Since 1950, a flow of theoretically resonant and poetically potent writing has emerged from the French Caribbean. Much of the passion and appeal of this work—by authors such as Édouard Glissant, Patrick Chamoiseau, Simone Schwarz-Bart, and Daniel Maximin—lies in its approach to time and to space, an approach still reverberating with the shock of displacement and its various after-tremors: the far-reaching expropriations of enslavement; a bracing sense of diversity; the charge of dislocation; the creative potential of radical relativization and relationality.

Through readings of high-profile as well as less acclaimed writing, *Soundings in French Caribbean Writing* tracks some of the more striking tensions and tropisms informing the French Caribbean imagination of space and time. Whether probing Joseph Zobel's configuration of plantation and urban time-space, or registering the relative imprint of European, African, and local American gravitations in Maryse Condé's work, it foregrounds the dynamics of writing itself. For it is largely by pressurizing narrative, diversifying genre, and highlighting textual meshwork and intertextual palimpsest that French Caribbean writing both stresses and manipulates innumerable intersections: between time and space, history and memory, chronology and duration, synchrony and allochrony, voice and text, place and displacement, theory and practice, identity and relativity.

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THE SHOCK OF SPACE AND TIME

Mary Gallagher

recomposition, but it would be a mistake to dissolve the specificity of individual instances within some general theory of what intertextuality is or does. In the first place, there are as many examples of intertextuality as there are texts. Even within the *créolité* movement, even within that movement's foray into the genre of memoirs of childhood, and therein, even in relation to intertextual reference to the same poet and the same work, Raphaël Confiant's *Ravines du devant-jour* creates an entirely different intertextual relation to Saint-John Perse than the one realized in *Antan d'enfance*. Intertextuality can perhaps be best regarded in this context as a poetic language of relation, each time unique, but always engaging the reader in a *process* of relation, not just between texts, *œuvres*, genres, and writers, but also between places and times.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Plantation Revisited: Revising Time

> Maintenez-vous en état de veille . . . la plantation, immuable dans le tremblement, vient jusqu'à vous.[1]

In the French Caribbean imagination of local time and space, few 'chronotopes' are of greater significance than those of the plantation and the town. It is in relation to these two nodal topoi that most other micro- or macro-spaces on the islands are defined, usually as tributary or oppositional. They configure not only Caribbean space, but also Caribbean time. Although it would be tempting to discuss here questions such as the relation of natural or uncultivated space (sea, forest, river) to planted space, or the rich semiology of toponyms, this chapter attempts to keep both space and time in focus together. This aim is facilitated by the fact that, given the collapse of the plantation system in the mid-twentieth century, 'plantation writing' is fundamentally retrospective. Unlike the urban chronotope, it is, axiomatically, a 'lieu de mémoire'.[2]

DEFINING A TOPOS

In the Caribbean, as in the American 'Deep South', the Brazilian north-east, and the islands of the Indian Ocean, the plantation—growing sugar, cotton, coffee, or tobacco—was the pivotal element

[1] 'Keep yourselves in a state of watchfulness . . . the plantation, immutable in the quaking, will come right up to you'; Glissant, *Mahagony*, 249.

[2] Keith Alan Sprouse, '*Lieu de mémoire, lieu de créolité*: The Plantation as Site of Memory', *Cincinnati Romance Review*, 18 (1999), 153–61. The title of this article, more than its content (a critique of *créoliste* positions on gender and *marronnage*), is suggestive of the resonance of the plantation *imaginaire* in contemporary writing.

in the imperial equation. Throughout these three zones, as Édouard Glissant puts it, 'la même organisation rythme la production économique et fonde un style de vie' ('the same organization would create a rhythm of economic production and form the basis of a style of life').[3] Given that the plantation system was the cradle of Creole society and culture and that it flourished for about three centuries, the writing of these regions might be expected to recall, if not reproduce, its rhythms. Whether or not late-twentieth-century French Caribbean writing repeats the plantation paradigm on a structural level, it is certain that, on a much more banal, strictly referential level, it has revisited the scene of the plantation compulsively. Indeed, in one of its more productive contemporary veins, it subjects that system to a radical reassessment, itself symptomatic of a far-reaching revisionism in contemporary French Caribbean thought.

Édouard Glissant defines the plantation as an 'une organisation socialement pyramidale, confinée dans un lieu clos, fonctionnant apparemment en autarcie mais réellement en dépendance, et dont le mode technique de production est non évolutif parce qu'il est basé sur une structure esclavagiste' ('an organization formed in a social pyramid, confined within an enclosure, functioning apparently as an autarky but actually dependent, and with a technical mode of production that cannot evolve because it is based on a slave structure').[4] This definition dwells on the spatial and temporal dimensions of the institution, which is represented as an enclosed and constricted space, and as a non-evolving or indeed static organization, largely because of its dependence on slavery. Glissant also underlines the constraints imposed by the colony's fixation on the distant European centre. This 'extraversion' causes a great deficit of autonomy and, combined with dependence on slavery, it limits change and creativity.

Joseph Zobel's *La Rue Cases-Nègres*, set in 1930s Martinique, is perhaps the most widely read and most comprehensive literary representation of the structure of plantation space and time in the French Caribbean.[5] The socio-spatial configuration of Zobel's

[3] Glissant, *Poétique de la Relation*, 77; *Poetics of Relation*, 63.

[4] *Poétique de la Relation*, 78; *Poetics of Relation*, 64.

[5] Although less well known than *La Rue Cases-Nègres*, Zobel's novel *Diab'là* (Paris: Présence africaine, 1946) is even more fundamentally a rural novel than the better-known work, which concentrates principally on the rural–urban shift.

plantation as a hermetically sealed time capsule, located in Petit-Morne, is sketched out by the narrator at the very start of the novel. The hierarchical regimen of plantation society is mirrored in the pyramidal organization of physical space: the *blanc créole* of this particular plantation is an absentee who leaves no mark on the visible landscape; beneath him is the *géreur*, the manager or agent, who alone lives in a proper house, and subordinate to the *géreur* is the *économe* (or overseer), followed by the *commandeur* (driver), then the *nègres* (blacks), and finally, at the base of the pyramid, the *petite bande* or child gang. The row of cabins housing the plantation workers is the protagonist/narrator's place of origin and the seminal location of the story; it is so significant that the entire novel bears its name. In fact, the expression is less a name than a generic term, since every plantation had its own 'black shack alley'.

The rigid social structure of the plantation is comfortingly Euclidean and resonates as such with its Newtonian calibration of time. This explains its deep-rooted attraction for De Cassagnac, the *béké* of Raphaël Confiant's novel, *Eau de café*:

> la canne est toute une civilisation, vous comprenez. Elle règle la vie de quatre heures du matin à six heures du soir. Chacun est à son poste: le commandeur qui distribue les tâches et en surveille l'accomplissement, les coupeurs . . . les amarreuses . . . les petites bandes de négrillons . . .[6]

This inflexible temporal order is reflected in the strict management of space (memorably celebrated by Saint-John Perse in 'Pour fêter une enfance')[7] and exacerbated by the pervasive sense of closure. In Raphaël Confiant's *Commandeur du sucre*, what Glissant has termed the plantation's 'autarky' is expressed in spatial terms: 'L'habitation est un enclos. Le monde extérieur n'existe pas pour ceux qui y vivent' ('The plantation is an enclosure. For those who

[6] Raphaël Confiant, *Eau de café* (Paris: Grasset & Fasquelle, 1991), 39. 'a whole civilization is based on the sugarcane, you see. The cane regulates life from four in the morning to six in the evening. Everyone is at their post then: from the driver who assigns the work and oversees the labour, the cutters . . . the binders . . . the child gangs.'

[7] 'A droite | on rentrait le café, à gauche le manioc'; 'Et par ici étaient les chevaux bien marqués, les mulets au poil ras, et par là-bas les bœufs; | ici les fouets, et là le cri de l'oiseau Annaô—et là encore la blessure des cannes au moulin' ('To the right | the coffee was brought in, to the left the manioc'; 'And over here were the horses duly marked, smooth-coated mules, and over there the oxen; | here the whips, and there the cry of the bird Annaô—and still there the wound of the sugar-canes at the mill'; *ŒC* 25; *EOP* 25).

live inside it, the outside world does not exist').[8] The same association of constriction and confinement is highlighted in *La Rue Cases-Nègres* by the fact that the alley where the labourers live is located right beside the canefields. There is thus no room for a hiatus between labour and life, between exploitation and existence. Moreover, the double echo—alliteration and assonance—linking the terms 'cases' and 'cannes' underlines this confining contiguity (a similar effect operates in English too: 'cane | cotton' and 'cabins'). A further index of closure, this time capitalist closure, is the plantation shop, run by the wife of the *géreur* (agent). The claustrophobic effect of this closed circuit of exchange, this absence of internal boundaries between life and work and between shelter and exploitation, is reinforced by the fact that the workers metonymically refer to this shop as 'la maison'.[9] In Zobel's novel, the factory or sugar-processing plant (often linked to a rum distillery) is also a significant locus, a fundamental part of the plantation's production system. The refinery reproduces the structures of the plantation, its organization of labour mirroring the racial hierarchy that obtains in the canefields. Thus, the factory foreman, Justin Roc, a *métis*, is a former plantation *géreur*. The closed circuit of agricultural production and industrialized processing is also exposed in Raphaël Confiant's diptych, *Commandeur du sucre* and *Régisseur du rhum*,[10] both set, like *La Rue Cases-Nègres*, in 1930s Martinique, the first in the canefields, the second in the distillery, and both figuring the same cast of characters.

Placing the plantation at the centre of his reflection on the 'repeating island' paradigm, Antonio Benítez-Rojo characterizes it as a machine in the Deleuzian sense:

> This family of machines almost always makes cane sugar, coffee, cocoa, cotton, indigo, tea, bananas, pineapples, fibers, and other goods whose cultivation is impossible or too expensive in the temperate zones; furthermore, it usually produces the Plantation, capitalized to indicate not just the presence of plantations but also the type of society that results from their use and abuse.[11]

Benítez-Rojo's reading of the Caribbean is based on what he terms

[8] Raphaël Confiant, *Commandeur du sucre* (Paris: Écriture, 1994), 51.
[9] *La Rue Cases-Nègres*, 105; *Black Shack Alley*, 61.
[10] Raphaël Confiant, *Régisseur du rhum* (Paris: Écriture, 1999).
[11] Benítez-Rojo, *Repeating Island*, 9.

the 'brand-new paradigm' of Chaos Theory, according to which 'within the (dis)order that swarms around what we already know of as Nature, it is possible to observe dynamic states or regularities that repeat themselves globally'.[12] In the Caribbean context, the Cuban critic sees not so much shapes as tropisms or movements repeating themselves. For example, as the title of his study suggests, he notes the dissemination across the Caribbean of a dynamic of disconnection or separation. In this way, the islands' spatial discreteness is repeated in the strict and closed organization of plantation and factory labour, and in the further repetition of discrete or isolated units in the plantation's residential arrangements. Indeed, in Glissant's *Le Quatrième Siècle*, it is the entire (post-plantation) island of Martinique that is represented as a 'closed space', set apart from the 'world', the latter being configured as a kind of outer space that occasionally hits the island like a meteor. Its population is bedazzled 'par tout ce qui, légitimement ou non, se proclamait l'émanation et la représentation de l'ailleurs. Comme si c'était un morceau miraculeux du monde qui venait chaque fois traverser en météore l'espace clos de l'ici' ('by anything that, legitimately or not, proclaimed that it emanated from and represented that somewhere else—coming every time like a miraculous bit of the world, like a meteor passing through the enclosed space here').[13] One could expand on Benítez-Rojo's insight by observing the importance for the Caribbean imagination of temporal disconnection too, as in the intense interest manifested in discrete 'islands of time', for example journeys or childhood.

'PLANTATION' OR 'HABITATION': WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Although historians still refer to the late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century colonization of Ireland as the Leinster, Munster, and Ulster 'plantations', the term functions in the Irish context as an overwhelmingly figurative allusion to the English conquest, clearing, and settlement of Ireland. Sheltering behind its benignly organic primary meaning (cultivation of the land), the term 'plantation' euphemizes in the Irish context what was primarily, and in

[12] Ibid. 2.
[13] Glissant, *Le Quatrième Siècle*, 255; *The Fourth Century*, 259.

most cases, purely a policy of agrarian dispossession and usurpation.[14] In the Caribbean, the term enacts a similar elision, less dramatically than in the Hibernian situation, only in so far as the superimposition of literal and figurative meanings is much more motivated in the so-called 'New World': there, the colonial settlement was, in fact, based on the plantation of labour-intensive crops and on a punishing system of production sustained by slavery and indenture. And yet, regardless of this literal reference, the principal and permanent object of plantation in the 'New World' context also was the displaced population. Hence, in the Caribbean, the term 'plantation' designated the entire colonial system of production and resettlement based on transportation and slavery. Furthermore, whereas in Ireland the indigenous population was colonized, and its space occupied, in the French Caribbean islands, virtually the entire indigenous population was either eliminated or expelled. In this sense, voluntarily or involuntarily, outsiders came to occupy the islands completely. Most colonial contexts produced a certain level of the 'extraversion' indicated in Glissant's definition of the plantation. But in the Caribbean, this tension between colonial space, on the one hand, and the umbilical pull tugging the settlers' attention back towards some original space or other characterized almost every single element of the population. Local observers like Moreau de Saint-Méry in the eighteenth century,[15] European travellers like Anthony Trollope in the following century,[16] and contemporary historians[17] alike draw attention to

[14] See Nicholas Canny, 'Early Modern Ireland *c.*1500-1700', in R. Foster (ed.), *The Oxford Illustrated History of Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 104–60: 131–9.

[15] In Saint-Domingue, in the first part of the 18th century, 'talk of definitive or provisional return to France is all the rage . . . everyone considers themselves as just passing through in a land where they often find their last rest': Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Description topographique, physique, civile, politique et historique de la partie française de l'isle Saint-Domingue* (1779; Paris: Société française d'outre mer, 1984), i, 34.

[16] Trollope's comments are quoted in Ch. 7.

[17] The historian Pierre Pluchon distinguishes between the planters of Saint-Domingue (present-day Haiti) and those of the smaller Windward Islands: the former are expatriates who see their tenure as strictly provisional, whereas the latter are more likely to be settled and adapted, or 'Creoles'; 'les Iles du Vent ont une société plus enracinée que celle de Saint-Domingue': Pierre Pluchon, *Histoire des Antilles et de la Guyane* (Toulouse: Privat, 1982): 171. Similarly, Gabriel Debien notes that the planter in Saint-Domingue, although he might call himself a 'habitant', is not a builder, his aim being rather to make a quick fortune: 'le colon de Saint-Domingue, quand il se dit "habitant" n'est pas un bâtisseur. Son but est de faire fortune au plus tôt . . .': 'Les Grand'cases des plantations à Saint-Domingue aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles', *Notes d'histoire coloniale*, 138 (1970), 1.

the unstable, provisional nature of the parenthetical attachment often formed with the Caribbean colonies by the first generations of European settlers. All these writers recognize, however, that the planter population of the French Leeward Islands put down roots much more rapidly than those of other islands.[18]

Significantly, in the French Caribbean context, the term 'plantation' is usually jettisoned altogether, or else—in the collocation 'Plantation-Habitation'—it is yoked to the term that frequently replaces it. The word 'habitation' would seem to be derived, as Régis Antoine suggests, from the expressions 'habitué' and 'habitant' used to qualify the planter over the 'first centuries of French settlement of the Antilles'.[19] It is in this historical sense that Édouard Glissant resurrects it: 'Il y eut une servante de cuisine pour hasarder de demander à *l'habitant* s'il comptait vendre le nouveau né, une fois enfant' ('There was one kitchen slave who ventured to ask the *planter* if he was intending to sell the newborn infant once it had become a child').[20] Régis Antoine notes that certain Creole idioms and toponyms retain this historical usage: 'crabes zhabitants' for example.[21] In Haiti, however, the term 'habitant' has survived up to the present to denote peasants working the land.[22] The temporal implications of these cognate expressions, especially

[18] The Creole residences described by Le Père Labat have an air of permanence, boasting 'beautiful avenues, tall trees, oak or elm, planted in rows and carefully tended', Le R. P. Jean-Baptiste Labat, *Nouveau voyage aux isles d'Amérique*, iii (1742), 16 (repr. Fort-de-France: Éditions des Horizons Caraïbes, 1972).

[19] Antoine, *La Littérature franco-antillaise*, 35.

[20] Glissant, *La Case du commandeur*, 159. Emphasis mine.

[21] Antoine, *La Littérature franco-antillaise*, 35.

[22] Jacques Roumain, *Gouverneurs de la rosée* (Paris: Éditeurs français réunis, 1944); tr. Langston Hughes and Mercer Cook as *Masters of the Dew* (Reynal & Hitchcock, 1947; repr. with introd. by J. Michael Dash (London and Kingston: Heinemann Educational, 1978): 'il n'y a d'autre Providence que son travail d'habitant sérieux, d'autre miracle que le fruit de ses mains' (p. 47). In the English translation, the word 'habitant' is not translated ('And there's no providence but hard work, no miracles but the fruit of your hands', p. 54), although from the context it clearly refers to those who toil on the land. Émile Ollivier uses it in the same sense: 'Personnellement, il n'avait rien contre ces gens de la ville qui voulaient s'enrichir de plus en plus, mais les habitants ne devraient pas faire les frais de leur prospérité' ('On a personal level he had nothing against the townsfolk who just wanted to get richer and richer, but the country dwellers should not have to pay for their prosperity'): *Passages* (1991; Paris: Le Serpent à Plumes, 1994).

their connection with the notion of 'habitude', are highly significant. André Leroi-Gourhan recognizes that the term 'demeure', or 'dwelling', a more poetic synonym of 'habitation' in French, suggests a somewhat sentimental notion of vague duration and sedentary space.[23] Pierre Bourdieu, for his part, uses the term 'habitus' to refer to the positions in social space associated with the system of 'durable dispositions' ('dispositions durables') or persistent world-views characteristic of different 'classes'. Bourdieu thus harnesses both the temporal connotations of duration or durability implicit in the term 'habit' and the spatial notion of (dis)positions in order to suggest social grooves, ruts, or furrows, thus echoing the 'rhizomatic' philological and semantic network linking notions of habit, settlement, persistence, custom, culture, and cultivation latent in the hybrid expression 'Plantation-Habitation'.

Use of the word 'habitation' as a synonym for 'plantation' is very widespread in the French Caribbean and not only within those contemporary discourses that seek to dissociate the entire plantation system from the negative associations to which it has long and legitimately been tethered. Thus Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant point out in their survey of Caribbean literature, entitled *Lettres créoles*: 'aux Antilles, le système des plantations devrait s'appeler "système d'habitation" ' ('in the Caribbean islands the plantation system should be called the "habitation" system').[24] They justify their prescription of this terminological distinction, widely observed in the French-colonized Antilles from the seventeenth century onwards, by referring to the disparity in area between the vast latifundaria of continental America and the more restricted colonial demesnes of the French Caribbean. For the reduced scale of the latter is held to explain the special intensity of French Caribbean creolization or cultural mixing. In other words, since the Big House of the *béké* was a real and visible centrepoint in the Caribbean plantation, slaves or labourers came into closer contact with its values or, to quote Chamoiseau and Confiant: 'tout cela amplifia les interactions de la créolisation' ('this all amplified the opportunities for creolization').[25]

[23] 'connotation sentimentale de durée vague et d'espace sédentaire', André Leroi-Gourhan, 'Demeure: "Espace construit dans lequel on vit" ', *Corps écrit, La Demeure*, 9 (1984), 9–13: 9.

[24] Chamoiseau and Confiant, *Lettres créoles*, 35.

[25] Ibid. 36

Limitation of scale is also held to explain the relatively porous nature of the *habitation*'s periphery. Towns, ports, and, thereby, the Metropolitan connection would all have impinged on the life of the French Caribbean plantation rather more intensely than would have been possible in the vast continental plantations or even in the estates of larger Caribbean islands such as Cuba or present-day Haiti.

Clearly, however, the *créolité* movement also promotes the term 'habitation' because of its connotations. Firstly, it suggests the quasi-ontological category of dwelling (witness Heidegger's capitalization on the rich phenomenological and ontological associations of Hölderlin's 'dichterisch wohnt der Mensch' or 'man dwells poetically'), rather than a provisional economic arrangement; secondly, it replaces the harsh realities of toil and exploitation in the canefields with the altogether more clement and congenial connotations of residence. Whereas the term 'plantation' implies a functional, economic paradigm, a proto-industrial unit of production, the word 'habitation' suggests instead a human habitat, an ecology, much more in tune with the *créoliste* rewriting of the time and space of the plantation. Thus, whereas the chapter devoted by Beverley Ormerod to the French Caribbean plantation novel is entitled 'The Plantation as Hell',[26] the inferno is not the comparison that comes to mind on reading many of the more recent French Caribbean plantation novels.

As though to underline the fact that the term 'habitation' is not neutral, the Haitian critic Maximilien Laroche writes of the plantation and the 'habitation' as two distinct and even dichotomous socio-spatial models, which he sees as emblematic of two successive approaches to Haitian literary creation, still caught up, according to him, in an evolutionary plot centred on the plantation:

> L'esprit de la littérature haïtienne est celui d'une rupture d'avec l'ère des plantations. Dans la réalité le passage des plantations aux habitations n'est pas encore achevé. . . . Dans l'utopie des écrivains haïtiens, la plantation est le lieu carcéral, concentrationnaire et ségrégationnaire où le planteur esclavagiste . . . isolait l'esclave noir pour le forcer à travailler. L'habitation dont rêve cet ancien esclave devenu homme libre et écrivain, est un espace

[26] Beverley Ormerod, *An Introduction to the French Caribbean Novel* (London: Heinemann, 1985).

ouvert choisi par lui et bâti à sa convenance, où il veut avoir le loisir de faire, selon la définition de la liberté, 'tout ce qui ne nuit pas à autrui'.[27]

Laroche believes, then, that Haitian writers are still only dreaming of the imaginative or literary freedom that one might associate with the term 'habitation', since, in order to lay claim to this desired freedom, they must first of all break free from the prisonhouse of racialization ('se déprendre de cette logique de la racialization dans laquelle il se voit enfermé contre son gré'), synonymous for Laroche with the plantation system:

> Car c'est cela la plantation: se trouver obligé, malgré soi, de faire de la négritude. On ne vous jette peut-être plus directement dans l'esclavage mais on vous oblige davantage encore que par le passé à être commandeur des vôtres. On ne vous interdit plus en principe de quitter la plantation mais vous n'avez nulle part où aller ni le choix d'*habiter la maison* qui vous plaît.[28]

Laroche's view of the plantation as a symbol of literary limitation and aesthetic/intellectual coercion, and his promotion of the 'habitation' as a figure of imaginative freedom, could be applied to much contemporary French Caribbean writing. Yet, ironically in the French Caribbean context, the obsessive return to the literal space and time of what is termed there the 'habitation' indicates an inability or an unwillingness to choose freely an open literary agenda. But then, in so far as dwelling or habitat is an obsessive Caribbean (or post-slavery) paradigm, and in so far as the French Caribbean plantation has colonized and even, perhaps, corrupted this paradigm by transforming the generic term 'habitation' meaning 'dwelling', into a synonym for itself, it is inevitably going to be difficult for writers to break out of that conceptual prisonhouse.

[27] Maximilien Laroche, *Sémiologie des apparences*, GRELCA Essais 11 (Quebec: Université de Laval, 1984), 109–10; 'The spirit of Haitian literature is informed by a break with the plantation era. In reality, however, the transition from plantation to "habitation" is not yet complete . . . In the utopia of Haitian writing, the plantation is a site of incarceration, a concentration camp, a space of segregation where the slave-owning planter . . . used to isolate the black slave and force him to work. The "habitation" dreamt of by this former slave become free man and writer, is an open space, chosen by him and constructed to his taste, where he wants to have the leisure to do, according to the definition of freedom, anything that does not interfere with somebody else's liberty.'

[28] Ibid. 110; 'Because that is what the plantation means: it is about being forced to enforce negritude. Although you are not technically enslaved, even more than in the past, you are turned into a driver. Nobody says that you cannot leave the plantation, but you have nowhere else to go and you cannot choose *where you want to live*.' Emphasis mine.

It must surely be significant that all Caribbean writing, in French at least,[29] should be so very preoccupied with representing inhabited space in general. Along with education, this is the single most predominant theme of *La Rue Cases-Nègres*, and it is also at the forefront of writing by Simone Schwarz-Bart, Gisèle Pineau, and Patrick Chamoiseau.[30] Michel Gresset, a specialist in William Faulkner's work, has observed that American culture in general is particularly concerned with the notion of the dwelling-place or the home. However, he believes that this is particularly true of Southern culture, in which space is perceived as 'the materialization of time' ('une culture qui perçoit l'espace comme du temps matérialisé']).[31] The notion that the relation to time can be translated into a relation to space is not unrelated to the phenomenology of Gaston Bachelard. For Bachelard, memory cannot really register Bergsonian duration: in other words, we cannot relive *as such* past duration, we can only recall it as abstract linear time, deprived of all density. In a particularly illuminating statement, Bachelard suggests that fossils are materialized duration, duration made concrete by long periods of dwelling.[32] We have already noted Édouard Glissant's concern with duration. He has made a connection, for example, between the fact that in Faulkner's poetics Southern blacks are not involved in linear plots or storylines of foundation and filiation, on the one hand, and on the other their

[29] This preoccupation makes itself felt in Caribbean writing in English too. See Maeve McCusker, 'No Place like Home? Constructing an Identity in Patrick Chamoiseau's *Texaco*', in Gallagher (ed.), *Ici-Là*.

[30] For example, in Schwarz-Bart's *Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle*, Toussine's house is the envy of the entire locality, Télumée represents herself as a tortoise, carrying her house around the island with her, and her grandmother represents the community as a set of homes linked by a spider's web of relations; in Gisèle Pineau's *La Grande Drive des esprits* (Paris: Le Serpent à plumes, 1993), Léonce builds his own house, and in Chamoiseau's *Texaco* Esternome is a carpenter and house-builder, while the eponymous 'Driver's Cabin' is at the heart of Glissant's fourth novel, *La Case du commandeur*.

[31] Michel Gresset, '*Going* la maison', *Corps écrit*, 9, *La Demeure* (1984), 119–26: 122.

[32] 'La mémoire . . . n'enregistre pas la durée concrète, la durée au sens bergsonien. On ne peut revivre les durées abolies. On ne peut que les penser, les penser sur la ligne d'un temps abstrait privé de toute épaisseur. C'est par l'espace, c'est dans l'espace que nous trouvons les beaux fossiles de durée concrétisés par de longs séjours': Bachelard, *La Poétique de l'espace*, 28.

ability to endure or to inhabit duration (like cats attaining to eternity by sheer immobility and somnolence).[33] In Daniel Maximin's *L'Isolé Soleil*, the plantation is called 'l'Habitation (des) Flamboyants', the flame trees for which it is named preserving the reference to the plant-ation, but the apposed phrase 'la maison de ton grand-père', underlines the notion of dwelling. A sense of duration is introduced by the further description of the house as a 'vivant rêve d'histoire', a living dream of history.[34] Similarly, in Saint-John Perse's 'Pour fêter une enfance', the house, foregrounded by capitalization, is associated both with trees and with duration: 'Et la Maison durait sous les arbres à plumes' ('and the House endured under the plumed trees').[35] In Patrick Chamoiseau's celebration of childhood, the house also ensures a sense of continuity, although it is, in addition, a locus of community; it becomes, after all, the objective correlative of collective memory; (with)holding the steadily retracting archive of the past, standing guard over an ever more distant era: 'O mes frères, vous savez cette maison que je ne pourrais décrire, sa noblesse diffuse, sa mémoire de poussière . . . la maison a fermé une à une ses fenêtres . . . se refermant à mesure sur sa garde d'une époque—notaire fragile de nos antans d'enfance' ('O my brothers, you know this house I could never describe, its noble aura, its dusty memory . . . the house has closed its windows one by one . . . gradually closing around its guardianship of an era—the fragile archive of our childhood yore').[36] However, one of the most striking poetic images of duration as materialization through dwelling is, perhaps, Chamoiseau's eponymous 'old man slave'. This figure (significantly defined not just as a slave, but also as a man) is said to 'last', to 'dwell' in his corner over years and years, his features 'sculpted' by the glow of his pipe,[37] his skin aged like the

[33] Glissant notes that, in Faulkner's poetics, 'les Noirs sont capables de se couler dans la durée (comme on a dit que les chats, à force d'immobile et de somnolence, ont fini par vaincre l'éternité'), and he attributes this to the fact that 'ils ne maîtrisent pas l'histoire': *Faulkner Mississippi*, 87.

[34] 'L'habitation des Flamboyants, la maison de ton grand-père, est un vivant rêve d'histoire': Maximin, *L'Isolé Soleil*, 21.

[35] Saint-John Perse, *Œuvres complètes*, 30; *Éloges and Other Poems*, 33.

[36] *Antan d'enfance*, 164; *Childhood*, 117.

[37] 'il demeure dans son coin, des années durant, suçant une pipe de tabac-macouba dont l'incendie sévère lui sculpte la figure'; 'il dure, il piète dans la friche qui ne procure'; 'rugueux comme l'écorce d'un arbre qui a passé mille ans': Chamoiseau, *L'Esclave Vieil Homme*, 22 and 17.

'bark' of a tree more than a thousand years old, his whole being ultimately evoked as 'un minéral de patiences immobiles' ('a mineral formed by still patience').[38]

A SPACE OF EXILE AND EXPLOITATION

Antonio Benítez-Rojo notes that the plantation machine was astonishingly productive in socio-economic terms: it produced, after all,

> no fewer than ten million African slaves and thousands of coolies (from India, China and Malaysia) . . . turned out mercantile capitalism, industrial capitalism . . . African underdevelopment . . . Caribbean population . . . imperialism, wars, colonial blocs, rebellions, repressions, sugar islands, runaway slave settlements, air and naval bases, revolutions of all sorts, and even a 'free associated state' next to an unfree socialist state.[39]

All this to remind the reader that the Caribbean is 'not just a multiethnic sea or a group of islands divided by different languages' but an 'important historico-economic sea'.[40] The plantation's prodigious productivity was predicated, however, on intensive oppression. In many of the major texts of the French Caribbean tradition, it appears as an abrasive, corrosive environment. The physical mutilation of Zobel's M'man Tine and of Simone Schwarz-Bart's eponymous Télumée in the canefields is emblematic in purely physical terms of the brutalization rampant under slavery. Maximilien Laroche uses the term 'concentration camp' to qualify the plantation, and certainly, it is represented as a carceral space and a site of hard labour, even when the workers are not technically enslaved:

> Un contremaître me désigna ma tâche et je me trouvai d'un seul coup plongée au cœur de la malédiction. Les sabres coupaient au ras du sol et les tiges s'affaissaient, les piquants voltigeaient, s'insinuaient partout, dans mes reins, mon dos, mon nez, mes jambes, pareils à des éclats de verre . . . J'avais entouré mes mains de bandages serrés très fort, mais ces diables de piquants s'enfonçaient dans le linge, mes doigts comprimés ne m'obéissaient plus et bientôt je rejetai toutes ces bandes, entrai carrément dans le feu des cannes.[41]

[38] Ibid. 17.

[39] Benítez-Rojo, *Repeating Island*, 9.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Schwarz-Bart, *Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle*, 199; 'A foreman told me what my job was, and I found myself plunged at a blow into the heart of maledic-

Canefield labour is idealized at the start of *La Rue Cases-Nègres*; it is represented through the eyes of a child as an innocent paradise, an entertaining spectacle, and a forbidden playground, only to be denounced once the child matures sufficiently to perceive it as a living hell. The narrator's eventual disillusionment is rendered all the more bitter by his previous failure to perceive the adult workers' infantilization by plantation managers and their collusion in this process as they too treat the plantation as a holiday camp following payday.[42] As the child's insight grows, the world of the black 'adult' workers is exposed as irredeemably stunted by their childlike dependency, and the novel's plot thus prefigures Édouard Glissant's indictment in *Le Discours antillais* and elsewhere of the temperamental irresponsibility and economic parasitism fostered by the plantation system.[43] In *Le Quatrième Siècle*, a novel that attempts to recover and reappropriate the story of the French Caribbean from 1788 to 1944, Édouard Glissant lampoons the fatuous tropical pastoral that would whitewash the harshness of plantation labour:

> Dans un pays où chanter est comme devenir libre, les chantres étaient inévitables . . . et ils naquirent de leur propre béatitude. 'Qu'il était beau et bon, en rangs coordonnés, au rythme du tam-tam, et dans la joyeuse confiance du travail de couper la canne: pendant qu'au loin les alizés caressaient la douceur des fleurs, des fruits, des feuilles et des branches!' . . . Le chantre se balançait, feignant la volupté. Ayant oublié, non seulement le morne et sa raide exigence mais encore l'épuisement, les fourmis rouges, la saignée, le désert des cannes étendues sous le soleil. Et c'est que le chantre dansait sur un chemin qui n'était pas tracé pour ses pieds; il rejetait loin de lui jusqu'au souvenir de la boue primordiale.[44]

tion. The machetes skimmed low, the stems fell, and the prickles flew everywhere, like splinters of glass, into my back, my nose, my legs . . . I had put tight bandages on my hands, but the infernal prickles stuck into the cloth, my constricted fingers wouldn't obey me, and soon I tore off the bandages and entered outright into the fire of the canes': *Bridge of Beyond*, 136. For a more dystopian view of plantation labour in *La Rue Cases-Nègres*, see pp. 89 and 210–11.

[42] See, for example, *La Rue Cases-Nègres*, 81.

[43] Glissant argues that dependence on enslaved human resources explains the technological irresponsibility of the planter class, just as slavery accounts for the tendency on the part of the ex-slaves to participate in an economy of subsistence ('généralisation des petits métiers, djobs, économie parcellaire'): *Poétique de la relation*, 79.

[44] *Le Quatrième Siècle*, 222; 'In a country where singing is like becoming free, bards were bound to come. They were born of their own bliss . . . "How lovely and

Le Quatrième Siècle is not the only one of Édouard Glissant's novels to dwell at length on the institution of the plantation. Numerous novels of the 1980s and 1990s—including Glissant's own *La Case du commandeur* (1981) and *Tout-monde* (1993)—are shot through with flashbacks to the plantation scene. In addition, Patrick Chamoiseau's *Texaco* (1992), Vincent Placoly's *Frères Volcans* (1983), and Roland Brival's *Montagne d'ébène* (1984), all emphasize resistance to slavery, while Chamoiseau's more recent novel, *L'Esclave Vieil Homme et le molosse* (1997) concentrates poetically on slave subjectivity and the dynamic between master and slave. 'Emancipation' in 1848 did not directly cause the demise of the plantation system nor did it dispel its traumatic associations. Hence the plantation's representation in novels set in the twentieth century as a realm that continued, long after the abolition of slavery, to be exploited for the sole profit of the *béké* and his administrators; a realm where the workers, descendants of the enslaved and/or the indentured, are all, from the very old to the very young, caught in the poverty trap of which the plantation becomes the symbol. Right up to the middle of the twentieth century, deprivation stalks the 'rues case-nègres' of Caribbean writing; hunger is a leitmotif not just of Césaire's *Cahier*, but also of Joseph Zobel's work, both in *La Rue Cases-Nègres* and also in the earlier novel, *Diab'là*, where the narrator, opening the narrative, admits that he is starving: 'et moi, je meurs de faim'.[45]

Most narratives emphasize less the material hardship of the post-slavery plantation than the spiritual rot at its core. In *Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle*, Élie and Amboise both avoid plantation work at all costs, being too conscious of its spiritually toxic effect.[46] Several novels underline the sexual abuse endemic in the

how fine it was to cut cane in orderly lines to the tom-tom's beat, joyful and confident in one's work while in the distance the sea breeze caressed the sweetness of the flowers, the fruits, the leaves and the branches!" . . . The bard rocked back and forth pretending sensual delight in this bright spot. He had forgotten not just the hills and their steep demands, but also the exhaustion, the red ants, the bleeding, the desert of cane stretched out beneath the sun, because the bard was dancing along a road not made for his feet. He drove even the memory of the primordial mud far from him': *The Fourth Century*, 224–5.

[45] Zobel, *Diab'là*, 12.

[46] 'Quant à Élie, le seul mot de canne le faisait entrer dans des transes, des fureurs incompréhensibles. . . . [Il] criait, jurait tous ses grands dieux que la canne ne le happerait pas, jamais, jamais il n'achèterait de coutelas pour aller dans la terre des blancs. Il préférait plutôt se trancher les mains avec . . .' ('As for Élie, the very word

plantation hierarchy, from predatory *commandeurs* to rapacious *békés*. Underlining the diffuse sense of dispossession that survived well beyond the nineteenth century, Michèle Lacrosil in her novel, *Demain Jab-Herma* (1967), has the Martinican Cragget articulate his tortured sense of dispossession, and his fixation on the white Metropolitan Philippe, who is and has everything that Cragget desires. In a context dominated by the power struggle between the Metropolitan White, the Creole White or Grand-Blanc, and the eponymous black *quimboiseur*, Cragget, the *métis*, craves a place of his own. It is highly significant that, in the following passage, the object of his yearning is a shelter, a dwelling-space, a home, a site, or even just a place of his own, on 'his' island:

> L'Autre est partout chez lui; Cragget est partout un étranger . . . Où trouver dans ce pays, les terres ayant été distribuées aux Autres il y a deux ou trois siècles, un lopin, un abri, et un concept permettant de se ressaisir et d'être soi? . . . Dans les pires moments des crises, il devient ce fou qui, pour *posséder une maison* décente et un coin de la terre où sa mère esclave est née, fouille depuis des années à la recherche d'un or légendaire.[47]

The dynamic between the plantocracy and the *Métropole* was a complex one, particularly following the abolition of slavery. Although the former entertained vague aspirations to secession in response to perceived Metropolitan interference in 'home affairs', the failure of these vague aspirations to independence and the copper-fastening of the Metropolitan connection in 1946 did not disturb the racial balance of socio-economic power. Indeed the *békés* and *grands blancs* managed to keep in place the structures of plantation apartheid well beyond the near total collapse of the plantation system. Thus, in Ernest Pépin's *Tambour-Babel*, the contemporary plantation, despite its predominantly vestigial aura,

cane drove him wild, filled him with incomprehensible fury . . . [he] railed and swore by all the gods the cane would never get him, he was never going to buy a knife to go work on the land of the white men. He'd rather use it to cut his own hands off?): Schwarz-Bart, *Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle*, 84; *Bridge of Beyond*, 54.

47 Michèle Lacrosil, *Demain Jab-Herma* (Paris: Gallimard, 1967), 42. My emphasis. 'The Other is all over his island; and he Cragget is everywhere a stranger . . . The land having been distributed amongst the Others two or three centuries ago, where can we find a patch, a shelter, or a concept that will allow us to regroup and be ourselves . . . At the darkest moments of his attacks, he becomes this madman who has being digging for years for legendary treasure, in order to possess a decent home and a corner of this earth where his slave mother was born.'

is still a by-word for socio-economic stratification along racial lines and remains, as such, an ongoing reminder of slavery and of all that remains to be reformed in the material and social conditions of post-abolition Caribbean society.

THE DIALECTIC OF ALIENATION AND RESISTANCE

Post-1940s writing cannot be accused of representing the plantation as an unopposed institution, immune to historical forces. On the contrary, much emphasis is placed on the possibility and practice of resistance and subversion. Central to Édouard Glissant's version of the past is the distinction between the *marron* or runaway and the plantation slave. In the historical fresco painted on one level at least by the narrative of *Le Quatrième Siècle*, this distinction and its legacy are projected as generating much of the ambivalence at the heart of contemporary Caribbean identity. Caribbean history, as Glissant creatively 'recovers' it, was determined, then, not only by the primary relation of slavery, a relation of domination/subordination itself bristling with ambivalence,[48] but also by the imagined dynamic or tension (impossible to recover properly across the temporal distance) between those who submitted and those who resisted, or at least between those who adopted different strategies of resistance.

Outside the pale of the Caribbean plantation, beyond the limits of those regulated and policed plains, are the *mornes* or hills. And to the *mornes* belong, traditionally, the fugitives. Even in the mid-twentieth century, the highlands still symbolized resistance or opposition. When José's friend Jojo eventually rebels against his victimization at the hands of a racist mixed-race stepmother, José imagines him fled to the hills, the traditional refuge of the *marron*, and indeed Jojo's classmates spread the rumour that he had 'marronné'. This figurative use of the term suggests a parallel between plantation slavery, on the one hand, and the ravages of the racism internalized by so-called 'assimilated' blacks, on the other hand. Although many Caribbean writers make much of the resistance of the *marrons*, magnifying the

48 See Glissant's *Discours antillais*; even in the glossary entry under 'abolition', Glissant notes the father fixation of the Caribbean mentality. The seminal father figure in this context is the colonist, but Schoelcher becomes a surrogate.

overt revolt of those who escaped the lowlands of the plantations to found more or less free and fierce outlaw or scavenger communities in the highlands, others concentrate much more on the covert resistance practised on the plantations by those slaves who expressed their opposition by poisonings, arson, and abortions or, indeed, more indirectly, by the elaboration of a counter-culture, a hidden, disguised culture transmitted orally through the *conteur*, descendant of the African *griot*.

Over two centuries, however, *marronnage* provided the principal focus of opposition to the plantation.[49] In so far as it was a reaction against the plantation, it was, of necessity, determined by that system and dependent on it. Yet the very existence of the *marrons* (or the *négateurs* ('negators') as Glissant has termed them) does define an alternative space, however partial or porous the plantation boundary. Indeed, many writers prefer to stress the interstitial space of *petit marronnage* involving a certain degree of symbiosis or negotiation between plantation and *marrons*. But whatever the balance between 'grand' and 'petit marronnage', the fact that the plantation system inspired its own negation inevitably mitigated its perceived closure and attenuated its perceived supremacy. One of the most significant aspects of Édouard Glissant's emphasis on the figure of the *marron* is, as we have seen, the refusal to polarize creolization and *marronnage*. Whereas the *marron* of Chamoiseau and Confiant's *Lettres créoles* preserves intact the beauty of mythical Africa in the hills over more than a century until it is safe to come down to the lowlands to participate in the Creole challenge, Glissant's 'marron originel' does not hold back from that adventure.

LABOUR POLITICS AND REVOLT

In post-slavery times, the persistent pattern of subjection at the heart of the plantation system continued to be challenged by the sedition, labour revolts, and confrontations depicted in several novels of the 1960s and 1970s: in *La Rue Cases-Nègres*, Jojo's exposure of the corrupt *économe* foreshadows the more extensive

[49] For a full discussion of *marronnage*, see Cailler, *Conquérants de la nuit nue;* Burton, *Le Roman marron*; Suzanne Crosta, *Le Marronnage créateur. Dynamique textuelle chez Édouard Glissant* (Laval: GRELCA, 1991).

treatment of labour relations in, for example, Jacqueline Manicom's *Mon examen de blanc*,[50] Vincent Placoly's *La Vie et la mort de Marcel Gonstran*,[51] Simone Schwarz-Bart's *Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle*,[52] and Bertène Juminer's *Au seuil d'un nouveau cri*.[53] While Juminer's novel vaunts the revolutionary efficacy of subversives undermining the plantation from within, in most representations—Placoly's novel, or Schwarz-Bart's, for example—the balance of power is less favourable. In the former, striking workers are met by the firepower of the army, and many of them are felled. These rumblings of revolt echo through time, of course, notably recalling the violent but usually abortive or ill-fated slave uprisings. In contrast to mostly unrecorded and thus forgotten resistance, the dramatic group suicide which ended the (rather ambiguous) uprising of Delgrès and his men left an indelible mark on the French Caribbean consciousness. These historical echos also subtend Dany Bébel-Gisler's *Léonora*, a novel that evokes the rise of unionized labour. However, Lucie Julia's novels,[54] which depict the fraught labour relations, industrial instability, and rampant emigration of the 1970s (as well as the scaled-down production, lock-outs, closures, and redundancies that are central to the plot of Léonard Sainville's *Au fond du bourg*),[55] break with the plantation paradigm, opening up instead the disarray, confusion, and distress of an erstwhile labour force that finds itself utterly expendable to Metropolitan capital.

ALTERNATIVE SPACES: DISPLACEMENT AS RESISTANCE

Following the abolition of slavery, the principal alternatives to plantation space were less the highland retreats of the *marron* communities or the cultural traditions sustained by the memory of the mythical homeland of Africa, than urbanization, education, and emigration (to France). The urban environment appears to

[50] Jacqueline Manicom, *Mon examen de blanc* (Paris: Presses de la cité, 1972).
[51] See *La Vie et la mort de Marcel Gonstran*, 113–14.
[52] See *Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle*, 221–2.
[53] Bertène Juminer, *Au seuil d'un nouveau cri* (Paris: Présence africaine, 1963).
[54] Lucie Julia, *Les Gens de Bonne-Espérance* (Paris: Temps actuels, 1982) and *Mélody des faubourgs* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1989).
[55] Léonard Sainville, *Au fond du bourg* (Paris: Messidor, n.d.).

promise deliverance from servile labour to rural, Creole-speaking agricultural workers, yet, as we shall see in the following chapter, it continues the pattern of alienation and segregation. While urbanity, formal education, assimilation, and the myth of France may well offer alternatives to the dead end of plantation labour, they prove unlikely to offer, in themselves, an escape from dispossession. On the contrary, these 'alternatives' can turn out to be inscribed in an ineluctable chain of estrangement. José of *La Rue Cases-Nègres*, who spends much of his young life fretting about freeing his grandmother from plantation servitude, himself escapes that fate by moving from plantation to village to town, from Creole to French, from illiteracy to initiation into 'high culture', and he is eventually drawn into exile in Paris, an exile explored in the sequel to *La Rue Case-Nègres*, entitled *Quand la neige aura fondu*.[56] José's schooling is a place of transformation and, on one level at least, a space of liberation via literacy. As Colette Maximin observes, he wants to put as much distance as possible between himself and the cruel world that had worn out Médouze. In relation to the myth of Africa and the myth of France, the plantation is exposed as the irredeemably deleterious, mutilating environment from which the child must rescue his grandmother.[57] Similarly, although on a less messianic level, at 12 years of age, Albert in Maryse Condé's novel *La Vie scélérate*, stares at his father's corpse, promising himself that he will not live and die like Mano, but rather 'Quitter la plantation. S'établir ailleurs' ('Get away from the plantation. Settle elsewhere').[58] These echos of the slogan 'Canne c'est maudition' ('the curse of the sugarcane')[59] beg the question: is it really possible to

[56] Joseph Zobel, *Quand la neige aura fondu* (Paris: Éditions caribéennes, 1979).

[57] 'José s'éloignera d'autant plus de l'ancien monde que le sort du vieux Médouze lui en offre des raisons: c'est la plantation qui a détruit le Nègre. Une seule porte de salut: l'école républicaine. L'assimilation se nourrit donc de l'aversion qu'engendre la souffrance. Les mythes, solidaires, de l'Afrique et de la France servent à négativer l'univers créole' ('José distances himself from the old world all the more radically since the fate of Médouze makes that choice the logical one: after all, it is the plantation that destroyed the black man. There is only one salvation, namely formal schooling. Assimilation is thus fortified by the aversion caused by suffering. Moreover, the two mutually reinforcing myths of Africa and France both serve to detract from the Creole world'): Colette Maximin, *Littératures caribéennes comparées* (Pointe-à-Pitre and Paris: Jasor and Karthala, 1996), 41–2.

[58] Condé, *La Vie scélérate*, 16.

[59] This is the refrain of Léandor's mother in Raphaël Confiant, *Commandeur du sucre*, 81.

escape the plantation? And if so, does the alternative necessarily lie outside rural space and/or beyond the Caribbean?

For those who remained on in the countryside, the *case* and its garden could sometimes constitute in themselves a space apart, a space that, although it might be located within the limits of the plantation, had nonetheless the potential to be oppositional, when it was, for example, appropriated by the worker and disassociated from his labour. As an example of this claiming of the 'jardin créole', we could point to Monsieur Saint-Louis's mysterious secret garden in the *Rue Cases-Nègres*. But Télumée's plot in *Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle* and Julia's plot for growing healing herbs in *L'Exil selon Julia* are two further examples of a reclaiming of rural space. In contrast to those who are drawn by an apparently more desirable 'elsewhere', the eponymous Télumée never aspires to find redemption beyond the patch of ground outside her home, wherever that home might be. Indeed, her Voltairean garden presents an alternative not just to the plantation, but also to the Frenchification and implied self-alienation of the town. Télumée's garden, like the plots cultivated on the hills or *mornes* by the descendants of the *marrons*, is an empowering and organic anti-plantation founded on love and solidarity, just as her little cabin or 'case' is an authentic *habitation* built on self-acknowledgement and self-possession. It is this redeemed relation with place and space that enables not just Télumée, but all the heroic figures of this novel to (re)possess themselves. The narrative closes upon Télumée's refusal to leave her patch, and upon her determination to enjoy her autonomy during the years that are left to her, an autonomy synonymous with a complete absence of exploitation.

> J'ai transporté ma case à l'orient et je l'ai transportée à l'occident, les vents d'est, du nord, les tempêtes m'ont assaillie et les averses m'ont délavée, mais je reste une femme sur mes deux pieds, et je sais que le nègre n'est pas une statue de sel que dissolvent les pluies. . . . Soleil levé, soleil couché, les journées glissent et le sable que soulève la brise enlisera ma barque, mais je mourrai là, comme je suis, debout, dans mon petit jardin, quelle joie!. . .[60]

[60] *Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle*, 248–9; 'I have moved my cabin to the east and to the west; east winds and north winds have buffeted and soaked me; but I am still a woman standing on my own two legs, and I know a Negro is not a statue to be dissolved by the rain. . . . Sun risen, sun set, the days slip past and the sand blown by the wind will engulf my boat. But I shall die here, where I am, standing in my little garden. What happiness!' *Bridge of Beyond*, 172–3.

CULTURAL RESISTANCE: IN PRAISE OF PLANTATION CULTURE

We have seen that Édouard Glissant represents the equivocal relation between resistance and compromise as explaining many of the gaps and complexities of the opaque Caribbean past. Although Glissant's novels show the ambivalence of both positions, and although he seems concerned above all with the in-between, or the relational space in which the one encounters the other, it was, essentially, the initiative of *marronnage* that facilitated, according to the author of *Le Discours antillais,* the development of an interstitial space and with it, the perspective necessary for a collective *prise de conscience.* The critic Jacques André notes that the plantation is inevitably regarded by some writers as a space of social and linguistic compromise ('espace social et linguistique qui recoupe celui des compromissions').[61] And indeed, one school of thought would go so far as to reject everything that emerged from the plantation system. This would include the Creole language, which would be dismissed on the grounds that it suggested an 'entente illusoire' or an illusion of understanding. Glissant's *Le Quatrième Siècle*, however, stages the momentous consummation of the relation between the first Longoué, the original *marron* who escapes from enslavement as soon as he disembarks in the Caribbean, and Louise, the apparently compliant plantation slave, mistress to the white planter, whom he abducts. The consummation of their relation is triggered by Longoué's effort to communicate with his own captive, the woman whom he has liberated from plantation bondage, by uttering in Creole the words meaning sea, earth, and lightning. The subsequent bond between the two depends on communication in Creole: 'Il accepta donc qu'elle lui apporta quelque chose: la parole nouvelle' ('He therefore accepted her giving him something: the new language').[62] If Glissant thus creolizes the space of the highlands and, by extension, the space of *marronnage*, traditionally viewed as the ultimate resistance to the plantation, it is because his view of the relation between compliance and resistance is open to ambiguity and ambivalence.

Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant celebrate both in

[61] André, *Caraïbales,* 17.
[62] Glissant, *Le Quatrième Siècle,* 95; *The Fourth Century,* 91.

their fiction and in their theoretical writings the resistance mounted against the plantation from within the system itself. Not simply, however, the poisonings, the arson, or the abortions to which the plantation slaves resorted as a sort of underground sedition nor the slave revolts, nor indeed the labour struggles that followed the era of slave labour. The resistance that they honour is principally cultural in nature and is outlined in their manifesto, *Éloge de la créolité* (1989), as well as in their literary work. In the chapter devoted to the 'La Plantation, l'Habitation' in *Lettres créoles*, the two authors concentrate on the contrast between the *marron* and the *conteur.* Whereas the *marron* is held to sustain the unarticulated primal scream of the displaced and enslaved population, the *conteur* is said to have articulated this scream; in fact, the *conteur* was an artist, 'l'artiste du cri' ('the artist of the scream').[63] Although both figures are said to represent resistance, the authors of *Lettres créoles* favour verbalization over revolt, the folktale over the primal scream, narrative over poetry, *créolité* over *négritude*, and Creole cultural continuity over political rupture. Putting it at its simplest, the *conteur*'s art, even if it amounted to adaptation, and even if it did involve compromise, survived 'to tell the tale'; whereas the *marron* did not leave any verbal trace as such. Certainly the champions of *créolité* do not fall into the trap of denying that the plantation was essentially an 'outil de conquête et de défrichement' ('a tool of conquest and colonization'), a 'machine à exploiter et à enrichir' ('a mechanism of exploitation and enrichment') (*LC* 35). Yet they insist that when they celebrate plantation culture as the cradle of *créolité*, they are celebrating resistance rather than assent. It is here that we could locate the radical shift represented by their interpretation of the plantation system. Their benediction of the cultural richness that emerged from the plantation context is based on the belief that such accommodation left room for resistance.

Chamoiseau and Confiant argue that the plantation system secreted Creole culture and that the *habitation* was, in this sense, a fruitful, sustaining womb, an 'amniotic space' ('espace créole quasiment amniotique') (*LC* 38). Presented as pragmatic in the first instance, the secretion of Creole culture was a matter of survival,

[63] Chamoiseau and Confiant, *Lettres créoles*, 39. Subsequent page references are given in the text (*LC*).

involving the essential acquisition of a 'savoir faire d'habitation pour l'habitation' ('insiders' plantation know-how') (*LC* 40). In other words, for the slaves and plantation workers, their popular culture amounted to no more than a sort of 'users' guide'. Yet Chamoiseau and Confiant insist that this acculturation was a form of clandestine resistance, in so far as survival and creativity in adverse circumstances are in themselves resistance. Michel De Certeau's complex notion of the tactic, and Glissant's notion of opaqueness as resistance, are implicitly being drawn upon here as models of opposition. Creole culture came into being, according to this interpretation, not just within but against slavery, and it was based on ruse and dissimulation; Creole *oralìture* is said to attack the 'valeurs du système' ('values of the system') and to 'installe[r] le lieu de marronnage dedans l'habitation' ('relocate *marronnage* within the plantation') (*LC* 58).

It might seem quixotic, to say the least, to insist that Creole popular culture was from the start a culture of resistance. Even if survival can be seen as a form of opposition, it necessitated in the first instance (and possibly beyond) a culture of compliance. In that sense, the so-called resistance of the *conteur* was recuperated and institutionalized. As Chamoiseau and Confiant openly admit, his art was 'dans la norme de l'habitation' ('normalized in the plantation') (*LC* 59), sanctioned by the *béké*, who, according to the two critics, failed to understand this secret subversion of plantation order. They go on to suggest, however, that the *conteur* was also the guardian of the group's cohesion, counteracting the slaves' original cultural diversity. Giving voice to the group and to its collective, fragmented memory, the *conteur*, even while offering distraction, might have enunciated, in his entertaining wake orations, a struggle against death that could have been heard as a struggle against the symbolic death of the slaves. But to leap from that plausible hypothesis to the deduction that 'ainsi, une grande part des esclaves n'a pas été esclave' ('in this way, a substantial proportion of the slave population were not really slaves') (*LC* 61) is a radical redefinition of the power of culture and an underestimation, perhaps, of the disempowerment of enslavement. Clearly, this positive re-evaluation of the plantation system is an essential part of the project of *créolité*. Equally clearly, its conflation of issues of power and identity and of politics and culture is consonant with that sidelining of political issues noted in the first chapter of this study.

If the plantation system failed, it was not because of a proliferation of *marrons* or because of sporadic or organized resistance on the part of the labour-force; nor was it because of some mass exodus to the towns or the following the abolition of slavery. And it was certainly not because of the conception and development of Creole culture. It was rather because of the rise of European-grown sugar beet as a competitive crop. Yet the plantation was doomed in any case, because, and this brings us back to Glissant's definition, it was a system stunted from the outset by its dependence on the *Métropole* and on slavery. This is the reason why, in the words of Glissant, 'partout le système des Plantations s'est brutalement ou progressivement effondré, sans engendrer ses propres dépassements' ('the Plantation system collapsed everywhere brutally or progressively, without generating its own ways of superseding itself').[64]

VISTAS OF LOSS: LOOKING BACK TO THE PLANTATION

Most of the writing of Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant is foundational, looking back to the origins of Creole culture and seeking to represent, to explain, or illustrate its mode of functioning. This retrospection is determined by a concern to locate and validate the advent of a new culture, a new people. Certain novels by both writers are substantially concerned with the dynamics of the plantation system; others, and indeed the majority of Confiant's work falls into this second category, are more concerned with the Creole town, although even then, the urban dynamic is consistently referred back to the seminal, ghostly space-time of the plantation. Chamoiseau's novels *Chronique des sept misères* and *Texaco* are both founded on a plantation narrative—'les dix-huit paroles rêvées d'Afoukal' ('Afoukal's eighteen dream statements') in *Chronique* and Esternome's story as relayed by Marie-Sophie in the case of *Texaco*—while the sense of time that predominates in *Solibo Magnifique* is based, as we saw in Chapter 2, on plantation time.

Although Édouard Glissant's writing demonstrates intense interest in the plantation—indeed, his gravitation towards the two talis-

[64] Glissant, *Poétique de la Relation*, 77; *Poetics of Relation*, 63.

manic figures of Saint-John Perse and William Faulkner is explained in terms of their shared status as writers of the plantation—he refrains from idealizing that space-time. In *La Case du commandeur* Marie Celat (Mycéa) and Mathieu Béluse represent two different approaches to the demise of the plantation system. Marie Celat allows herself to drift, passively registering the island's absorption into the colourless morass of modernity and the bland alienation of global consumerism: 'elle subissait le pays, sa lente absorption dans la vie neutre et blême' ('she suffered the land passively, its slow absorption into a pale and neutral life'). She is convinced that she must leave behind plantation time ('ce temps des Plantations'), and prepare to live with the new 'platitude irréparable' ('irredeemable flatness'), the alliteration of 'platitude' and 'plantation' resounding here in the reader's ears. The spatial metaphor is paradoxical in that the memory of plantation time is preserved, not in the lowlands, where this time has fallen into oblivion, but in the island's relief, up in the highlands. Mathieu Béluse, on the other hand, holds on to the 'rêve d'avant, fuligineux et incertain' ('obscure and uncertain dream of before').[65] He even persuades Mycéa to visit the old *quimboiseur/conteur*, Papa Longoué, one last time. The latter is said to be 'abandonné du temps, incompris de ce qui gagnait là comme une gangrène en surface: les agents de la fonction publique, les voitures à crédit, la Lézarde tel un filet de boue au long de la piste d'atterissage' ('abandoned by time, misunderstood by what was taking over here like a surface gangrene: bureaucracies, cars sold on credit, the Lézarde river like a trickle of mud running along the landing runway').[66] However, although Longoué is said to be outside time, excluded and misunderstood by those who are 'in time', that time is itself silted up, its sluggish or arrested flow is evoked in terms of gangrene and mud. After their visit to Papa Longoué, represented as a visit to the past, the pair come back down to the lowlands, returning to what the narrator terms the present ('revinrent donc au temps présent'). For Mathieu, however, the present is the site of loss. He asks Marie Celat if she has ever counted all the words that are now extinct, all the gestures made defunct by the collapse of the plantation system. The litany of loss includes all the plantation work with bananas and yams, and all the skills and specialist

[65] Glissant, *La Case du commandeur*, 190–1.

[66] Ibid. 191.

vocabulary linked to the closed-down refinery. Included in the enumeration also are the *commandeurs* and the *géreurs*, and oral culture, especially the folktales.

> Non, pas un ne se souvient par ici du temps longtemps . . . Non, la distillerie est fermée depuis on ne sait pas quand . . . En ce temps-là les commandeurs et les géreurs avaient disparu du paysage. On en voyait encore quelques-uns, zombifiés. Les chiffres officiels décomptaient une usine et demie dans le pays: une qui marchait pour la récolte pleine, l'autre pour une moitié de la saison. Plus personne ne croyait aux contes . . . c'est-à-dire à l'opportunité d'en réciter, pas plus qu'à l'importance sans poids de ce qu'ils disent.[67]

In addition to the sense of loss of a whole way of life, there is, here, a sense of fracture: it is not just that a culture, a hierarchy, a way of life, a set of values and meanings, and a language have disappeared but that a whole tradition, a whole line of descent or continuity has been broken. Monsieur Chanteur is one of those who regrets the changes. He laments in particular the abandon of the canefields: 'mais c'est parce qu'il regrettait le temps où les commandeurs à cheval (le plus souvent à mulet) régentaient le pays alentour . . . lui qui descendait de tant d'économes, de commandeurs; qui avait été un des meilleurs cuiseurs à la distillerie' ('but that is because he missed the time when the drivers on horseback (mostly riding mules) governed the land for miles around . . . as the descendant of so many overseers and drivers . . . he who had been one of the best boilers in the distillery').[68]

Losing her senses, Marie Celat begins to haunt the countryside like a lost soul, but her compulsion is characterized as banal, since she is said to be one of many in modern Martinique to have become fixated with their rural roots, trying to reconnect with the countryside regarded as the space of authenticity, a space to be cultivated,

[67] Ibid. 201; 'No, not one person around here remembers the time that lasted a long time . . . No, the distillery has been closed for no one knows how long . . . By this time, the drivers and the agents had disappeared from the landscape. You might still see one or two wandering around like zombies. The official figures showed one and a half refineries on the island: one that operated for the whole harvest, the other for half a season. Nobody believed in folktales any more . . . that is, in the wisdom of telling them, or in the importance of what they were about' (ibid. 201). The same sense of loss is registered in the evocation of 'les gestes que plus personne ne faisait, les mots morts, disparus avec les gestes' ('the actions no longer accomplished by anybody, the dead words, gone with the actions they had denoted').

[68] Ibid. 202.

that is, reclaimed through planting crops or gardening.[69] The (collective) narrator concludes from all this evidence that something is missing.

il manquait donc quelque chose. Nous avions beau être actifs, efficaces, modernes, équipés, il manquait quelque chose. Nous avions beau manipuler des gadgets, il manquait quelque chose. . . . nous levions les yeux sur ce qui de l'alentour nous échappait tellement. Nous ne savions à la fin comment faire marcher notre usine, ni par quoi remplacer sa vacance terrible. On nous divertissait d'activités de remplacement, qui nous saturaient d'une jouissance au bout du compte insupportable.[70]

This Pascalian pronouncement is confirmed by the growing delirium of Marie Céelat, as she finds the countryside that she roams more and more encroached upon by modernity, tarred roads and cement-built houses. Her distress is contrasted with the lazy, uncritical, unresistant pragmatism of the 'rusés d'en bas' ('wily plains people').[71] The latter, taking refuge in the urgency of artificial busyness, avoid confrontation with the terrifying cultural hollowness (or 'vacance') at the centre of their lives. For those who barely register their own cultural bankruptcy and political paralysis, Mycéa is a crank ('une enquiquineuse'). They delude themselves that 'le pays n'allait pas si mal' ('the country isn't doing so badly'), implicitly contrasting it with Haiti, with Africa, or with countries afflicted by dictatorships and other ills, such as endemic famine, massacres, death squads, fascist dictators, and so forth.[72]

What, then, is *La Case du commandeur* saying about the plantation? Clearly, the novel does not endorse nostalgia for that system, given the implicitly ironic portrayal of Monsieur

[69] 'Depuis peu, il est vrai, tout un chacun revenait aux sources. Les fonctionnaires, qui continuaient d'investir en clandestins dans les taxis et les autobus, commencaient d'acheter des morceaux de terrain et de faire planter des ignames' ('recently, it is true, everybody was returning to their roots. The civil servants, still investing on the black market in taxis and buses, were beginning to buy plots and have yams planted on them') (Glissant, *La Case du commandeur*, 211).

[70] 'so something was missing. No matter how active, efficient, modern and well-equipped we were, something was missing. No matter how well we manipulated our gadgets, something was missing . . . we looked up at what was escaping us so completely. At the end of the day we could not make our factory work, nor did we know how to replace its dreadful absence. We were being distracted with displacement activities that were saturating us with a pleasure that we found unbearable in the final analysis') (ibid. 212).

[71] Ibid. 214.

[72] Ibid. 214–15.

Chanteur's pining after slave-drivers on horseback. Nor does it idealize a system that had betrayal, coercion, and brutalization at its core. Yet the novel acknowledges that the system's collapse has left in its wake a yawning abyss. The replacement of production by consumption, the withdrawal of a reassuring routine, of valorizing know-how, and of a social relief dependent on clear distinctions and hierarchies has led to an unrelieved sense of emptiness in which the population is both 'at a loss' and 'at a loose end'. However, these withdrawal symptoms are in themselves an eloquent indictment of a system that was not so much unable to, as unconcerned with engendering a system to replace it.[73] In Glissant's view, then, the plantation *produced* above all this very void. In contrast to the *créolistes*' claims that it was an eminently productive time and space, Glissant's assessment, even in his propositional or theoretical work, is more muted and nuanced. What he does acknowledge is that the plantation is perceived, retrospectively, as a source of structure, order, certainty, and routine, as a locus of endurance and duration, as habit as well as habitat. He is both able to imagine the demise of the plantation as eviction from duration, and intent on criticizing colonial nostalgia. Even in 1981, his discourse on the plantation was complex. He was already noting darkly the paradoxical extraversion of this solipsistic space, but, commenting that a year would not suffice to describe this world, he limited himself to outlining the oral and written literature that it occasioned. The entire thrust of Glissant's thinking on the plantation is thus shot through with a deep ambivalence. He regards it, along with the slave ship, as the 'difficult and opaque' source or matrix of the Caribbean people: 'Mais c'est bien à cette deuxième matrice de la Plantation, après celle du bateau négrier, qu'il faut rapporter la trace de nos sources, difficiles et opaques' ('This second Plantation matrix, after that of the slave ship, is where we must return to track out difficult and opaque sources').[74] However, one of its chief secretions was the deep-seated and long-lived neurosis of unproductivity: 'aujourd'hui notre collectivité ne produit certes plus rien en tant que telle . . . notre conscience d'un tel manque nous constitue pour une part' ('these days, collectively, we produce nothing as such . . . and our awareness of this lack partly makes us what we are').[75]

[73] See Glissant, *Poétique de la Relation*, 77.

[74] Ibid. 87.

[75] Glissant, *Le Discours antillais*, 183 (not included in *Caribbean Discourse*).

In *Faulkner Mississippi*, Glissant notes that a literary caesura divides Caribbean writing between the plantation and the town:

> nous ne sommes pas loin d'une sorte de césure littéraire, entre une écriture de la source, de la matrice, du temps lent et de l'espace ouvert dans un lieu clos (la Plantation), et une écriture de la multiplicité, de la vitesse foudroyante, de l'entassement et du détachement (la Ville). Le verdural, et le concassé.[76]

In thus characterizing the plantation/town dichotomy, he defines the plantation as an open space enclosed within boundaries, and as a space of gestation and slow time, whereas the town is a space of crowding, severance, or at least disengagement, and speed. Although the two chronotopes are clearly being contrasted, their difference cannot be reduced to a simple binary or dialectical structure. The relation between 'verdural' and 'concassé' further confirms this rejection of symmetrical opposition or polarization. Glissant's neologism 'verdural' is derived from 'verdure' meaning vegetation or greenery. Not only does it connote the rhythms of organic life and growth, the slow process of gestation, but its central syllable suggests the word 'durée' or duration, as well as endurance, thus suggesting long-term organic sedimentation and lived time foreign to the urban economy of speed, fragmentation, and detachment. Through his choice of the caesura metaphor, which suggests both break and suspension, both rupture and continuity, Glissant inscribes the relation between plantation and town into a kinetic, rhythmical pattern. In the poetics of French, the caesura traditionally divides the alexandrine into two hemistiches, balancing the line between two periods, neither of which replaces or displaces the other. This poetic logic explains the plantation's literary endurance as locus of duration and gestation, its poetic persistence or 'rémanence'.

[76] Glissant, *Faulkner Mississippi*, 334; 'We are not far from a sort of literary caesura between writing of sources, gestation, slow time and open space in a closed place (the plantation), and writing of multiplicity, lightning speed, accumulation and detachment in (the Town). The verdurant and the pulverized.'

CHAPTER SIX

Urban Time: The Reproduction of Space?

A writer's heaven.[1]

A 'FERMENT WITHOUT A HISTORY'?

In *Tristes tropiques* Lévi-Strauss recalls the mischievous description of America as bypassing civilization in its race from savagery to decadence and from newness to decrepitude, although he himself reserves this description for the cities of the New World.[2] Refining this view, the Canadian writer Pierre Nepveu contrasts the cities of the American north with the paradigmatic city of the southern hemisphere, 'ville du sud, sublime et tragique magma, espace de décomposition qui fournit un merveilleux creuset aux métaphores organiques et aux hyperboles flamboyants' (a 'magma no less tragic than sublime, a space of decomposition that provides a wonderful crucible of organic metaphors and flamboyant hyperbole'), and instances Émile Ollivier's Port-au-Prince as just such a frenzied site of premature blight.[3] Although similar in many

[1] Walcott, *What the Twilight Says*, 71; the context of this phrase is quoted on p. 176.

[2] 'Un esprit malicieux a défini l'Amérique comme un pays qui a passé de la barbarie à la décadence sans connaître la civilisation. On pourrait, avec plus de justesse, appliquer la formule aux villes du Nouveau Monde: elles vont de la fraîcheur à la décrépitude sans s'arrêter à l'ancienneté. . . . Certaines cités d'Europe s'endorment doucement dans la mort; celles du Nouveau Monde vivent fiévreusement dans une maladie chronique: perpétuellement jeunes, elles ne sont pourtant jamais saines': Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes tropiques* (1955; Paris: Plon, 1993), 105.

[3] Pierre Nepveu, *Intérieurs du nouveau monde. Essai sur les littératures du Québec et des Amériques* (Quebec: Boréal: 1998), 333; 'lieu d'enlisement et de décadence' ('morass of decadence') and 'foyer de délire' ('site of delirium'): ibid. 333.