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I celebrate myself, and sing myself,
And what I assume you shall assume,
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.
I loafe and invite my soul,
I lean and loafe at my ease observing a spear of summer grass.

- Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself", 1892

Differences: singularities.
Transparency-Opacity....
Totality: Relation....
Thought of the Other: -the Other of thought.
Assimilations—distancings that determine....
Creolizations, errantry.

In this litany commas (,) indicate relation, dashes (-) opposition, and colons (:) consecution.

- Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*

Poetics of Relation presents a powerful account of Relation. "Relation is an open totality evolving upon itself" whose elements "don't blend" nor "lose themselves" in relation¹; instead, "each element can keep its... essential quality, even as it accustoms itself to the essential qualities and differences of others."² In its most absolute formulation, Relation enables "a relational practice affirming the multiplicity and diversity of components".³ The subject of relation "is not: (of) Being, but: -(of) beings"⁴; there is no "Non-Being...

except outside of Relation”, for Relation facilitates the existence of all beings through the relation with the self, as it is through Relation that beings come into being⁵. Insofar as Relation is total, it is the primordial condition of beings in the world to come into being. However, Relation exceeds the bounds of traditional Western metaphysics by facilitating a connection not only with the thought of the other, a constitutive object of the mind that reaffirms the self, but the other of Thought. It is Relation that enables the haunting connection to the other of Thought, an Other with such alterity that it lacks representation in Thought, which exerts an ethereal pressure to cause one to “have to act... [and] change [one’s] thought, without renouncing its contribution.”⁶ Relation remains as a set of relations that is total, constitutive, mutualist, mutable, and autotelic.

And yet, given the totality of Relation, there appears to be a seemingly aporetic double movement between the opacity of its constituents and self-consciousness. On the one hand, relation is the site of opacity, where the “complex mix” of its constituent elements highlights the extent of one another’s differences: each element defines themselves by the “the mutual mutations generated by this interplay of relations.”⁷ This mode of Relation, creolization, enables the creation of an intermixture greater than the sum of its parts and does not efface or diminish its constituent components; “creolization diffracts” and entails “always being open, that is, perhaps, never becoming fixed except according to systems of variables that we have to imagine as much as define. Creolization carries along then into the adventure of multilingualism and into the incredible explosion of cultures. But the explosion of cultures does not mean they are scattered or mutually diluted. It is the violent sign of their consensual [sic], not imposed, sharing.”⁸ The result is a set of relations that is totalizing but non-totalitarian, a rhizomatic network of multiple origins in contrast to the singular root, ever expanding and mutating in its scope⁹. Moreover, it is through this “chaotic network of Relation”, a “conscious and contradictory experience of contact among cultures”, that the self emerges¹⁰. *E pluribus unum*: a self whose existence is contingent on their set of relations. The question of ‘what’ one’s essence is becomes a question of ‘how’ to maintain the relation that constitutes the self and other, as “[t]o himself the subject is a thick cloud of knowledge. That is why Relation also dismantles the thought of non-Being”¹¹, for there is no thing outside of Relation. Through the totality of Relation, thinking of all becomes one (Relation); at the same time, “thinking about One is not thinking about all”¹². *Poetics of Relation* famously poses a powerful injunction to the reader: “Why wouldn’t I accept the other’s opacity?”¹³. Why must we reduce the other to a kind of knowledge than to let the Other, and by extension, our selves and our relation to them, be?

On the other hand, relation enables the realization of similarity and difference that gives rise to the transparency of self-consciousness. Relation is the precondition for the immanence of self-consciousness, as the comparisons

between self and Other that highlights one another's similarities and differences become the very site of producing the difference of self and other: comparisons facilitate the moment of self-consciousness, when the self has "come out of itself" to differentiate itself from others in the world¹⁴. This 'transcendental' return into one's self, or the coming into one's own by self-realization, reaffirms the order of things, but the continued centrality of the self in opposition to the Other presents a totalitarian set of relations, especially in the way the self subjugates the Other. Even if there is no thing outside Relation, it does not entail those in relation are or ought to be instrumentalized for the self's use. It is this impetus to gain mastery over Relation, by reducing the multifaceted and multiple Other(s) of relation as an object to the self's subject, thereby reinforcing the primacy of the self over the Other, that Glissant condemns as the tenet of Western expansionism and colonialism: for it is impetus to "understand" the Other that reduces the Other and renders them 'transparent' to the subject by measuring a "solidity with the ideal scale providing [the subject] with grounds to make comparisons and, perhaps, judgments"¹⁵. Contrast this with Relation, which makes place for the other of Thought and allows for "Beings [to] remain" with the absence of the claim of Being. And yet, given the totality of Relation and our mutable standing as beings-in-time and beings-in-relation, are we not doomed to coming into self-consciousness via reflection, superseding and rendering transparent ourselves and others in the process? Can we help ourselves from forming our place in the world as Dasein and assimilating others into ourselves as part of the process, particularly when we comport ourselves in our mode of being in the world?

Given Glissant's Counter-Enlightenment project, there exists this apparent antinomy between self-consciousness and opacity: how does one attain self-consciousness without breaking one's fidelity to one's own opacity and the opacity of others? How does one stay ignorant from reflecting on the changes to one's self when one is thrust into an old unknowing world with a face towards the past? How does one refuse and refute the call to 'know thyself'?

Surprisingly, Glissant provides an innovative answer to this problem of ontology in his passing reference to Walt Whitman, a poet engaged in "a total poetics of relation", and Whitman's unique formulation of a lyric subject¹⁶ in his poem "Song of Myself". As this paper will explore, the apparent disjunctions between self-consciousness and the opacity of self and Other under the totality (but not totalization) of Relation find themselves in harmony once we read *Poetics of Relations* not as a collection of essays, but as an anthology of prose poetry. When read through the lens of traditional Western metaphysics, any relationship between self and Other produces a certain level of transparency through their interactions, resulting either in the assimilation of the Other as part of the self or an endless deferral of engagement with the Other to preserve the latter's opacity and diversity.

However, Relation can be total without totalizing under a poetic lens, as the lyric subject, with its transtemporal structure and its porosity the presence of the Other (including the other of the reader), facilitates a more responsible mode of being necessary for the actualization of Relation. The unique properties of the lyric subject enables modes of relation impossible under traditional Western metaphysics, like relations with non-entities and relations with entities beyond one's own time, as its openness to the world makes enables the lyric subject to host all traces of the past, present and future. Through the construction of Glissant's self-subject in *Poetics of Relation* and its relation to the Other within himself – his past and future 'selves' – Glissant demonstrates how Relation to selves of different temporal moments enables and occludes the lyric subject.

The Double(d) Edge(s) to Relation - Totality and Totalization

Under the purview of traditional Western metaphysics, the totality of Relation produces two parallel and interrelated problems: a tension between opacity (of self and other) with the transparency of self-consciousness and the slip from totality to totalitarianism by virtue of self-actualization facilitated by self-consciousness. Glissant claims that “[t]he totality within which Relativity is exerted and to which it is applied, through the workings of the mind, is not totalitarian, therefore: not imposed a priori, not fixed as an absolute”¹⁷, as the chaotic possibility of relation allows for chiasmic and errant manifestations of relation. But it seems equally possible that the self is made all the more secure and rooted through its relations with Others, as the perturbation of Relation pushes beings to “form around an idea of power – the totalitarian drive of a single, unique root – rather than around a fundamental relationship with the Other”¹⁸. How does Glissant maintain this tension, this relation between the paradoxical positions of opacity and transparency, totality and totalitarianism, without ceding to one position over another?

One consequence of the totality of Relation is that Relation is unilateral and non-consensual – one is thrown into the network of relations under Relation by virtue of being in the world. There is no non-being but outside of Relation – all beings, known and unknown, thoughts of Other and other of Thought, have their fates intertwined *a priori* in the fabric of Relations. But if one comes into being through this relation with others, any self-knowledge comes with a certain amount of knowledge of others, or at the very least, of what the Other is not. Glissant would counter that being in the world does not come at the cost of others: “Opacities can coexist and converge, weaving fabrics. To understand these truly one must focus on the texture of the weave and not on the nature of its components. For the time being, perhaps, give up this old obsession with discovering what lies at the bottom of natures”¹⁹. But it is undeniable that a certain breach in opacity is necessary for the self and the Other to be in relation with one another. The “violent sign of their

consensual sharing" à la creolization, or the common wealth of heritage (language, culture, history) between formerly subjected nations, is only possible because of their shared history as subjects of common imperialist organizations such as the Commonwealth²⁰. The grafting of cultures on and with one another enables the heterogeneous mixture so long as one culture does not totalize the other, as "the genesis of a particular culture could be grasped and its specificity approached without having to be defined". And yet, it seems all too easy for one to "misjudge the intensity of the particularity of a culture... [and] deny the particular value of any culture" in these imperialist organizations with their projects of producing a "universality of an All", resulting in a "Relation [that] has in its principle in itself (it would be the universal in-itself and only that)" or a relation that turns inwards and provides "one another with mutual reference and consequently leading not to totality but to the totalitarian"²¹. Historically, the latter is far more likely than the former, as the totalitarian set of relations produces a clarity of self and Other through a strict dichotomy of self and Other, metropole and colony, centre and periphery, citizen and barbarian.

This line between totality and totalitarianism can be seen in the example of the plantation. "The Plantation is one of the focal points for the development of present-day modes of Relation"²². Despite "the plantation's will to [isolation and] autarky... [the Plantations] paradoxically, have all the symptoms of extroversion. They are dependent, by nature, on someplace elsewhere. In their practice of importing and exporting, the established politics is not decided from within."²³ The plantation, with its horrors, forced the convergence and entanglement of cultures and intensified "historical *marronage* ... over time to exert a creative *marronage*, whose numerous forms of expression began to form the basis for a continuity. Which made it no longer possible to consider these literatures as exotic appendages of a French, Spanish, or English literary corpus; rather, they entered suddenly, with the force of a tradition that they built themselves, into the relation of cultures"²⁴. "African languages became deterritorialized, thus contributing to creolization in the West"²⁵, but through the survival of the enslaved, new cultures and expressions formed through Relation to mutate both the colony and the metropole:

Negro spirituals and blues, persisting in towns and growing cities; jazz, *biguines*, and calypsos, bursting into barrios and shantytowns; salsas and reggaes, assembled everything blunt and direct, painfully stifled, and patiently differed into this varied speech. This was the cry of the Plantation, transfigured into the speech of the world.²⁶

And yet, despite the plantation being a site of generation, the plantation was equally the site of death. New cultures came into being at the expense of other cultures, resulting in the proliferation of Western metaphysics and modes of being. The proliferation of Western thought also meant that "[t]he conquered or visited peoples are thus forced into a long and painful quest after an

identity whose first task will be opposition to the denaturing process introduced by the conqueror.”²⁷ But given that all beings exist in Relation, one can never return to the prelapsarian world before the introduction of European thought. Glissant warns against such a project, as “the deconstruction of any ideal relation one might claim to define in this interaction [of cultures makes possible the re-emergence of] ghouls of totalitarian thinking”. At the same time, Glissant points to the need to see “the position of each part within this whole: that is, the acknowledged validity of each specific Plantation yet at the same time the urgent need to understand the hidden order of the whole-so as to wander there without becoming lost²⁸. But in this pursuit of self-knowledge about our place in the world, we lapse once more into the possibility of committing the same “projects of transmutation ... [that] have resulted from the worst pretensions and the greatest magnanimities on the part of the West” in its pursuit of “understanding”²⁹. Thus, we find ourselves again at the same impasse between opacity and self-consciousness, as the transparency of the self risks rendering ‘transparent’ the opacity of the Other.

From the purview of traditional Western metaphysics, Glissant is faced contradictory choice of pursuing the impossible ascetic denial of becoming or breaking fidelity to opacity and assimilating the Other as part of the self, both of which result in a totalitarian relationship between self and Other. Relation is to enable the “complex mix’ of its heterogenous elements without homogenizing its components: “Diversity, the quantifiable totality of every possible difference ... must be safeguarded from assimilations, from fashions passively accepted as the norm, and from standardized customs.”³⁰. Guaranteeing the continuity of self and other in the process of intermixture in the model of self and Other of traditional Western metaphysics is only possible by reifying the Other as the other of thought and the self as a static entity. It is only by staking the relations between self and other in place that the self and Other remain distinct from one another:

As far as my identity is concerned, I will take care of it myself. That is, I shall not allow it to become cornered in any essence; I shall also pay attention to not mixing it into any amalgam. Rather, it does not disturb me to accept that there are places where my identity is obscure to me, and the fact that it amazes me does not mean I relinquish it.³¹

But such a mode of preserving diversity and opacity comes from the denial of Relation, as the prospect of the self remaining static under Relation runs counter to the process of creolization. The ensuing diversity safeguarded from one form of assimilation (the totalization of Other by the self) results in a different form of assimilation with the tokenistic standardization of diversity, as the potential of self and Other are circumscribed in their interactions. Glissant assures us that the opacity within the self in Relation is not a sign of relinquishing the self, but from the logic of traditional Western metaphysics, the loss of self is the very sign that the categories of self and Other erode one

another through their interactions. Alternatively, one could maintain ignorance of the presence of the Other and the self's relation to the Other. Glissant declares "it is not necessary for me to grasp [the Other]. It is not necessary to try to become the other (to become other) nor to "make" him in my image" while still feeling in "solidarity with him or to build with him or to like what he does"³². To have a grasp of the Other would be the reduction of the Other to the thought of the Other, and such "projects of transmutation ... have resulted from the worst pretensions and the greatest magnanimities on the part of the West"³³. And yet, the self makes use of the Other in its mode of being in the world by casting the Other as an object for the various modes of being it undertakes. In both cases, the totality Relation runs aground by creating an absolute set of relations that renders the relation between self and other totalitarian "on the basis of a nonprime element (violence, for example, or race) whose definition is overdetermined but knowledge of which, nonetheless, has limits."³⁴ But given that there can be no "relation-open-among elements the knowledge of which has boundaries"³⁵, both of these approaches are unfaithful to the totality of Relation.

This problem of the totality of Relation remains under the purview of Western metaphysics, a problem that Glissant acknowledges fully:

totality, already in its very concept, is in danger of immobility. Relation is open totality; totality would be relation at rest. Totality is virtual. Actually, only rest could, in itself, be legitimately or totally virtual. For movement is precisely that which realizes itself absolutely. Relation is movement.³⁶

Under Relation, one must be total but not totalizing, producing a self that is both distinct from Others without rendering the self and the Other static. But the forced contact between self and Others that enables Relation is also what makes possible the totalization and assimilation of others. Self-knowledge comes with knowledge of others; for one never comes into one's own alone. One must walk the fine line of both being in the world and not becoming the world, something that the self under traditional Western metaphysics is unable to facilitate.

Whitman's Lyric Self

What appears contradictory and aporetic from the view of traditional Western metaphysics resolves itself once we read *Poetics of Relation* poetically with the introduction of the lyric subject in place of the metaphysical subject. There is good reason to think Glissant is engaged with a poetics of Relation and not a metaphysics of Relation, even as there are metaphysical implications from this poesis of self. First, the subject of Relation "is not: (of) Being, but: -(of) beings," as Relation mediates beings in the world without a need for taxonomy or genealogy. The need to make others transparent in relation to

one's self, to assimilate the other and render them transparent, is what Glissant finds troubling with the epistemological foundations of Western metaphysics that assimilates all through their maxims of "I relate it to my norm. I admit you to existence, within my system. I create you afresh."³⁷ Second, the limits of the Western metaphysical subject that troubles the totality of relation are less prominent with the lyric subject. As this section will show, it is the lyric subject, with its unique ontology, that is better qualified to facilitate Relation by rendering obsolete "the thought of self and thought of other"³⁸ and producing an openness that renders one "incapable of projecting from on to the other"³⁹, including relations with Others impossible under the axioms of traditional Western metaphysics.

The lyric subject is one that both generalizes and individuates as the site of cleaving (together and apart) the self and Other. The openness of the "I" in the lyric subject invites the reader to identify with the speaker at the same time the excesses in the formal structure of the lyric resists the speaker's identification⁴⁰: the lyric subject "expresses the feelings and thoughts of a single speaker (not necessarily the poet herself) in a personal and subjective fashion"⁴¹. Ultimately, in a lyric, the otherness of the "I" melds with the reader as the gives voice to the words on the page⁴². As the event of the "I" works to conjoin the reader to the text, the union between the reader and the text in the event of the "I" produces the tertiary subject of the lyric subject:

The lyric poem, where the poet is presumably speaking to himself or to no one in particular, depends, in fact, on being heard by a "you" as an "I" speaking.... The lyric "I" must also always be a "you," if it is to mean— if it is to spell out the condition for meaning. For the lyric "I" is not prior to its words, and its words have nothing to do with "self-expression." The referent of the lyric poem is not a preexisting individual entity we can see or imagine but an "I" that must be heard as choosing words, intending sounds to make sense and troping the gap between sensation and cognition. The poem does not express some prior intention or meaning; it is an act of intending to mean.⁴³

The result is the lyric subject: a limping, lagging movement of constant negotiation and negation between the reader and the text.

In Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself"⁴⁴, Whitman develops a lyric subject that plays with the construction and slippages of its own morphology, mythology, and ontology. In his survey of Whitmanian scholarship, Howard J. Waskow notes the central question regarding the ontology of Whitman's lyric self, which scholars categorize as dialectical or organicist⁴⁵. Whitman's lyric subject is particularly notable because it "occupies the hazy ground between the two worlds, the area where [dialectics and organicism] intersect. Even as he assumes the existence of 'Me' and 'Not-Me', he is concerned about 'fusing' them; and even as he argues the oneness of 'object gross' and 'the unseen soul,' he is aware that his argument is paradoxical."⁴⁶ Whitman's lyric

self embodies the paradoxical position of traditional Western metaphysics by having both dialectical and organicist elements, as the self becomes in unison with the Other in ways that both diminishes and reinforces the self. For Whitman does not qualify how the self and Other came into a relationship with one another or the nature of their relationship, instead revelling in the self that contains multitudes (of self and Other) through the iconic line: "Do I contradict myself?/ Very well then I contradict myself,/ (I am large, I contain multitudes.)"⁴⁷

It is this self-awareness of the 'multitudes' of 'selves' within the lyric self of the poet-speaker in "Song of Myself" that reveals the limits of the self and the opacities in the Other(s) within. As Whitman's poet-speaker posits:

There is that in me—I do not know what it is—but I know it is in me.

Wrench'd and sweaty—calm and cool then my body becomes,
I sleep—I sleep long.

I do not know it—it is without name—it is a word unsaid,
It is not in any dictionary, utterance, symbol.

Something it swings on more than the earth I swing on,
To it the creation is the friend whose embracing awakes me.

Perhaps I might tell more. Outlines! I plead for my brothers and sisters.

Do you see O my brothers and sisters?

It is not chaos or death—it is form, union, plan—it is eternal life—it is Happiness.⁴⁸

Such lines are not the mere acknowledgement of the lyric subject as a host to the reader nor the synthesis between the reader and the text⁴⁹, but an acknowledgement of how all subjects are always host to others in the world in order to attain their individual subjectivity – even the lyric subject exists in relation to the other of Thought, as the subject only exists vis-à-vis the presence of the Other. The poet-speaker acknowledges that there is an ineffable, opaque Other within the self at the same time the self's relation to the Other constitutes a "form, union, plan" that is "eternal life" and "happiness". All the while the poet-speaker is unable to name and define what this Other is due to its opacity, the poet-speaker nevertheless respects and carries the Other within their being while acknowledging the relation to it is the foundation of the self. Whitman – as poet-speaker and lyric subject – readily admits that "these are really the thoughts of all men in all ages and lands, they are not original with me,/ If they are not yours as much as mine they are nothing, or next to nothing,"⁵⁰ but the presence of these thoughts nonetheless exert a force in the formation of himself. It is the repetition of

these thoughts in their present particular permutations makes these ideas their own.

While the subject of traditional Western metaphysics faces a crisis of self with the introduction of the other, the lyric subject invites the presence of an Other through its porous structure. The lyric subject is always open to cohabitation by an alien reader to facilitate the experience of the poem without the experience of the poet-speaker and the experience of the reader becoming one or the other. Given this openness to the world, the relation between the lyric self and its opacities regarding the other of Thought means the lyric subject is ever-expansive, always open to becoming a host to others brought into itself. But given that the self arises from this kind of open relation to any possible reader, every attempt at pinning the self down puts another entity in relation to the lyric subject⁵¹: “facts are useful, and yet they are not my dwelling, /I but enter by them to an area of my dwelling.”⁵² The lyric self is elastic – it expands and contracts with what is necessary in the moment to encompass all, including facts from mariners, lexicographers, and geologists⁵³. Throughout the poem, Whitman identifies with all manner of people as part of himself, including “the duck-shooter,” “the quadroon girl,” “the machinist,” “the Wolverine,” the baptized child, “the peddler,” “the opium-eater,” and “the prostitutes”. It is from this encyclopedic catalogue of the world that enables Whitman’s lyric subject to “be of these more or less I am, and of these one and all I weave the song of myself.”⁵⁴ The lyric subject of “Song of Myself” is “of one phase and of all phases./ Partaker of influx and efflux I, extoller of hate and conciliation,/ Extoller of amies and those that sleep in each others’ arms.”⁵⁵ As the poet-speaker develops throughout the poem, the subject of the poem ends up containing the world such that “One world is aware and by far the largest to me, and that is myself”⁵⁶. Then, and only then, can the lyric subject speak for the “many long dumb voices,/Voices of the interminable generations of prisoners and slaves,/ Voices of the diseas’d and despairing and of thieves and dwarfs...” and the “forbidden voices,/ Voices of sexes and lusts, voices veil’d and I remove the veil,/ Voices indecent by me clarified and transfigur’d.”⁵⁷ It is this weave, or rather, a focus on “the texture of the weave and not on the nature of its components”⁵⁸ that enables the lyric subject to be; it takes the world to be oneself at the same time one reconstitutes the world by being the site of gathering⁵⁹. Such is how the poet-speaker see themselves “none more and not one a barley-corn less,/And the good or bad I say of myself I say of them.”⁶⁰

The Ghost(s) of the Other

The transtemporal potential of the lyric subject brings into light the capacity of Relation with non-entities and entities of differing temporal moments. Under the logic of traditional Western metaphysics, beings can only interact with entities of the same temporal intervals⁶¹. In contrast, insofar as

creolization enables the relationality of relationships to and with all, with an openness to the totality of the world, there is “no longer need to add: relation between what and what? This is why the French word Relation, which functions somewhat like an intransitive verb, could not correspond, for example, to the English term relationship”⁶². The syntax of the English noun “relationship” pre-inscribes a subject-object relation between the independent subject of the sentence with its modifiers as its dependent properties, whereas the intransitive verb of “Relation” does not specify the kind(s) of relationship it facilitates to other parts of the sentence. “But because what [Relation] relates, in reality, proceeds from no absolute, it proves to be the totality of relatives, put in touch and told.”⁶³ There is nothing that precludes Relation from facilitating a relation between entities of differing temporal moments; on the contrary, the radical experience of the alterity of the other of Thought already present and structuring one’s thinking is most evident when considering the inheritance of history. For the dead do not stay dead – they are reborn anew in their afterlife through their traces in the present to haunt the living.

Given the totality of relation, there is “Non-Being... except outside of Relation” and “Non-Being does not precede Relation”; however, for traditional ‘non-Beings’ to exist in relation to beings, they must exist as qua-beings to the self. This spectral, always-already presence of the Other is what Derrida brings to light with the hauntology of *Spectres of Marx*, specifically with the possibility of the Other-as-spectre, or an Other that is out of joint with the subject’s present. As Derrida explains, this seemingly impossible and temporally disconcerted relation to others must *a priori* have been the case to enable ontology as such: “To haunt does not mean to be present, and it is necessary to introduce haunting into the very construction of a concept... beginning with the concepts of being and time. That is what we would be calling here a hauntology. Ontology opposes it only in a movement of exorcism. Ontology is a conjuration.”⁶⁴ What appears to appear and disappear (like spectres) are that which must always already have been present, and yet they appear out of joint on the part of the subject relating to these non-entities; non-entities are “something that one does not know, precisely, and one does not know if precisely it *is*, if it exists, if it responds to a name and corresponds to an essence. One does not know: not out of ignorance, but because this non-object, this non-present present, this being-there of an absent or departed one no longer belongs to knowledge. At least no longer to that which one thinks one knows by the name of knowledge.”⁶⁵

Indeed, the fact that non-entities were *a priori* present are the very condition for animating the subject as such. The relation to ghostly non-entities is what animates the subject into being as such through a “specular circle: one chases after in order to chase away, one pursues, sets off in pursuit of someone to make him flee, but one makes him flee, distances him, expulses him so as to go after him again and remain in pursuit.”⁶⁶ The attempt to

exorcise the ghost animates the subject is the very condition of their haunting, with “those who inspire fear frighten themselves ... [and] conjure the very specter they represent. The conjuration is in mourning for *itself* and turns its own force against itself.”⁶⁷ This attempt at exorcism cleaves (together and apart) the dead from the subject: “The living ego is auto-immune, which is what they do not want to know. To protect its life, to constitute itself as unique living ego... it must therefore take the immune defenses apparently meant for the non-ego, the enemy, the opposite, the adversary and direct them at once *for itself and against itself*.”⁶⁸ At the same time, the attempt to individuate and otherize the ghost cleaves the dead manifold, as “the experience, the apprehension of the ghost is turned into *frequency*” and a subsequent chain of ghosts⁶⁹. The dead multiply when out of sight (but not out of mind) until the bodiless body of the spirit of all spirits possesses the material for the subject to feel “sensuous non-sensuous, sensuously supersensible.”⁷⁰ We are haunted by the dead (in its multiplicities) even before we are aware that the dead already haunt us.

Likewise, in his attempt to gather all, Whitman’s lyric subject also ends up inheriting the past. Through its relations, the lyric subject becomes all, including all that came before it: “Distant and dead resuscitate, / They show as the dial or move as the hands of me, I am the clock myself.”⁷¹ The poet-speaker is able to conjure the distant and the dead in such a mystical manner, not just because the poet-speaker is already in relation with the distant and the dead but also because the speak-poet is attuned to the trace of the distant and the dead. Despite their apparent absence, the poet-speaker is conscious of how these other of Thought (non-beings under traditional Western metaphysics) nonetheless create the condition of the lyric-self’s being. For even before the presence of the lyric self, the past was always already animating the spirit of the poet-speaker:

Before I was born out of my mother generations guided me,
My embryo has never been torpid, nothing could overlay it.

For it the nebula cohered to an orb,
The long slow strata piled to rest it on,
Vast vegetables gave it sustenance,
Monstrous sauroids transported it in their mouths and deposited it with care.

All forces have been steadily employ’d to complete and delight me,
Now on this spot I stand with my robust soul.⁷²

And yet, the presence of the self effaces both the conditions and the presence of others that enabled the self to spring forth. Moreover, the relation that produces a self is not always a true union, instead producing a “flight of the imagination” that “breaks through all distinctions”⁷³. Given the centrality of the self, every other of Thought rendered legible by the poet-speaker is made

into the thought of Other, as new invocations and introductions to the lyric subject are reincorporated as part of the lyric subject. Interestingly, Whitman acknowledges this transition from other of Thought to thought of Other as a violent transcription whenever the lyric subject shows the presence of the other of Thought within itself. While the poet-speaker identifies as “the poet of the body” and “the poet of the Soul,/ the pleasures of heaven are with [them] and the pains of hell are with [them],/ the first [they] grant and increase upon [themselves], the latter [they] translate into a new tongue.”⁷⁴ The poet-speaker makes clear that this marriage of heaven and hell, body and soul, is only possible by gathering and enframing [*Gestell*] the world within the fourfold of the speaker. At the same time, the act of gathering produces a mutation of some kind, as the granting and increasing of pleasure and translation of pain into “a new tongue” entails a simulation of the original experience. Integrating all elements within the self makes the lyric subject “of one phase and of all phases”; at the same time, the lyric subject is “not the poet of goodness only, [they] do not decline to be the poet of wickedness also.”⁷⁵ This acknowledgement of the intrinsic violence of the lyric subject as a being in Relation with others is what is so unique about Whitman’s lyric subject⁷⁶: unlike the typical lyric subject who assumes “that the self is so healthy and whole that it can exchange identities endlessly, without injuring itself or the process”, Whitman’s lyric subject appears to understand the intrinsic violence of relating, of grafting one’s self to another and vice versa through relation. The poet-speaker reproduces the moment of impression:

Before the “pains of hell” can be “translated into a new tongue,” they must be confronted in all their original hellishness... The self is born anew... to insist upon private identity is to define “the Me myself” as Everyone one is. Body and soul are reconciled, their unity dependent upon the separate function for each; ideal self and actual self are reconciled.⁷⁷

The interplay between self and other that puts the self in relation to the other is not only a procession, but a progression, as the relation “moves towards the One. Like the realm of the One, the interplay allows for now gradations. The interplay, however, goes beyond the cosmic democracy; it insists not only upon equality but upon no distinctions for all.”⁷⁸ It is through Relation that the lyric subject *is* all that they are in relation with: “All this I swallow, it tastes good, I like it well, it becomes mine,/ I am the man, I suffer’d, I was there.”⁷⁹ The self gathers, enframes [*Gestell*], and becomes all regardless of the Other’s consent to enable the self to stand in for the Other. At the same time, this process of gathering and hosting the world in the self also individuates the self *as* self – the self comes to focus as the centre that all others (including the Other) center themselves, eliding both the presence and dependence on the centre has to the other and its peripheries for its own position and relation to the world.

If the lyric subject undergirds Relation, then the self in a poetics of Relation enables a poesis of the self that is totalizing (and perhaps even violent) but not totalitarian. The stability and mutability of the self is what becomes possible through the fashioning of the lyric self as the poetic self becomes an acknowledgement of itself as the site of gathering for the self to come into the world. As Whitman's lyric subject shows, the lyric subject does not give total access to itself – opacities arise from the way it resists the interpretation by the reader and the way it relates to the world of the poem. At the same time, the question of what is and is not, or the question of being and non-being, dissipates as all beings come into existence in and through the relation to the subject. Through the lyric subject, the self becomes the host to all beings, as the self exists vis-à-vis relation to other beings external and internal to itself. The sum product of this intersubjective grafting between the self and Other is the constitution of the self, one that is host to the thought of the Other and the other of Thought. From this poesis, insofar as the subject exists, the self and Other are already in Relation.

Glissant as a Lyric Subject

No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is
a piece of the continent, a part of the main. If a clod be
washed away by the sea, Europe is the less

– John Donne, Meditation XVII

Should one read the self in *Poetics of Relation* as a lyric subject, then who/what is the Other that constitutes the self? An index of this idea of the lyric subject could be gleaned at the end of the book, when Glissant pulls back the curtain to unveil the Other(s) that have enabled the presence of the self in the book:

Is it not one of the conditions of writing today that it conceive of itself as preceded by a pretext of discourse? In any case, this is what usually happens: I accept invitations to expose my points of view publicly whenever the proposed conference fits in with my (nonprojectile) project. And sometimes the suggested theme will have a ripple effect, set rootlets, or swerve in some new direction.

The public lecture functions as a sort of first draft to the written text resulting from it. But this presentation will have determined, meanwhile, the lineages of the text and oriented its economy. The practice of writing then will tighten, or draw out, what the lecture brought to light. Preliminary written texts sometimes function in this process as approaches that foretell and really provoke orality.

These two practices contribute to a phenomenon that is no longer certifiably either "pure" writing or transcribed orality. The consequence of this is that, with each edition of such a text, if there happen to be any,

the temptation arises (by recalling these relayed techniques) to change - to perfect - the letter of it, over and over again. What is related thus varies (at the same time that the substance of Relation moves) toward a perfectibility of expression that does not arrive at an absolute. To what extremities can this go? What is the limit? No doubt to the point where voice begins to fail and the hand stops.⁸⁰

Like a magician revealing the 'trick' to their performance at a final curtain call, Glissant reveals in the endnotes that there was no singular self present throughout the book. Instead, the book itself was a site that gathered a bricolage of various different selves at different moments and contexts, an assemblage of multiplicities to enable a new mode of being. The autopoiesis of the work, or rather, the phenomenology of Glissant, only comes into itself through a poetic relation to the differing selves at different points in time brought together in a porous configuration by the book. Like the Whitman's lyric subject, the self of Glissant in *Poetics of Relations* is porous and open to alterities - it is large and contains multitudes. What contradictions appear appears by necessity, as readers experience Glissant's thoughts at different moments and places in his life. But it is the contradiction, conflict, and mutation of these thoughts that makes Glissant present. The Other that enables the other of Thought in *Poetics of Relation* then is the past selves of Glissant (at Louvain, Berkeley, Martinique, Louisiana, etc...), each of whom overlaps in the space of the text as 'Glissant'⁸¹.

It is through the relation of selves in *Poetics of Relation* that the Glissant of the book appears as host to the past Glissant(s). The construction of the lyric subject produces the self, but a self that both exceeds and recedes its limits in its relationship to the world. The poetic self becomes a site of experience, a fourfold, which gathers past and future selves in Relation. The chain of spectres is the spectres of what one was, is, and becomes - the self itself is out of joint. Such is how:

"Beings remain, as long as Being dissipates.

Relation scatters from Being, asserts the subject.

To himself the subject is a thick cloud of knowledge. That is why Relation also dismantles the thought of non-Being.

That is why it is not: (of) Being, but: - (of) beings.

Non-Being could not be except outside Relation.

Non-Being does not precede Relation, which is not expressed on the basis of any break.

The nonbeing of Relation would be its impossible completion.⁸²

Or, as Whitman's lyric subject explains of the seemingly impossible relations that the poet-speaker is attuned to:

What do you think has become of the young and old men?
And what do you think has become of the women and children?

They are alive and well somewhere,
The smallest sprout shows there is really no death,
And if ever there was it led forward life, and does not wait at the end to
arrest it,
And ceas'd the moment life appear'd.

All goes onward and outward, nothing collapses,
And to die is different from what any one supposed, and luckier...

I am not an earth nor an adjunct of an earth,
I am the mate and companion of people, all just as immortal and
fathomless as myself,
(They do not know how immortal, but I know.)⁸³

Those that the poet-speaker meets, “the young and old men” and “the women and children”, are rendered immortal, both by virtue of having an independent existence outside of the lyric subject and from the lasting impression they made on the lyric subject. But with the presence of the reader in the lyric subject, these relations are rendered further immortal by the mark they leave on the reader. The openness of the lyric subject becomes a way of revealing the self as Being in the being-becoming relation: the self is chimeric, always susceptible to change depending on its contexts and its relations. At the same time, the lyric subject produces an endless métissage of reolization as the self is put into an endless set of Relation with the world, always being open to new forms of relation regardless of its own temporality. The limit of the lyric subject exists only when there is an end in engagement, “where voice begins to fail and the hand stops.”⁸⁴ In transplanting the lyric subject from its original form of the poem to the form of the anthology, Glissant reveals how the construction of the lyric subject is always at play with the formation of the self. The self was always intersubjective, facilitated by the relation to the Other by way of others and other selves past and future. Such is the generative poiesis of self possible via a poetics of Relation.

From this view, the numerous and contradictory Glissants that we initially began this paper with are united once more in a weave. The self is never “cornered in any essence” and never “mixed into any amalgam” because the self only exists as an amalgamation of different beings past, present, and future. Being escapes the interdiction of totalitarian thought, wherein “either the other is assimilated, or else it is annihilated”, and instead Being allows for every other being to become a citizen equal to the subject without subjecting “the other to the transparency experienced by oneself.”⁸⁵ While expanding the independent conception of the self to others would force a totalitarian subjugation of the other as a subject, the lyric sense of self,

insofar as it is already a product of a relation with the Other, is able to become a subject only because the Other was always-already a citizen equal to oneself. All the while the lyric self acknowledges that the Other remains other – just because one is host to others does not entail that one is Other nor that one owns Other. Instead, the Other constitutes the self without becoming subject to the self. From this view, it becomes obvious that Glissant would find “places where [his] identity is obscure to [him]”, for it is through his relation to others, the other of Thought, that he comes to find himself and his own thoughts, always effected by the Other in ways that the self could never comprehend. Moreover, “the fact that it amazes [Glissant] does not mean [he will] relinquish” his identity, for he is who he is insofar as he is the subject of these relations as its product, its common denominator and as an object of Relation that he relates to. One becomes oneself as the site of convergence for the world, where and when one becomes the focal point that brings the world into being.

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- ¹ Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Wing Betsy (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 192.
- ² Édouard Glissant and Manthia Diawara, “Édouard Glissant in Conversation with Manthia Diawara,” trans. Christopher Winks, *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art* 28, no. 1 (2011): 15.
- ³ Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 214.
- ⁴ *Ibid*, 187.
- ⁵ *Ibid*, 187.
- ⁶ *Ibid*, 154.
- ⁷ *Ibid*, 89.
- ⁸ *Ibid*, 34.
- ⁹ *Ibid*, 171.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid*, 144.
- ¹¹ *Ibid*, 180.
- ¹² *Ibid*, 49.
- ¹³ Glissant and Diawara, “Édouard Glissant in Conversation with Manthia Diawara,” 15.
- ¹⁴ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford: OUP, 1979), 111.
- ¹⁵ Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 189-90.
- ¹⁶ Other synonyms of this idea of the lyric subject include, but are not limited to: ‘poetic subject’, ‘lyric I’, ‘poet-speaker’, ‘poetic subject’. For the purposes of this paper, I will refer to this idea as the lyric subject for two reasons: first, to highlight the continued existence of the Other in subject formation; and, expanding on the former point, highlighting how even the lyric subject is dependent on the continued existence of an Other to itself.
- ¹⁷ Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 134.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid*, 14.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid*, 190.
- ²⁰ *Ibid*, 34.
- ²¹ *Ibid*, 171.
- ²² *Ibid*, 65.
- ²³ *Ibid*, 67.
- ²⁴ *Ibid*, 71.
- ²⁵ *Ibid*, 5.
- ²⁶ *Ibid*, 73.
- ²⁷ *Ibid*, 17.
- ²⁸ *Ibid*, 131.

- ²⁹ Glissant and Diawara, "Édouard Glissant in Conversation with Manthia Diawara," 191.
- ³⁰ Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 30.
- ³¹ *Ibid*, 192.
- ³² *Ibid*, 193.
- ³³ *Ibid*, 193.
- ³⁴ *Ibid*, 171.
- ³⁵ *Ibid*, 171.
- ³⁶ *Ibid*, 171.
- ³⁷ *Ibid*, 190.
- ³⁸ *Ibid*, 189-90.
- ³⁹ *Ibid*, 189-90.
- ⁴⁰ For a discussion on how the lyric subject came to dominate poetic subject in other poetic forms, see Virginia Jackson, "Lyric," in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, 4th ed. (Princeton University Press, 2017), <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/acref/9780190681173.001.0001/acref-9780190681173-e-0666>. For a discussion on how ideas from the lyric subject (with its construction of subject) came to influence notions of the self in post-structural debates, see Cuddon, *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, 690-91.
- ⁴¹ J. A Cuddon, *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, 5th ed. (Chichester, West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, A John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., Publication, 2013), 412, <https://resolver.ebscohost.com/Redirect/PRL?EPPackageLocationID=2106155.1755544.21608746&epcustomerid=s9001366>.
- ⁴² Jonathan D. Culler, *Theory of the Lyric* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2015), 2, 14, 94-95, 97, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=1006650>; William Waters, "Address," in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, 4th ed. (Princeton University Press, 2017), <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/acref/9780190681173.001.0001/acref-9780190681173-e-0009>; Mutlu Blasing, *Lyric Poetry: The Pain and the Pleasure of Words* (Princeton, UNITED STATES: Princeton University Press, 2006), 2, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/cornell/detail.action?docID=457754>.
- ⁴³ Blasing, *Lyric Poetry*, 5-6.
- ⁴⁴ While there are multiple versions of "Song of Myself", which express the lyric subject slightly differently (see footnote three for a brief discussion on how different editions of the poem highlight the mutability of porosity of the lyric subject and footnote four for a discussion on the effect of paratextual elements on Whitman's lyric subject) I have chosen to use a single edition of the poem. Unless otherwise stated, all references in this paper to "Song of Myself" reference the 1892 edition.
- ⁴⁵ Howard J Waskow, *Whitman Explorations in Form* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 9.
- ⁴⁶ Waskow, 15.
- ⁴⁷ Walt Whitman, *Song of Myself: Origin, Growth, Meaning*, ed. James E. Miller, jr. (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1964), ll. 1324-1326.

⁴⁸ Ibid, ll. 1309-1318.

⁴⁹ Such metafictional elements are present within the text itself from the various self-conscious references Whitman has. Lines like “I know perfectly well my own egotism” Ibid, l. 1083. and “Eveles, I salute you! come forward!/Continue your annotations, continue your questionings.” Ibid, l. 1083. makes clear that Whitman (as author) knows his position and performance of the writing has a part to play in the construction of the lyric subject.

⁵⁰ Whitman, *Song of Myself*, ll. 355-356.

⁵¹ The ephemerality and mutability of the lyric subject from its dependence on others becomes all the more prominent when considering the publication history of “Song of Myself”. Originally published untitled in the original publication of *Leaves of Grass* in 1855 (Trimble 25), the poem was later titled “Song of myself” in subsequent publications (see W. H Trimble, *Walt Whitman and Leaves of Grass: An Introduction* (Folcroft, Pa.): Folcroft Press, 1970), 25.). The multiple editions of this work highlights how the lyric subject accumulates and expands ad infinitum as the past selves become other to itself - Whitman goes from being a “kosmos” specific to America to an universal one the first (1855) and last (1892) edition of *Song of Myself* (see Whitman, *Song of Myself*, l. 499.), just as the specificity of the grass he venerates once specifically “for the illiterate” and “for the judges of the supreme court” to become an universal grass for all (see Ibid, ll. 354-360.).

⁵² Whitman, *Song of Myself*, ll. 490-492.

⁵³ Ibid, ll. 481-489.

⁵⁴ Ibid, ll. 305-329.

⁵⁵ Ibid, ll. 458-460.

⁵⁶ Ibid, l. 416.

⁵⁷ Ibid, ll. 508-518.

⁵⁸ Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 190.

⁵⁹ It should also be worth noting the way these constructions of the lyric subject comes to haunt its creators - in this mode of self-creation, the art ends up constituting the artist. Quite comically, some of the first reviews of *Leaves of Grass* were written by Whitman himself: while other reviewers thought that his diction “often renders an otherwise striking passage altogether laughable” (Charles Norton, “[Charles Eliot Norton]. ‘Whitman’s Leaves of Grass.’ Putnam’s Monthly: A Magazine of Literature, Science, and Art 6 (September 1855), 321-3.,” The Walt Whitman Hypertext Archive, September 1855, <https://whitmanarchive.org/archive1/works/leaves/1855/reviews/putnum.html>.) that say him as an “arrogant young man who proclaims himself the Poet of the Time” and “roots like a pig among a rotten garbage of licentious thought” (“New York Daily Times (13 November 1856), 2.,” The Walt Whitman Hypertext Archive, November 13, 1856, <https://whitmanarchive.org/archive1/works/leaves/1856/reviews/nytimes.html>.), Whitman used his journalist connections to produce a series of anonymous self-reviews that proclaimed that the publication of *Leaves of Grass* brought with it “an American bard at last!” (Walt Whitman, “[Walt Whitman]. ‘Walt Whitman and His Poems.’ United States Review 5 (September 1855), 205-12.,” The Walt Whitman Hypertext Archive, September 1855, <https://whitmanarchive.org/archive1/works/leaves/1855/reviews/usreview.html>.) with a style that is more subtler than that of Homer, Shakespeare and Tennyson (Walt Whitman, “[Walt Whitman]. ‘An English and American Poet’ [Review of Alfred Tennyson, Maud, and Other Poems and Leaves of Grass]. American Phrenological Journal 22, No. 4 (October 1855), 90-1.,” The Walt Whitman Hypertext Archive, October 1855, <https://whitmanarchive.org/archive1/works/leaves/1855/reviews/phren.html>.). The ensuing

fracas of Whitman's authorship of these reviews of high praise only added to the notoriety and image of Whitman as a poet (see M. Jimmie Killingsworth, "Self-Reviews of the 1855 Leaves, Whitman's Anonymous," The Walt Whitman Hypertext Archive, 1998, https://whitmanarchive.org/criticism/current/encyclopedia/entry_651.html).

⁶⁰ Whitman, *Song of Myself*, l. 401.

⁶¹ See, for example, the discussion surrounding the nonidentity problem in Derek Parfit's *Reasons and Persons* and James Woodward's 1986 essay "The Non-Identity Problem".

⁶² Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 27.

⁶³ *Ibid*, 27.

⁶⁴ Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf, Repr, Routledge Classics (London: Routledge, 2011), 202.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 5.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 175.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 145.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 177.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 133.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 189.

⁷¹ Whitman, *Song of Myself*, ll. 856-857.

⁷² *Ibid*, ll. 1162-1169.

⁷³ Waskow, *Whitman Explorations in Form*, 30.

⁷⁴ Whitman, *Song of Myself*, ll. 422-424.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, l. 463.

⁷⁶ Others have noted the intrinsic violence in the dialectic formation of the self, particularly a Hegelian formulation. Not only has Whitman directly the ideas for his poems to Hegel (Marks 105-106), but scholars have also noted the embodiment of Hegelian dialectics in Whitman's' writings. See Alfred H. Marks, "Whitman's Triadic Imagery," *American Literature* 23, no. 1 (1951): 105-6, 109, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2921434>.

⁷⁷ Waskow, *Whitman Explorations in Form*, 180-81.

⁷⁸ Waskow, 40.

⁷⁹ Whitman, *Song of Myself*, ll. 831-832.

⁸⁰ Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 225.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, 226.

⁸² *Ibid*, 186-87.

⁸³ Whitman, *Song of Myself*, 123-30.

⁸⁴ Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 225.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 49.