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On Archipelagic Temporality

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Abstract: This essay examines the colonial and capitalist organisation of time through a reading of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and Édouard Glissant's theory of Relation. It argues that Crusoe's improvised calendar on the island is not merely a practical device for survival, but a symbolic act of temporal enclosure through which European modernity imposes its linear, Protestant, and capitalist order onto archipelagic space. By inscribing days, weeks, and months onto the landscape, Crusoe transforms the island into a colonial prototype of disciplined labour, productivity, and historical legibility. The essay situates this act within Marx's critique of abstract labour-time, E. P. Thompson's account of industrial clock-time, and the broader history of capitalist temporal discipline. Against this homogeneous and measurable temporality, the essay turns to Glissant's notion of archipelagic time: a nonlinear, relational, and opaque temporality shaped by slavery, creolisation, rupture, and survival. Through the figures of errantry, opacity, and the Whole-World, Glissant offers a poetics of time that resists both colonial historicism and capitalist synchronisation. The essay ultimately proposes archipelagic time as a decolonial and planetary alternative to the temporal regimes of empire, capital, and redemption.

Keywords: Glissant; archipelago; *Robinson Crusoe*; E. P. Thomson; modernity

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标题：论群岛时间性

摘要：本文通过解读丹尼尔·笛福的《鲁滨逊漂流记》以及爱德华·格里桑的关系理论，探讨殖民主义与资本主义的时间组织形式。文章认为，鲁滨逊在岛上临时制作的日历不仅是一种实用的生存工具，更是一种象征性的“时间圈地”行为——欧洲现代性正是通过这种行为，将其线性、新教式的资本主义秩序强加于群岛空间之上。通过将日、周、月铭刻于自然景观之中，克鲁索将岛屿转变为一处彰显规训劳动、生产力及历史可读性的殖民地原型。本文将这一行为置于马克思对抽象劳动时间的批评、

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E.P.汤普森对工业钟表时间的论述，以及更广泛的资本主义时间规训史的语境中进行探讨。与这种同质化、可测量的时间性相对，本文转向格里桑的“群岛时间”概念：一种由奴隶制、克里奥尔化、断裂与生存所塑造的非线性、关系性且不透明的时间性。通过“漂移”“不透明”“全—世界”等意象，格里桑提出了一种既抵制殖民历史主义又反抗资本主义同步化的时间诗学。本文最终提出，群岛时间可以作为一种去殖民的、具有行星尺度的替代方案，用以对抗帝国、资本与救赎所支配的时间体制。
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Modernity has often understood time through a continental imagination: linear, progressive, measurable, and oriented toward mastery. In this temporal regime, history appears as a continuous movement from origin to destination, from backwardness to development, from disorder to civilisation. Such continental temporality underlies Christian eschatology, Enlightenment progress, colonial historicism, and capitalist clock-time. It converts the plurality of lived rhythms into a single abstract measure and treats those who do not conform to this measure as delayed, primitive, or outside history. I contrast that continental model of temporality with what may be called archipelagic temporality. Archipelagic time does not unfold as a single line of progress. It is discontinuous, tidal, relational, and opaque. It emerges through rupture, displacement, creolisation, memory, and survival. In this way, archipelagic temporality offers not merely an alternative concept of time but a decolonial critique of the temporal order of modernity itself.

Robinson’s Time

In *Robinson Crusoe*, Daniel Defoe depicts the island as a remote geographical location and a temporal void as a place outside the regular structures of time that govern European civilization. Upon finding himself shipwrecked and isolated, Crusoe experiences a moment of temporal disorientation. He confesses, “[a]fter I had been there about Ten or Twelve Days, it came into my Thoughts, that I should lose my Reckoning of Time for want of Books and Pen and Ink, and should even forget the Sabbath Days from the working Days; but to prevent this I cut it with my Knife upon a large Post, in Capital Letters, and making it into a great Cross I set it up on the Shore where I first landed, viz. *I came on Shore here on the 30th of* Sept. 1659” (Defoe, 1719/2007, p. 55-56). This statement reveals the fragility of timekeeping once external instruments, such as calendars, clocks, and texts, are removed. The absence of such devices threatens not only his ability to measure time but also his sense of cultural and spiritual continuity, particularly the distinction between sacred and profane time.

In response, Crusoe undertakes a symbolic and practical act of temporal reconstruction. He crafts a personal calendar by cutting notches into a wooden post and marking each notch with the date of his arrival. Around this inscription, he structures a system: “Upon the Sides of this square Post I cut every Day a Notch with my Knife, and every seventh Notch was as long again as the rest, and every first Day of the Month as long again as that long one, and thus I kept my Kalander, or weekly, monthly, and yearly reckoning of Time.” (pp. 55-56) In doing so, Crusoe inscribes linear time onto the landscape, transforming the island into a space where European notions of order and chronology can be re-imposed.

It was Karl Marx who first uncovered the structural link between time and the formation of European capitalist civilization, particularly through his analysis of labour and the historical emergence of industrial production. His critique of political economy is deeply concerned with the transformation of time into a

measurable, abstract, and exchangeable quantity. This process, integral to the commodification of labour, was historically enabled by the technological revolution of mechanical timekeeping, which disembedded time from nature and ritual, rendering it an instrument of discipline and control. Marx's point is that the clock is not merely a mechanical device for measuring time, but the symbolic spatialisation of temporality itself.

Marx associates this transformation with the rise of abstract labour-time as the universal measure of value. In *Capital,* he writes:

> 'The time shall be regulated by a public clock,' for example the nearest railway clock, by which the factory clock is to be set. The manufacturer has to hang up a 'legible' printed notice stating the hours for the beginning and ending of work and the pauses allowed for meals. Children beginning work before 12 noon may not be again employed after 1 p.m. The afternoon shift must therefore consist of other children than those employed in the morning. Of the hour and a half for meal-times, 'one hour thereof at the least shall be given before three of the clock in the afternoon . . . and at the same period of the day. No child or young person shall be employed more than five hours before 1 p.m. without an interval for meal-time of at least 30 minutes. No child or young person (or female) shall be employed or allowed to remain in any room in which any manufacturing process is then' (i.e. at meal-times) 'carried on.'
>
> It has been seen that these highly detailed specifications, which regulate, with military uniformity, the times, the limits and the pauses of work by the stroke of the clock, were by no means a product of the fantasy of Members of Parliament. They developed gradually out of circumstances as natural laws of the modern mode of production. (Marx, 1990, pp. 394-395)

This formulation indicates that time, under capitalism, is not only measured but stretched, compressed, and extracted. It becomes a fungible resource that can be bought, sold, intensified, or economised. Labour is no longer defined by the nature of the task but by its duration, and value no longer resides in use but in time quantified through the mechanical regularity of the clock.

Though often implicit, the figure of the clock looms over Marx's analysis as a ghostly presence. As Friedrich Engels makes clear in *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, industrial capitalism introduced a new form of temporal domination: The worker is obliged to work when the clock dictates (1845/1958, p. 203). This is a far cry from premodern or task-based societies, where labour followed the rhythm of necessity or seasonal variation. Under industrial conditions, mechanical time enforces a regime of synchronisation and punctuality, reshaping subjectivity and space around the imperative of productivity.

In this sense, Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* can be read as a literary allegory of the spatialisation of archipelagic time that subtends the global expansion of European modernity. On the surface, Crusoe's island appears as a site of isolation and bare survival. More fundamentally, however, it becomes a space where the European temporal order is projected, mapped, and territorialised. The island is no longer simply a place within an archipelago; it becomes a unit to be organised through the abstract, linear time of colonial modernity. Crusoe's anxiety about losing track of the days is therefore not merely a practical concern. What is at stake is the collapse of a temporal regime: the Protestant order of measured weeks, disciplined labour, and moral regularity. In this way, the novel stages how archipelagic time, with its discontinuities, rhythms, and spatial dispersions, is subordinated to the homogeneous clock-time of European civilisation.

To counteract this, Crusoe erects a wooden post marked with notches to represent each passing day, extending one every seventh to denote the Sabbath. This act of timekeeping replicates the calendaric and disciplinary structures of European time, projecting a system of measurement onto a landscape previously

untouched by such categories. It is, in essence, an act of temporal enclosure, akin to the enclosure of the commons in early modern England: a carving up of time itself, parcelled out, regularised, and made productive.

Thus, *Robinson Crusoe* is nothing less than the narrative of how European civilisation imposes its values on the rest of the world by inventing and exporting its own specialisation of time. The island, a space outside history, is converted into a colonial prototype of the capitalist world, where productivity, discipline, and time management become the signs of civilisation. Crusoe's improvised clock, embodied in his calendar of notches and his solar reckoning, symbolises the deeper epistemic violence of empire: not merely the occupation of land, but the occupation of temporal structures, of how life is lived, scheduled, and valued.

The Capitalist Specialisation of Time

This reading finds retrospective confirmation in E. P. Thompson's landmark argument that under industrial capitalism the clock, not the task, became the measure of labour (1967, pp. 56-97), a formulation that Defoe, writing at the cusp of that transformation, seems almost to have scripted in advance. Crusoe does not merely survive on the island; he colonises it temporally, remaking its rhythms into a legible economy in which nature submits to schedule, labour accrues value, and time itself becomes a form of capital. The novel in this sense does not simply reflect an emergent modernity but actively imagines its governing logic, i.e., what we might call colonial-modern time: a regime of synchronisation and productive reckoning whose dominion would extend, in the centuries to come, far beyond the Atlantic world to reorganise the lived temporalities of much of the global South.

As Ian Watt (1957) observes, the novel's detailed temporal tracking reflects the emergence of a modern bourgeois sensibility rooted in economic rationalism and a Protestant ethic of self-discipline (pp. 60-62). Crusoe's improvised calendar thus aligns with the novel's broader commitment to empirical observation and facticity, traits that Mary Poovey (1998) argues are foundational to the epistemology of modernity (pp. 123-126). His recording of time, even in isolation, mimics both the diary and the account book, reproducing the ledger's cultural logic.

Importantly, there is no mention in the novel of Crusoe possessing a mechanical clock. Instead, his perception of time becomes qualitative and environmental, governed by the cycles of light and shadow. He refers to parts of the day by the sun's position, a method of reckoning that recalls pre-modern, non-instrumental conceptions of time. Peter Hulme (1986) underscores this tension by arguing that "despite the importance of *Robinson Crusoe*'s topography, there is a sense in which the island episode is, so to speak, a retreat from chronology and from geography into a moment that can in certain respects be called 'Utopian'" (p. 187).

Here, Hulme reads Robinson's obsession with time in the island episodes as deterritorialised, insofar as Crusoe's island appears as a utopian space in which conventional European temporality has been suspended. Yet Hulme also describes this space as a "colonial utopia," suggesting that the island is never simply outside Europe, but is instead reterritorialised through European cultural inheritance. From this perspective, Crusoe's calendar-making and Sabbath observance can be understood as acts of cultural reterritorialisation: attempts to suppress the island's temporal otherness and to reassert European mastery over an otherwise unfamiliar environment.

The contrast between Crusoe's notched post and his reliance on solar rhythms illustrates a deeper tension between two temporalities: the abstract, segmented time of modernity and the cyclical time of the island. Quoting Michel Foucault, Roxann Wheeler (2000) explains that "classification was based on 'the prinicple of

the smallest possible difference between things'" and links this classificatory logic to what she calls a "taxonomic impulse" (p. 29). Indeed, such ordering practices are inseparable from the taxonomic ambitions of Enlightenment thought, which sought to classify not only people but time and space themselves Crusoe's actions can thus be read as part of a broader imperial epistemology, in which mapping, naming, and timekeeping are instruments of domination.

Defoe's narrative subtly reveals the colonial desire to domesticate time, just as Crusoe domesticates space. His attempt to mark days and restore the Sabbath reflects the effort to preserve a Protestant ethic and temporal discipline even in the absence of a social world. Yet the novel also exposes the instability of this project, for time on the island is always at risk of slipping into formlessness. As Homi Bhabha (1994) has argued, colonial discourse often stages its authority through temporal claims, projecting the coloniser as modern and progressive while relegating the colonized to a state of arrested development or stasis (pp. 236-237). The island, as the colonised space, is likewise consigned to that same state of temporal arrest and stagnation. Crusoe's improvised calendar thus becomes both a survival tool and a metaphysical gesture: a way to stave off the temporal entropy that haunts imperial solitude.

The specialisation of time under capitalism, its reduction to a uniform, measurable, and productive medium, finds one of its most searching literary-theoretical challenges in the work of Édouard Glissant. While Glissant does not deploy a single, programmatic counter-concept to capitalist temporality, the cluster of temporal figures he develops across Caribbean Discourse, collectively articulate what we might call, drawing out their archipelagic logic, an archipelagic time: a mode of temporal experience rooted in the specific histories of Caribbean dispossession and creolisation, and irreducible to the linear, accumulative, teleological time of Western modernity and its capitalist organisation.

The starting point of Glissant's intervention is his critique of History, i.e., capital H, which he identifies as "a highly functional fantasy of the West, originating at precisely the time when it alone 'made' the history of the World" (Glissant, 1989, p. 64). This History is not a neutral register of events but a totalising discourse that imposes order on human experience through "ethnocultural hierarchy and chronological progression," producing a narrative whose theological structure articulates it ultimately "more mythical than rational" (p. xxix). Its secular variants, Enlightenment progress and Marxist historicism alike, reproduce the same governing logic: time as a linear ascent toward a predetermined destination, with those peoples deemed ahistorical consigned to the periphery or the waiting room of modernity. What Glissant identifies, in other words, is a temporal regime that is also a regime of power whose chronological grammar legitimises colonial hierarchy by naturalising a single, metropolitan measure of historical time.

Against this, Glissant (1989) situates the Caribbean condition of nonhistory: "no collective memory, no sense of a chronology; the history of Martinique in particular is made up from a number of pseudo-events that have happened elsewhere" (p. xxxii). The decisive catalyst of historical change in Martinique, he observes, is "not secreted by the circumstances but externally determined in relation to another history", i.e., French history (p. 91). There is therefore a "real discontinuity beneath the apparent continuity" (p. 91), a structural severance from one's own past that the plantation system and subsequent departmentalisation have imposed and consolidated. Nonhistory is not, however, a simple absence or lack; it is the name for the condition in which a people is dispossessed of its own temporal self-understanding, forced to inhabit a chronology that is not its own, calibrated to the rhythms of metropolitan accumulation rather than to the lived experience of insular communities.

It is out of this condition that Glissant's counter-temporality emerges. What he proposes is not the recovery of an originary, pre-colonial time, because such nostalgia would merely invert the terms of the same

linear logic, but a radically different mode of temporal inhabitation he calls the "prophetic vision of the past": an exploration "related neither to a schematic chronology nor to a nostalgic lament", leading instead "to the identification of a painful notion of time and its full projection forward into the future, without the help of those plateaus in time from which the West has benefited" (Glissant, 1989, p. 64). This is a temporality that refuses both the arrow of progress and the mirage of origins, insisting instead on the creative, forward-projecting force of a past that has not yet been fully encountered, let alone assimilated.

The temporal figure Glissant most consistently opposes to Western linear time is duration, a concept he draws from the poetics of landscape rather than from the abstractions of political economy. Where European poetics, he argues, is "characterized by the inspiration or the sudden burst of a single moment", the poetics of the Caribbean and the Americas is "a search for temporal duration", in which past and future are linked through continuous, accretive flow rather than sequential punctuation (Glissant, 1989, p. xxxvii). American writers, he observes, are "prey to a kind of future remembering": a temporal orientation in which the past is not behind but ahead, not superseded but still arriving, still making claims on a present that has not yet caught up with it (p. 144). This is time experienced not as a calm extension into the future but as something that "implode[s] in us in clumps, transported in fields of oblivion where we must, with difficulty and pain, put it all back together" (p. 145), i.e., what Glissant elsewhere characterises as "exploded, suffered time" (p. 144).

Caribbean Space

Time is never abstracted from place: it is embedded in landscape, in the shifting profusion of the Caribbean environment, in the sea that holds memories of the past, while the river flows toward an open future. The three dimensions of Caribbean space such as heights, plains, and sea, correspond not to three fixed chronological zones in linear succession but to a dialectical "becoming," an "inexhaustible change" that resists resolution into any single temporal direction (Glissant, 1989, p. xxxviii). This is a relational temporality: plural, lateral, archipelagic in structure, composed of islands of experience that connect across distance rather than proceeding along a single track. Against the monoculture of capitalist clock-time, which, as Thompson showed, reduces all labour to a uniform, exchangeable temporality, Glissant's archipelagic time insists on irreducible multiplicity, on the coexistence of discontinuous temporal currents that cannot be synchronised without violence.

This insistence on multiplicity extends to Glissant's politics of opacity. Against the West's demand for "transparent universality", he asserts "the right to obscurity": the refusal to represent Caribbean temporal experience fully legible to the conceptual frameworks of metropolitan modernity (Glissant, 1989, p. 2). This is not mere mystification but a principled resistance to the epistemological imperialism embedded in capitalist-colonial time, the demand that all experience submit to a single, universal measure, that all histories be translatable into the grammar of Progress. Archipelagic time, as we are using the term, holds this resistance at its centre: it is a temporality that does not ask permission to be valid, that does not require assimilation into the dominant chronology in order to carry weight, dignity, or political force. "The intention poétique," Glissant writes, "replaces the intention historique" (p. xxxvii): the creative imagination, attuned to the unofficial truths that official history suppresses, becomes the primary medium through which an alternative relation to time is sustained and transmitted.

In this sense, archipelagic time, understood as the synthetic name for this cluster of Glissantian temporal figures, does not simply negate capitalist temporality; it displaces its foundations, proposing in their place a way of being in time that is answerable not to the universal clock but to the tides, ruptures, and long memories

of insular life. Within the Christian tradition, time is understood as linear, teleological, and universal: it begins with divine Creation and proceeds toward a predetermined end, Judgment or Redemption. This conception of temporality underpins a redemptive narrative of history that situates all human events within a divine plan and renders local temporalities subordinate to an overarching framework. As European colonialism expanded globally, this linear model of time was exported through conquest, mission, and governance, profoundly restructuring non-Western societies' relations to their own histories. Scholars such as Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000) have shown how historicism, closely tied to Christian temporal logic, functions as a mechanism of imperial domination by situating Europe as the origin and destiny of all history (pp. 7-23).

The Enlightenment's secularisation of Christian time did not abandon this structure but rearticulated it as a discourse of historical progress. Modernity came to be defined by a forward-moving historical arc, with Europe cast as its vanguard and the non-European world positioned as either temporally delayed or outside of history altogether. Islands, in this framework, were particularly vulnerable to such chronopolitical marginalisation. They were imagined as remote, isolated, and timeless, i.e., residues of the primitive or the exotic, suspended in the waiting room of history until absorbed into the developmental logic of the modern world. As Elizabeth DeLoughrey (2007) argues, island spaces have long been romanticised or infantilised in Western imagination, flattened into symbols of Edenic stasis or sites of colonial experimentation (pp. 11-29).

In contrast to this, Glissant advances archipelagic time as a radically different temporal paradigm. Drawing on the cultural and historical experiences of the Caribbean, particularly its legacies of slavery, displacement, and creolisation, Glissant proposes a conception of time that is nonlinear, recursive, and situated. Archipelagic time does not follow a unidirectional trajectory but unfolds through tidal rhythms, seasonal cycles, and repeated ruptures. It is shaped by trauma and survival, memory and forgetting, by the layers of sedimented history rather than by a forward march toward progress or redemption. As Glissant (1997) writes in Poetics of Relation, "what took place in the Caribbean, which could be summed up in the word creolization", is not simply "an encounter, a shock … a métissage," but "a new and original dimension allowing each person to be there and elsewhere, rooted and open, lost in the mountains and free beneath the sea, in harmony and in errantry" (p. 34). In this way, Caribbean is not only the place of errantry, but of errant temporality.

The figures of Glissant's errant and Charles Baudelaire's flâneur both centre on the act of wandering, yet they emerge from profoundly different historical, poetic, and philosophical contexts. At first glance, both seem to revel in movement, displacement, and perception. However, while Baudelaire's flâneur is emblematic of the modern urban gaze, Glissant's errant inhabits a postcolonial and relational world, one marked by the ruptures of slavery, exile, and creolisation. The comparison between them reveals two contrasting conceptions of subjectivity, space, and time, grounded in aesthetic detachment, the other in political and poetic relation.

Flâneur and Errant

In Baudelaire (1965), the flâneur is not simply a stroller but "the passionate spectator," a figure who takes "immense joy" in dwelling "in the heart of the multitude" (p. 9). He belongs to the crowd without being dissolved into it. Because he is at once immersed and detached, Baudelaire compares him to "a kaleidoscope gifted with consciousness" (p. 9): a mobile sensorium that absorbs the shocks, gestures, fashions, and passing surfaces of the modern city and turns them into aesthetic perception. The flâneur thus becomes the privileged interpreter of modernity as "the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent" (p. 13). Yet this figure is not a force of resistance. He does not break the spectacle so much as refine it into style, melancholy, and observation. His freedom depends on leisure, mobility, and social ease within the metropolis, which is why he remains marked

by bourgeois privilege. What Baudelaire ultimately offers is not a politics against capitalist modernity, but a lyrical consciousness fully attuned to its fleeting forms.

In contrast, Glissant's concept of errantry arises from the fractured histories of the Caribbean and the Global South. It is not the voluntary saunter of a city-dweller, but a condition shaped by historical violence, including colonial conquest, the Middle Passage, and cultural displacement. The errant does not seek to return to an origin, nor to dominate a destination. Rather, errantry is a mode of being-in-relation: it embraces unpredictability, opacity, and multiplicity. Glissant insists that such wandering resists totalising narratives, such as those imposed by Western modernity or nationalist essentialism. The errant is always moving, always becoming, and this movement is not toward completion, but toward entanglement with others.

Whereas the flâneur reflects the rhythms and contradictions of a capitalist metropolis, the errant reflects the archipelagic temporality of postcolonial experience. The flâneur's detachment is visual and observational; he sees the city as a tableau to be interpreted. The errant, on the other hand, is immersed in a world that cannot be totalised, where knowing another requires accepting their opacity. This distinction also points to divergent political stakes: the flâneur may capture the spirit of modern alienation, but the errant enacts a decolonial ethics of relation. One aestheticises the world's surfaces; the other refuses transparency and calls for solidarity across difference.

While both the flâneur and the errant are figures of wandering, their journeys lead in different directions. Baudelaire's flâneur walks through a modern world shaped by spectacle, commodity, and melancholia, while Glissant's errant navigates a creolised world of entanglement, rupture, and relation. The former belongs to the geography of the boulevard; the latter to the unpredictable routes of the archipelago. To err is not to drift aimlessly, in Glissant's sense, but to inhabit the world as an unfolding web of historical and affective connections, where wandering becomes a form of resistance, and where relation replaces mastery.

This conception of errant temporality emphasises relationality over universality. Whereas Christian time seeks to subsume all difference within a singular historical arc, archipelagic time foregrounds the opacity and plurality of local temporalities. It privileges microhistories, discontinuities, and the entanglement of multiple genealogies without seeking their synthesis. In this sense, Glissant's temporal philosophy resists both the homogenising force of colonial historicism and the abstraction of global modernity. His insistence on opacity, a refusal to be fully known or translated into dominant epistemologies, is not merely a methodological stance but a temporal one, preserving the right of communities and experiences to remain outside of developmentalist logics (Glissant, 1989, pp. 219-220).

Furthermore, archipelagic time is not defined by isolation but by complex forms of relation. The island, for Glissant, is not a bounded entity but a node in a wider archipelagic network, shaped by movement, exchange, and historical resonance. This vision recalls his broader notion of Relation, where identity is not fixed but emerges through connection and difference. Archipelagic time, then, is inherently archipelagic: it registers both separation and linkage, both solitude and interdependence. It displaces the mainland as the privileged site of historical agency and repositions the island as a generative space of thought, resistance, and becoming.

The implications of this critique are both philosophical and political. Glissant's temporal reimagining invites a rethinking of history not as a single story but as a constellation of co-existing, intersecting durations. In doing so, it challenges the chronopolitics of developmentalism and demands a more nuanced understanding of historical experience that is attentive to the fractures, silences, and rhythms of island life. This is especially urgent in postcolonial contexts, where inherited colonial frameworks continue to shape intellectual, cultural, and political self-understandings.

Archipelagic time offers not only a counterpoint to the linear temporality of Christian and Western modernity but also a conceptual resource for reimagining the world otherwise. It affirms a poetics of time grounded in the lived experiences of island worlds, worlds marked by rupture and survival, entanglement and opacity. In articulating this alternative temporality, Glissant makes a vital contribution to decolonial thought and planetary critique, offering an ethics of temporality that is responsive to the complexities of history, ecology, and relation.

Glissant introduces Relation as a world-making process based on unpredictability and multiplicity. Relation temporality does not follow a singular, linear axis but emerges from what he calls the chaos-monde—a dynamic entanglement of fragments, contacts, ruptures, and echoes. Archipelagic time is thus a product of this chaotic poetics. As Sam Coombes (2018) explains in Édouard Glissant: A Poetics of Resistance, Relation is a "non-system of thought" (p. 5) that aligns with a kind of temporal multiplicity. It is not a rejection of time, but an affirmation of times: overlapping, plural, contradictory. Glissant's world is not built on a single origin but on the "conscious and contradictory experience of contacts among cultures" (p. 7).

Such temporality stands in opposition to linear eschatology. Glissant critiques the Christian eschatological vision for its rigid linearity: a teleological arc stretching from Eden, through the Fall, toward Redemption, a narrative architecture that served to legitimise colonial conquest and the so-called civilising mission. Archipelagic time, by contrast, does not seek redemption or return. It is genealogically ruptured, as with the African diaspora's relation to lost homelands, and radically emergent, as in the unpredictable outcomes of creolisation.

The concept of islandic temporality is thus deeply shaped by the legacy of slavery and colonisation, yet it refuses to be defined by victimhood or nostalgia. The past does not determine the future in a teleological sense; rather, memory works through what Glissant calls trace and opacity. The slave ship, plantation, and creole language become not mere relics of a past, but active elements in the poetic composition of a shared world, i.e., an archipelago of time.

In Coombes's reading, Glissant (2018) even draws a parallel with Einsteinian relativity to reimagine global interconnection as a form of relational time: one where every phenomenon "is constantly subject to potential mutation" (p. 8). This suggests that archipelagic time not only resists universal temporality but affirms the material heterogeneity of world history. It is not timelessness, but rather a refusal to let hegemonic clocks determine the rhythm of cultural life.

Indeed, the poetics of errantry is fundamentally temporal. The errant does not voyage toward a known destination. Time here is navigational rather than calendrical. The rhythms of the tide, the circulation of languages, the unpredictable flowering of encounters; these shape the tempo of islandic life. As Coombes (2018) notes, errantry embraces "the impossibility for any mode of thinking to become universalized" and instead "plunges into the opacities of that part of the world to which [one] has access" (pp. 15-16).

Archipelagic Time and the Whole-World

In Glissant's philosophical and poetic corpus, the concept of errantry (l'errance) serves as a key intervention into dominant Western understandings of identity, knowledge, and mobility. Errantry departs from the classical notion of identity as rooted in a singular origin, what Glissant terms la pensée de l'Un (the "thinking of the One"), which has historically supported colonial ideologies and racial essentialisms. In contrast, errantry posits a model of subjectivity that is relational, discontinuous, and open-ended. Drawing on Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's notion of the rhizome, Glissant embraces a rhizomatic identity, one that emerges through

transversal encounters rather than genealogical rootedness (Glissant, 1997, p. 11; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, pp. 11-12).

Errantry also designates a mode of spatial and cognitive movement that resists the logic of conquest, mastery, or teleological arrival. "In the poetics of Relation", Glissant (1997) writes, "one who is errant (who is no longer traveler, discoverer, or conqueror) strives to know the totality of the world yet already knows he will never accomplish this—and knows that this is precisely where the threatened beauty of the world resides" (p. 20). This figure of the errant, nomadic but not rootless, open but not dissolved, offers a philosophical alternative to both colonial exploration and neoliberal globalisation. Whereas the former sought to territorialise the unknown, and the latter flattens cultural difference into consumerist sameness, errantry values opacity, unpredictability, and ethical non-knowing.

Epistemologically, errantry signals a critique of the Western metaphysical desire for totality and transparency. As Glissant (1997) argues, "Relation cannot be 'proved', because its totality is not approachable" but "it can be imagined, conceivable in transport of thought" (p. 174). This acknowledgment of the limits of knowledge is not a retreat into relativism, but rather the foundation for a poetics of opacity, a right to incommensurability that refuses the demands of epistemic capture (pp. 190-192). Opacity is, in this sense, not obscurantism but resistance: a refusal to be reduced, explained, or assimilated into systems of universal equivalence.

Politically, errantry subverts the linear temporalities and hierarchical spatialities of colonial modernity. It aligns with Glissant's broader critique of globalisation understood as cultural standardisation or "the leveling effect" (*l'égalisation*) (Glissant, 1997, p. 112). In this context, errantry does not simply describe a literary motif or aesthetic category; it becomes a strategic modality of thought and existence. It is a "poetics before it is a politics (*est une poétique avant d'être une politique*)", as Glissant (2006) later writes, yet one that enables the conditions of possibility for ethical and political transformation (p. 162).

As Coombes notes, errantry in Glissant's thought is not a flight from political responsibility but a way of reimagining solidarity in a world of irreducible difference. According to Coombes (2018), Glissant affirms that "the irreducible specificity and inassimilability of each phenomenon in relation to others" while also emphasising that every phenomenon remains connected to others through a dialectic of relationality (p. 24). It rejects both the totalising universalism of Enlightenment modernity and the identitarian closures of nationalist essentialism. In doing so, it articulates what can be called relational ontology anchored in the poetics of the Whole-World (Tout-monde), where multiplicity is not merely tolerated but affirmed as the very substance of existence.

Thus, archipelagic time is poetical and political. It is the refusal of the homogeneous time of capital, empire, and salvation. It is rooted in the non-synchronous temporalities of the Caribbean, where African memory, Amerindian disappearance, European domination, and creole becoming coexist. Glissant's poetic vision calls us not to synchronise with the dominant order, but to relate otherwise, in time as well as in space. Archipelagic time is the time of the archipelago: discontinuous, submerged, echoing, and resistant. It calls for a politics of care rooted not in a return to origin, but in the creative navigation of multiplicity, a model not only for Caribbean futures, but for planetary thought.

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