

# Short-Circuiting Linguistic Currents

## Return and Impossibility in Glissant's Creolization

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# Short-Circuiting Linguistic Currents

## Return and Impossibility in Glissant's Creolization

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Are we not returning here, in the unforeseeable meanders of Relation, to this abyssal word?

—Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*

A question of repetition: a specter is always a *revenant*. One cannot control its comings and goings because it *begins by coming back*.

—Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*

### Introduction: The Impossible Path of Speech and Language

Whence does the speaking subject of language return? Return is the mark and trajectory of filiation. It transitively entails a prior departure and a place from which one had left—derivatively, on terms not of their own. The detour of language—its *rupta via*, its broken way—is inaugurated by an impossibility inherited in a primordial scene of usurpation. Dispossession here retroactively marks an originary scene of possession: The subject is inducted into a circuit of language that is not their own while a “*prior-to-the-first language*”<sup>1</sup> is postulated in the moment that it is dispossessed. Hence the desire to invent a “*pre-originary*”<sup>2</sup> language is set into motion—to unite with the One that came before separation, before which one was separated, but one which could only be regarded as such after separation. The One—the impossibility—now remains to be fashioned, re-fashioned, or re-invented through another’s language, through the language of the Other. We are presented here with a knot of speech and language toward which Jacques Derrida attunes our attention—namely, the predicament of calling upon a language (the detour) to speak about *the* language (the impossibility) insofar as the latter “does not exist” and given “the absence of all metalanguage.”<sup>3</sup>

The former is a detour insofar as it can only inadequately translate the latter, for the latter is always subject to misrecognition in that it always remains to be given.<sup>4</sup> Yet it is this impossibility and absolute resistance to translation that makes everything translatable. Derrida concisely concludes this discussion: “translation is another name for the impossible.”<sup>5</sup> While the mother tongue [*la langue maternelle*] does not exist as such it nevertheless resides over all language and translation. It is thus the condition of possibility for conceiving of any notion of multilingualism. Though this language can only fail to be recognized as such in its absolute resistance to being understood or grasped through the Lacanian Symbolic (the register of order, language, and law), this *prior-to-the-first* language vies to be heard from within its detours.

What Derrida calls the “impossible path,”<sup>6</sup> allowing him to leave familiar roads, allowing him the slip, and allowing him escape to the unknown, is what both renders return and annuls its possibility. The subject only returns within the domain of the circuits of language, but in each detour—the subject’s ventures down the impossible path—the subject marks sites within language anew. If language “is not at one with itself” it is because there is a gap “inside it”<sup>7</sup> from which the speaking subject departs from themselves to elsewhere that accompany disruptive returns. The moment in which impossibility comes to the fore in speech’s disruptive, perlocutionary return and effects—the “button tie [*point de capiton*]”<sup>8</sup> in language’s circuitous system—is the Real performance of language to engender or reveal meanings carried within its system. Is every return, then, the rehearsal of return’s very impossibility, to a place one can no longer return the same? What does the gap within monolanguage imply for the (in)stability of circuitous illustrations of language? To what forms of speech does this give rise?

In roving the routes of Glissant’s creolization, this essay describes the ways in which return and the impossibility of return render the *short circuits* of language—that is, what enables the currents of language to flow, for linguistic encounters and culture contact to re-produce, reorganize, and create sites within it, and for the system of language to potentially combust. This is what Glissant might refer to as the “accident” of the virus within the computer system: “the virus would manifest the fractal nature of the system; it would be the sign of the intrusion of Chaos, the irremediable indicator, that is, of the asynchronous nature of the system.”<sup>9</sup> The virus is the “sign” or “indicator” of an already asynchronous system—a system not at one with itself. It is at once a part of the computer system as well as what can potentially shut it down. Toward its generative capacity, it is in the affordances of the virus from which the “accidents” natural to poetics emerge.<sup>10</sup> Analogously, it is in this way that the short circuit betrays its circuitry while at the same time performing and actualizing its circuitous potential, giving rise to the re-production of its system in creative ways. The circuitry—which we can simply denote as the circuit’s syntax—is the material order or path necessarily

circumvented and re-produced for the short to elicit recursive inscriptions of meaning within the system of language.<sup>11</sup>

What if instead of where there would be a point of return, or symbolic designation, for this current to rejoin its circuit there is alternatively another short, opening upon other detours, or venturing and relinking instead through a series of errant flows? It is in this way that a series of short circuits reflects the linguistic routes of creolization. In describing the contexts of return in relation to the people of Martinique, Glissant states the following: “the community has tried to exorcise the impossibility of return by which I call the practice of diversion.”<sup>12</sup> But Derrida reminds us that to exorcise also means to conjure: “to attempt both to destroy and to disavow a malignant, demonized, diabolized force, most often an evil doing spirit, a specter, a ghost who comes back or who still risks coming back *post mortem*.”<sup>13</sup> It is only insofar as this ghost was at some point declared dead that it becomes a specter that haunts and risks coming back. This exorcism therefore dredges up and is beholden to what it conjures; it is in this way that ghost “chases” or “hunts” or the attempts to evoke the appearance of the ghostly figure are attempts to reach them “and thus keep them close at hand.”<sup>14</sup> As such, to exorcise the impossibility of return is, in a paradoxical performance, to “wage war...the restless dream, of an execution” in a conjuring which catches up with what it attempts to dispel. What returns is the very impossibility of return. With creolization, current returns only to diverge, deviate, flow in an errant movement to elsewhere in which abyssal origin is found everywhere and nowhere at all. However, insofar as Glissant emphasizes that “the Creole language has another, internal obligation: to renew itself is ever instance on the basis of a series of forgettings,”<sup>15</sup> return to abyssal origin is not itself without a form of *seriality*, even if this form is of a “hidden order.”<sup>16</sup> This circuitry as syntax remains hidden from our sight and is only illuminated in the linguistic spark(le) of the short circuit, a diffraction and refraction of light subject to apprehension by “flash agents,”<sup>17</sup> which its syntax necessarily induces as its legibility escapes.

Derrida and Glissant share the linguistic gestures that belong to the impossible returns and detours of language, even as their circumventions of language unfold in ways that resist absolutely the collapsibility of their speech into one another. Of course, for a relation to absolutely resist collapsibility into constituent components is also what allows for it to remain subject to misrecognition. To accept this misrecognition—the impasse of language—is to find oneself in the dismissed cartographies of speech, the lack of symbolic coordination of which it appears that anything could be said for the subject to say it all. It is clear, however, that not just anything is said, but rather that what is said belongs to what Derrida recalls as “the compulsive impulse to anamnesis”—one whose ostensibly disordered emergences coincide with “[t]he break of tradition, uprooting, the inaccessibility of histories, amnesia, indecipherability, and so on”<sup>18</sup> or a “series of forgettings.”<sup>19</sup> For these

forgettings to be in series they must be serial in that they are renewed towards subsequent forgettings in ways that do not escape repetition but that trouble its apprehension, its symbolic designations. As such, anamnesis can inversely belong to a potent form of reminiscence that rehearses a recollection of not what is forgotten, but of forgetting itself. Such impulses of a return to forget unsettle a “genealogical drive”<sup>20</sup> where the subject claims to know their place, affording Derrida and Glissant the capacity to (ap)pose serious questions to reconsider the problematic of filiation and language, to reframe and trouble conceptualizing the inheritance of a circuit of language that “is not at one with itself”<sup>21</sup> and what it evens means to inherit or return in language more generally. In this vein, Derrida and Glissant allow us to engage the short circuits of language, to interpret its detours, its deviations, and its syntactical mirages that give rise to its spark(le) of intelligibility and the inadequate attempts to surmise its syntax’s ordered forgettings.

In what ways is the speaking subject of language beholden to syntax? In what ways does the speaking subject of creolization give rise to a poetics in its creative re-productions of/within this order?

### Children’s Games: Is Odd or Even the Question?

Jacques Lacan insists that insofar as “[c]ybernetics is a science of syntax, ... it is in a good position to help us perceive that the exact sciences do nothing other than tie the real to a syntax.”<sup>22</sup> However, before making his way to the workings and alternations of the cybernetic machine, Lacan describes the contours it structures which pertain to a drive that Sigmund Freud does not situate in life: The human being does not come (back) to “find death along any old road,” rather, the rhythms of the subject and the routed curves that it takes towards death are already mapped.<sup>23</sup> Through this, Lacan traces the alternating currents of life and death within the realm of thermodynamics:

There is an essential link which must be made right away – when you draw a rabbit out of a hat, it’s because you put it there in the first place. Physicists have a name for this formulation, they call it the first law of thermodynamics, the law of the conservation of energy – if there’s something at the end, just as much had to be there at the beginning.<sup>24</sup>

The human subject heads towards where they were but could not remain in a destiny prophesized by the primordial symbol of their history. They are left to assume a history in the shadows of death – inasmuch as “the symbol first manifests as the killing of the thing”<sup>25</sup> – a death from which the subject was introduced to the serial games of speech (*Fort! Da!*). It is in the symbol’s killing-of-the-thing that commences the haunting consecution of the Thing over the subject. In calling upon Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Lacan suggests that “everything is always there, all of history is always actually present.”<sup>26</sup> We inherit it and are placed within the circuit of its discourse, in

which we are a link—a circuitry in whose configuration the short circuit was inscribed from the outset. And as we know through Derrida, “[i]nheritance is never a *given*, it is always a task.”<sup>27</sup> It sets its path before us, making it ours to follow by enclosing us within it. It summons us through a call elicited from a spectral repetition situated in a future anterior of the present and is issued by the revenant who “*begins by coming back*” inasmuch as it was already there.<sup>28</sup>

The question of chance undoubtedly bears its weight within the realm of cybernetics. Through the work of Edgar Allan Poe, Lacan reveals in the game of even and odd that once symbolic succession (which he exemplifies through detailing variations in the possible sequences of pluses and minuses) is underway “what comes out can no longer be just anything.”<sup>29</sup> The plus-and-minus series, and the field for all possible strategic variations of the game, are governed by laws of succession and beholden to an order in which “the symbol already plays and produces by itself, its necessities, its structures, its organi[z]ations.”<sup>30</sup> The symbol gives rise to its own order in its successive presences and absences. In other words, the cybernetic machine “looks after itself.”<sup>31</sup> Moreover, while the human subject is caught up in this game, he does not foment it: “[H]e takes his place in it, and plays the role of the little *pluses* and *minuses* in it. He is himself an element in this chain which, as soon as it is unwound, organi[z]es itself in accordance with laws. Hence the subject is always on several levels, caught up in crisscrossing networks.”<sup>32</sup> These networks are transversal; they systematically incise and bind subjects to one another, extending within, through, and beyond them to connect with other networks and link with other elements in the chain of discourse.

The alternations that enclose the human subject’s intersubjective fate take place in a children’s game—*Fort! Da!*—wherein the child “destroys the object that causes it to appear and disappear by *bringing about* its absence and presence in advance.”<sup>33</sup> This *there (Da)*, “that is, when it is there without being there,”<sup>34</sup> a promise to be there again, even if it does not exist, if it had not existed, or if it has yet to exist, precipitates a compulsion to repeat and carries a spectral anteriority that discloses a singularity: “that every other is altogether other.”<sup>35</sup> It is in this way that one finds oneself in a discourse not of one’s own, nor “the discourse of the abstract other, of the other in the dyad, of my correspondent,...it is *the discourse of the circuit* in which [they are] integrated”<sup>36</sup>—it is the discourse of the Other. If we take this “terrifying children’s game, unforgettable overthere,” as “interminable,”<sup>37</sup> as inescapable, can there be a form of speech whose syntax does not belong to the repetitious order ushered in by this children’s game? Does the short circuit, as embedded within this historical circuitry, spring off or toward or against this filiation?

Glissant attends to the mechanism of the computer. He distinguishes between poetry and the computer because of the “binary character of the latter.”<sup>38</sup> More specifically, while “[b]inarity is not a simple one-two rhythm,...neither is it a poetic mode” insofar as “accident that is not the result

of chance is natural to poems, whereas it is the consummate vice (the ‘virus’) of any self-enclosed system such as the computer.”<sup>39</sup> We might conceptualize the computer system in this self-enclosed fashion because it functions in a “yes/no/yes”<sup>40</sup> form similar to the binary alternations we gleaned from the children’s games. However, if this virus is the vice of a computer system, it is still nonetheless produced by its very binary interplay. This virus, the “accident” of poetics to which any self-enclosed computer system would disavow, sparks something that the system could not create or perform itself—that is, without the virus. Through emphasizing the short circuit’s inside-out, outside-in relationship with its circuitry, we can surmise that the virus to which Glissant refers was produced in the very affordances of the computational syntax. Does this virus not relate to the computer in the same way that the short circuit does with its circuitry? The series of short-circuits illuminates notions of return and impossibility (as well as the circuitous affordances and occlusions of illumination itself)—that is, to question how the current returns from the short circuit, how it affects or takes part in the system that was a condition for its possibility, and thus how the current in its encounters with others returns anew to mark and re-produce the circuits of language. But, as Glissant notes, return itself is *compromised* in creolization<sup>41</sup>—a return at the mouth of the abyss against the context of the violent conditions of genocide and enslavement from which it emerged.

In “The Open Boat” section of *Poetics of Relation*, Glissant attends to the violent terms from which abyssal beginnings arise. The traumatic losses and separations of the Middle Passage demand questions for the watchwords of filiation. Glissant asks the following: “Is this boat sailing into eternity toward the edges of a nonworld that no ancestor will haunt?”<sup>42</sup> Ocean currents hold within them a movement in which return is rendered impossible; deracination, uprootedness, and the impossibility of return issue a severed filiation. In the wake, that is, in the haunting and irreducible presence of this trauma and irretrievable loss which lies in the belly of modernity,<sup>43</sup> the subjects partake in a movement of subject formation that Glissant—borrowing from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari—calls rhizomatic, moving against rooted notions of a fixed subjectivity. Let us not forget that while the rhizome moves against rooted and fixed forms of subjectivity it too is striated. More specifically, return to abyssal origins does not escape ordered recurrence, even if this takes the form of an ordered disorder affixed to the unknown.

The becoming of the Caribbean subject for Glissant is indelibly linked to the horrors of the unknown:

What is terrifying partakes of the abyss, three times linked to the unknown. First, the time you fell into the belly of the boat. For, in your poetic vision, a boat has no belly; a boat does not swallow up, does not devour; a boat is steered by open skies. Yet, the belly of this boat dissolves you, precipitates you into a nonworld from which you cry out. This boat

is a womb, a womb abyss. It generates the clamor of your protests; it also produces all the coming unanimity. Although you are alone in this suffering, you share in the unknown with others whom you have yet to know. This boat is your womb, a matrix, and yet it expels you. This boat: pregnant with as many dead as living under the sentence of death.<sup>44</sup>

The matrixial space of the abyss births the subject into the unknown. The subjects cannot draw on the loss of their filial chains. In considering a sinthomatic re-invention in place of the failure of the phallic economy (or lack in the Symbolic) and situated with respect to the Real, we can consider Bracha Ettinger's notions of the "potentialities *beyond-the-phallus*" where "*eluding the phallus does not necessarily mean a complete detachability from subjectivity, but rather the creation of a site within it.*"<sup>45</sup> While the subjects escape *phallicious* apprehension of the Symbolic in their subject formation, they re-produce or create sites of subjectivity in its place. In this (non)sense, the creative productions of short circuiting arise from encounters within the matrixial borderspace linked to the m/Other—a performance of the short that is rendered in the abyssal beginnings within which creolizations emerge, reorganize, and renew. Moreover, this abyss, working off the edges of the unintelligible "nonworld," effaces the origin of loss, meaning that "The Open Boat" itself is not the sole "origin" per se, but rather whenever and wherever there is the spoken act of creolization there is a return of the impossibility of return which takes its creative impulse from detours to elsewhere.

Glissant's figuration of the message leaves the irreducibility of impasse (or passage through impasse) and the conditions of translation intact: "speaking one's language and opening up to the language of the other no longer form the basis for an alternative. 'I speak to you in your language voice, and it is in my language use that I understand you.'"<sup>46</sup> A message is delivered from and returned to Glissant: He receives his own message in an inverted form. The joining points of the short circuits within their series of beginnings then work off impasse—each subject returning from an-Other as another beginning at the abyss issued in their conjunction.

Filial dis-locations are the vestiges left in the wake of these conjunctions, only to return, but within a chaotic order and/of disorder that escapes scientific grasps of language. What (dis)order can we then attribute to the serial re-production of these meanings/meetings, these dis-regarded itineraries, to what eludes legible localizability in the symbol's phallic designations?

## The Hidden Order: Chaos and Creolization

Glissant opens the question of order as it pertains to the potential and potentialities of the irreducible confluence of languages: "Is there a hidden order to contact among languages?"<sup>47</sup> For Glissant, this "hidden order"

belongs to *chaos-monde* whose “Chaos is not chaotic” per se. He describes Chaos as order and disorder which “has no language but gives rise to quantifiable myriads of them.” In this sense, while identifiable patterns emerge from *chaos-monde*, the inconclusive nature of these patterns, elements, and expressions (as extensions of *chaos-monde*) persists. Due to their nonlinear processes, chaotic networks do not settle into predictable patterns. It is not a mechanism from which one can arrest its process as such, for “it has no keys.” To mistake that one possesses the keys, or that one has the assurance of certainty that they do not need such keys,<sup>48</sup> to expose or reveal this hidden order is the attempt to wrest or estrange oneself from the Chaos of which they are a part—a resistance indicative of attempting to swim against the currents as one fails to get to the bottom of them.

In what ways does creolization relate to chaotic linguistic and cultural contact, and in what ways does it enable its irreducible currents to flow through speech? Glissant avers that creolization is characterized as “a language whose lexicon and syntax belong to two heterogeneous linguistic masses.”<sup>49</sup> However, instead of holding these differentiated linguistic masses as such, what affordances might be garnered by reframing creolization as instead reflective of a series of the short circuits of language that belong to and re-produce what may be singularly referred to and opaquely rendered as syntax? How might this prevent us from apprehending the irreducibility of creolization’s emergence and bifurcating its composition to instead allow us to question the individuated and component-based visage that we claim to witness? In Glissant’s words, might this help us to “focus on the texture of the weave and not on the nature of its components”?<sup>50</sup> The chaotic expression of creolization is most descriptively pronounced in the impasse of the linguistic encounter, in the enunciation of its very speech. Glissant specifies that “[i]n expanse/extension the forms of *chaos-monde* (the immeasurable intermixing of cultures) are unforeseeable and foretellable.” The impasse of speech in creolization gives rise to its unforeseeable detours and its creative reorganizations of language. The series of short circuits of language relink in unpredictable ways, or more generatively put: creolization gives irreducible expression to and respects the opacity of *chaos-monde*. Its chaotic syntax is both expressed and concealed in language’s circuitous spark. In returning to the virus, Glissant claims that it is in this way that the “accident” of the virus is already a (fractal) part of the nature of the computer system.<sup>51</sup> The short circuit is the “fractal” and necessary component of the circuitry embedded in its very nature. Importantly, Glissant continues, if “the virus would manifest the fractal nature of the system it would be the *sign* of the intrusion of Chaos, the irremediable *indicator*, that is, of the asynchronous nature of the system.”<sup>52</sup> The virus then is the “sign” or “indicator” of an already chaotic order of which it performs, re-presents, re-produces. What then leads to the spectacle upon which the radiant spark(le) of the short circuit becomes apprehended by an expeditious grasp towards knowability? What forgetting and non-sense makes this (im)possible?

Forgetting is an escape down the “impossible path” but not in any ordinary way nor for any insignificant circumvention. Through Deleuze and Guattari’s first volume of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia, Anti-Oedipus*, we might consider the ways in which creolization actualizes “forces that escape coding, scramble the codes, and flee in all directions.”<sup>53</sup> Where there would be a filial designation located within the register of the Symbolic, there is a hole—a short circuit in place of the hole—escaping the normative codes of discourse but not without its effect on them. The impossibility of return affords creolization to take another detour in its splitting off in perceptibly unpredictable directions, extending and exteriorizing its motions (off the surface). I write “perceptibly” to specify that the vast creative expanse of creolization does not extend just anywhere and in any which way, for it too is beholden to an order that structures its series of “forgettings” and its “impossibilities.”<sup>54</sup> However, this order and its linguistic expressions cannot be placed in familiar ways and as such is necessarily subject to symbolic misrecognition. Forgetting, as belonging to a series, comes up when one least expects it or more specifically when one could not expect it. This is effectively how creolization reinvigorates its opaque syntax, its hidden order. It then renews itself towards subsequent forgettings in a repetition of anamnesis via the path of detour and the unwitting practice of diversion. But instead of this compulsion to repeat corresponding to the unleashing of the “genealogical drive” and a strict filial designation, it refracts its errant trajectories upon other ventures, opened within and against the abyss.

It is important to remember that this abyss is not without site, as it opens movements of deterritorialization and processes of reterritorialization through which decoding performs its escapes and gives rise to other sights. Indeed, the sites/sights of Relation are made possible by inexistences and impossibilities that shape their detours. The *minus one* for Lacan represents the signifier most purely as an absence or for its inability to be complete and adequately accounted for while standing within the battery of signifiers: “a signifier is what represents the subject to another signifier,” and thus it “can only be a line that is drawn from its circle without being counted in it.”<sup>55</sup> The symbolic illuminations of the circuit of discourse are rendered from the offscreen work of the *minus ones*, its electrons, that give the s(cr)een its glimmer of intelligibility, its patina of meaning. This comes at an expense: the electrons give way to entropy, *E*, allowing for the possibility of them to release photons. The series of short circuits illuminates the surface while an irreducible opacity (of the *minus ones*) of the syntax makes this spectacle possible. The rendering of opacity is not only an incidental quality of these short circuits but rather is necessarily embedded in its elemental basis, *mors tua vita mea*: it resists absolute entropy, that is, the death of the symbolic universe. It makes something seen and unseen in a creative production at the ultimate risk of death (which I note with respect to Glissant’s claims regarding the fragility of creolization).<sup>56</sup> This is why in place of falling short of the hole of the Symbolic, the short circuit, in an aesthetic production of *chaos-monde*,

“embraces all the elements and forms of expression of this totality...: it is totality’s act and its fluidity, totality’s reflection and agent in motion.”<sup>57</sup> Its respective detours thus do not detach from subjectivity and are not disconnected from the Symbolic, but rather, are productive encounters created in a movement towards the short circuit in place of what it lacks—a forgetting which folds back on an impossibility of return, creating an array of optical phenomena in its spark-inducing creases.

### Syntactical Mirages: Diffraction and the “Radiant Sparkle”

To set the scene, or the screen, of visibility is not an act that happens on top of what is apparent or “present,” but it is what happens behind the scenes that we do not see that allows there to be a “‘reality’ (to which ‘actuality’ refers),”<sup>58</sup> that is, the very apparentness of presence, its staging. Derrida’s concept, “artificiality,” indicates that “actuality is *made*,” and while “it is important to know what it is made of,...it is just as important to know that it is made.”<sup>59</sup> Moreover, actuality “is not given, but actively produced, sifted, contained, and performatively interpreted by many hierarchizing and selective procedures—*false* or *artificial* procedures that are always in the service of forces and interests of which their ‘subjects’ and agents...are never sufficiently aware.”<sup>60</sup> It is the working fact that there is a concealment of the behind-the-scene that one’s attention is drawn to an elsewhere, to what we might call “reality,” in which we confine ourselves in the walls of our own tower without view of what made this construction possible. If a novelty is struck by what is present-at-hand then it gives rise to the predicament of one’s enthralment by the scene of what was already there. It is the drawing of the subject’s attention towards the notion that there is an order hidden from sight in which one already plays a part, in which one is (re-en)acting, and of which any “method acting” is a neurotic preoccupation.

The spark(le) of the linguistic contact of the short circuit gives rise to apprehension of the visible and intelligible. It is this that sets out the path of the “flash agents”: Glissant describes that “[t]hey send consciousness hurtling into the sudden certainty that is in possession of the obvious keys of interaction or, usually, into the assurance that it does not need such keys.”<sup>61</sup> As such, the short circuit at once sets the trap for the violence of flash agents in its setting-of-the-stage and renders opaque the order beneath the flash. The flash agents do not need keys because they attempt to conceal or they fail to acknowledge such an order to which they are beholden (if their attention is even drawn to such an order)—they imposture as its exception. This is why any production of “newness” of creolization should not be disconnected from the hidden order through which it produces and of which it reproduces. Any production of newness must be considered as both being opened by and opening a space within the order that was already there. It is inscribed in a series of short circuits that both is the path and marks the path of the circuitry.

Concealing this already thereness, flash agents are caught up in the diffractory light of the spark, its “linguistic sparkle,”<sup>62</sup> iteratively deferring recognition of this hidden order of syntax—forever a sight-to-come, a syntactical order awaiting discovery in the *phallicious* apprehensions of science.

This diffraction of the short circuit also gives rise to a refraction circulating among the flash agents, what we might refer to as a *syntactical mirage*. The mirage is an optical illusion caused by atmospheric conditions, especially within the context of heat-generated refractions and distortions of light. The heat emanations of the spark, of the dense quantities of current flowing through the short circuit, produce distortions that can cause one to question the conditions of actuality or dismiss these conditions in favor of assuming a certainty against them or can even cause one to faint. The syntax of the current of *minus ones* offers light, but its mirages can also stun, disorient, or deceptively reshape in ways that conceal its own opaque movement. The *minus ones* produce the spark(le) of visibility subject to the apprehension of flash agents and those who take a certain path towards the towers of science.

Is this a flash in which Glissant himself is not stunned? Is Glissant not enamoured of the spectacle of the short circuits? If we assume that the series of short circuits is creolization, from which he posits the syntax of two (or multiple) languages, Glissant thus holds them (the differentiated languages) both in an attempted suspension of current in which the “I” forms around the ocular in a resistance to its flows. The fragmented and fragmenting “I” forms in the subject’s illusory prospect that one can swim against currents in the circuits of discourse. Moving against this resistance, moments of escape are rendered most fragile and bare through the short circuit that is already inscribed in a circuitry. Glissant describes his fear that creolization would be a language “missing from the radiant sparkle...of the *chaos-monde*”<sup>63</sup>—but it is in this miss from which this essay has emphasized that creolization is rendered opaque, distancing (or more accurately, escaping) from the violence of knowability by putting itself on its very line. The Other is not a mere contributor to the current but is what (re)sets its very flow—resistance is *understandable*, but perhaps that is the problem. It is in the resistance produced in response to the short circuit’s changes to the flows of current in which divisions upon return can be made or staged. When resistance is at its lowest (or what we can even assume is asymptotically approaching zero) current flows unimpeded (or what we can assume asymptotically approaches infinity) through the short circuit.<sup>64</sup> What *minus ones* then give rise to the resistance in which the “I” of Glissant forms? What conditions his sights/sites? What other absences are the conditions for his visage? And what only refractory light can we shed upon them, or are they better left in the opaque elsewhere to which his currents trend?

*This is a correction to the original article. For information about the changes made, please see the erratum linked as a supplemental file on the articles landing page. The information will also be available at DOI 10.5195/jffp/2026.1122 in volume XXXIV, no. 1/2 (2026)*

- <sup>1</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other: or, The Prosthesis of Origin*, trans. Patrick Mensah (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 61 (italics in original).
- <sup>2</sup> Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other*, 64 (italics in original).
- <sup>3</sup> Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other*, 63, 66, & 69 (italics in original); Jacques Lacan, “The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious,” in *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company Inc., [1966] 2006), 691.
- <sup>4</sup> Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other*, 67.
- <sup>5</sup> Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other*, 57.
- <sup>6</sup> Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other*, 66.
- <sup>7</sup> Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other*, 65.
- <sup>8</sup> Lacan, “The Subversion of the Subject,” 681.
- <sup>9</sup> Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, [1990] 2010), 139.
- <sup>10</sup> Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 82.
- <sup>11</sup> By recursion, or history as recursion, or “recursive analytics,” through Ann Laura Stoler’s invocation of Michel Foucault, I refer to the ways in which historically contingent qualities fold back onto themselves. Rather than in its mathematical formulation of recursion as a process of “repeating items in a self-similar way,” Foucault emphasizes that such histories are less marked by a sameness of repetition than through “processes of partial inscriptions, modified displacements, and amplified recuperations”; see Ann Laura Stoler, *Duress: Imperial Durabilities in Our Times* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 26-27.
- <sup>12</sup> Édouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, trans. J. Michael Dash (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, [1989] 1999), 18.
- <sup>13</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York, NY: Routledge, [1993] 1994), 59.
- <sup>14</sup> Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 175.
- <sup>15</sup> Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 69.
- <sup>16</sup> Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 118.
- <sup>17</sup> Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 166.
- <sup>18</sup> Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other*, 59-60.
- <sup>19</sup> Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 139.
- <sup>20</sup> Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other*, 60.

- <sup>21</sup> Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other*, 65.
- <sup>22</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book II: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1954-1955*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Sylvana Tomaselli (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company Inc., [1978] 1991), 305.
- <sup>23</sup> Lacan, *Book II*, 80-81.
- <sup>24</sup> Lacan, *Book II*, 81.
- <sup>25</sup> Jacques Lacan, "The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis," in *Ecrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company Inc., [1966] 2006), 263.
- <sup>26</sup> Lacan, *Book II*, 71.
- <sup>27</sup> Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 67 (italics in original).
- <sup>28</sup> Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 11 (italics in original).
- <sup>29</sup> Lacan, *Book II*, 193.
- <sup>30</sup> Lacan, *Book II*, 193.
- <sup>31</sup> Lacan, *Book II*, 81.
- <sup>32</sup> Lacan, *Book II*, 192-193 (italics in original).
- <sup>33</sup> Lacan, "The Function and Field," 262 (italics in original).
- <sup>34</sup> Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 124.
- <sup>35</sup> Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 217.
- <sup>36</sup> Lacan, *Book II*, 89 (italics added).
- <sup>37</sup> Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other*, 73.
- <sup>38</sup> Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 82.
- <sup>39</sup> Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 82.
- <sup>40</sup> Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 82.
- <sup>41</sup> Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 118.
- <sup>42</sup> Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 7.
- <sup>43</sup> Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 74.
- <sup>44</sup> Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 8.
- <sup>45</sup> Bracha L. Ettinger, *The Matrixial Borderspace* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 56 (italics in original).
- <sup>46</sup> Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 107.
- <sup>47</sup> Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 99.
- <sup>48</sup> Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 118.
- <sup>49</sup> Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 118.
- <sup>50</sup> Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 190.
- <sup>51</sup> Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 139.

- <sup>52</sup> Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 139 (italics added).
- <sup>53</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, [1972] 1983), xxi.
- <sup>54</sup> Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 69; Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 18.
- <sup>55</sup> Lacan, "The Subversion of the Subject," 693-694.
- <sup>56</sup> Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 93.
- <sup>57</sup> Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 94.
- <sup>58</sup> Jacques Derrida, "The Deconstruction of Actuality," in *Negotiations: Interventions and Interviews, 1971-2001*, trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 86.
- <sup>59</sup> Derrida, "The Deconstruction of Actuality," 86 (italics in original).
- <sup>60</sup> Derrida, "The Deconstruction of Actuality," 86 (italics in original).
- <sup>61</sup> Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 166.
- <sup>62</sup> Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 98.
- <sup>63</sup> Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 98.
- <sup>64</sup> This can be attributed to the simple formula of " $V=IR$ ," where " $V$ " is voltage, " $I$ " is current, and " $R$ " is resistance.