimes it is an epiphyte); but not being *a stem* predisposes it to 'accept' the inconceivability of the other."⁴³ Glissant reacts to Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome with considerable skepticism, rejecting what he reads as its smooth abstraction and indifference to alterity.⁴⁴ But already, he embraces the rhizome as an image: one of outward extension toward an Other, while always respecting the Other's "right to opacity." *Poetics of Relation* may appear to have lost its critical edge toward Deleuze and Guattari, but in fact,

38 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 6, 24.

39 Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 11.

40 Glissant, *Le discours antillais*, 339, my translation.

41 To follow the taxonomy: the Discoverers, the Nomadic wanderers, and the "interior exiles."

42 Ibid.

43 Ibid., p. 340, my translation.

44 It is indeed true that Deleuze and Guattari avoid any concept of "the Other." It appears not once in the chapter on the rhizome in *A Thousand Plateaus* and only as a term attributed to others in the rest of the work.

Glissant's apparent misreading of the rhizome as still "rooted" retains the critique that he made more explicitly, if more marginally, in *Le Discours antillais*, for he directly contradicts Deleuze and Guattari's injunction, "not roots!" And he adds a Hegelian and Levinasian term that Deleuze and Guattari avoid so conspicuously—the *Other*—when he defines *Relation* via the rhizome "in which each and every identity is extended through a relationship with the Other."⁴⁵ Glissant's theory, responding to the postslavery landscape and creolized cultures of the Antilles, cannot do away with roots. It makes do with traces of roots, wounded roots, and roots of uncertain origin—roots that survive only by tangling together and forming something new in their heterogeneity.

Singularities of Influence

The rhizome, in this article, has served as an example of how literary and philosophical influence does not necessarily operate according to a linear progression, even if this seems to fly in the face of historical common sense. Glissant leads us to believe that Deleuze and Guattari influence his thinking at the moment that he discovers their writings on the rhizome. What goes unsaid, though, is that a kind of rhizome has always been operating in his work since the very first poems and essays. Similarly, one must ask whether it would have been possible for Deleuze and Guattari to write their essay on the rhizome, or indeed other essays involving the concept (such as the Kafka book) without the discourses of *Antillanité*, creolization, and *Relation* that Glissant was developing and publishing in France, the Caribbean, and the United States. All poetics is, after all, a network. It matters little whether Deleuze and Guattari actually read Glissant (Alain Badiou is basically right that Deleuze's literary tastes—at least those disclosed in his writing—are "profoundly aristocratic").⁴⁶ If we take seriously Deleuze's ontology (both before and during his collaboration with Guattari) and Glissant's poetics of *Relation*—if, indeed, we take seriously either of their versions of the rhizome—we must believe in the possibility for authors to affect one another's work prior to their mutual discovery. We must not consider notions as rooted to the author who penned them; notions themselves extend along the rhizomatic paths of *Relation*. Aren't notions, as processes of thought, "always in the middle, between things, interbeing, *intermezzo*"?⁴⁷ Practically speaking, this could mean that bits of ideas circulate through various oral and written forms and penetrate through several degrees of (personal) separation, in the same way that subatomic particles can invisibly penetrate through solid edifices. It could mean authors concurrently reading a number of texts (e.g., Mallarmé, Aimé Césaire, Hegel, Bergson) and actualizing their writings in different but still resonant ways. Deleuze and Glissant both theorized this mode of circulation in their own way during their early careers (indeed, in the same years, 1968–1969). In *L'intention poétique*, Glissant defines "poetic intention" not as the conscious expression of a poet's will but—in a striking similarity to the swarming, constantly shifting "singularities" by which Deleuze defines philosophical "events" in

45 Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 11.

46 Alain Badiou, *Deleuze. "La clameur de l'Être"* (Paris: Fayard/Pluriel, 2010), 22, my translation.

47 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 25.

The Logic of Sense—as a teeming “mass” emitted beneath the level of authorial intention:

As the [author] nears the realization of [his] intention, he discovers that this created reality does not, properly speaking, conform to his ambition, and that the truth of the intention matured less in the intentional consciousness than in the *unconscious mass of emissions [donnés]* underlain by intention. The work that realizes its purpose unveils an other purpose (hidden) from the author, and that remains open: yet to be accomplished. The writer is always the phantom of the writer that he wants to be.⁴⁸

Certainly, this post-Mallarmé and post-surrealist thinking on the text, the unconscious, and the (un)intentional was very much in the air at this time in the mid-century—to the point that we may be tempted to reduce it to a (post)structuralist platitude: the text exceeds its writer. But Glissant and Deleuze both, in different ways, identified a major problem in Western epistemology, the priority on genealogy, and they both saw intersubjective and intertextual relations as operating outside of the paradigm of arborescent genealogies and unidirectional lines of “influence.” They developed their rhizomes together and separately, unbeknown to each other and yet in kinship, from swarms of singularities that they must have in part shared, and elaborated these theories in the virtual space of their essays and poems, so that the notions could ramify outward into actuality across time and geography, entangling and intertwining, continuing to influence each other as we reread them today.

Glissant is one of many postcolonial writers who take great care to identify their influences (in the Antillean context, one might also think of Condé, Walcott, Chamoiseau, and Césaire, all of whom have written about their relationships with past and contemporary writers). But when Glissant writes, with critical admiration, about the importance to his own work of poets and novelists such as Saint-John Perse, Rimbaud, or Faulkner, it is not to identify his literary forefathers. It is to incite us to reread their work from a relational perspective, for they all contribute to an ever-changing imaginary: “*L’imaginaire est un champ de fleuves et de replis qui sans cesse bougent*” [“The imaginary is a field of rivers and folds that ceaselessly move”].⁴⁹ Glissant may never have been the same writer after he read Rimbaud, but nor is Rimbaud the same writer after his work encounters Glissant’s. His “Drunken Boat” finds itself navigating through the decentered space of archipelagoes and, in its rhythmic remapping of French verse, demolishing the universalism of the European continent.⁵⁰ Identifying postcolonial influences means identifying points of entry into a rhizomatic system whose contours change with each new text and each new reading, a network whose strains and tendrils intertwine and interact, maintaining the opacity of each writer’s particular idiom while also creating meaning in a continuing symbiosis with others. The rhizome itself, as a concept, develops this way, not as a thought image that

48 Édouard Glissant, *L’intention poétique* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1969), 35–36, my translation, my italics.

49 Glissant, *La terre, le feu, l’eau et les vents*, 15. The English translation is mine.

50 See Neal Allar, “Le Bateau ivre’ en archipel,” *Parade Sauvage* 28 (2017): 131–49.

Glissant created in parallel with Deleuze and Guattari, but as a node by which we gain access to an ongoing encounter between the three thinkers. It simultaneously names the modality by which literary influence does not adhere to rooted genealogies and, in its own pathways of influence, also serves as a specific instance of this relational modality at work.