

ÉDOUARD GLISSANT

Poetics of Relation



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Translator's Introduction

Betsy Wing

"Je bâtis a roches mon langage."
 (I build my language with rocks.)
 —Glissant, *L'Intention poétique*

The stumbling blocks of a translation frequently exist at its most productive points. Their usual first effect is frustration caused by obstinate resistance (on both sides), but, in their ever-renewed demand for conjecture, these apparent obstacles can allow us to escape the cramped, habitual postures of our own thought. This is the hoped-for reward of translators—whose first work is to be attentive, even hopeful readers—then, with as many premonitions of disaster as prospects of opening possibilities within their own languages, they must confront the task of making these new openings available to new readers.

All of Édouard Glissant's work, as a poet, novelist, playwright, or theoretician from the very beginning (*Les Indes* and *Soleil de la conscience* [1956], *La Lézarde* [1959]) has been concerned with exploring the possibilities of a language that would be fully Antillean. Such a language would be capable of writing the Antilles into history, generating a conception of time, finding a past and founding a future. It would escape the passivity associated with an imposed language of fixed forms (French) as well as the folklore traps of a language that

III

PATHS

Out loud, to mark the split

CREOLIZATIONS



Creolization, one of the ways of forming a complex mix—and not merely a linguistic result—is only exemplified by its processes and certainly not by the “contents” on which these operate. This is where we depart from the concept of creoleness. Though this notion covers (no more and no less) that which accounts for creolizations, it goes on to propose two further extensions. The first opens onto a broader ethnocultural realm, from the Antilles to the Indian Ocean. But variations of this sort do not seem to be determining factors, because the speed with which they change in Relation is so great. The second is an attempt to get at Being. But that would constitute a step backward in comparison with how creolizations can function. We propose neither humanity’s Being nor its models. We are not prompted solely by the defining of our identities but by their relation to everything possible as well—the mutual mutations generated by this interplay of relations. Creolizations bring into Relation but not to universalize; the principles of creoleness regress toward negritudes, ideas of Frenchness, of Latinness, all generalizing concepts—more or less innocently.

Dictate, Decree

Baroque derangement and the guarantee provided by scientific rigor: just yesterday these were the counterpoises of our movement (our *balan*, our surge, our momentum) toward *totalité-monde*.¹

But the baroque no longer constitutes a derangement, since it has turned into a "natural" expression of whatever scatters and comes together. The age of classicisms (of deepening an internal unity, raised to the dimensions of a universal itself postulated) is past, no doubt, for all cultures. It remains to make the network of their convergences work, or to untangle it. It remains to study those cultures that have not had time, before coming into planetary contact (or conflict), to realize "their own" classicism. Are their powers not impeded as they come to the meeting? Then again, what shall we say about composite cultures, whose composition did not result from a union of "norms" but, rather, was built in the margins with all kinds of materials that by their very nature were exceptions to the patience of the rule, to be thrust headlong into the world by necessity, oppression, anguish, greed, or an appetite for adventure?

The baroque is the favored speech of these cultures, even if henceforth it belongs to all. We call it baroque, because we know that confluences always partake of marginality, that classicisms partake of intolerance, and that, for us, the substitute for the hidden violence of these intolerant exclusions is the manifest and integrating violence of contaminations.

Note that *métissage* exists in places where categories making their essences distinct were formerly in opposition. The more *métissage* became realized, the more the idea of it faded. As the baroque became naturalized in the world, it tended to become a commonplace, a generality (which is not the same as a generalization), of a new regime. Because it proliferated rather than deepened a norm, it is unable to consent to "classicism." There is no culture rightfully impeded in the baroque; none imposes its tradition, even if there are some that export their generalizing products everywhere.

How can continuity (which is "desirable") be practiced in this incessant turnover? How can the stabilizing action of former classicisms be replaced? And with what?

At first our only recourse in the matter seemed to be the positivity of scientific method. This, for example, was the method adopted for the defense and promotion of languages, corresponding to the ambition of linguistics to set itself up as a science. A profitable pretense: despite its failure to be confirmed, it provided the basis for a system and gathered together its scattered materials. But science had ceased having any desire to obtain this sort of guarantee, having, meanwhile, ventured not outside the positive but beyond positivism. It had come face to face with the baroque and understood that the work of the latter deserved cognizance.

The most recent developments of science invite us, therefore, to venture in our quest beyond the laws laid down by its philosophies. For a long time we have divined both order and disorder in the world and projected these as measure and excess. But every poetics led us to believe something that, of course, is not wrong: that excessiveness of order and a measured disorder exist as well. The only discernible stabilities in Relation have to do with the interdependence of the cycles operative there, how their corresponding patterns of movement are in tune. In Relation analytic thought is led to construct unities whose interdependent variances jointly

piece together the interactive totality. These unities are not models but revealing *echos-monde*. Thought makes music.

William Faulkner's work, Bob Marley's song, the theories of Benoit Mandelbrot, are all *echos-monde*. Wilfredo Lam's painting (flowing together) or that of Roberto Matta (tearing apart); the architecture of Chicago and just as easily the shantytowns of Rio or Caracas; Ezra Pound's *Cantos* but also the marching of schoolchildren in Soweto are *echos-monde*.

Finnegan's Wake was an *écho-monde* that was prophetic and consequently absolute (without admission into the real).

Antonin Artaud's words constitute an *écho-monde* outside of the world.

Whatever, coming from a tradition, enters into Relation; whatever, defending a tradition, justifies Relation; whatever, having left behind or refuted every tradition, provides the basis for another full-sense to Relation; whatever, born of Relation, contradicts and embodies it. Anglo-American pidgin (something, therefore, spoken neither by the English nor by the Americans) is a negative *écho-monde*, whose concrete force weaves the folds of Relation and neutralizes its subsistence.

The Creole language is a fragile and revealing *écho-monde*, born of a reality of relation and limited within this reality by its dependence.

Spoken languages, without exception, have become *echos-monde*, whose lack we are only just beginning to feel each time one is wiped out by this circularity in evolution.

Echos-monde are not exacerbations that result directly from the convulsive conditions of Relation. They are at work in the matter of the world; they prophesy or illuminate it, divert it or conversely gain strength within it.

In order to cope with or express confluences, every individual, every community, forms its own *echos-monde*, imagined from power or vainglory, from suffering or impatience. Each individual makes this sort of music and each community as

well. As does the totality composed of individuals and communities.

Echos-monde thus allow us to sense and cite the cultures of peoples in the turbulent confluence whose globality organizes our *chaos-monde*. They pattern its constituent (not conclusive) elements and its expressions.

What we earlier remarked in Saint-John Perse as an aesthetics of the universe ("narration of the universe"), we now describe in a different manner. It is an aesthetics of the *chaos-monde*.

The *chaos-monde* is only disorder if one assumes there to be an order whose full force poetics is not prepared to reveal (poetics is not a science). The ambition of poetics, rather, is to safeguard the energy of this order. The aesthetics of the universe assumed preestablished norms; the aesthetics of *chaos-monde* is the impassioned illustration and refutation of these. Chaos is not devoid of norms, but these neither constitute a goal nor govern a method there.

Chaos-monde is neither fusion nor confusion: it acknowledges neither the uniform blend—a ravenous integration—nor muddled nothingness. Chaos is not "chaotic."

But its hidden order does not presuppose hierarchies or pre-celencies—neither of chosen languages nor of prince-nations. The *chaos-monde* is not a mechanism; it has no keys.

The aesthetics of the *chaos-monde* (what we were thus calling the aesthetics of the universe but cleared of a priori values) embraces all the elements and forms of expression of this totality within us; it is totality's act and its fluidity, totality's reflection and agent in motion.

The baroque is the not-established outcome of this motion.

Relation is that which simultaneously realizes and expresses this motion. It is the *chaos-monde* relating (to itself).

The poetics of Relation (which is, therefore, part of the aesthetics of the *chaos-monde*) senses, assumes, opens, gathers,

scatters, continues, and transforms the thought of these elements, these forms, and this motion.

Destructure these facts, declare them void, replace them, reinvent their music: totality's imagination is inexhaustible and always, in every form, wholly legitimate—that is, free of all legitimacy.

An equilibrium and ability to endure are revived through *echos-monde*. Individuals and communities go beyond vain-glory or suffering, power or impatience, together—however imperceptibly. The important thing is that such a process represents an optimum. Its results are unpredictable, but the beginnings of the capacity to endure are detectible, coming where formerly there were classicisms. It is no longer through deepening a tradition but through the tendency of all traditions to enter into relation that this is achieved. Baroque serve to relay classicisms. Techniques of relation are gradually substituted for techniques of the absolute, which frequently were techniques of self-absolution. The arts of expanse relate (dilate) the arts of depth.

These are the forms we must use to contemplate the evolution of the Creole language: viewing it as a propagation of the dialects that compose it, each extending toward the other; but being aware also that this language can disappear, or un-appear if you will, in one place or another.

We agree that the extinction of any language at all impoverishes everyone. And even more so, if that is possible, when a composite language like Creole is in question, for this would be an instant setback for the processes of bringing-into-relation. But how many languages, dialects, or idioms will have vanished, eroded by the implacable consensus among powers between profits and controls, before human communities learn to preserve together their diversities. The threat of this disappearance is one of the facts to be incorporated, as we earlier remarked, into the field of descriptive linguistics.

Not every disappearance, however, is equivalent. The fact that French-Ontarians are gradually ceasing to speak French will not cause the latter to vanish from the world panorama. Creole is not in the same situation because its elision in one single region would make the areas of its survival even more scarce. But establishing that these differences exist in no way attenuates both the human drama unleashed each time it happens and the extent of impoverishment then inflicted upon the *chaos-monde*.

We are not going to save one language or another here or there, while letting others perish. The floodtide of extinction, unstoppable in its power of contagion, will win out. It will leave a residue that is not one victorious language, or several, but one or more desolate codes that will take a long time to reconstitute the organic and unpredictable liveliness of a language. Linguistic multiplicity protects ways of speaking, from the most extensive to the most fragile. It is in the name of this total multiplicity and in function of it, rather than of any selective pseudo-solidarities, that each language must be defended.

An idiom like Creole, one so rapidly constituted in so fluid a field of relations, cannot be analyzed the way, for example, it was done for Indo-European languages that aggregated slowly around their roots. We need to know why this Creole language was the only one to appear, why it took the same forms in both the Caribbean basin and the Indian Ocean, and why solely in countries colonized by the French; whereas the other languages of this colonization process, English and Spanish, remained inflexible as far as the colonized populations were concerned, their only concessions being pidgins or other dialects that were derived.*

*Another language of the region that would be an exception to this statistical rule is Papiamentu, which has a Spanish lexical basis in countries (Curaçao) that are no longer Spanish. It seems that, in this same region of the Americas, more and more linguistic microzones are being discovered in which Creoles, pidgins, and patois become undifferentiated.

One possible response—in any case, the one I venture—is that the French language, which we think of as so intent on universality, was, of course, not like this at the time of the conquest of the Americas, having perhaps not yet achieved its normative unity. Breton and Norman dialects, the ones used in Santo Domingo and the other islands, were less coercively centripetal and thus able to enter into the composition of a new language. English and Spanish were already perhaps more “classic,” and lent themselves less to this first amalgam from which a language could have sprung. Of course, the “unified” French language also spread throughout these territories with no language. The Creole compromise (metaphorical and synthesizing), favored by Plantation structure, was the result of both the uprooting of African languages and the deviance of French provincial idioms. The origins of this compromise are already a marginality. It did, indeed, name another reality, another mentality; but its actual poetics—or construction—was what was deviant in relation to any supposed classicism.

Traditional linguistics, when applied to such a case, seeks first and foremost (and counter to what the history of the language would indicate) to “classify” this language. That is—and it is perfectly understandable—it attempts to endow it with a body of rules and specifically stated standards ensuring its ability to endure. But, though fixing usage and transcription are both indispensable, there still remains a need to devise (given marginality as a component of the language) systems of variables, such as I earlier discussed, that would be distinguished from a mere allocation of variants among the dialects—of Haiti, Guadeloupe, or Guiana, etc.—of this Creole language. We would have a whole range of choices within each dialect. Wherever etymology or phonetics faltered (and, doubtless, etymology would be of less use in the matter) one should let poetics take its course, that is, follow intuition about both the history of the language and its development in the margins. In other words, the alleged scientific character can lapse into scholarly illusion, can conceal its strategem

for "staying put." The standard of such a language formation would be fluent. One could never legitimately have decreed it.

The decisive element, as far as fixing language is concerned, is the rule of usage; those who forge words frequently come up against it. And, in turn, this rule depends to a large extent on the practical functioning of the language. But, in the environment we have outlined (combining *échos-monde* and prevalent baroque), one could assume that the true basis for an ability to endure is that the rule of usage have both momentum and diffraction.

One can imagine language diasporas that would change so rapidly within themselves and with such feedback, so many turnarounds of norms (deviations and back and forth) that their fixity would lie in that change. Their ability to endure would not be accessible through deepening but through the shimmer of variety. It would be a fluid equilibrium. This linguistic sparkle, so far removed from the mechanics of sabirs and codes, is still inconceivable for us, but only because we are paralyzed to this day by monolingual prejudice ("my language is my root").

The normative decree, edict and instrument of this prejudice, prides itself, then, on the outmoded "guarantees" of scientific positivism and tries to administer the evolution of threatened languages, such as Creole, by attempting to "furnish" such a guarantee to the principle of identity (of permanence) that language implies. But it is not simply because the Creole language is a component of my identity that I am worried about its possible disappearance; it is because the language would also be missing from the radiant sparkle, the fluid equilibrium, and the ability to endure in disorder of the *chaos-monde*. The way that I defend it must take this into account.

Normative decrees have ceased to be the authoritative rule as far as vehicular languages are concerned. English and Span-

ish, the most massive of these, and seemingly the best entrenched in a sort of continental nature, met on the territory of the United States (Puerto Ricans, Chicanos, the immigrants in Florida). It may well be that their massiveness has become fissured, that alongside the variances proliferating Anglo-American, lucky contaminations from the Spanish will occur, and vice versa. This process will no doubt move more quickly than any analysis one will be able to make of it.

Contemporary arguments over whether or not to simplify the spelling of the French language demonstrate how many contaminations have occurred there. These proposals are a counter-decree, as futile as the purism they oppose is inoperative. Though the language must change in the world, and its plurality must be confirmed, only dictions will bring this about—not some authoritative edict.

We can only follow from afar the experimentation feeling its way along in all the elsewheres that we dream of.* Is the Chinese language absorbing the Latin alphabet? How is the actual status of languages changing in the Soviet Union? Is Quechuan beginning to make its escape from silence? And in Europe are the Scandinavian languages starting to open up to the world? Are forms of creolization silently at work, and where? Will Swahili and Fulani share the written domain with other languages in Africa? Are regional dialects in France fading away? How quickly? Will ideograms, pictograms, and other forms of writing show up in this panorama? Do translations already allow perceptible correspondences between

*It is not essential to note that archipelagic agglomerations of language have formed everywhere. Either according to "roots" or families: Indo-European languages, Latin languages, etc. Or according to their characteristic techniques of relation: composite languages, Creole languages, etc. Or according to both dimensions at once: vehicular languages and their pidgins, all languages and their dialects, etc. It is dangerous for the world's poetic diversity merely to link each of these agglomerations to some politically self-interested project. What is important is to track down the constants both within the agglomerations and within the majority of their confluences: Is there a hidden order to contacts among languages?

language systems? And how many minorities are there struggling within diglossia, like the numerous French-speaking Creole blacks in southwestern Louisiana? Or the thirty thousand Inuits on Baffin Island? Lists of this sort are not innocent; they accustom the mind to apprehending problems in a circular manner and to hatching solutions interdependently. Relating realms of knowledge (questions and solutions) with one another cannot be categorized as either a discipline or a science but, rather, as an imaginary construct of reality that permits us to escape the pointillistic probability approach without lapsing into abusive generalization.

The pronouncement of decrees in any case (issuing edicts that constrict the future of the language) does not set you free from collective anxieties. Game shows on television, organized in every country equipped to do so, spotlight the destabilization of languages in a spectacular manner. These games are the same everywhere. One must reconstitute words whose letters are either hidden or given in no order. Meaning has little importance, and there have been cases in which contestants have appeared on the shows after having learned whole sections of dictionary. So one disjoins a language, taking into account, in short, only its skeleton (if one can speak of the lexicon as a mere skeleton) to which one clings.

The amusing character of these exercises, which fall within the province of true performance, links them with another sort of contest that is organized in France on a very large scale and whose purpose is a much more elitist practice: dictation. The dictation is diction doing its best. In it, of course, it is a matter of conquering the difficulties of French syntax and grammar, which, as everyone knows, are not simple.

Thus, a learning exercise, whose success depended on its repetition day after day (we all remember the fateful dictation period in primary school), has turned into a show. Where we had to learn, now we have to win. To prove there

are people, beginning with the winners of these sparring matches, who still are interested in the subtleties—even the most specious—of the language and who more often than not master these.

These games seem to me a nostalgic exercise not devoid of a strong tinge of collective anxiety.

Dictating, decreeing: both activities (in their secret complicity: a decree affixes laws to us, a dictation is from an edict now essential) attempt to form a dam against what makes languages fragile—contaminations, slovenliness, barbarism.

But what you would call barbarism is the inexhaustible motion of the scintillations of languages, heaving dross and inventions, dominations and accords, deathly silences and irrepressible explosions, along with them. These languages combine, vary, clash, so rapidly that the lengthy training of earlier times is no longer worth much. Decreeing will have to use dialects, devise systems of variables. Dictation, if it exists, will have to transform itself into an exercise in creation, with no obligation or penalty. Faults of syntax are, for the moment, less decisive than faults of relation (though they may be symptoms among others of the latter) and will take less time to correct. On the other hand, let's admit to taking a very personal pleasure in these rules when they improve the quality of our expression. The only merit to correctness of language lies in what this language says in the world: even correctness is variable.

Baroque naturalities and the forms of *chaos-monde* have a (desirable) ability to endure that a priori reasoning will not unearth. It will not precede their work, the movement of engagement (ascendency and surprise) from which, simultaneously, their matter and their full-sense arise. No topology results from the *échos-monde*. But, on the other hand, the baroque is not just passion and mystery, nor does the guarantee of scientific rigor lapse in every instance into a dogma secure in the positive. Baroque naturality, if it exists, has a

structure or at least an order, and we have to invent a knowledge that would not serve to guarantee its norm in advance but would follow excessively along to keep up with the measurable quantity of its vertiginous variances.

To Build the Tower

“Live in seclusion or open up to the other”: this was supposedly the only alternative for any population demanding the right to speak its own language. It is how inherited premises of centuries-old domination were given legitimacy. Either you speak a language that is “universal,” or on its way to being so, and participate in the life of the world; or else you retreat into your particular idiom—quite unfit for sharing—in which case you cut yourself off from the world to wallow alone and sterile in your so-called identity.

However, as populations became liberated from legal (if not actual) dependencies, the view emerged that it is the language of a community that controls the main vector of its cultural identity, which in turn determines the conditions of the community’s development. This viewpoint has been considered suspect and, more often than not, pernicious. During this same period all developmental processes became reduced to one exclusive type of perfection, that is, technological. Hence the puzzle: What is it that you are demanding when a language, one single language, would provide you with the key to progress?

Nations could have only one linguistic or cultural future—either this seclusion within a restrictive particularity or, conversely, dilution within a generalizing universal. This is a formidable construction, and the “oral genius” of peoples of the world urges us to burst our way out of it. The words of griots and storytellers washed up on the edges of large cities, and

eroded by second-rate forms of progress, still endure. Gradually, the governments of poor countries are coming to understand that there is no single, transcendent, and enforceable model for development.

In this explosion of incredible diversity, linguistic relations have become marked by creations springing from the friction between languages, by the give-and-take of sudden innovation (for example, initiatory street languages in southern countries), and by masses of generally accepted notions as well as passive prejudices.

The assumption that was, perhaps, most crucial concerned the hierarchical division into written and oral languages. The latter were crude, unsuited to conceptualization and the acquisition of learning, incapable of guaranteeing the transmission of knowledge. The former were civilizing and allowed man to transcend his natural state, inscribing him both in permanence and in evolution.

It is true that literacy is a matter of utmost urgency in the world and that, lacking other appropriate materials, this is usually accomplished in what are called communication, or vehicular, languages. But we have come to realize that all literal literacy needs to be buttressed by a cultural literacy that opens up possibilities and allows the revival of autonomous creative forces from within, and hence "inside," the language under consideration. Development thus has linguistic stakes, with consequences that can be neither codified nor predicted.

Relationships between languages that were supposedly transcendent because written and others long kept at a level referred to, with a hint of condescension, as "oral"—these relationships I described of suddenness, unplanned adaptation, or systematic apprenticeship—have been made even more complex by both political and economic oppression.

The relationship of domination, consequently, is the most blatant, gaining strength in technological expansion and generalizing a neutral uniformity. Dominated languages are thus

pigeonholed as folklore or technical irresponsibility. At this point a universal language, such as Esperanto, no matter how well thought out, is not the remedy. For any language that does not create, that does not hoe its own tuff, subtracts accordingly from the nongeneralizing universal.

The relationship of fascination has become, of course, less and less virulent, but it drove intellectual elites of "developing countries" to the reverent usage of a language of prestige that has only served them as self-impoverishment.

Relationships of multiplicity or contagion exist wherever mixtures explode into momentary flashes of creation, especially in the languages of young people. Purists grow indignant, and poets of Relation marvel at them. Linguistic borrowings are only injurious when they turn passive because they sanction some domination.

Relationships of polite subservience or mockery come about when frequent contact with tourist enclaves plays a substantial role, along with daily practices of subordination or domestic service. This tendency to promote the appearance of pidgins is swept aside by the politics of national education, when these are well conceived and carried to completion.

Relationships of tangency are by far the most insidious, appearing whenever there are composite languages, languages of compromise between two or more idioms—for example, the Creoles of francophone regions in the Americas or the Indian Ocean. Then the erosion of the new language must be forestalled, as it is eaten away from within through the mere weight of one of its components, which, meanwhile, becomes reinforced as an agent of domination.

Relationships of subversion exist when an entire community encourages some new and frequently antiestablishment usage of a language. English-speaking Caribbeans and blacks in the United States are two convincing examples in their use of the English language, as are the Quebecois in their appropriation of French.

Relationships of intolerance are seen, for example, in the teaching of a communication language. The language is

established once and for all in its (original) history and regarded as uncompromising toward those formidable contagions to which speakers or creators from elsewhere are likely to subject it. An "atavistic fluidity" in exercising a language is deemed indispensable to its perfection, resulting in the opinion that theories concerning its learning and teaching can only be developed in the "country of origin."

Oppositions between the written and the oral do not date from the recent past alone; they have long exercised their divisions within a given language voice [*langue*], Arabic for example, in which two separate orders of language use [*langage*]¹ for the community are designated: one learned and the other popular.

This is the case for monolingual countries with "internal" problems, in which these two usages—oral and written—introduce ruptures (through social discrimination, which deploys the rules of language usage). Other internal problems are linked, sometimes to the erosion of regional dialects inscribed within the language, sometimes to the difficulty of transcribing this language. This example provides a glimpse of the inexhaustible variety of linguistic situations—something far more unsettling than the number of spoken languages in the world.

Monolingual countries with "external" problems would be those in which a national language, the main form of communication, is threatened on an economic and cultural level by a foreign language.

In bilingual countries with internal problems there are two languages of wide communication that confront each other; each one is assumed by one portion of the community, which is destabilized in consequence.

In diglot countries one communication language tends to dominate or restrict one or several "mother tongues," vernaculars or composite languages whose tradition is oral—sometimes to the point of extinction. The tasks of fixing and transposing these languages then becomes critical. As schol-

ars take responsibility for them and everyone uses them, these languages will doubtless reinforce compromise solutions that will spread gradually according to systems of variables. One can expect the same urgent situation to apply to languages whose writing is not phonetic, even when vigorously backed by national unanimity.

In multilingual countries with no apparent problems there is a federative principle that tempers the relations among the languages in usage, which are usually vehicular.

There are some multilingual countries, on the other hand, in which the great number of mother tongues makes choice difficult, when it comes to deciding which is the official or national language.

All these situations intersect; they add up and thwart one another and go far beyond any conflict solely between the oral and the written. They are astounding indicators of the relations among peoples and cultures. Their complexity prohibits any summary or reductive evaluation concerning the strategies to be implemented. In global relations languages work, of course, in obedience to laws of economic and political domination but elude, nonetheless, any harsh and rigid long-term forecast.

This same complexity is what allows us to come out of seclusion. We stop believing that we are alone in the sufferings of our expression. We discover that it is the same for any number of other communities.* From that point on the idea grows that speaking one's language and opening up to the language of the other no longer form the basis for an alternative. "I speak to you in your language voice, and it is in my language use that I understand you." Creating in any given language thus assumes that one be inhabited by the impossi-

*To our astonishment we also discover people comfortably established within the placid body of their language, who cannot even comprehend that somewhere someone might experience an agony of language and who will tell you flat out, as they have in the United States, "That is not a problem."

ble desire for all the languages in the world. Totality calls out to us. Every work of literature today is inspired by it.²

The fact remains, nonetheless, that, when a people speaks its language or languages, it is above all free to produce through them at every level—free, that is, to make its relationship to the world concrete and visible for itself and for others.

The defense of languages assuring Diversity is thus inseparable from restabilizing relations among communities. How is it possible to come out of seclusion if only two or three languages continue to monopolize the irrefutable powers of technology and their manipulation, which are imposed as the sole path to salvation and energized by their actual effects? This dominant behavior blocks the flowering of imaginations, forbids one to be inspired by them, and confines the general mentality within the limits of a bias for technology as the only effective approach. The long-term remedy for such losses is to spell out over and over again the notion of an ethnotechnique, by means of which choices of development would be adapted to the real needs of a community and to the protected landscape of its surroundings. Nor is it certain that this will succeed, its prospects being very chancy; but it is urgent that we take this route. The promotion of languages is the first axiom of this ethnotechnique. And we know that, in the area of understanding, poetry—watch out for it!—has always been the consummate ethnotechnique. The defense of languages can come through poetry (also).

Moreover, the tendency of all cultures to meet in a single, identical perspective laid out by radio and television unleashes yet unimagined possibilities for sharing and equality. It is not a sure thing that languages with an oral tradition would start with a disadvantage in this encounter. Perhaps more supple and adaptable, they would lend themselves to change, all the more if the only other languages are those with a written tradition, which have become stiffened and

fixed over the centuries. Not long ago I learned of a project in which a Japanese computer company was investing considerable sums of money on a theoretical study of several African oral languages. Its intention was to explore the capacity of these languages to generate a new computer language and to provide broad-based support for new systems. The primary goal of this research was, of course, to capture a potential market in the twenty-first century, and it was motivated by competition from Anglo-American companies. Still, it should be noted how the most self-interested technology was thereby sanctioning not the (actual) liberation of the languages of orality, of course, but already their right to be recognized.

On the other side of the bitter struggles against domination and for the liberation of the imagination, there opens up a multiply dispersed zone in which we are gripped by vertigo. But this is not the vertigo preceding apocalypse and Babel's fall. It is the shiver of a beginning, confronted with extreme possibility. It is possible to build the Tower—in every language.

Transparency and Opacity

There still exist centers of domination, but it is generally acknowledged that there are no exclusive, lofty realms of learning or metropolises of knowledge left standing. Henceforward, this knowledge, composed of abstract generality and linked to the spirit of conquest and discovery, has the presence of human cultures in their solid materiality superimposed upon it. And knowledge, or at least the epistemology we produce for ourselves from it, has been changed by this. Its transparency, in fact, its legitimacy is no longer based on a Right.

Transparency no longer seems like the bottom of the mirror in which Western humanity reflected the world in its own image. There is opacity now at the bottom of the mirror, a whole alluvium deposited by populations, silt that is fertile but, in actual fact, indistinct and unexplored even today, denied or insulted more often than not, and with an insistent presence that we are incapable of not experiencing.

The recent history of the French language corresponds (and responds) to this trend. Because it lacks an anchor in areas of concrete and undisguised domination—the Anglo-American model—for some time now certain people have apparently pledged the French language to establishing a sort of semiconceptual dominance. It would thus maintain its transparency and contain the increasing opacity of the world within the limits of a well-phrased classicism, thereby perpetuating a lukewarm humanism, both colorless and reassuring.

All languages have to be defended, and therefore French (the language in which I create and, consequently, would not like to see stereotyped) must also be defended—against this sort of *maladroit* rearguard mission. Whether it is vehicular or not, a language that does not risk the disturbances arising from contact among cultures, and not ardently involved in the reflections generated by an equal relation with other languages, seems to me doomed to real impoverishment. It is true that the leveling effect of Anglo-American is a persistent threat for everyone and that this language, in turn, risks being transformed into a technical salesman's Esperanto, a perfunctory containerization of expression (neither Faulkner's nor Hopkins's language but not the language of London pubs or Bronx warehouses either). It is also true that the actual situation is that languages lacking the support of economic power and the competitive politics that convey this are slowly disappearing. The result is that the languages of the world, from the most prestigious to the humblest, have ended up backing the same demand, though general opinion has not yet caught up. They demand a change in ways of thinking, a break with the fatal trend to annihilate idioms, and they would grant to every language, whether powerful or not, vehicular or not, the space and means to hold its own within the total accord. It would be more beautiful to live in a symphony of languages than in some reduced universal monolingualism—neutral and standardized. There is one thing we can be sure of: a *lingua franca* (humanistic French, Anglo-American *sabir*, or Esperanto code) is always apoetical.

In the indeterminate context of the French-speaking communities we lump together as *la francophonie*, it was, therefore, an apparently simple notion to regard the French language as the *a priori* bearer of values that could help remedy the anarchistic tendencies of the various cultures that are, completely or partially, a product of its expression. *La francophonie* would be less what it claimed to be, an interdependent gathering of cultural convergences, than a sort of pre-

ventive medicine against cultural disintegrations and diffusions that were considered unfortunate. This is one way, at least, to analyze the discourse of a number of its early proponents.

According to this way of thinking, for example, the French language has always been inseparable from a pursuit of the dignity of mankind, insofar as man is conceived of as an irreducible entity. From this one could infer that French would thus make possible the lessening of certain angry resentments that are limiting and that have allegedly been observed in quests for identity currently taking place in the world. In a collective quest for identity—somehow now labeled the quest for ethnicity—sterile extremes would exist in which man, as an individual, would risk disappearing. Because the French language vouches for the dignity of the individual, the use of it would limit any such excesses on the part of the collectivity. In other words, this language would have a humanizing function supposedly inseparable from its very nature, which would serve as protection against the rash actions of an excessive collectivization of identity. In the present conceptual debate the French language, the language of the Rights of Man, would provide useful protection against excesses set in motion by the presuppositions of any proclamation of the Rights of Peoples. *La francophonie* would provide that transcendancy by giving the correct version of humanism.

Another characteristic of the language would lie in its literary dedication to clarity, a mission that has led to its reputation for a pleasing rationality, which is, in fact, the guarantee of a legitimate pleasure to be had in the manipulation of a unity composed of consecutive, noncontradictory, concise statements.

The "essential" nature of literary language would preexist any of the felicitous or infelicitous accidents of its real, diversified cultural usages. (This literary mission repeats certain tactical approaches: the defense of languages is said to

be inscribed in the nature of the French language as defined here; it is a plural *francophonie*, or, as regards the Antilles and Indian Ocean, the speaking of Creole within a French-speaking population.) Looked at this way, French would represent not just what is common in various ways to the linguistic practice of the populations constituting francophone culture, it would also, in literature, or perhaps even in absolute terms, be what is given in advance. From this it takes no time to reach the conclusion that there is a "right" way to use the language. And the natural result will be scales of value to appraise usage in the French-speaking realm.* Language would reveal the differing degrees in this hierarchical organization.**

Neither its humanizing function, however (the famous universality of French as the bearer of humanism), nor its concordant predestination to be clear (its pleasurable rationality) stand up to examination. Languages have no mission. This is, however, the sort of learnedly dealt nonsense we have to struggle eternally against in a discourse depriving populations of cultural identity. An attentive observer will notice that such windbags are anxiously intent on confining themselves to the false transparency of a world they used to run; they do not want to enter into the penetrable opacity of a world in which one exists, or agrees to exist, with and among others. In the history of the language the claim that the conciseness of French is consecutive and noncontradictory is the veil obscuring and justifying this refusal. This is, in fact, a rearguard mission.

*Already a distinction is made between *la francophonie* of the north, the French spoken in France, Switzerland, Belgium, or Quebec; and *la francophonie* of the south, everything else.

**Specialists in francophone literatures do not always resist "comparing" the writers from these countries. This objectifying practice negates with one stroke the organic unity of our literatures for the benefit of the appreciation of the critic, who would never dare apply such methods to the French literary corpus.

Just as there is a right way to use the language, there would be a "correct" way to teach it. This notion has repercussions not just on the idea one has of the language but on the idea one forms of its relationship with other languages. Consequently, there are also repercussions on the theoretical apparatus set in place by disciplines pertaining to language usage, whether these are used to analyze languages or to translate from one to the other or to make learning a language possible.

If, however, we look at literary texts, which after all best delineate the image of a language, if not its function, and if we analyze how such texts are affected by language learning or translation (these being the two fundamental mechanisms of relational practice), ideas of transparency and opacity quite naturally present themselves as the critical approach.

The literary text plays the contradictory role of a producer of opacity.

Because the writer, entering the dense mass of his writings, renounces an absolute, his poetic intention, full of self-evidence and sublimity. Writing's relation to that absolute is relative; that is, it actually renders it opaque by realizing it in language. The text passes from a dreamed-of transparency to the opacity produced in words.

Because the written text opposes anything that might lead a reader to formulate the author's intention differently. At the same time he can only guess at the shape of this intention. The reader goes, or rather tries to go back, from the produced opacity to the transparency that he read into it.

Literary textual practice thus represents an opposition between two opacities: the irreducible opacity of the text, even when it is a matter of the most harmless sonnet, and the always evolving opacity of the author or a reader. Sometimes the latter becomes literally conscious of this opposition, in which case he describes the text as "difficult."

Both learning a language and translation have in common

the attempt to give "some transparency" back to a text. That is, they strive to bridge two series of opacities: in the case of language learning these would be the text and the novice reader confronting it, for whom any text is supposedly difficult. In the case of translation the transparency must provide a passage from a risky text to what is possible for another text.

Preferably, the literary works one chooses for learning a language are those best corresponding to what is assumed to be the pattern of the language, not the "easiest" works but ones supposedly having the least threatening opacity. This was true of texts by Albert Camus given to foreign students in France during the 1960s—a revealing instance of fundamental misinterpretation, since Camus's work only gave the appearance of being clear and straightforward. Language learning, whose main axiom was clarity, skipped right over the situational crisis that events in Algeria had formed in Camus and the echoes of this in the tight, feverish, and restrained structure of the style he had adopted to both confide and withdraw at the same time.

When it is a question of using a language, therefore, we must analyze the "situational competence" (to use an expression of Patrick Charaudeau's) of this language. Charaudeau showed how the preliminary stages of language learning consist of bringing the student to a state of "situational competence" in relation to the subject of the text he is tackling. Extending this notion from language learning to usage, I think that there is a global situational competence that the learner as well as the speaker or author needs to be aware of and that it concerns not a given text but the language itself: its situation within Relation, its precursors and its conceivable future.¹

So we must reevaluate vehicular languages, that is, the Western languages, which have spread practically everywhere in the world. Communities that are too "dense" to be considered as the linguistic margins of their languages'

countries of origin have adopted them in their diffusion. The United States is not considered peripheral to Great Britain (and neither is Australia or Canada); nor is Brazil peripheral in relation to Portugal nor Argentina nor Mexico in relation to Spain. Among these vehicular languages only French seems to have spread everywhere without really concentrating anywhere. French-speaking Belgium and Quebec are threatened, the Maghreb becomes more and more Arabic, the African states and francophone countries in the Caribbean do not carry sufficient weight, at least in political and economic terms. Moreover, as French spread, it simultaneously strengthened the illusion that its place of origin remained (even today) the privileged womb and promoted the belief that this language had some kind of universal value that had nothing whatsoever to do with the areas into which it had actually spread. Consequently, the situational competence of the language became overvalued and at the same time "upheld" in its place of origin. A generalizing universal is always ethnocentric. This movement, which is centripetal, is the opposite of the elementary, brutal expansion of Anglo-American, which doesn't bother itself with values or worry much about the future of the English language, as long as the sabir obtained in and through this expansion works to maintain actual domination. Imperialism (the thought as well as the reality of empire) does not conceive of anything universal but in every instance is a substitute for it.

We can see another difference in the relationship, whether manifest or latent, of these vehicular languages to the vernacular or composite or subversive languages with which they have been in contact. Attempts have been made to understand why, during European expansion in the Caribbean, only French gave rise to compromise languages—the francophone Creoles—that get away from it and at the same time remain dangerously close. Other languages that spread into these regions permitted only pidgins or sub-

versive practices inscribed within the language itself or distinctive features that only emphasized regional cultural characteristics, without, apparently, calling into question the organic unicity of each of these vehicular languages.* The result of this is that Spanish, for instance, really became the national language of Cubans and Colombians, with no spectacular problems or acknowledged conflicts. This did not happen with French. The language underwent far greater changes when it became Quebecois; it was not able to serve as an unproblematic national language for the states of former French-speaking Africa; nor—because of diglossia—could it “naturally” be the language of inspiration for the people of the Antilles or Réunion.**

Despite these differences in situation, one cannot help but notice that, in varying degrees of complexity, there exist several English, Spanish, or French languages (not counting the Anglo-American *sabir* that everybody readily uses). Whatever the degree of complexity, the one thing henceforth outmoded is the principle (if not the reality) of a language’s intangible unicity. Multiplicity has invaded vehicular languages and is an internal part of them from now on, even when—like Spanish—they seem to resist any centrifugal movement. What does this multiplicity consist of? The implicit renunciation of an arrogant, monolingual separateness and the temptation to participate in worldwide entanglement.

We can deduce three results of this: first, the bolstering of old oral, vernacular, or composite languages, their fixing and

*What I call Creole here (and contrary, perhaps, to the rules) is a language whose lexicon and syntax belong to two heterogeneous linguistic masses: Creole is a compromise. What I call pidgin is a lexical and syntactical reforming within the mass of a single language, with an aggressive will to deformation, which is what distinguishes pidgin from a dialect. Both practices are products of an active creolization.

**What I call diglossia (an idea that made its appearance in linguistics, though linguists say it doesn’t work) is the domination of one language over one or several others in the same region.

transcription, will necessarily be subjected to the hazards of this internal complexity that is now part of the system of languages. It would be almost futile and even dangerous to defend these languages from a monolingual point of view, because this would enclose them within an ideology and a practice that are already outmoded. Next, any method of learning or translation today has to take into account this internal multiplicity of languages, which goes even further than the old divisions of dialects that were peculiar to each language. Finally, and this observation is how the process operates, the share of opacity allotted to each language, whether vehicular or vernacular, dominating or dominated, is vastly increased by this new multiplicity. The situational competence of each of the languages of our world is overdetermined by the complexity of these relationships. The internal multiplicity of languages here confirms the reality of multilingualism and corresponds to it organically. Our poetics are overwhelmed by it.

It is, therefore, an anachronism, in applying teaching or translation techniques, to teach *the* French language or to translate into *the* French language. It is an epistemological anachronism, by means of which people continue to consider as classic, hence eternal, something that apparently does not “comprehend” opacity or tries to stand in the way of it. Whatever the craven purist may say (and he has neither Étiemble’s arguments nor his force of conviction, hunting down *sabirs*), there are several French languages today, and languages allow us to conceive of their unicity according to a new mode, in which French can no longer be monolingual. If language is given in advance, if it claims to have a mission, it misses out on the adventure and does not *catch on* in the world.

The same is true for those languages that are currently struggling inside the folklore pigeonhole. Through fixation and new methods of transcription they are trying to join into the baroque chorus, the violent and cunningly extended frame-

work of our intertextuality. But because intertextuality is neither fusion nor confusion, if it is to be fruitful and capable of transcendence, the languages that end up involved in it must first have been in charge of their own specificities. Consequently, it is all the more urgent to carefully untangle moments of diglossia. If one is in too much of a hurry to join the concert, there is a risk of mistaking as autonomous participation something that is only some disguised leftover of former alienations. Opacities must be preserved; an appetite for opportune obscurity in translation must be created; and falsely convenient vehicular sabirs must be relentlessly refuted. The framework is not made of transparency; and it is not enough to assert one's right to linguistic difference or, conversely, to interlexicality, to be sure of realizing them.

It would be worthwhile for someone who works with languages to reverse the order of questions and begin his approach by shedding light on the relations of language-culture-situation to the world. That is, by contemplating a poetics. Otherwise, he runs the risk of turning in circles within a code, whose fragile first stirrings he stubbornly insists on legitimizing, to establish the illusion that it is scientific, doing so at the very point in this concert that languages would already have slipped away toward other, fruitful and unpredictable controversies.

The Black Beach

The beach at Le Diamant on the southern coast of Martinique has a subterranean, cyclical life. During the rainy season, *hivernage*, it shrinks to a corridor of black sand that you would almost think had come from the slopes above, where Mont Pelée branches out into foliage of quelled lava. As if the sea kept alive some underground intercourse with the volcano's hidden fire. And I imagine those murky layers undulating along the sea floor, bringing to our airy regions a convoy of this substance of night and impassive ashes ripened by the harshness of the north.

Then the beach is whipped by a wind not felt on the body; it is a secret wind. High waves come in, lifting close to the shore, they form less than ten meters out, the green of *campêche* trees, and in this short distance they unleash their countless galaxies. Branches of manchineel and seagrape lie about in havoc, writing in the more peaceful sunlight a memoir of the night sea's work. Brown seaweed piled there by the invisible assault buries the line between sand and soil. Uprooted coconut palms have tumbled sideways like stricken bodies. Along their trail, all the way to the rocky mound marking the distant Morne Larcher, one can sense the power of a hurricane one knows will come.

Just as one knows that in *carême*, the dry season, this chaotic grandeur will be carried off, made evanescent by the return of white sand and slack seas. The edge of the sea thus represents the alternation (but one that is illegible) between

order and chaos. The established municipalities do their best to manage this constant movement between threatening excess and dreamy fragility.

The movement of the beach, this rhythmic rhetoric of a shore, do not seem to me gratuitous. They weave a circularity that draws me in.

This is where I first saw a ghostly young man go by; his tireless wandering traced a frontier between the land and water as invisible as floodtide at night. I'm not sure what he was called, because he no longer answered to any given name. One morning he started walking and began to pace up and down the shore. He refused to speak and no longer admitted the possibility of any language. His mother became desperate; his friends tried in vain to break down the barrier of total silence. He didn't get angry; he didn't smile; he would move vaguely when a car missed him by a hair or threatened to knock him down. He walked, pulling the belt of his pants up around his waist and wrapping it tighter as his body grew thinner and thinner. It doesn't feel right to have to represent someone so rigorously adrift, so I won't try to describe him. What I would like to show is the nature of this speechlessness. All the languages of the world had come to die here in the quiet, tortured rejection of what was going on all around him in this country: another constant downward drift yet one performed with an anxious satisfaction; the obtrusive sounds of an excitement that is not sure of itself, the pursuit of a happiness that is limited to shaky privileges, the imperceptible numbing effect of quarrels taken to represent a major battle. All this he rejected, casting us out to the edges of his silence.

I made an attempt to communicate with this absence. I respected his stubborn silence, but (frustrated by my inability to make myself "understood" or accepted) wanted nonetheless to establish some system of relation with this walker that was not based on words. Since he went back and forth with the regularity of a metronome in front of the little garden between our house and the beach, one day I called him

silently. I didn't exactly know what sign to make—it had to be something neither affected or condescending but also not critical or distant. That time he didn't answer, but the second or third time around (since without being insistent I was insisting) he replied with a sign that was minute, at least to my eyes; for this gesture was perhaps the utmost he was capable of expressing: "I understand what you are attempting to undertake. You are trying to find out why I walk like this—not here. I accept your trying. But look around and see if it's worth explaining. Are you, yourself, worth my explaining this to you? So, let's leave it at that. We have gone as far as we can together." I was inordinately proud to have gotten this answer.

It was really a minute, imperceptible signal, sort of seesawing his barely lifted hand, and it became (because I adopted it as well) our sign of complicity. It seemed to me that we were perfecting this sign language, adding shades of all the possible meanings that chanced along. So until my departure we shared scraps of the language of gesture that Jean-Jacques Rousseau claimed preceded all spoken language.

I thought of the people struggling within this speck of the world against silence and obliteration. And of how they—in the obstinacy of their venture—have consented to being reduced to sectarianism, stereotyped discourse, zeal, to convoy definitive truths, the appetite for power. And also of what Alain Gontrand has described so well as "our masquerades of temperament." I thought about those people throughout the rest of the world (and the rest, moreover, is what is on the move) who have not had the opportunity to take refuge, as this walker has, in absence—having been forced out by raw poverty, extortion, famines, or massacres. It is paradoxical that so many acts of violence everywhere produce language at its most rudimentary, if not the extinction of words. Is there no valid language for Chaos? Or does Chaos only produce a sort of language that reduces and annihilates? Does its echo recede into a sabir of sabirs at the level of a roar?

The beach, however, has confirmed its volcanic nature. The water now runs along the sea wall of rocks heaped there, a souvenir of former hurricane damage, Beulah or David. The black sand glistens under the foam like peeling skin. The shoreline is cornered, up among coconut palms that now stand in the sea, hailing with their foliage—so perfectly suited—the energy of the deep. We gauge the more and more drastic shrinkage as the winter season strengthens. Then, abruptly, at least for those of us attentive to such changes, the water subsides, daily creating a wider and wider grayish strip. Don't get the idea that this is a tide. But, still, it is on the ebb! The beach, as it broadens, is the precursor of a future *carême*.

It seemed to me that the silent walker accelerated the rhythm of his walks. And that exhilaration also infected the surrounding country. At all costs we wanted to imitate the motion we felt everywhere else, by synthesizing, agitating, and speeding everything up (noise, speech, things to eat and drink, *zouc*, automobiles). Forgetting ourselves any way possible in any kind of speed.

Then, in this circularity I haunt, I turned my efforts toward seeing the beach's backwash into the nearby eddying void as the equivalent of the circling of this man completely withdrawn into his motor forces; tried to relate them, and myself as well, to this rhythm of the world that we consent to without being able to measure or control its course. I thought how everywhere, and in how many different modes, it is the same necessity to fit into the chaotic drive of totality that is at work, despite being subjected to the exaltations or numbing effects of specific existences. I thought about these modes that are just so many commonplaces: the fear, the wasting away, the tortured extinction, the obstinate means of resistance, the naive belief, the famines that go unmentioned, the trepidation, the stubborn determination to learn, the imprisonments, the hopeless struggles, the withdrawal and isolation, the arrogant powers, the blind wealth, the maintenance of the status quo, the numbness, the hidden ideologies, the

flaunted ideologies, the crime, the whole mess, the ways of being racist, the slums, the sophisticated techniques, the simple games, the subtle games, the desertions and betrayals, the unshrinking lives, the schools that work, the schools in ruin, the power plots, the prizes for excellence, the children they shoot, the computers, the classrooms with neither paper nor pencils, the exacerbated starvation, the tracking of quarry, the strokes of luck, the ghettos, the assimilations, the immigrations, the Earth's illnesses, the religions, the mind's illnesses, the musics of passion, the rages of what we so simply call libido, the pleasures of our urges and athletic pleasures, and so many other infinite variations of life and death. That these commonplaces, whose quantities are both countless and precise, in fact produced this Roar, in which we could still hear intoned every language in the world. Chaos has no language but gives rise to quantifiable myriads of them. We puzzle out the cycle of their confluences, the tempo of their momentums, the similarities of their diversions.

The beach now undergoes tempestuous change. The sand is the color of confusion, neither dull nor bright, and yet it suits the quality of the atmosphere and wind. The sea is unseasonably foamy: one feels that it will soon subdue the attacks on shoaling rocks. It is haloed by flickering surfaces. As if this reality (the sand, the sea trees, the volcano's conductive water) organized its economy according to a cyclical plan, buttressed by disorder. Those fantastic projects set up every two years or so to save the country crossed my mind: every one of them determined by notions of subjection and inevitably destroyed, swallowed up by personal profit. I wondered whether, in little countries such as ours ("I believe in the future of little countries"), economic prospects (their inspiration) ought not to be more like the beach at Le Diamant: cyclical, changeable, mutating, running through an economy of disorder whose detail would be meticulously calculated but whose comprehensive view would change rapidly depending on different circumstances.

When, in fact, we list unmethodically some of the realms demonstrating every level of economic development in a country like this—the infrastructure and its maintenance, the terms of investment, the budget of the state (what state?), professional training, the search for prospects, energy sources (what sources?), unemployment, the will to create, Social Security coverage, taxes, union dialogue, the internal market, import-export, capital accumulation, the division of the national product (of what nation?)—every single one is in crisis, nonexistent, or impossible; not one has summoned its inspiration from independent political power; furthermore, all are products of structural disorder inherited from colonization, which no adjustment of parity (between the former colony and the former home country) and, moreover, no planning of an ideological order could ever remedy.

That is what we have to shake off. To return to the sources of our cultures and the mobility of their relational content, in order to have a better appreciation of this disorder and to modulate every action according to it. To adapt action to the various possibilities in turn: to the subsistence economy as it existed on the Plantation fringes; to a market economy as the contemporary world imposes it upon us; to a regional economy, in order to reunite with the reality of our Caribbean surroundings; and to a controlled economy whose forms have been suggested by what we have learned from the sciences.

To forsake the single perspective of an economy whose central mechanism is maximum subsidization, that has to be obtained at the whim of an other. Obsession with these subsidies year after year clots thought, paralyzes initiative, and tends to distribute the manna to the most exuberant, neglecting perhaps those who are the most effective.

An economy of disorder, which, I now recall, Marc Guillaume had turned into a completely different theory (*Éloge du désordre*, Gallimard, 1978), but perhaps it is one that would be akin to what Samir Amin said about autocentric economies. Madness! was my first thought. Then—madness!

they jeer. But this is madness made up of considerable possibilities of reflection for experts in the matter.

Here acceleration becomes the most important virtue. Not the deliberately forgetful haste prevailing everywhere but an intense acuteness of thought, quick to change its heading. The capability of varying speed and direction at any moment, without, however, changing its nature, its intention, or its will, might be perhaps the optimal principle for such an economic system. Course changes would be dependent on a harsh analysis of reality. As for steadfastness of intention and will, this we would forge as we come to know our cultures.

This acceleration and speed race across the Earth. “And yet, it does turn!” Galileo’s aside did not simply determine a new order in our knowledge of the stars; it prophesied the circularity of languages, the convergent speed of cultures, the autonomy (in relation to any dogma) of the resultant energy.

But, while I was wandering like this, a silence as dizzying as speed and disorder gradually rose from the uproar of the sea.

The voiceless man who walks keeps on carting his black sand from a distant volcano known only to himself, to the beaches he pretends to share with us. How can he run faster when he is growing so desperately thin? One of us whispers: “He goes faster and faster because if he stops, if he slows down—he will fall.”

We are not going any faster, we are all hurtling onward—for fear of falling.