American Creoles

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Édouard Glissant’s writing is deeply rooted in a strategy that challenges a hegemonic form of language use, as described in detail by Celia Britton, with particular reference to his essays and novels (Britton, 1999). Miles Davis’s music, too, can be interpreted as a counter-discourse. The literature of the Caribbean and jazz music in the United States belong in fact to areas of cultural activity which have comparable histories despite their dissimilarities. A comparative approach to Glissant’s writing and the trumpet player’s improvisations can therefore allow us to reflect on the connections between strategies of resistance and, on the other hand, the emergence in these two artists of independent formal concerns.

We do find references to music from time to time in Glissant’s writings on poetics. He quotes Bob Marley in Poétique de la relation (Glissant, 1990: 107) and frequently mentions jazz in particular as an example of ‘pensée de la trace’ [trace thought]. It has to be said, though, that the position of music in his poetics is not as prominent as that of literature and the visual arts. Nevertheless, the limited number of references to music in Glissant’s writings is perhaps not an accurate reflection of the true importance of this art to his poetics. The author of Sel noir in fact asserts: ‘Il y a une mesure secrète des formes de la musique et de la philosophie, les deux arts les plus proches à la fois dans leur précision et leur évanescente’ [There is a secret time signature in the structures of music and philosophy, the two arts which are closest to

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1 Glissant’s fictional quimboiseur, Papa Longoué, in Le Quatrième Siècle, is a healer, a seer and a storyteller.
each other in both their precision and their evanescence (Glissant, 2006: 116). One of the most intense prose pieces in *La Cohée du Lamentin*, entitled ‘*Au plus obscur des musiques*’ [Music at its most obscure] (Glissant, 2005: 243), is on the subject of silence and music as they enter into contact with the vastness of the world. And, during a press conference given on 21 July 2007 in the Basque village of Itxassou to introduce his collaboration with the multi-instrumentalist Bernard Lubat, the poet declared: ‘*Mon style d’écriture est le style de jazz de Miles Davis*’ [My writing style is the jazz style of Miles Davis].

In common usage, when the term ‘style’ is associated with a writer it tends to define individual character. ‘*Le style est l’homme même*’ [style is the man himself] declares Buffon in his *Discours sur le style*. ‘*On peut empiriquement constater que chaque écrivain a son style propre*’ [we can ascertain empirically that each writer has his own style], adds Etienne Souriau (Souriau, 1990: 1315). Roland Barthes refers to ‘des images, un débit, un lexique’ that ‘naissent du corps et du passé d’un écrivain et qui deviennent peu à peu les automatismes même de son art’ [‘imagery, delivery, vocabulary’ that ‘spring from the body and the past of the writer and gradually become the very reflexes of his art’] (Barthes, 1953: 12 [Barthes, 1977: 10]). Édouard Glissant’s style is not that of Léon Gontran Damas. Style is an important part of the identity of these writers, distinguishing them from each other, serving as their ‘*langage autarcique*’ [autarchic language]. When applied to music, the concept of style often extends beyond the individual. For historians of music, the works of Mozart and Haydn are both written in the Classical style which provided the title of Charles Rosen’s famous book. At the beginning of the 1950s, Miles Davis’s and Dizzy Gillespie’s choruses grew out of the same bebop style, despite their many formal differences.³ (We can nevertheless still speak of a musical work ‘in the style of’ Bach or Mozart, which implies an individual referent for the word ‘style’).

Taken literally, Glissant’s remark suggests that his own writing style and the jazz style of Miles Davis are identical. In this, he extends the concept of style to embrace two distinct artists and arts. This type of shift, operating through displacement and a broadening of focus, often dictates the hermeneutic movement that Glissant’s poetics invites us to follow.

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² Where a published translation of a work in French exists, with the exception of Glissant’s poetry, this is cited, with references. Where no published translation is available and no references are provided, the translation is the work of the translator of this chapter. A simple literal translation has been provided of the poetry.

³ In jazz, the term ‘chorus’ is used to describe one full cycle of a song’s form. Choruses can be performed by either a solo instrument or an ensemble.
Accordingly, the concept of ‘Creolization’ involves the deterritorialization of a properly Caribbean linguistic and cultural reality as perceived by the poet. The opposition between langue [language] and langage [language use] postulated by Édouard Glissant can equally allow us a better understanding of the poet’s thoughts on style. He observes that a discourse community is to be found in the Caribbean that goes beyond the linguistic differences between English, French, Creole languages and Spanish. Langage in Glissantian poetics is, therefore, according to Celia Britton, ‘un pont entre les langues’ [a bridge between languages] (Britton, 2008: 238). Langage is even ‘un voyage’ [a journey] (Glissant, 1993: 307) for the writer. Style, too, according to Glissant, can also be conceived as a bridge, not between languages, but between arts.

The poet observes that a ‘communauté de structures discursives’ [community of discursive structures], to borrow Celia Britton's formulation, extends beyond langage and the Caribbean, to embrace the totality of cultures which have suffered the consequences of the slave trade. This is what Glissant calls ‘pensée de la trace’ [trace thought], under which heading he explicitly includes music.

Dans les pays composites, et par exemple pour les cultures créoles des Amériques, l’avancée s’est faite par traces. L’essentiel de la population y est arrivée nue, c’est-à-dire après avoir été dépouillée des artefacts de sa culture originelle, de ses langues, de ses dieux, de ses objets usuels, ses coutumes ses outils et il lui a fallu recomposer, par traces, ‘dans les savanes désolées de la mémoire’, ce qui lui restait des anciennes cultures ataviques […]. Le jazz du sud des États Unis comme les musiques de la Caraïbe et du Brésil ont d’abord constitué une remontée de la trace africaine […] et les langues créoles de la Caraïbe ont aussi procédé par traces pour constituer leur corpus lexical et syntaxique.4 (Glissant, 2006: 188).

Langage and the trace bring together different cultural phenomena within a single community. They also bring together communities who are widely

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4 ‘In culturally composite countries and, for example, in the case of the Creole cultures of the Americas, advances are accomplished by means of traces. Most of the population have arrived there naked, that is to say deprived of the artifacts of their original cultures, of their languages, of their gods, of their daily objects, their customs, their tools, and they have had to reconstruct, through traces, “in the desolate savannahs of memory”, the remains of their earlier atavistic cultures […]. The jazz of the southern United States, like the musical cultures of the Caribbean and Brazil, initially followed the African trace […] and the Creole languages of the Caribbean also built up their lexical and syntactic corpuses by means of traces.’
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separated by either geography or linguistic differences but have been brought closer to each other by the history of the slave trade. Glissant thus sees the discursive structures of the Caribbean tale in other forms of art and in other locations. He evokes an aesthetic which is born of silence and of deferred speech deep within the plantation:

La nuit des cases a enfanté cet autre énorme silence d’où la musique incontournable, d’abord chuchotée, enfin éclate en ce long cri. Cette musique est spiritualité retenue, où le corps s’exprime soudain. […] ces musiques nées du silence, negro spirituals et blues, continuées dans les bourgs et les villes grandissantes, jazz, biguines et calypsos, éclatées dans les barios et favelas, salsas et reggaes, rassemblent en une parole diversifiée cela qui était crûment direct, douloureusement ravalé, patiemment différé.⁵ (Glissant, 1990: 88)

These global discursive structures: the trace and langage, seem to me to come close to what Glissant is describing when he talks about style. They also closely resemble Alain Locke’s concept of idiom. The American anthropologist suggested that a shared idiom, born out of the traces of African cultures, links not only the different musical traditions of the Americas but also their styles of dress and habits of daily life, even extending the connection to the European artistic movement of cubism (Locke, 2009: 29). Anthony Mangeon describes the Lockean idiom as the ‘produit d’attitudes émotionnelles privilégiées, de préférences dispositionnelles constituées dans l’expérience, lesquelles sont à leur tour constitutives d’un rapport au monde, d’une personnalité, d’un tempérament, tempérament dont l’art et plus particulièrement la poésie et la musique nègres sont les vecteurs privilégiés’ (Mangeon, 2004: 466).⁶ The concepts of trace, langage and style, as referred to by Glissant, appear to correspond to Locke’s idiom. Idiom, however, places

⁵ ‘Night in the cabins gave birth to this other enormous silence from which music, inescapable, a murmur at first, finally burst out into this long shout – a music of reserved spirituality through which the body suddenly expresses itself. […] These musical expressions, born of silence: Negro spirituals and blues, persisting in towns and growing cities; jazz, biguines, and calypso, bursting into barrios and shantytowns; salsas and reggaes, assembled everything blunt and direct, painfully stifled, and patiently differed into this varied speech’ (Glissant, 1997: 73).

⁶ ‘Product of particular emotional attitudes, of dispositional preferences constructed through experience, which in their turn constitute the building blocks of a relationship with the world, of a personality, of a temperament, a temperament for which art and, more particularly, negro poetry and music are the preferred vehicles.’
Poetic Intention in Miles Davis and Édouard Glissant

particular emphasis on an aesthetic viewpoint, including reception, whereas the concepts developed by Glissant are situated rather on the poïetic side of creative endeavour.

Glissant’s formulation, understood literally, would thus define an aesthetic community bringing together several artistic disciplines that could be thought of as a synthesis of the concepts of langage and trace, closely resembling the concept of idiom developed by Alan Locke. Style in this case primarily has a collective value.

In his own definition of the concept of style, Nelson Goodman provisionally proposes that it should be described as a signature (Goodman, 1992: 59). I would revise this to ‘formal signature’. Under this definition, Glissant’s words can only be understood as a metaphor: the identity of a writer cannot be that of a musician nor, moreover, that of another writer, except in cases of pastiche or plagiarism. As formulated, the metaphor establishes an analogy between two creative outputs, one musical, the other literary. Since style, according to Roland Barthes, is already a metaphor that establishes equivalence between ‘l’intention littéraire et la structure charnelle de l’auteur’ (Barthes, 1953: 13) [the author’s literary intention and carnal structure (Barthes, 1977: 12)], the new metaphor formulated by Glissant becomes part of a metaphorical chain characterizing artistic expression and the relationship between its different forms.

As Jean-Louis Backès remarks, the analogy between music and literature is not a scientific one (Backès, 1994: chap. 4). Like all metaphorical processes, it requires our good will and a subjective response. Rhythm in music is not the same as the rhythm of poetry. When musical or melodic terms are applied to poetry they are only metaphors whose validity cannot be proven. Any formal analogy between music and poetry must therefore be the result of interpretation. The latter is rendered even more complex by the unity implied in the terms ‘style d’écriture’ [writing style] and ‘style de jazz’ [jazz style] when considering corpuses as abundant and protean as Glissant’s writings and Davis’s music.

Glissant’s works can be divided into three equally important groups: the novels, the essays and his poetry. Within each genre we encounter great variety in the forms of writing. Thus, the essays include image-laden poetic prose, aphorisms and conceptual developments. The poetry includes narrative epic poems, such as Le Sel noir and Les Indes, prose poems that verge on the lyrical, fragments where syntax is broken down and compositions that are more rhythmic in nature. The novels are also varied in style and structure, including prose works with such intensive imagery that they are almost poems, discursive prose pieces which resemble essays, narratives and interior monologues. The poet accepts the divisions provided
by the traditional generic categories but constantly overturns them, disturbs them or ‘creolizes’ them. Glissant’s writing itself cannot be summed up in terms of a tone or a cadence. For example, we find extreme variations in the sentence lengths of the essays. In ‘L’espace d’une journée’ (Glissant, 2006: 11–17) the sentences get progressively longer until the full stop disappears. The Caribbean writer’s work here resembles a flood not unlike the prose of James Joyce’s novels:

Alors ici vous consultez toutes ces roches de rivières polies et lustrées qui sont accourues rencontrer les gros morceaux déchiquetés de rocs et de laves froidies, et autour du Rocher, lui-même en paquets mais tout en un et ses creusements comme des yeux de nuit ou des bouches d’ombre et ses saillies comme des nez démantelés taris, et du rivage jusqu’ici, vous consiédrez comment la parole d’abord confuse s’est mêlée de sable gris, les mots sont raides et décarrés dans la page, et s’est éclairée d’un charroi de grosses ténèbres propices et s’est éclaircie d’un infini de ces sens qui tous tremblent là [...] (Glissant, 2006: 18)

By contrast, La Cohée du Lamentin and Traité du tout-monde employ a technique of fragmentation. In the excipits of the former, such fragments are in the form of maxims, each sentence constituting an independent entity:

LE TOUT-MONDE, L’OBJET LE PLUS HAUT DE POETIQUE, EST, AUSSI, L’IMPREVISIBLE. EN Q UOI IL EST CHAOS MONDE. J’ECRIS EN PRESENCE DE TOUTES LES LANGUES DU MONDE.8 (Glissant, 2005: 37)

The expression ‘vertige des styles’ [dizziness of styles] used by Édouard Glissant to describe baroque aesthetics (Glissant, 1990: 92) could thus apply to his own work. It could also define the musical career of Miles Davis. The trumpet player worked through almost all the jazz styles of the second half of the twentieth century. Having started out at Charlie Parker’s side, in the

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7 ‘Here then you consult all these polished and sparkling river stones which have raced to join the great jagged lumps of rock and cold lava, and around the Rock, itself in clusters but forming a single mass and its gouges like night eyes or shadow mouths and its projections like broken up dried up headlands, and from the shore to here, you consider how speech that was originally confused has been mixed with grey sand, the words are unyielding and have escaped into the page, and has been lit up by a convoy of vast auspicious shadows and has been brightened by an infinity of those senses which are all trembling there [...]’

8 ‘The tout-monde, the highest object of poetics, is, also, the unpredictable. In which it is chaos-monde. I write in the presence of all the languages of the world.’
midst of the excitement of bebop, he was an instigator in the development of modal jazz, followed by what was later called post bop, or ‘controlled freedom’. He was the creator of jazz rock and ended his career close to pop music. With each aesthetic change, he shifted the parameters of complexity and the balance between them: simplifying harmonic structure in order to free up the melodic language of the album *Kind of Blue* (Davis, 1959); integrating polyrhythms and polytonality with his second quintet; then simplifying the polyrhythms while increasing the complexity of the contrapuntal texture and tonality in the album *Bitches Brew* (Davis, 1970). In this process, Davis integrated and reworked a mass of influences, from Stravinsky to James Brown, via Prince and Stockhausen.

Davis also turned his attention to the concept of style, but he gave this term a meaning which was both broad and, to say the least, enigmatic: ‘But you’ve got to have style in whatever you do: writing, music, fashion, boxing, anything. Some styles are slick and creative and imaginative and innovative and others aren’t. For me, music and life are all about style’ (Davis and Troupe, 1989: 181).

Nevertheless, beyond this interweaving of forms and languages, there is a unity in each of Glissant’s works, as in Davis’s music, to which few other creators can aspire. Between these two diverse unities, the poet calls on us to distinguish a shared poetic intention.

When I asked him how his writing style and the jazz style of the trumpet player could be linked, Glissant promptly answered: ‘par le rythme’ [through rhythm]. Rhythm, for which there is no easy definition, is at once, according to Pierre Sauvanet, cosmic, biological and aesthetic in character (Sauvanet, 2000: chap. 1). I shall provisionally draw on André Lalande’s very general definition of rhythm as the ‘caractère périodique d’un mouvement ou d’un processus’ [periodic character of a movement or process]. The philosopher further suggests that we should understand rhythm primarily as ‘le caractère d’un mouvement périodique en tant qu’il compose une succession de maxima et de minima’ [the character of a periodic movement considered as a series of maximum and minimum values] (Lalande, 1926: 935).

Aesthetic rhythms exist in complex symbolic relationships with biological and cosmic rhythms. Édouard Glissant writes that he uses breathing to measure the pace of his poetry:

> En poésie le verset de Claudel ou de Saint John Perse ou celui des livres de la bible correspond à la mesure du souffle humain mieux que l’alexandrin. Le verset est ce que l’on peut dire le temps d’un souffle. J’ai essayé inconsciemment de faire la même chose dans l’écriture, et je ne m’en suis rendu compte qu’après. C’est à dire amener la phrase au bord
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de la rupture et de l’explosion pour que le lecteur lui-même se sente à ce point de rupture! C’est une technique de l’oralité que je fais entrer dans l’écriture.9 (Glissant, 2001: 37)

Miles Davis, too, constructs his improvisations around breathing. His phrases develop according to the rhythm of the silences and gaps which unrelentingly punctuate them. In this sense, his style is the opposite, for example, of Sonny Rollins or of Dizzy Gillespie, both users of circular breathing techniques to free themselves from breathing constraints. In Davis, this habit of listening to his own limits gradually becomes more marked as his style develops, but also as his strength declines. We can hear this method of building the music around a cycle of breaths in the famous chorus of ‘All Blues’ on the album Kind of Blue. The moments of silence and breathing around which the musician constructs his improvisation recur periodically but unpredictably. This irregular pattern contrasts with the regularity of the chord progressions and of the ostinato of the drums and bass. The moments of silence appear to coincide with moments of reflection on the part of both the musician, who considers what he will play next, and the listener, who can take the time to make sense of the pattern that he has just perceived. At other times the trumpet player’s breathing becomes a space which allows the pianist to establish a dialogue and to step, for a brief moment, out of his accompanist’s role.

In Glissant’s poetry the rhythm constructed around breathing is explicit, for example in these verses taken from La Terre inquiète:

Sable, saveur de solitude! quand on y passe pour toujours.
O nuit! plus que le chemin frappé de crépuscules, seule.
À l’infini du sable sa déroute, au val de la nuit sa déroute, et sur le sel encore,
Ne sont plus que calices, cernant l’étrave de ces mers, où la délice m’est infinie.
Et que dire de l’Océan, sinon qu’il attend?10

(Glissant, 1994: 103)

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9 ‘In poetry, the lines of Claudel, Saint John Perse or the books of the Bible are closer to the pattern of human breathing than is the alexandrine. The line is that which can be spoken in the space of a breath. I have subconsciously tried to achieve the same thing in my writing, a fact which I have only subsequently realized. That is to say that I take the sentence to its breaking point, the point of explosion, so that the reader also feels himself to be at that breaking point! It is an oral technique that I incorporate in my writing.’

10 ‘Sand, taste of solitude! when you enter it for eternity / Oh night! nothing
Glissant uses punctuation in the form of exclamation marks and commas as echoes of orality. At the ends of the segments interrupted by these marks, the recurrence of the mute e (in the words solitude, crépuscules, seule, déroute and encore) generates a bell-like effect which increases the musicality of these verses and gives them a quality of cantillation. Organization based on breathing patterns can be heard not only in the poetry but also in the prose of Édouard Glissant; we can accordingly hear it in this extract from Philosophie de la relation:

J’ai touché cet arbre du voyageur, que j’avais transplanté en l’autre saison du carême. Sa ramure balayée par le cyclone Dean. Je lui parle doucement. Dans l’éclair d’une semaine, il a poussé de nouvelles feuilles vert pâle. Je ne lui commande pas, il m’emprunte et me donne. C’est en face du rocher du Diamant.11 (Glissant, 2009: 71)

The breathing patterns incorporated in the writing bring it closer to the spoken word. Combined with the power of metaphor, they give the proffered words the impression of an almost prophetic strength, powerful enough to reach beyond language and physical experience. At the same time, the constraints of breathing draw the poetic discourse back to its physical origins and assert their immanence.

Taking this dialogue between emptiness and plenitude as his starting point, Miles Davis creates complex melodic phrases whose development is nevertheless clearly structured between protasis and apodosis or clearly oriented towards masculine or feminine closing cadences. This almost calligraphic art of musical phrasing brings Davis’s improvisations close to a form of writing. The structure in the first chorus of So What (Davis, 1959) can accordingly be heard to privilege symmetry over surprise. The trumpet player begins his chorus by developing a motif based on the interval of a fifth and bringing out the ninth of the chord. The ascending transposition of the modal scale brings about a more ornamental and horizontal development but with the return of the original chord the improviser also returns to his initial

remaining but the path stricken by twilights, alone. / In the infinity of the sand its flight (defeat), (for, to) in the valley of the night its (his) flight (defeat), and salt once again, / Are now nothing but chalices, encircling the stem of these seas, where delight is endless for me. / And what can be said of the Ocean, other than that it awaits.’

11 ‘I have touched this traveller’s tree, which I transplanted in that other season of Lent. Its branches swept by hurricane Dean. I speak gently to it. In the flash of a week, it has put out new pale green leaves. I don’t give it orders, it borrows from me and gives to me. This is opposite the Diamant rock.’
set of musical elements, sometimes lingering over long-held notes. The almost classical clarity and balance of Miles Davis's phrasing are sometimes disturbed in the course of the chorus as a whole by chromaticisms and anticipations drawn from blues music. Despite these irregularities, which slip in almost imperceptibly, Davis's sobriety is in contrast to John Coltrane's vehemence and baroque illuminations. It also differs from the bluesy truculence of Cannonball Alderley who follows them both.

Aesthetic rhythm most often occurs as the extended repetition of a beat or group of beats. This regularity characterizes dance music as well as metric poetry. Towards the end of his career Miles Davis was particularly fond, at least in his recordings, of pre-programmed rhythms. He expressed a preference for rock drummers who were, in his view, more rigorous than jazz drummers. On the topic of tempo and arrangement, he commented, 'Music is about timing and getting everything in order. It can sound good, even if it is Chinese, as long as the right things are in place' (Davis and Troupe, 1989: 396). This taste for perfectly regular rhythmics finds expression in his use of drum machines, that is, synthesized and electronically programmed percussion. The track ‘Splat’ from the album *Tutu* (Davis, 1986) exemplifies this obsession with an almost mechanical precision while reflecting a general trend in 1980s funk rock.

The actress Sophie Bourel, who has performed many readings of Glissant's poetry, evokes in discussion rap music with respect to *Grands chaos*. For his part, the stylistician George Molinié also detects a 'forte structuration rythmique' [strong rhythmic construction] (Molinié, 1999: 142) in Glissant's poetry as evidenced by the following lines:

Ras du sel de mai, cayali  
Qui scellait étoile en midi  
Sa voyance est de plume folle  
Il s'est noyé dans un mécrit

D'ombre boit durci, sucier  
Nom de cris plus que doux mis  
A tout chemin inachevés  
Nous avons garé son dédit.12

(Glissant, 1994: 403)

12 'Maytime salt level, green heron / Who sealed up the star in noon / Its clairvoyance is feather mad / It has drowned in a de-write // Of shadow sips hardened, sugarbird / Name of more than sweet calls set / On all paths unfinished / We have sheltered its broken promise.'
In this extract from *Grands chaos* the rhythm of the octosyllabic line is strengthened by the rhymes, by the versification without enjambement and a syntactic and lexical parallelism between the two verses. These both begin with the name of a bird in apposition and conclude with a proposition in the perfect tense.

Such a strongly rhythmic style of writing, whatever its power, does not, however, reflect the entire rhythmic complexity of Glissant’s writing any more than the pre-programmed rhythms on the album *Tutu* or the trumpet player’s brief remarks on tempo encapsulate the latter’s understanding of rhythm. Poet and musician take equal pleasure in building complex structures where order and disorder are mixed, where ‘la mesure et la démesure’ [moderation and excess] (Glissant, 1956: 25), to borrow Glissant’s expression, are at work. These can be juxtaposed, for example, in *Un Champ d’Iles*. This collection is composed on the one hand of seven prose poems. The poems contain long phrases whose constituent parts sometimes appear to be produced one by one with no obvious links: ‘Tourmentes, feu marin, étendues sans pitié: ce sont les hautes houilles, parfois le vent qui tout doux avive tout doux surprend le cœur et l’empanache; ce sont meutes du vent qui dévolent des mains, vers la coulpe et l’accomplissement du gravier’ (Glissant, 1994: 55).

At other times the poet accumulates conjunctions.

Son silence est de vous appeler à ce feuillage de grandeur où naissent la mer, et les continents après elle, et toutes saveurs réparties sous le couteau de la lumière, les nappes spectrales du silence, buses et blancheurs du cri, et toute chose épanouie vers son île quotidienne, ouverte hélante, et secrètement close, et muette autant qu’une splendeur. (Glissant, 1994: 59)

The breadth and complexity of these lines, combined with a wealth of markers of expression (exclamation marks, question marks, apostrophe), produce the

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13 *La mesure* also denotes musical time (in the sense of time signature, beating time, playing in time) here providing an additional layer of meaning to the two terms.

14 ‘Torments, marine fire, pitiless expanses: they are the high swells, sometimes the wind which quite gentle stirs up quite gentle surprises the heart and bedecks it with plumes; they are hounds of the wind which unfly from your hands, towards guilt and the completion of the gravel.’

15 ‘Its silence is to summon you to these leaves of grandeur where the sea is born, and the continents after it, and all flavours spread under the knife of the light, the ghostly layers of silence, buzzards and whiteness of the cry, and every single thing blooming towards its usual island, open calling, and secretly closed, and as silent as a splendour.’
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effect of a musical recitative, that is to say, extended speech that follows a melodic line without the constraint of a regular beat. These fragments of prose contrast with a hypnotic series of forty-seven octosyllabic quatrains. Throughout the series, the poet employs a large number of repetitions while the motif of percussion is also repeated thematically:

\[
\begin{align*}
C'est \text{ là que dorment les tam-tams} \\
Dormant ils rêvent de flambeaux \\
Leur rêve bruit en marée \\
Dans le sous-sol des mots mesurés^{16}
\end{align*}
\]

(Glissant, 1994: 65)

La mesure and la démesure appear in succession but they may also be combined. For example, in 'Promenoir de la mort seule' Glissant again makes use of octosyllabic verse but this regularity is overturned by a mode of discourse which is sometimes on the verge of disintegration:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{La baie triste n'a pas bougé} \\
\text{Sur un lac de roses, jonchée} \\
\text{De morts pâlis dans le rosier} \\
\text{Baie funèbre elle est demeurée} \\
\text{La rive hésite la mer passe} \\
\text{Les barques sont laveuses d'eau} \\
\text{Noir est le sable, la couleur} \\
\text{Est évidente dans ce lieu.}^{17}
\end{align*}
\]

(Glissant, 1994: 89)

In 'Pour Mycea', prose fragments are to be found juxtaposed with free verse where brief series of decasyllabic or alexandrine lines sometimes surface. The dream-like fragmentation of the discourse is counterbalanced by the repetition of images (night, hearth, water, day) which express the movement of the island to the rhythms of the cosmos.

This ambivalence between recitative and dance is also to be found in the music of Miles Davis. The blending of the solo line with the drums and, more broadly, with the rhythm section was one of the driving forces behind the different instrumental combinations directed by the ‘sorcerer’. The trumpet

\[
\text{‘It is there that the tom-toms sleep /} \text{As they sleep they dream of torches /} \text{Their dream sounds as a tide /} \text{In the cellar of regular words.’}
\]

\[
\text{‘The sorrowful bay has not moved /} \text{On a lake of roses, strewn /} \text{With whitened dead in the rosebush /} \text{Funereal bay it remains //} \text{The shore hesitates the sea passes /} \text{The boats are washing the water /} \text{Black is the sand, the colour /} \text{Is apparent in this place.’}
\]
player's incisive execution, which comes close to that of guitarists such as Wes Montgomery or George Benson, allows him to join in the rhythmic energy of his accompanists. It is this sharpness of style which is to be heard in the chorus of ‘Budo’ on the album *Birth of the Cool* (Davis, 1949) or on the title track of *Spanish Key* (Davis, 1970).

On occasion, however, Miles Davis establishes a rhythmic pattern which is independent of that of his rhythm sections and closely resembles a flow of words. At these moments, for instance in the chorus of ‘Masqualero’ on the album *Sorcerer* (Davis, 1967), he invites a double perception in the listener. On listening to the soloist, the beat at times seems suspended by the curve of a minute inflexion or by an apparently endless parasitic sound. At the same time, the rhythm section makes us hear the beat as a movement which is born out of the power of the trance and of dance.

Clearly, these two modes of relation are inextricably bound up with each other in Davis’s choruses. The musician draws his partners into a dialogics of *la mesure* and *la démesure*, whose intensity culminates, in my view, with his second quintet (with Tony Williams, Herbie Hancock, Ron Carter and Wayne Shorter). As Franck Bergerot remarks with regard to the album *Nefertiti* (Davis, 1967), the different performers in the rhythm section enter and then fall silent, divide the tempo and pull it apart in unpredictable ways (Bergerot, 1996: 98). The wind instruments sometimes act as accompanists to a rhythm section which is constantly generating new patterns. Tony Williams’s drumming sums up this rhythmic aesthetic, being anchored in the power and physicality of the rhythmic idiom of black music described by Alain Locke while developing in parallel, by means of his cymbal playing in particular, an exploration of tone also to be found in the experimentation of a composer such as Edgar Varèse.

The complex rhythmic structures to be found in the work of Miles Davis, as in that of Glissant, lead us to another figure common to both: the spiral. This figure combines the return to an initial point (repetition), with the distancing of that same point (difference). In his compositions, which in the event are not very numerous, as in those of his colleagues, Davis favoured the short and repetitive harmonic sequences which would become emblematic of jazz rock. These repetitions, far from being restrictive or appearing obsessive, open up the space of freedom available to the improvisers. It is striking to hear how far the repetitive and circular chord sequence of ‘Blue in Green’ (Davis, 1959) inspires the musician to produce one of his most lyrical solos, however brief. Miles Davis’s fascination with circular forms, which can be traced on the album *So What* (Davis, 1959), is explicit in the titles of the first two tracks of *Miles Smiles* (Davis, 1966), called respectively ‘Orbit’ and ‘Circles’.
In his improvisations, Davis’s method is often to repeat a short phrase which is then developed and transposed along the way. This process of spiral development, which can be heard clearly in many of the numbers he composed and improvised for the film *Ascenseur pour l’échafaud* (Davis, 1957), is influenced by the poetic form employed by blues singers. The poet Langston Hughes often used this form for expressive purposes. In Miles Davis, the form is systematized, autonomized and expanded. Spiral repetition is also to be found on a larger scale. In ‘It’s About That Time’ (Davis, 1969), sustained by the same rhythmic and harmonic ostinato, Miles Davis takes the first chorus then hands over to the guitar and the saxophone. His return brings about an unleashing of energy. Tony Williams, who until this point has been happy to produce a continuous drum beat based on the Charleston, lets his contained energy spill out. Here, repetition and the return to the point of departure are liberating rather than restricting forces, forming a spiral, not a closed circle.

We can also see this larger spiral form in the epic poem *Les Indes*. The poem opens beside the sea: ‘Nous sur la plage, il nous est fait licence de nous assembler à la proue de la voix, de crier, Sur la plage’ [We on the beach, we are given permission to gather together at the prow of our voices, to call out, On the beach] (Glissant, 1994: 112). Moved by ‘l’air lyrique des départs’ [the lyric melody of departures], the navigators ‘s’élancent sur l’Atlantique à la recherche des Indes’ [set out on the Atlantic in search of the Indies] (Glissant, 1994: 109). After discovery comes conquest. Then massacres and plunder, followed by deportation, chains and battles for freedom. The epic poem ends with an evocation of the town where desire was born: Genoa. Far-sighted men have not forgotten ‘la première plage’ [the first beach], but they find themselves confronted by a new Indies: ‘Voici la plage, la nouvelle. Et elle avance pesamment dans la marée’ [Here is the beach, the new one. And it moves forward heavily in the tide] (Glissant, 1994: 165). This new horizon is not one of conquest but of Relation. The return to the open sea is no longer an invitation to the conquest of new territories but to that of its own gaze which is now turned towards the face of the Other. The call is no longer that of a ‘nomadisme en flèche’ [arrow-like nomadism] but of a ‘nomadisme circulaire’ [circular nomadism] (Glissant, 1990: 30).

With regard to his essays, Édouard Glissant also speaks of ‘écho recomposé’ and of ‘redite en spirale’ [recomposed echo, spiral repetition] (Glissant, 1990: 28). Concepts, or rather thoughts, are repeated and reformulated from one book to the next. Thus, on the subject of Relation, the poet writes in *L’Intention poétique*: ‘la terre a cessé d’être essence, elle devient Relation’ [the earth is no longer essence, it becomes Relation] (Glissant, 1969: 190). In *Le Discours antillais*, Relation is ‘le feu majeur des poétiques à venir’ [the
principles light of future poetics] (Glissant, 1981: 19). It is ‘l’effort sans limite du monde’ [limitless effort of the world] in Poétique de la relation (Glissant, 1990: 186). In the recent Philosophie de la relation, the poet writes: ‘Divination et présence de la Relation, qui s’annonce, acceptons-en l’invitation partout incertaine, avec l’alliance des continents et des archipels’ [Divination and foreknowledge of Relation, which is on its way, let us accept its invitation which is everywhere uncertain, along with the union of continents and archipelagos] (Glissant, 2009: 79). These changes in formulation, which are mostly metaphorical, call on us to allow the ideas they contain to move through our imaginations and open up ever-wider spaces within them.

The combination of repetition and the opening up of new vistas would appear to be an aesthetic ideal for the writer. As he himself puts it,

Je ne sais pas à quel âge, dans mon très jeune temps, j’ai rêvé d’avoir développé un texte qui s’enroulerait innocemment mais dans une drue manière de triomphe sur lui-même, jusqu’à engendrer au fur et à mesure ses propres sens. La répétition en était le fil, avec cette imperceptible déviance qui fait avancer. Je m’ennuie encore de ne pas retrouver l’enhâlement tant tourbillonnant qu’il créait, qui semblait fouiller dans une brousse et dévaler des volcans.18 (Glissant, 2005: 20)

Through breathing, through la mesure and la démesure, and in the figure of the spiral, we can see that the work of these two creators, each in its own way, is centred on rhythm. At the end of this journey through the rhythms of poetry and jazz, we can perhaps arrive at Nelson Goodman’s definition of style as ‘those features of the symbolic structure of a work that are characteristic of author, period, place, or school’ (Goodman, 1978: 35). Style is thus at once a part of what is expressed and the means by which this part is expressed. We can also come to Glissant’s definition of rhythm as a ‘levier de conscience’ [a lever of awareness] (Glissant, 1969: 216).

Miles Davis and Édouard Glissant both transform rhythm into a lever of awareness which opens up space. The desire for space was a constant preoccupation for the musician. His disagreements with Thelonious Monk and his shifts towards modal jazz and then fusion music all result from

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18 ‘I don’t know at what age, in my extreme youth, I dreamed that I had developed a text which would coil innocently but in a powerful triumphant way around itself, to the point that it would create its own meanings along the way. Repetition would be the guiding thread, with that imperceptible deviation which pushes you onward. I am still frustrated at my inability to rediscover the hot dry whirling wind it created, which seemed to blast through bush and to flow down volcanoes.’
this same preoccupation. In fact, Davis, with his colleague John Coltrane, opened up the musical space of the twentieth century well beyond the limits of jazz. Miles was one of the prime movers in the renewal of improvisation in Western music. His liberating influence is to be found in many types of music from rock to contemporary music, not to mention French chanson and the revival of ancient music. It is no longer possible to perform Bach in the same way once you have heard Miles Davis’s phrasing.

Likewise, for readers sensitive to Glissant’s writing style and philosophy, the expansion of their imaginations and perceptions of the world brought about by his works is an almost physical experience. Glissant’s words liberate those who have ears to hear, making them reconsider their own existence. The cascades of rhythms and metaphors carry them towards the foreknowledge of this complex and unexpected new region of the world. The quest for a space without limits is to be heard in many of the trumpeter’s choruses, for example that of ‘Footprints’ (Davis 1966). It can equally be heard in the speech which concludes Les Indes:

Ô course! Ces forêts, ces soleils vierges, ces écumes
Font une seule et même floraison! Nos Indes sont
Par delà toute rage et toute acclamation sur le rivage délaissées,
L’aurore, la clarté courant la vague désormais
Son soleil, de splendeur, mystère accoutumé, ô nef,
L’âpre douceur de l’horizon en la rumeur du flot,
Et l’éternelle fixation des jours et des sanglots.¹⁹

(GLissant, 1994: 109)

A performance of African dance and music was the inspiration for Miles Davis’s modal revolution. The space he offers thus finds its origin in the wound created by a lost and forbidden space. As Glissant says in ‘La Barque ouverte’, the trauma of the slave trade can be brought to a close in ‘connaissance du tout’ [knowledge of the totality]. ‘Le gouffre est aussi projection et perspective d’inconnu. Par delà son abîme, nous jouons sur l’inconnu’ [The abyss is also a projection and view of unknown things. Beyond its depths, we are playing on the unknown]. ‘Nos barques sont ouvertes, pour tous nous les naviguons’ [Our boats are open, for everyone we sail them] (Glissant, 1990: 21). The extraordinary power represented symbolically by the style of these

¹⁹ ‘Oh race! These forests, these virgin suns, these foaming waves / Are part of one and the same flowering! Our Indies are / Beyond all anger and all acclamation on the shore abandoned, / Dawn, light running across the waves henceforth / Its sun, of splendour, usual mystery, oh vessel, / The bitter sweetness of the horizon in the crashing of the waves, / And the eternal binding of the days and of tears.’
two creators thus derives from a common history, from a movement towards ‘l’aurore’ [dawn] and ‘la clarté courant la vague’ [light running across the waves], which was born out of the darkness of the mutilated ship’s hold. The power of these two rhythms cannot, however, be reduced to this shared history. It is the reflection of two creative forces who transcend their century and who can be neither explained nor summed up except, perhaps, when we remember that the trumpet player was born one year after a hurricane, and the poet during the onset of a volcanic eruption by Mount Pelée.

Works Cited

American Creoles


Discography