



History as neurosis: Psychoanalysis and Marxism in Édouard Glissant's *Le Discours antillais*

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Abstract

In *Le Discours antillais* (1981) Glissant analyses the alienation of the Martiniquan people within both a psychoanalytical and a Marxist perspective. He argues that they have *repressed* their consciousness of their history, so that their relation to it is *neurotic*. He considers psychosis to be in some sense less negative, because it is an escape from repression. But he also uses Marxism because he believes that the current state of the society derives from economic factors, specifically the collapse of the sugar cane industry: and since Martinique has no 'real' economy, it can have no 'real' social classes either. His use of both theoretical approaches is compared with the positions of Lacan and Althusser.

Keywords

alienation, history, Martinique, Marxism, neurosis, psychoanalysis, social classes

Introduction

The texts that make up *Le Discours antillais* were almost all written in the 1970s, in other words in a period when political struggles and protests of various kinds were prominent around the world, and memories of similar events in the 1960s were still fresh. In the Caribbean, Jamaica, Trinidad and Barbados had gained independence by 1970, and the Bahamas, Grenada, Dominica and St Lucia would do so in the course of the 1970s. Although most African nations became independent much earlier, countries such as Mozambique, Angola and Zimbabwe did so only in the 1970s. The defeat of the USA in Vietnam in 1975 had a profound effect on the American people. In France, the events of May 1968 had politicised a generation of left-wing students and others, and this also had repercussions in the Caribbean.¹ The earlier defeat of De Gaulle in Algeria in 1962 had been a serious body blow for the right in France; and it also, according to Glissant, upset Martiniquans' impression of superiority with regard to the Algerians. He refers to 'l'impressionnant impact des

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événements mondiaux, lesquels ont marqué depuis, sans qu'elle en ait crûment conscience, cette communauté', and continues: 'L'élite martiniquaise inconsciente se gaussait des fellagas, mais la guerre d'Algérie a changé quelque chose ici' (Glissant, 1981: 338–9). Equally, Martiniquans living in France, who had always considered themselves superior to Algerians, were forced to re-evaluate their status: a process that Glissant describes as 'traumatising': 'Traumatisés de constater une telle détermination chez ces colonisés, qu'en général, dans leur naïf vécu de l'assimilation, ils estimaient "inférieurs" à eux' (1981: 310).

Glissant looks back to the period of the Second World War in the 1940s as a time when Martiniquans did resist: 'Mais en ce temps-là nous avons résisté, parce que le régime vichyste nous opposait un déni total. Nous aussi, "nous n'avons jamais été aussi libres que sous l'Occupation"' (1981: 39–40). But nothing remotely similar to these events was happening in Martinique in the 1970s: instead of the generally left-wing fervour to be found in so much of the rest of the world, Martinique remained passively apolitical and, according to Glissant, ignorantly self-satisfied. In particular, he deplores their ignorance of their own *history*, commenting that this makes it impossible for them to have a true knowledge of themselves as a collectivity: 'L'inconscient et lancinant besoin de se connaître se perd dans l'absence du sens ou de la dimension historique' (1981: 88); history has been erased from their consciousness – 'raturée' (1981: 88). He enlarges upon this theme in the section entitled 'La querelle avec l'Histoire' (1981: 130–3), claiming that 'Notre conscience historique . . . s'agrégeait sous les auspices du choc, de la contraction, de la négation douloureuse et de l'explosion. Ce discontinu, et l'impossibilité pour la conscience d'en faire le tour, caractérisent ce que j'appelle une non-histoire' (1981: 130–1).

For Glissant this ignorance was deeply depressing, and he devoted much time and energy to contesting it. For instance, he set up the Institut Martiniquais d'Études in 1965 as a forum for collective analysis of the situation – many of its lectures and discussions are printed in *Le Discours antillais*.² However, the great majority of the Martiniquan population in the 1970s seemed quite happy with their situation, above all because, although poverty still existed, their economic standard of living was considerably higher than that of most other Caribbean islands, to the extent even that they believed that Martinique was not an underdeveloped country. (An additional reason was that their status as a Département d'Outre Mer meant that they were no longer a colony and gave them a close cultural connection with France.) But Glissant refuses to subscribe to this view, ironically describing Martinique as 'un pays réellement sous-développé, avec une inouïe profusion de voitures particulières' (1981: 349), and the Martiniquan as a 'zombi heureux' (1981: 125). In his view, the only solution for Martinique was for it to gain independence – he writes on the final page of *Le Discours* that 'il n'y a pas d'alternative à un rassemblement des partisans de l'indépendance' (1981: 467).³

In other words, Glissant's analysis here does not concern the objective conditions and structures of Martiniquan society so much as the *subjective* experience that derives from them: it is, indeed, the '*discours antillais*', in the sense of the dimension in which Martinique collectively experiences and expresses (or fails to express) the fact of being Martiniquan. Glissant sees his fellow citizens as afflicted with a level of *alienation* – a 'sentiment individuel et inconscient d'être autre que ce qu'on croit être' (1981: 339, italics in original) – that prevents them from truly knowing themselves: 'il ne se trouve peut-être pas au monde une communauté aussi aliénée que la nôtre, aussi menacée de dilution' (1981: 63). The relatively high economic standard of living coexists with an emotional and even moral poverty, which he succinctly formulates as a combination of 'Grandes surfaces et misère morale' (1981: 175).

Psychoanalysis and alienation

But what is particularly striking in Glissant's discussion of alienation is that he sees it as a form of *repression*. This is, as far as I know, completely original; alienation in the classical sense is

analysed in Marxist terms rather than through the psychoanalytical framework of repression. But in defining alienation as a form of repression Glissant is presenting it as a *neurotic* process, that is to say in Freudian rather than Marxist terms: the neurotic represses, i.e. excludes from his consciousness, the realities of his life that he is not able to confront.⁴

In particular, Glissant argues that it is the Martiniquans' historical memory that has been repressed, and is therefore neurotic. He formulates this idea somewhat defensively: 'Serait-il dérisoire ou odieux de considérer notre histoire subie comme cheminement d'une névrose?' (1981: 133), but in fact he makes it the basis of a large part of his analysis of the Martiniquans' attitude to history. Most importantly, all this also means that they are unable to create a collective consciousness that would enable them to *act* in the present, in political and cultural terms, to change their lives; as a result 'la vocation nationale n'a cheminé que dans l'inconscient et le névrotique' (1981: 390).

Instead, 'la société martiniquaise apparaît ainsi à tous les niveaux comme irresponsabilisée' (1981: 281): it is unable to assume the responsibility for what is wrong or lacking in Martinique in the present. Glissant is very clear in his insistence that, conversely, a collective memory of history, shared by the community as a whole, would enable the Martiniquans to bring about change in the present, and to become responsible for their own social structures: 'C'est en réinvestissant son passé que, dans notre pays, on échappe à l'ambigu traumatique des refus et des rejets inconscients' (1981: 92).

Thus what would protect the Martiniquans against ambiguity and traumatism is, Glissant repeatedly insists, historical memory: a society that, unlike Martinique, has kept its 'mémoire historique' is able to use it to '[armer] la collectivité d'une décision nouvelle' which 'lui permet de dépasser les rejets d'une structuration imposée' (1981: 92); and he goes on to claim that historical memory would one day lead to a more general collective consciousness throughout the society; thus he evokes the prospect of 'La communauté s'arrachant de son traumatisme et naissant à sa propre conscience' (1981: 93).

But none of this has so far been achieved in Martinique, which still suffers from its repressed, i.e. neurotic, relation to both history and its own present-day reality: hence the relevance of psychoanalysis to an understanding of the collective condition. Thus one of Glissant's key terms is the 'pulsion mimétique', for instance: the urge, basic to the assimilationist programme, to identify with France is not conscious (although one might argue that it quite often is), but an *unconscious* 'drive'. This makes it all the more harmful: indeed, Glissant characterises it as a kind of violence: 'La pulsion mimétique est une violence insidieuse' (1981: 31). He in fact goes so far as to argue that the mimetic drive constitutes the *worst* kind of oppression – worse, in other words, than poverty or overt subjugation – precisely because those who suffer from it are not aware of it as suffering; indeed, the subject is complicit in it and even 'enjoys' it: 'La pulsion mimétique est peut-être la violence la plus extrême qu'on puisse imposer à un peuple; d'autant qu'elle suppose le consentement (et même, la jouissance) du mimétisé' (1981: 63–4). Again, only the collective memory of history would allow the mimetic drive to be overcome:

Une théorie de base de la situation martiniquaise devra mettre en évidence la possibilité d'accumuler suffisamment d'expérience dans la mémoire collective de la communauté pour qu'un jour les pulsions traumatiques passagères puissent être transformées ou continuées en projets politiques éclairés. (1981: 172)

In this context it becomes clear why a psychoanalytical approach is appropriate: it is a question of analysing unconscious drives rather than consciously held views.⁵ Here again, Glissant introduces the idea rather tentatively: 'La situation en Martinique imposerait *presque* le souci d'aborder ce réel sous l'angle d'une sorte de psychanalyse "globale"' (1981: 101, italics added). In the same

way, he is careful to point out that psychoanalysis cannot be considered as the solution to all political problems: 'Il ne s'agit pas d'avancer que la psychiatrie (orientée par la psychanalyse) donne ici les clefs des problèmes politiques' (1981: 292).

While the main thrust of Glissant's analysis is based on the notion of neurosis – that, is, repression – *Le Discours antillais* also contains some quite substantial investigations of *madness*: that is, psychosis. The central characteristic of psychotic subjects is that they do not repress anything, and this takes Glissant to some extent beyond Freudianism. Unlike in the case of neurosis, madness is seen by him as a form of *escape* from repression, and hence even as a kind of choice. Thus he refers to the point at which 'la relation au réel est devenu impraticable, même sur le mode névrotique, et que se décide le *choix psychotique*' (1981: 290, italics in original), and a little later, even more emphatically, to 'La violence psychotique du choix radical dans la "folie"' (1981: 292).

One particularly prominent form of madness would seem to be what Glissant defines as 'délire verbal', which according to him is extremely prevalent in Martinique – indeed he refers to it as 'le délire mental coutumier'. But in fact he is ambivalent as to whether it is a form of psychosis, or just an everyday form of resistance to what he calls 'la misère mentale' of life in Martiniquan society:

L'analyse de ce que j'appelle misère mentale montre que les manifestations les plus évidentes n'en sont pas données dans le pathologique ni le délirant, mais dans la texture même de de l'existence quotidienne . . . Le 'délire' est une forme de résistance à la misère mentale. (1981: 212)

The most substantial discussion of 'délire verbal' occurs right at the end of *Le Discours*, in Glissant's introduction to his reproduction of the texts of the 'Dogme du Cham' (1981: 485–92). These are an extraordinary collection of pamphlets written and distributed in Martinique by a certain Evrard Suffrin in the 1950s and '60s, which address, among other things, the condition of the black man. They do so by elaborating a new religion called 'Chamisme', and promoting the idea that the black race should have its own separate nation, with its own currency and flag. And the pamphlets do indeed strike the reader as, to put it crudely, pretty crazy. For instance, he refers to a:

Déclaration faite à la Magistrature Française par SUFFRIN Edmond-Evrard autodidacte, interné par la France du 18 Mars au 10 Août 1943 pour propagande séditeuse anti-nationale de Liberté humaine et aux interventions prononcées, étant délégué du Dogme de Cham a l'Assemblée Générale et la Confédération Mondiale le 27 Avril 1948 renouvelée le 29 Octobre 1950 à l'Union Française et à la France. (1981: 491)

But Glissant's introduction claims that these texts show how 'en bien des endroits cet homme a vu et senti plus juste que combien de nos politiques' (1981: 484), and goes on to relate Suffrin's use of language to his lack of economic power:

Si j'en ai fait un des types du délire verbal coutumier . . . c'est parce que les constructions du *Dogme de Cham* sont une réponse pathétique et incontrôlable à une éradication économique. Le délire verbal coutumier est substitutif du pouvoir économique néantisé. (1981: 485).

Glissant's novel *Malemort* was published in 1976, and it is therefore not surprising that it reflects and illustrates several of the themes of *Le Discours antillais*. Thus Médellus, one of its trio of main characters, is a practitioner of 'délire verbal coutumier', and the novel provides many instances of this – for example: 'De sitôt que faire, disait Médellus . . . vous auréolez que vous êtes connaissant, mais le démente du pur est plus à profond que la nuit. Je suis le pur de pureté qui vous propose la science' (Glissant, 1976: 153).⁶ The novel also makes it clear that 'délire verbal' is a consequence of the difficulty of saying anything 'normally': it is the 'goût strident d'un chanter

interdit . . . tout cet interdit de mémoire accumulé qui soudain explosait à la gorge en un enchevêtrement sans suite ni logique' (1976: 124).

The three characters are described as 'mad'; but their madness is not presented as something alien to the reader – who is led to identify with them: 'eux-mêmes nous, eux-mêmes fous' (1976: 23). Thus the fictional genre opens up the possibility of a different kind of *empathy* with the 'mad' men, that is not to be found in the theoretical texts despite Glissant's obvious sympathy with them here too. Fiction allows us to enter into their subjective experience. The effect of this is also to question the borderlines between madness and sanity (or neurosis), in the same way that the 'délire verbal coutumier' itself holds a similarly ambiguous position.

There are also striking similarities between Médellus and the real-life Suffrin; thus Médellus, just like Suffrin, designs a utopian community – but his is based on land reform. He and a chosen group of acquaintances are squatters on a piece of land, and chapter 9 of *Malemort* starts by listing his aims:

Réunir l'eau de terre à la communauté. L'eau de rivière, l'eau de source. L'écrevisse au manger du matin, le poisson noir pour le manger de vendredi. Nasses taillées pour la communauté. Le trou de bain. La Fontaine de Résurrection. (1976: 196)

This is accompanied by a map of the piece of land, which also includes – in a fashion very similar to that of Suffrin – a 'Fontaine de Purification', a 'Temple universel' and the 'Assemblée générale des Nations'. The 'Fontaine de Résurrection' is a pipe stand that Médellus finds on the piece of land; and he builds the 'Assemblée générale des Nations' and the 'Temple universel' from scrap iron and pieces of wood. The final paragraph of the chapter implies both that his madness gives him access to a vision which cannot be expressed in ordinary language, and that he tries to make 'you' understand it:

Les gens disaient: Médellus est tombé fou. Il comprenait l'invisible dans sa netteté, il voyait l'avenir inconnu rouler dans la pente entre les villas de lotissement, il ressentait la mort de l'antan connu qui laisse dans la tête un doux contentement de laissez-faire, un renoncement paisible traversé de violences plus soudaines terrifiantes qu'un tremblement de terre. Il comprenait cela, et sans doute essayait-il de te le faire comprendre. (1976: 213)

This is a very clear illustration of Glissant's conviction that madness is a more favourable condition than neurosis because it gives the subject access to insights that are usually repressed. But at the very end of the chapter, the pathos of Médellus's dream of land reform is powerfully expressed when 'his' piece of land with all its 'buildings' is destroyed by a tractor: 'Il voyait chaque jour, par delà les derniers acacias, un tracteur jaune et rouge . . . allant venant dans un boucan de tonnerre, et ravageant tout ce rêve de réforme agraire' (1976: 213–14).

Marxism and the economy

However, Glissant's analysis of the alienation and 'irresponsibility' of Martiniquan society – of the 'discours antillais', that is – is not solely based on his psychoanalytical approach. He combines this with an equal emphasis on the relevance of Marxism, and I want now to discuss the rationale for this; that is, to look at Glissant's analysis of the role of the economy in the causation and maintenance of Martiniquan alienation. In other words, while the experience of alienation is best analysed in psychoanalytical terms, its causation is economic.

The most likely explanation of the alienation he describes would perhaps be political. Martinique's political status as a 'Département d'Outre Mer' makes it easier for its people to identify with France rather than with the Caribbean – in other words, the 'pulsion mimétique' that I have discussed above. (They were also encouraged to emigrate to France, under the BUMIDOM programme from 1963 to 1981,⁷ although Glissant does not discuss this.) And he does indeed describe departmentalisation as 'la limite extrême de l'aliénation' and as blocking 'le dur chemin de l'identité, de l'indépendance' (Glissant, 1981: 154). But in his view the ultimate cause of the problem is not political but *economic*: and it dates not from departmentalisation in 1946 but from the collapse of the international market for sugar cane that, from the late nineteenth century onwards, had been brought about by the rise of sugar beet. Thus he describes 'la lutte entre colons et betteraviers: sucre continental ou sucre tropical?' and how 'La question sera tranchée au bénéfice du premier' (1981: 61). And what makes this 'victoire des betteraviers français sur la canne à sucre' (1981: 315) particularly devastating is that there was no other significant agricultural production for export: with the decline of sugar cane 'on comprendra que la Martinique soit devenue en fin de compte une terre de change, où il ne se produit plus rien. Terre sans production, la Martinique devient de plus en plus incapable de déterminer son avenir' (1981: 315).

Again following Marx, Glissant argues that the absence of any real economic production in Martinique means that there can be no 'real' social classes; since the decline of cane sugar, the *békés* are not the employers of a 'class' of agricultural workers; therefore, they themselves have no real (i.e. economic) function to justify their existence. Glissant speaks of 'le caractère artificiel et "non-fonctionnel" de ce qu'on appelle les classes sociales en Martinique. Ma proposition est qu'ici la "morbidité" est liée à cette "artificialité", à cette "non-fonctionnalité"' (1981: 109). He expands on this in his italicised list of 'Repères: la "logique historique" des rapports':

- *Artificialiser les 'classes sociales'.*
- *Interdire qu'elles exercent une fonction dans une production.*
- *Rendre impossible la résolution autonome des conflits.* (1981: 57)

The absence of any economic production in Martinique of course has equally, not to say greater, negative consequences for the agricultural workers. Instead of collectively working to produce goods to be sold on the market – i.e. in conditions that would be favourable to effective collective action in the form of strikes – their work is limited to a survival economy (1981: 68): in other words, individuals growing produce for their own use on their own small pieces of land. Not only can this never produce a surplus of goods that would see them through hard times, or could be sold – 'La hantise du surplus est la marque fondamentale de l'économie de survie' (1981: 69) – but it is also an individual activity that does nothing to promote solidarity with other agricultural workers: thus the survival economy 'ne provoque pas l'apparition d'un corps de traditions paysannes' and its organisation rules out the possibility of communal actions such as 'les foires et les marchés saisonniers, où se renforce le trait commun' (1981: 69).

Another important group of workers that Glissant mentions are the 'djobeurs': men who survive from day to day doing casual menial jobs such as market porters or selling scrap iron or old tyres, where they can find them. They figure far more prominently in *Malemort*, where Dlan, Médellus and Silacier, the three main characters, are 'djobeurs'; a section near the beginning of the novel shows Médellus and Silacier making a list of all the 'métiers' – i.e. 'djobs' – that they can practise (1976: 35–8). Thus here again the novel illustrates and expands on some of the themes of *Le Discours antillais*. The situation of the 'djobeurs' is obviously very different from that of the agricultural workers – it is more urban, for instance, and even more insecure – but in *Le Discours*, Glissant makes clear the similarities in their respective situations. Thus 'le djobage', too, is just a

short-term and individual solution, which does nothing to encourage solidarity with other types of worker. Conversely, only ‘un programme collectif de production’ will allow Martinique to ‘échapper à la fatalité du “djobage”’ (1981: 340). ‘Djobage’ requires individual qualities such as enterprise, flexibility and what Glissant calls ‘débrouillardisme’: ‘le débrouillardisme hasardeux de ceux qui survivent au jour le jour’ (1981: 340). While this in itself is a positive attribute, it works against the development of a collective consciousness of one’s common predicament and a sense of social solidarity: Glissant refers to ‘l’absence du sentiment de solidarité sociale, qu’on peut résumer dans le mot “débrouillardise”’ (1981: 90).⁸ Even more importantly, the fact that the agricultural workers and ‘djobeurs’ now rely to a very large extent on subsidies and social security payments from France means that they have no motivation at all to struggle for independence, to which they are just as opposed as the *békés* – although Glissant has surprisingly little to say on this point.

Another consequence of the fact that the social classes have no function in economic production is that there is far less basis for conflict between them. But this is by no means an advantage, because it is only such conflict that, in Marxist terms, could lead to a dialectical resolution and hence a new set of social relations – as Glissant puts it, ‘Les couches sociales n’entretiennent entre elles de relations dialectiques autonomes’ (1981: 288). The lack of class conflict thus contributes significantly to the ‘morbidité’ (1981: 109) and stagnation of the society.

Therefore, although Glissant does not deny that there have been many twentieth-century manifestations of political discontent in Martinique in the form of strikes and riots, he points out that these have never been successful – ‘L’histoire martiniquaise déborde d’insurrections sans profit’ (1981: 135) – and gives as the reason the fact that the agricultural workers have never been able to exert any political influence because on the economic level they are not really producing anything. Rather than producers, they are merely consumers, which does not encourage any sense of social solidarity – thus, ‘Nous avons désappris les gestes collectifs de la solidarité’ (1981: 39). The great success of the ongoing colonial system in Martinique, Glissant remarks with characteristic irony, is that it has ‘réussi à la fin une grande égalisation qui s’offre comme solution, mais névrotisante, des anciens conflits: les Martiniquais sont tous désormais des *clients*’ (1981: 72, italics in original). Moreover, their status as consumers is made possible solely through the social security payments that they receive.

For the same reason, Glissant argues that political struggle must necessarily take the form of *cultural* action: in other words, led by the intellectuals with the aim of politicising the people. Even here, however, he does not appear to be very optimistic: there are only two chapters of *Le Discours antillais* – ‘Action culturelle, pratique politique’ (1981: 205–19) and ‘Théâtre, conscience du peuple’ (1981: 395–415) – devoted to this question, and most of these are taken up with analysis of the impossibility of the project rather than plans for action.

Glissant’s use of psychoanalysis

If, for the reasons I have discussed, the collective Martiniquan consciousness of history has been repressed, it follows that Glissant is extending the scope of psychoanalysis far beyond what Freud envisaged. For Freud, repression and neurosis were primarily concerned with sexuality; but Glissant considers this to be too restricted. (Conversely, the one section of *Le Discours antillais* that is concerned with sexuality – ‘Plaisir et jouissance: le vécu martiniquais’ (1981: 293–302) – does not use psychoanalytical concepts at all, but relates the present-day state of sexual relations rather to history, in particular slavery.) This becomes explicit in the section of *Le Discours* entitled ‘Maud Mannoni et Georges Payote’ (1981: 305–11), where Glissant criticises one particular psychoanalytical case history: that of the analysis by the eminent Lacanian Maud Mannoni of a certain Georges Payote, a Martiniquan living in France, and its publication in her book *Le Psychiâtre, son*

'Fou' et la psychanalyse (1970). Glissant is careful to stress at the outset that he is not criticising psychoanalysis in general ('Il ne s'agit pas de soutenir une contestation sur le terrain psychanalytique . . . Ni le psychanalyste ni ses méthodes ne sont donc en cause' (Glissant, 1981: 305)). The focus of his criticism is rather that Mannoni seems to be blind to what Glissant sees as Payote's neurotic repression of the 'difficulté d'être Martiniquais' (1981: 306).

Since Mannoni's book gives a very detailed account of the sessions, he is able to show how she overlooks evidence of this. For instance, Payote talks at some length about his hostility towards Algerians in France and seems to hold them responsible for his mental illness ('Je suis tombé malade par le problème algérien' (1981: 307)) but, as Glissant notes, Mannoni does not comment on this at all. Even more significantly, perhaps, she interprets Payote's remark: 'Après ma jouissance, j'ai perdu ma beauté, j'ai perdu mon nez négroïde' (1981: 308) as symbolising his fear of castration – i.e. 'nez' stands for phallus. She goes on: 'Georges évoque une situation de *scène primitive*; après des rapports sexuels, il perd sa jouissance, son nez négroïde' (1981: 308, italics in original). But in Glissant's view the nose is not phallic, but a signifier of his race; and indeed this interpretation is supported by what Payote goes on to say immediately afterwards: 'Je suis rentré à la maison complètement fou. J'ai eu peur en chemin d'être lynché par les Noirs. Arrivé hébété à la maison, je retrouve mes cousins blancs' (1981: 308) – implying, in other words, that the significance of the incident for him was racial rather than sexual. Thus Glissant concludes 'Nous n'allons pas prétendre après ces citations que Mme Mannoni n'a pas vu que Georges Payote était un Martiniquais, mais nous disons qu'elle ne l'a pas vu en tant que Martiniquais, et que c'était peut-être là sa demande primordiale' (1981: 309). That is, Payote's neurosis was caused by his repression of his cultural and racial identity; and therefore psychoanalysis needs to be able to extend its concept of repression so that it covers other kinds of content: for instance, history.

Glissant does not seem to have been influenced by the very dominant, in the France of the 1970s, work on psychoanalysis by Jacques Lacan. But Lacan's concept of the Imaginary might have been extremely useful to his own argument, through the Imaginary's emphasis on *misrecognition*: it is inaugurated by the 'mirror stage' in which the child learns to recognise himself in the mirror, but this 'image' is a form of alienation.⁹

Glissant also makes some use of the notion of the collective unconscious – i.e. not questioning Freudian theory but relying more specifically on the work of Carl Jung. Except, however, the collective unconscious for Jung was based on the idea of the 'archetype' – as in his book *Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* (1969) – and Glissant explicitly rejects this, saying: 'Nous n'entreprenons pas ici une illustration du point de vue jungien, et ne défendons pas l'existence déterminante d'archétypes universels' (1981: 285). This is in line with his more general rejection of universal concepts or values. But he goes on to outline (again, as with his use of Freudianism, somewhat hesitantly) his belief that social structures can in certain circumstances determine the formation of a *kind* of collective unconscious:

Mais nous croyons à la répercussion des données socio-historiques non seulement sur les croyances, les moeurs, les idéologies (ce qu'on appelle les superstructures), mais aussi *dans certaines conditions*, sur la formation d'un champ de pulsions 'communes' qu'on pourrait alors appeler l'inconscient d'une communauté. (1981: 285, italics in original)¹⁰

(The reference to 'superstructures' introduces a Marxist perspective here alongside the psychoanalytical one, as though Glissant is anxious to demonstrate the compatibility of his two theoretical approaches.)

This discussion also makes very clear the extent to which for Glissant the collective unconscious is extremely negative: he talks about 'la contrainte paralysante d'un inconscient collectif'

(1981: 285), and a few pages later expands on this: ‘Ce que j’appelle ainsi l’inconscient collectif des Martiniquais . . . résulte négativement d’expériences communes non achevées’ (1981: 288). But, in fact, this extends to the unconscious in general – collective or individual. And this can be seen as a result of its ‘content’: if what is being repressed is history, awareness of which is so necessary to Martiniquans’ understanding of their society, then clearly the unconscious can only be a wholly negative force.¹¹

Glissant’s use of Marxism

The use Glissant makes of Marxism, conversely, is extremely orthodox in its ‘reflectionism’, i.e. the insistence that the economy is the sole driving force of a society, and that therefore all its other levels – its political, ideological and cultural superstructures – are merely ‘reflections’ of the economic base. Thus the ‘morbid’ status of Martiniquan society (1981: 109, 296) is directly determined – is a consequence or ‘reflection’ of its economic reality. This view had been countered by the most eminent French Marxist of the 1970s, namely Louis Althusser, who rejected reflectionism in favour of a looser, pluri-dimensional model in which the social structure did not directly ‘reflect’ the economic base. (The Lacan–Althusser duo was in some ways the dominant intellectual force of 1970s France, and Althusser drew on Lacan’s imaginary and mirror-stage in Althusser (1971).¹²) In his *Pour Marx* (1965) Althusser distinguishes between the economic *structure* of a society and the *superstructure*, which is made up of the state and its institutions and all political and ideological forms (and ideology includes culture and art): ‘D’un côté la *structure* (base économique: forces de production et rapports de production); de l’autre la *superstructure* (l’État et toutes les formes juridiques, politiques et idéologiques)’ (1965: 25, italics in original). He then goes on to argue that the economy does not directly and immediately determine the superstructure: it does so, but only in the ‘last instance’, and the superstructure enjoys a ‘relative autonomy’: ‘d’une part la *détermination en dernière instance par le mode de production (économique)*; d’autre part l’*autonomie relative des superstructures et leur efficace spécifique*’ (1965: 28, italics in original). He shows how this conception is already at work in the writings of Engels, but also makes it clear that it forms an important and original part of his own work: ‘il faut bien dire que la *théorie de l’efficace spécifique des superstructures . . . reste en grande partie à élaborer*’ (1965: 35, italics original).

This concept of relative autonomy is very different from Glissant’s insistence on the economy as the determining factor in Martiniquan society – its lack of ‘real’ social classes, for instance – and, although he at one point does use the Althusserian concept of ‘surdétermination’ (Glissant, 1981: 286, note 5), he does not seem to have been influenced by Althusser in any substantive way.¹³

Conclusion

Le Discours antillais is the only one of Glissant’s 12 collections of essays to be substantively concerned with the problems of Martiniquan society,¹⁴ and it is by no means solely devoted to the topics discussed in this article; it devotes just as much – or more – space to issues of language and literature. As a result, it nowhere gives the reader a single, comprehensive set of conclusions on the idea of history as neurosis. Indeed, given its overall construction – the printing or reprinting of an enormous number of earlier articles, lectures and discussions – it is difficult to see how it could have done. But this structure is also characteristic of the way in which Glissant always prefers to work: he places a positive value on *repetition*, as he (also repeatedly) makes clear; for instance, he opens the second chapter of his *Introduction à une poétique du divers* with a strong defence of it: ‘Affirmer d’abord que l’on peut répéter des choses. Je crois que la répétition est une des formes de

la connaissance dans notre monde; c'est en répétant qu'on commence à voir le petit bout d'une nouveauté, qui apparaît' (1996: 33). In other words, returning to the same topic from a different perspective gives him a chance to discover new aspects of it. Nevertheless, the analysis that I have undertaken here does, I believe, show that Glissant's ideas on history as neurosis form a coherent whole – he does not contradict himself – and provide a strikingly convincing and illuminating account of its processes and consequences.

Notes

- 1 See Romain Cruse (2018) for a full discussion of this.
- 2 Romuald Fonkoua (2004) gives a detailed account of the setting-up and the activities of the IME.
- 3 Glissant's involvement with the struggle for independence had started well before the 1970s: in 1961, he, together with Marcel Manville, Albert Béville and others, created the Front antillo-guyanais pour l'autonomie (FAGA), which was banned by De Gaulle three months later.
- 4 I have discussed the more general question of psychoanalysis in the French Caribbean, including Glissant's relationship to Frantz Fanon and René Ménéil, in Britton (2002). Other work in this area includes Jeanne Wiltord (2009) and Thamy Ayouch (2018).
- 5 Frantz Fanon had of course made similar use of psychoanalytic theory in relation to Martiniquan society 20 years earlier (Fanon, 1952).
- 6 Raymond Chassagne describes Médellus as 'le discoureur malade de discours, perdu de discours, et chez qui le mot s'est depuis longtemps dissocié de toute incarnation; sa vie quotidienne n'est qu'une joute discursive et surannée' (1982: 66).
- 7 'Bureau pour le développement des migrations dans les départements d'outre-mer'.
- 8 'Débrouillardisme' has something in common with Glissant's concept of 'le détour': they are both *tactics*, sharing the same ambiguity as both a way for the individual to 'cope' with everyday life but also a refusal to consider more long-term solutions that would require collective change (Glissant, 1981: 28–36).
- 9 See, for example, Lacan's seminal article 'Le Stade du miroir comme formateur de la fonction du Je', in Lacan (1966: 89–97).
- 10 Fanon (1952: 152–4) had already put forward a very similar conception of the collective unconscious, writing, for instance, that: 'Il y aurait sur ce plan tout simplement à démontrer que Jung confond instinct et habitude. Selon lui en effet, l'inconscient collectif est solidaire de la structure cérébrale, les mythes et les archétypes sont des engrammes permanents de l'espèce. Nous espérons avoir montré qu'il n'en est rien et qu'en fait cet inconscient collectif est culturel, c'est à-dire acquis' (1952: 152).
- 11 In this, he differs from Lacan, whose reinterpretation of Freud's dictum 'Wo Es war, soll Ich werden' (given in the English translation of Freud's works as: 'Where Id was, there shall Ego be', i.e. suggesting that the aim of psychoanalysis is to *release* the subject from his or her unconscious) is a clear rejection of this notion: 'Il apparaît ici que c'est au lieu: *Wo*, ou *Es* . . . *war*, était, c'est d'un lieu d'être qu'il s'agit . . . c'est-à-dire . . . venir au jour de ce lieu même en tant qu'il est lieu d'être' (Lacan, 1966: 227). In other words, the unconscious is where I come from. (This does not explain, of course, why Freud used the past tense: 'Wo Es war'.)
- 12 This first appeared as an article in the journal *La Pensée* but is best known in its English translation by Ben Brewster. See Reader (1987) for an extended discussion of the relation between Lacan and Althusser.
- 13 Glissant's fellow Martiniquan René Ménéil (1907–2004), in contrast, makes considerable use of Althusser: for instance, writing on the latter's concept of relative autonomy: 'Ce qui veut dire que les activités littéraires et artistiques se développent à l'intérieur de notre société et en relation, corrélation, contradiction, détermination réciproque avec les autres activités parmi lesquelles les activités politiques' (1999: 47–8). In the chapter 'Le Roman antillais' (1999: 187–202) he uses relative autonomy to argue against a 'vulgar Marxist' conception of literature.
- 14 Indeed, Alexandre Leupin argues that *Le Discours* 'occupe un statut particulier' in Glissant's work, and suggests that this is because it was originally written as a doctoral thesis: '*Le Discours antillais* marque

l'entrée de Glissant dans le discours de l'Université; il n'est donc pas étonnant qu'il comporte des caractéristiques exceptionnelles dans le contexte de l'écriture glissantienne' (Leupin, 2016: 19). But to attribute the particular status of *Le Discours antillais* simply to its academic origin seems to me unconvincing, given the intensity of the anger and frustration that emanate from many of its pages.

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