Rhythms of Locality. A Travel through Caribbean Performances and Literature

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Abstract

The paper aims to give an insight on various concepts created and developed within the Caribbean literary context, in order to find some strategic elements capable of allowing us reframe the idea and meaning of locality. The necessity of such an operation lies in the urgency of rethinking the political dimension of locality due to its reactionary and repressive use by alt-right and fascist movements, in particular in Europe and the US. In this vein, concepts such as "polyrhythm", "meta-archipelago" (Benítez Rojo), "tidalectics" (Brathwaite), "poetics of relation", "creolization", "transnation" and "commonplace" (Glissant), become of strategic use as a way of opening up the idea of locality, which we aim to conceive precisely as a kind of social openness. Beside this conceptual reframing of locality, developed through the analysis of Benítez Rojo and Kamau Brathwaite's rhythmical concepts, the reader can find, on the one hand, the concept of performance as the very engine of such a reframing, and, on the other end, an attempt to show how the concepts we analyse are deeply intertwined with those of Deleuze and Guattari, in particular multiplicity, difference and repetition, and rhizome.

> *The noise my leaves make is my language. In it is tunneled the roar of seas of a lost ocean.*
>
> Derek Walcott

Performing locality

In the contemporary geopolitical framework, with the development of economic conditions and constraints that have accompanied the process of so-called globalization, a particular term has been garnering quite a significant and suggestive level of power: *locality*.

In several fields, locality has risen as a necessary counterpoint to globality, a claim to be a kind of constitutive, sustainable and harmonious origin that would precede the tech-

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nological exploitation of nature. Confronted with the rise of globalization and its side effects, a profusion of various localisms have arisen everywhere. In such a context, and furthermore with the growth of ultra-libertarianisms, locality has frequently acquired connotations that appear not only reactionary, but regressive and fascist (it's enough to think, for instance, of the discourse on migration, borders and all the "we first" movements that are spreading around the world). Behind this specific idea of locality, it is easy to find feelings of fear, rejection, anguish, hate, rage and insecurity, caused by the economic and political situation, feelings that financial globalization itself has provoked in all those who have sometimes felt, consciously or unconsciously, threatened by the articulation of a globalized technological progress and the presence of several forms of *otherness,* perceived as threatening the "pure identity" of a place and of the people that the very concept of locality should express*.* In this sense, if locality might be thought as the expression of a place, the issue is thus of what kind of expression this could be, and of what content such an expression could propagate.

This fold of the problem brings us to the political core of Deleuze and Guattari's theory about territories and collective assemblages (Deleuze & Guattari 1987). As is well known, within Deleuze and Guattari's perspective, a collective enunciation expressing a territory (not only geographical, but also symbolic, existential, ideological, etc.) could be sedentary and identitarian, or it could be nomadic (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 380). To affirm that locality corresponds to a territory would be too simplistic, and would limit the problem to only one of its multiple aspects, however, we could begin to imagine locality, too, as expressing one of these two tendencies: a fixed identity or a crossing. This is thus our starting point: how to criticize the identitarian dimension of locality and, consequently, how to let upsurge its nomadic side? We certainly believe that it is worth providing locality with another meaning, and the aim of this paper is to attempt to establish a set of preliminary suggestions capable of allowing such an alternative to be imagined. In this vein, and against the conservative perspective on locality, which aims to think of it as something rooted in the past, to be preserved in its original purity and to be defended from the contagion of otherness (foreign people, technology, globalization), we will propose the idea that locality possesses an essentially performative dimension rooted in the dynamics of repetition. This means that every locality should be conceived not as a place, but as the result of a repeated collective performance that gives sense to a place, that allows the expression of a place.

At this point, another terminological specification is required, concerning the way in which performance is utilized as a reference. Clearly, our aim is not to retain performance as an object of analysis, or as a particular artistic manifestation, but rather as a theoretical lens (Taylor 2003: 15), that is, a paradigm for knowledge, which considers it as the embodied enactment of cultural forces, but also as the result of a complex system of transmission, not always reducible to a relation between subjects and objects (Fischer-Lichte 2008). And furthermore: it is precisely because of this conception of performance as an

act that subverts roles and rules in the relations between subjects and objects that it becomes a strategic element in our discourse. Indeed, what a performance performs is the co-construction of meanings and sense, through the interplay of behaviours from which it is constituted:

> In performance, participants experience themselves as subjects who partially control, and are partially controlled by, the conditions—neither fully autonomous nor fully determined. They experience performance as an aesthetic and a social, even political, process in which relationships are negotiated, power struggles fought out, and communities emerge and vanish. (Fischer-Lichte 2014: 42)

What is worth stressing here is that performance does not want to deliver a message or to replay former significances, nor assert a particular vision of the world and even less its representation, but it is itself a composition of meanings that is achievable only through the desire of the participants, which in turn is produced as such thanks to a relationship of proximity that "the audience" maintains with what happens. The very sense of the act of performance, therefore, is not a kind of resultant "object" (cultural, representative, artistic), but rather the production and display of a *shared knowledge in action*, where memories, practices, events and behaviours intertwine in order to give place to forms of life. That is why performance becomes a mode of cultural action, an arena for the constant process of negotiating experiences and meanings that constitute culture.

When we affirm that performance supplies no meaning, but produces it, we also should assert that it does so through its iterability[1]: it is by the possibility of repeating, or, as Richard Schechner would say, restoring for *n* times a behaviour[2], that a "reading machine" is put in place, and the meaning performed. It is precisely this repetition that gives sense and symbolic power to performance, a sense that is thus not universal but variates according to the "worlds" in which it is framed. This should be thought as an "originary repetition" that re-inscribes in a new context a behaviour making it function in several different ways.

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) describe a similar dynamic in terms of coding and transcoding, in order to express the relation that takes place in a specific milieu between the several points of view and specific codes developed and repeated by the living beings – their interpretations, in Nietzschean terms. In this sense, we can begin by saying that «every milieu is vibratory, in other words, a block of space-time constituted by the peri-

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[1] Iterability is recognized by Derrida as one of the main features of writing, which couples repetition with alterity structuring its own readability. See «Signature Event Context» (in Derrida 1988: 1-23).

[2] According to Schechener (1981), a behavior is material, and as such doesn't depend on any subject or causal system that brought it into existence. Rather, a behavior can be isolated and repeated (performed), rearranged, manipulated, shaped and displayed far beyond its origin in time and space, "as a strip of film".

odic repetition of the component», and coded, «a code being defined by periodic repetition» (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 313). At the same time, «each code is in a perpetual state of transcoding or transduction […] [that] is the manner in which one milieu serves as the basis for another, […] dissipates in it or is constituted in it» (*Ibid.*). In other words, any of the "worlds" or points of view that converge in a milieu is characterized by one or more codes that determine it, and in it repeat, making things happen or produce, as Antonio Benítez Rojo would say, "in a certain way" (1996: 10) – and we will see later what this means.

According to Deleuze and Guattari, the dynamic principle of this kind of repetition is rhythm, as the chance to connect several milieus: «there is rhythm whenever there is a transcoded passage from one milieu to another, a communication of milieus, coordination between heterogeneous space-times» (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 313). This definition of rhythm is not to be confused with a metric cadence or an imposed regularity, but should rather be considered as the possibility of crossing or "passing through", suddenly changing direction and, of course, changing milieu, producing difference. That is why we are defining locality as a rhythmic figure, and proposing an essential relationship between it and performance, locality always and necessarily being a place that has been performed (repeated) through different milieus in order to express itself and to make sense.

In this vein, one can consider locality as the result of a differentiating repetition, being the place repeated by other means that mere physical reality. This is at least what we can grasp from Deleuze's definition of desert islands in the homonymous essay that is among the very first texts published by the French philosopher:

> The deserted island is the origin, but a second origin. From it everything begins anew. The island is the necessary minimum for this re-beginning, the material that survives the first origin, the radiating seed or egg that must be sufficient to re-produce everything. Clearly, this presupposes that the formation of the world happens in two stages, in two periods of time, birth and re-birth […]. The second moment does not succeed the first: it is the reappearance of the first when the cycle of the other moments has been completed. The second origin is thus more essential than the first, since it gives us the law of repetition, the law of the series, whose first origin gave us only moments. […] The idea of a second origin gives the deserted island its whole meaning, the survival of a sacred place in a world that is slow to re-begin. In the ideal of beginning anew there is something that precedes the beginning itself, that takes it up to deepen it and delay it in the passage of time. The desert island is the material of this something immemorial, this something most profound. (Deleuze 2004: 13-14)

In this early essay, it is already possible to find both the theme of repetition, which will subsequently be developed by Deleuze in *Difference and Repetition* (Deleuze 1994), driving the interpretation of Nietzsche's Eternal Return, as well as the topic of the relations between territory, thought and sea, which will be expressed, in the last works, through

the plane of immanence and the image of the archipelago (Deleuze & Guattari 1994; Deleuze 1998). In the same way, and moving to another context, the one of so-called Caribbean Thought or Archipelagic Thinking, it is possible to detect three figures of performance and of performed localities that have a powerful relation with Deleuze's repetition: polyrhythm, tidalectics, and creolization, which have been respectively developed by Antonio Benítez Rojo, Kamau Brathwaite and Edouard Glissant. It will be through these three figures, and with a special focus on Benítez Rojo's notion of polyrhythm and Brathwaite's poetics, that we will attempt to establish some strategic components for a concept of locality worthy of what happens to us. In doing so, we will follow some guidelines pointed out by Florencia Bonfiglio in her essay on these three authors, starting from the following statement:

> The essays of these authors repeat themselves, in consonance, in a "certain way". Faced with institutionalized violence, historical domination and dispossession, the way out is the collective performance, the cimarroneo as resistance and the relief of the fragments. Hence the importance of the "Relationship" (with capital letter) in Glissant, the "submarine unit" in Brathwaite and the "repetition" (as a form of integration) of the islands in Benítez Rojo. (Bonfiglio 2014: 28-29)

By highlighting a kind of repetition with difference – and thus a kind of rhythm – that empowers the theoretical relations between the three Caribbean thinkers, Bonfiglio explicitly convokes Benitez Rojo's suggestion about the essentially repetitive character that forms the imaginary and the poetics of the Caribbean archipelago. Furthermore, the "certain way" through which these essays repeat themselves becomes the aesthetic component of the very concept of the "repeating island", and in this sense a further exploration of the relation between such "certain way" and repetition in Benitez Rojo's *Repeating Island* will allow us to deepen the relationships between rhythm and locality.

Repeating islands

The first feat of Antonio Benítez Rojo's *The Repeating Island* (1996) is to argue that within the apparent disorder of the Caribbean, the area's discontinuous landmasses, its different colonial histories, languages, ethnic groups, politics and traditions, there is an "island" of paradoxes that emerges and "repeats" itself, giving shape to an unexpected and complex sociocultural archipelago, whose conditions are not that different from the ones of ancient Greece (Benítez Rojo 1996: 4). Benítez Rojo himself designates it as an island that repeats itself, whereby the expression "the repeating island" doesn't point to something that exists: it has no referent, outside of itself or before and in front of itself, but once again, it is performative, in the sense that «it does not describe something [...] [but] it produces or transforms a situation, it effects» (Derrida 2008: 13). As has frequently been

observed, the Caribbean is the union of the diverse (several colonizations, languages, cultures), but what is even more interesting is that they connect North and South America in another way, that is, through an archipelago: as «a discontinuous conjunction […] [of] unstable condensations, turbulences, whirlpools, clumps of bubbles, frayed seaweed, sunken galleons, crashing breakers, flying fish, seagull squawks, downpours, nighttime phosphorescences, eddies and pools, uncertain voyages of signification» (Benítez Rojo 1996: 2). So, according to Benítez Rojo, in «the Caribbean archipelago […] one can sense the features of an island that "repeats" itself, unfolding and bifurcating until it reaches all the seas and lands of the earth, while at the same time it inspires multidisciplinary maps of unexpected designs» (Benítez Rojo 1996: 3).

> The culture of the Caribbean, at least in its most distinctive aspect, is not terrestrial but aquatic, a sinuous culture where time unfolds irregularly and resists being captured by the cycles of clock and calendar. The Caribbean is the natural and indispensable realm of marine currents, of waves, of folds and double folds, of fluidity and sinuosity. It is, in the final analysis, a culture of the meta-archipelago: a chaos that returns, a detour without a purpose, a continual flow of paradoxes; it is a feed-back machine with asymmetrical workings, like the sea, the wind, the clouds, the uncanny novel, the food chain, the music of Malaya, Gödel's theorem and fractal mathematics. (Benítez Rojo 1996: 11)

In his book, Benítez Rojo frequently refers to the theory of Chaos – not as how we think chaos in everyday life but as a model where within a disorder, some regularities repeat themselves globally. Chaos looks toward everything that repeats, preproduces, grows, decays, unfolds, flows, spins, vibrates, seethes. What is interesting is that according to him, in the Caribbean this attitude takes the form of rhythms.

In the discourse of Chaos, "a chaos that returns", every repetition is a practice that entails difference and a step towards nothingness. A chaos within which there is an island that proliferates endlessly, each copy a different one, founding and refounding ethnological materials like a cloud will do with its vapor. As we saw, and as Benítez Rojo, too, affirms, this can also be described in terms of performance:, once again, not in terms of scenic interpretation, but rather, in the sense of the creation of a ritual, as a certain "way of doing", as something that repeats while always being different. There is here an expression of the mystic or magical proper of the Caribbean culture, which nourishes the so called *supersyncretism* of the encounters: in this sense, a syncretic artefact is not a synthesis, but a signifier made of differences, performed by them.

In the Caribbean, the interplay of these differences takes a dynamic movement that resonates with the one Deleuze and Guattari describe in *A Thousand Plateaus*: the code that crosses thresholds and borders, through which a kind of union and exchange is produced. Hence the Caribbean appears as a space of fluxes and rhythms, where rhythm is

what «puts all the Caribbean peoples in "the same boat", over and above separations imposed on them by "nationality and race"» (Benítez Rojo 1996: 75). What makes us perceive this "impossible unity" (Benítez Rojo 1996: 20) is precisely the "certain kind of way" that is produced through the rhythm. Benítez Rojo refers to it as «something remote that reproduces itself and that carries the desire to sublimate apocalypse and violence; something obscure that comes from the performance and that one makes his own in a very special way; concretely, it takes away the space that separates the onlooker from the participant» (Benítez Rojo 1996: 16), something that comes from the past but is not originary, that is not an object or a specific behaviour but a way of performing it, increasing the game of differences through a repeating line.

We shouldn't conceive this phenomenon as springing up from a specific territorial area, as one might think, but rather as a local development that "originates", or puts in place, something that, with Benítez Rojo, we could call "a grand epic travel of meaning and sense", where the sea could be seen as something that isolates or cuts the continuity of physical connections with the South American coast, but not the flux of culture between territories, the flux of signifiers that crosses the space-time barrier continuing to connect the knowledge that passes throughout it.

> The Peoples of the Sea proliferate incessantly while differentiating themselves from one another, traveling together toward the infinite. Certain dynamics of their culture also repeat and sail through the seas of time without reaching anywhere. If I were to put this in two words I would say: performance and rhythm. (Benítez Rojo 1996: 16)

From Rhythm to Polyrhythm

If we think of rhythm as a flux cut through by other rhythms, then, «the culture of the Peoples of the Sea is a flux interrupted by rhythms which attempt to silence the noises with which their own social formation interrupts the discourse of Nature» (Benítez Rojo 1996: 16-17). In other words, their cultural discourse has always tried to neutralize external and internal violence and to refer society to the transhistorical codes of Nature, generating through them a space that, because these codes are not intelligible, can only be intuited through a poetic or artistic act.

At the same time, this engenders a network of subcodes that hold together rituals, dances, music, cosmologies and oracles, constituting «a vast hermetic labyrinth», one that refers to «another wisdom», which, in the Caribbean, and unlike what happens in the West, succeeds in coexisting with scientific knowledge, as differences that repeat within the same system.

> In this paradoxical space, in which one has the illusion of experiencing a totality, there appear to be no repressions or contradictions; there is no desire other than that of

> maintaining oneself within the limits of this zone for the longest possible time, in free orbit, beyond imprisonment or liberty. (Benítez Rojo 1996: 17)

Through this kind of rhythmic movement, which originates and is originated at the same time, we become capable of grasping and feeling a concept of locality that is neither fixed in a specific territory nor represents a central and ancient place: rather, it is a particular way of *giving* place, continuously becoming something else, and as such proliferating, through different territories, by a singular language, sound, movement. In brief: a certain kind of expression that marks a poetic territory *to come*.

Referring once again to Deleuze and Guattari (and even trying to push their thought further, *to machine* it), Benítez Rojo describes this complex feature as a «machine of machines» (1996: 6), where flows and rhythms are constantly interrupted and reinvented, and where regularities are produced only through its profound link with the march of Nature, and the desire to reread (rewrite) it in terms of (other) rhythms (Benítez Rojo 1996: 17). The technological-poetic Caribbean machine is thus, in a certain sense, «a metamachine of differences whose poetic mechanism cannot be diagrammed in conventional dimensions, and whose user's manual is found dispersed in a state of plasma within the chaos of its own network of codes and subcodes» (Benítez Rojo 1996: 18).

To explain it, Benítez Rojo uses the notion of polyrhythm – a rhythm that can be cut through by other rhythms, which are in turn cut by other rhythms – which takes us to the point where «the central rhythm is continuously displaced by other rhythms, in such a way as to make it fix a center no longer, then to transcend into a state of flux» (Benítez Rojo 1996: 18). This is the way in which the Caribbean machine makes us finally understand what kind of performance Antonio Benítez Rojo is referring to: one where at a certain point it will no longer be clear what is cut by what, and who's the agent of this cutting. This kind of rhythm can be reached through several systems of signs, whether it be dance, music, language, text, body language, ways of doing… and it is one that can for instance be felt by somebody who at some moment realizes they are travelling easily and well as they walk, that is, with all the body at once: each muscle moving without effort, adjusting to the rhythm of the whole. But this is a kind of polyrhythm in which the rhythm comes from a central direction (each step). However, it is always possible that one wants to walk not only with the feet, and for that she impels to the muscles of her neck, back, abdomen, arms, their own rhythm, which is different from the rhythm of the steps, which then no longer dominates. If this were to happen, Benítez Rojo affirms, a transitory performance would occur, which would make this person connect with the local and originating "way of doing", or, in other words, with a decentred or even diffuse dynamic that is always at the source of the production of (common) meanings.

Repeating waves

Benítez Rojo's aesthetic-political imaginary of the archipelago is also inspired by the image of the Eternal Return, as a «feedback machine» with all its repetitions: islands, sea currents, origins, roots, waves (1996: 16). That of the Caribbean archipelago would therefore be an origin that always returns, or better, that always returns in the present, and always returns different. To put it in the words of another writer, Kamau Brathwaite tries to refer to this particular rhythmicity through the notion of *tidalectics*. This is a word that joins two heterogeneous terms, tide and dialectic: something physical, material, with something theoretical, conceptual. An interesting philosophical point is that the tide, with its waves repeated again and again, as in an eternal return, but an eternal return of the different (Deleuze 1994), seems to have no end, which is to say no *telos*. As Beatríz Llenín-Figueroa points out (2012): «the ocean seems engaged in an infinite repetition of the same movement over and over again, the tide is, in fact, never exactly the same, nor does it retract or return to the same place of "origin"» (7). It is this sense that tidalectics has to be conceived as an alternative to dialectics, which is precisely that movement of thought that tries to give a meaning and an end to history and humanity[3]. More than a pun, tidalectics is the ironic *work of the concept* that ends up calling into question dialectics itself. It is in this same vein that, during an interview with Nathaniel Mackey, Brathwaite defines tidalectics as «dialectics with my difference», that is to say, instead of the Hegelian «one-two-three», a feature that emerges from the «movement of water backwards and forwards as a kind of cyclic [...] motion, rather than linear» (Mackey 1995: 14). According to him, the Caribbean history is a confluence of repetitions, produced by migration, the constant movement of peoples, their relationship with the landscape, and a series of breaks and reversals, which we can find evoked in his poetry thanks to the rhythmicity and musicality of the words. In his writings, Brathwaite experiments new possibilities of poetic discourse by mixing various musical rhythms (see Manolachi 2013) with ambiguities and neologisms, but it is in particular his articulation of the migrant experience in terms of rhythms (Gargaillo 2018) that we would like to emphasise here in order to understand its *local* condition.

According to Brathwaite, migration is the key feature of Caribbean history, and as such

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[3]   But it can thus also be conceived as a thought of the fold, whose minimum unit, or minimum fold, is the wave. Impossible then not to recall a passage of *What is philosophy?* that seems to be reflected in this concept and also summons the figure of the archipelago: «Concepts are like multiple waves, rising and falling, but the plane of immanence is the single wave that rolls them up and unrolls them. [...] Concepts are the archipelago or skeletal frame, a spinal column rather than a skull, whereas the plane is the breath that suffuses the separate parts (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 36)». In sum: it has no end. But the end, like history – and like the end of history – is something human, too human for this unattainable entity. In this vein, Elizabeth DeLoughrey has defined tidalectics as a «geopoetic model of history», engaging with what Brathwaite conceives as an "alter/native" historiography to linear models of colonial progress (DeLoughrey 2007: 2).

it doesn't represent «a clean break from a monolithic past, but should be understood instead as just one instance of a process that has been repeated variously across generations» (Gargaillo 2018: 164). In his poetry, migration is seen from the perspective both of the people arriving in Barbados, the Caribbean island where Brathwaite is from, and of those that had to choose to leave. In the first sense, indeed, the original prism of migrations generates a singular *local* condition that gives place to a new language, the so called *nation-language*, which is in a process of constant transformation due to the influences on "official English" from the submerged languages of the previous cultures, the ones brought by the slaves and servants deported from Africa, and the way in which the French, Dutch and Spanish spoke their own languages (Brathwaite 1984: 261-262).

As Brathwaite reports, the imposition of English language and culture in the scholar system created a situation in which people from the Caribbean are more excited by English literary models and characters than locals, and, furthermore, if we look at perceptual models, we discover that young people «are more conscious (in terms of sensibility) of the falling of snow for instance […] than of the force of the hurricanes that take place every year» (Brathwaite 1984: 263). In other words, Brathwaite points, «we haven't got the syllables, the syllabic intelligence, to describe the hurricane, which is our own experience; whereas we can describe the imported alien experience of the snowfall» (*Ibid*.). The focus on the syllables, on how the language produces significance through its sounds and bodies, and thus on the rhythmic experience of a phenomenon, is what strikes us here. The rhythms of English poetry, for instance, are given by the iambic pentameter, which evokes a particular kind of experience and sensibility that doesn't pertain to these lands. «And that's the problem: how do you get a rhythm that approximates the natural experience, the environmental experience» (Brathwaite 1984: 265)? This appears to be a question of locality: not just thinking to which kind of words are used or produced, but rather, and even more slightly, to which kind of syntaxes and rhythms can be developed through language that are able to express the local experience. How can this imported and "educated" language be used and transformed from a local sensibility, which is not, we should repeat, the expression of an ancient or original state of things, a localism, but a process of and in constant transformation, that couldn't have taken place but for the migrations and influences from other cultures, as well as from the native musical structures and languages, which we could call creolization (Brathwaite 1974: 10-25)?

Brathwaite recognizes that it is from the oral tradition that a new kind of poetry and literature has sprung, which uses the tongue and the intonation "in a certain way", able to produce a remarkable complexity, coupling music and intervals. Once again, the lexicon of performance helps us: in this kind of "auriture" (or oral literature, see Brathwaite 1984: 267), it is the way in which "the audience" completes the noises and sounds, the syncopes, the pauses and repetitions produced by the poet creating a continuum that produces meaning, which is significant. Indeed, as Pearn (1985: 8) recognises, his poetry requires

some elements of performance to be fully appreciated[4]. In general, eloquence, verbal agility and a repertoire of rhymes and rhythms characterize the inventiveness in oral production that makes the Caribbean performers earn high prestige in their societies (Pearn 1985: 27). And, applying it to poetry, «through rhythm and counter-rhythm, a sense of energy which is generated through motion is built up» (Pearn 1985: 303). All this creates a sort of "kinetic energy" or "kinetic poetry" that repeats the movement of the bodies and of the tides, transforming it into sound and rhythm – which, as Brathwaite (1984) points out, are indeed part of the meaning. This is perfectly expressed by one of Brathwaite's masterpieces, *Rights of Passage*, a collection of poems built on Afro-Caribbean sounds.

> *New World A-Comin'*
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> [...]
> Watch now these cold men, bold
> as the water banging the bow in a sudden wild tide,
> indifferent, it seems, to the battle
>
> of wind in the water;
> for our blood, mixed
> soon with their passion in sport,
>
> in indifference, in anger,
> will create new soils, new souls, new
> ancestors; will flow like this tide fixed
>
> to the star by which this ship floats
> to the new worlds, new waters, new
> harbours, the pride of our ancestors mixed
>
> with the wind and the water
> the flesh and the flies, the whips and the fixed
> fear of pain in this chained and welcoming port.
> (Brathwaite 2014: 28)

These *stanzas* make clear that linguistic and technical experimentation has a *local* source, which resides in the environmental experience, which is present also when, as in this case, the travel is taking somebody *outside* of it. The rootless travel that is undertaken is thus one where each word reflects the fragmentation of the multiple directions it takes, and the sense of discovering something new (Pearn 1985: 323). What remains *fixed*, then,

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4   For a careful, broader analysis of the rhythmic and poetic possibilities developed through the relation between poetry and performance, see Julie Pearn's PhD dissertation, *Poetry as a Performing Art in the English-Speaking Caribbean* (1985).

is this possibility created *in* and *through* language, of expressing such locality, which comes to surface in literature.

Indeed, when asked about what generates his poetry, Brathwaite replies:

> An image or a rhythm, or a rhythm-image. Not an idea. It might seem so when I talk, but that's long after. I can conceive of what a poem would mean, but it's basically an intuition. The image of a stone skimming across the yard in the dark against the glittering water at Runaway Bay, for instance, that created the poem. [...] I hear it, like footsteps or a heart rate, a literal rhythm. (Smilowitz 1991: n.p., quoted in Gargaillo 2018: 155)

But let's come back to the poem. First the title, *Rights of Passage*: let us imagine a situation in which it is not the place, but the possibility of crossing it, which give sense to the adventure – or creates the sense of *an adventure*. This refers not only to the migrant condition, but also, and by assonance, it can be thought, as Kehinde (2007: 187) remarks, as a series of "rites of passage", that is, a kind of anthropological ritual of transition between one condition and another. Once again, it is a transformative power that echoes as a performance that is evoked, a crossing of thresholds that permanently modifies – almost by denying it – the traveller's identity. Somebody leaves a place or arrives at a place: in between, a fluctuation is produced that repeats the movement of the waves. The errancy of the points of view constantly changes the places where one passes through: not as such, as territories, but as localities, *events* of sense and meaning – that give place to sense and meaning – thus, events of openness[5]. Here, it is difficult to say what generates a locality is a point of view, or the other way around. As Deleuze, following Nietzsche and Whitehead, would have put it, «every point of view is a point of view on variation. The point of view is not what varies with the subject [...]; it is, to the contrary, the condition in which an eventual subject apprehends a variation» (Deleuze 1993: 21). The formation of the new, of this locality, is something that happens *in* this variation, as a concrescence of elements that are "prehended" (in Whitehead's sense) and inversely: «the event is inseparably the objectification of one prehension and the subjectification of another [...] participating in the becoming of another event and the subject of its own becoming» (1993, 88). Said in other terms, a locality is produced by something, but also produces[6].

So, not only are both dynamics of migration present in Brathwaite, but also, they are re-doubled by the double arrow of locality, which, in a kind of circular mood, can be thought as something originating and originated. Brathwaite seems to evoke this double

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[5] In *The Fold*, Deleuze defines the event according to Whitehead as follows: «the event is a vibration with an infinity of harmonics or submultiples, such as an audible wave, a luminous wave, or even an increasingly smaller part of space over the course of an increasingly shorter duration» (Deleuze 1993: 87).

[6] The overall coincidence with a possible definition of locality as we are trying to think it and some elements derived from the definition of the Event according to Deleuze and Whitehead is something that would need more attention and that we will try to develop further in other texts. For now, let us just put it as a worthy initial suggestion.

direction while affirming that the experience of migration is reflected in the nation-lan-guage as the «recovery of our selves through our voices: of our voices through the discov-ery of ourselves» (Brathwaite, quoted in Pearn 1985: 26). Or, consider the epopee of the birth of the archipelago, evoked in his poem *Calypso* (in Brathwaite 2014: 115-119) which «can be thought as the beat of a rhythm that propagates» (Gazzoni 2013), creating through it what then configures this singular locality:

> The stone had skidded arc'd and bloomed into islands:
> Cuba and San Domingo
> Jamaica and Puerto Rico
> Grenada Guadeloupe Bonaire
>
> curved stone hissed into reef
> wave teeth fanged into clay
> white splash flashed into spray
> Bathsheba Montego Bay
>
> bloom of the arcing summers…
>
> […]. (Brathwaite 2014: 115)

As Gazzoni (2013: 157) points out, the islands seem to have been created by a bodily movement, by a throw of a stone, performed according to the rhythm of calypso music, which is dactylic, not iambic, and which makes this locality appear. It is thus a way of talking, of perceiving the movements and rhythms of nature, that generates the archipel-ago, giving sense to its energy, memories, ruptures and waves – to its "tidalectics", which defines seas as sites of permanent circulation.

Performing localities to come

We have now arrived at the last island of our archipelagic travel, Édouard Glissant's Martinique. Unlike our approach to the other authors we have analysed, we will remain at the surface of Glissant's conceptual elaboration, by using his poetics of relation only in "a certain way", and within the horizon of a definition of locality.

In a text that attempts to give a precise insight into Caribbean thinking, Jean Khalfa argues that one of the elements that the heterogeneous set of writers from Caribe have in common is the effort to describe «subjectivity as becoming», that is to say, «as process rather than identity»:

> Although in a sense all of these writers could be (and were) read as epic poets, their poetics was not one of origins, of foundational myths. Origins were only valued

through their loss, and this lyricism was that of a subject that can only be found at the end of a process of erring or detour, a psyche which does not preexist the voice supposed to "express" it. These were all *dit d'errance*, to use Césaire's phrase, in *Corps perdu*. (Khalfa 2017: 3)

The topic of a subjectivity in process no doubt pertains to Glissant. In an essay that attempts to describe the Deleuzian accent that the Martinican writer expresses, Michaela Ott (2007) suggests that, with his "poetics of relationship", Glissant has developed a pragmatist project of universal brotherhood that echoes Deleuze's image of the «archipelago and hope» (Deleuze 1998) gathered from Melville's pragmatism. And such a pragmatism must be conceived, as Deleuze puts it, as a process. Furthermore, the poetics of the relationship, understood in a general sense as the definition of identity starting from the relationship with the Other, is based on a principle of hybridization that Glissant himself conceives as rhizomatic. Indeed, Glissant develops, re-semantising them, the concepts of rhizome, nomadism and "people to come" in the context of the melting-pot of plantations.

In fact, should we be more precise, the term Glissant uses to describe this dynamics is not melting-pot, nor *métissage* (which exists in places where categories work through oppositions): rather, he explicitly talks of *creolization*, as a particular way of forming a complex mix – «the mutual mutations generated by this interplay of relations» – and with not merely a linguistic result (Glissant 2007: 89). The meaning of *creolization* seems indeed to summarise the Deleuzian concepts we evoked, but also expresses the resistance to colonization as idiomatic, political and existential invention: the rhizome in the plantations is thus another form, this time somewhat literal, of the *work* of the concept.

If the plantations are for Glissant the territories of ethnolinguistic mixing, places where the hierarchical structure of the white male and the black slave is affected by lateral filiations and horizontal nets, the Creole language «is a fragile and revealing *écho-monde*, born of a reality of relation and limited within this reality by its dependence» (Glissant 2007: 93). Indeed, the whole Caribbean archipelago with all its history can be read as a result of the immanence of heterogeneous relations, a kind of "circular nomadism" that crosses time and space, abolishes the very notion of center and periphery, and produces a particular aesthetics that Glissant calls "the *chaos-monde*":

> The *chaos-monde* is only disorder if one assumes there to be an order whose full force poetics is not prepared to reveal (poetics is not a science). The ambition of poetics, rather, is to safeguard the energy of this order. The aesthetics of the universe assumed preestablished norms; the aesthetics *chaos-monde* is the impassioned illustration and refutation of these. Chaos is not devoid of norms, but these neither constitute a goal nor govern a method there. (Glissant 2007: 94)

Once again, we are talking of a movement with no telos, but one that must not be taken for a confusion: "Chaos is not chaotic", says Glissant, but, through relation, «senses, assumes, opens, gathers, scatters, continues, and transforms the thought of these elements, these forms, and this motion» (Glissant 2007: 94-95).

We can easily understand that this movement has much in common with what we have described, through the words of the other writers here convened. For instance with Benítez Rojo, when he refers to a movement marking a «cultural sea without boundaries» (Benítez Rojo 1997: 314). Or Brathwaite (1984), talking of the movement of migrations that produced the nation language. For Glissant, this also takes the form of the Caribbean *trans-nation*: «an economic and popular [...] discursive category but also an assemblage of people, the products of arrival from a variety of other world locations, seasoned in the Caribbean but now occupying places inside and outside the Caribbean nation-state boundaries» (Boyce Davies 2018: 16). Benítez Rojo defines it as «a cultural meta-archipelago without centre and without limits, a chaos within which there is an island that proliferates endlessly, each copy a different one» (Benítez Rojo 1997: 9).

In this sense, the Caribbean trans-nation could be thought as an image of locality, which is also «an imagined, politically-advanced community which incorporates the pre-independence desire for and claims of a Caribbean nation, and the actual current migrations which have created Caribbean communities – island, continental, and diasporic» (Boyce Davies 2018: 21). Once again, we should repeat, it is not the revindication of a particular identity but the construction of a nascent identification which takes place. This because locality, more than a particular place, pertains to a «deterritorialization of space» (Boyce Davies 2018: 19), where borders and boundaries multiply while disappearing – a multiplication that Edouard Glissant defines as something that comes «from those somewhat secret, somewhat unknown places that overturn in themselves what's being created in the world, the world's passage, and which resonate unbeknownst to those who inhabit the great continental land masses of power and force» (Glissant 2011: 10[7]).

*

By way of conclusion, we would like to make a final attempt to define the concept of locality as it could be derived from this Caribbean conceptual experience. To put it simply, locality is what transforms a place in a field of possibilities and possible relationships. Or, wanting to summarize it with Édouard Glissant's words, *locality is the poetics of a relationship between a place and a subject, whether the latter is individual or collective.* As we said with Benítez Rojo, locality performs an opening and a power of openness, the result of a differentiating and performative repetition of a place, which gives place to a *poetic*

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[7]   The "world's passage" is another Whiteheadian topic, which once again suggests the need to deepen the analysis of the relation between these authors.

territory to come. In this vein, locality is not at all natural, but rather artificial, precisely because it is the result of a repetition. And feeling the sway of the undertow of Brathwaite tidalectics, locality is what is expressed by the multiplicity of voices, thoughts and variable configurations, or mutual catches, that encounter and convene in a specific *milieu*.

In sum, to say it through keywords, locality is thus essentially related to *repetition*, *differentiation*, and contains a *performative* dimension.

Repetition: as we tried to demonstrate through Caribbean literature, locality lacks an origin, it consists in missing the origin, it is a default of origin: the origin of locality is not the place, because locality is precisely the *transformation of a place that makes this place meaningful*, which is to say that it is *the way in which the geographical place becomes a noetic place*[8] (through a deterritorialization and reterritorialization).

Differentiating: locality is not exactly place insofar as Repetition gives rise to territorial bifurcations (through the movement of deterritorialization and reterritorialization) between place and locality, in the sense that locality is the result of a *response to the place*, a quasi-causal response, in the sense of the Stoics and Deleuze.

Performative: This answer is always performative – being aesthetic, linguistic, political – which temporally opens the place to its relation with what is not the place, which is literally off-site or out of place: the product of imagination. Temporally: that is to say, it hasn't a stable form, and it is always projected towards future.

But locality is also idiomatic, plural and collective "giving place", where spatio-temporal relations are not understandable in terms of "simple location," that is, the situation in which things or materials can be said to be *here* in space and *here* in time in a perfectly definite sense – which makes things self-sufficient and without needing to refer to other entities. This is a fundamental aspect also raised by Caribbean culture and its relational dimension, while self-sufficiency is linked to isolation and exclusion.

In this sense, and to conclude, the only place that pertains to locality is a *commonplace*, which, according to Glissant, is what brings together a set of ways of thinking much more than a system of ideas, a place «where worldly thinking meets other types of worldly thinking» (Glissant 1996: 33), and that as such, will give rise to other peoples, places and points of view yet to come.

«An idea rerun across many, in principle, heterogeneous fields; repetitions […]; baroque assemblages of force lines that intensify in unexpected places, etc.» (Glissant 2007: 176). Should we call it Commonplace, Transnation, Relation, Tidalectics, Polyrhythm, the Caribbean definition of locality could help us to extirpate that powerful identitarian machine and substitute the right of purity, blood and integrity with a *right of passage*, made of bifurcations, divergences, incompossibilities and discards able to open those divergent series that will render us worthy of our planetary wandering.

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8   We adopt the adjective "noetic" from Bernard Stiegler's concept of "noetic life" and his attempt to define locality as a "negentropic openness". For Stiegler, locality is potentially negentropic to the extent that the fight against entropy can only be undertaken locally. See in particular Stiegler 2018.

Acknowledgments

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