CARIBBEAN PHILOSOPHY AND THE CHALLENGE TO NEOLIBERAL IMAGINATION

Alexandra Perisic
University of Miami

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The argument of this article is fairly simple: it is time for a post-neoliberal education, one founded on a new form of utopian, relational thinking that encourages students to envision new realities and empowers them to change the conditions of the present. This argument has been long in the making, but appears to me even more urgent now, due to a course I have taught recently.

In the fall of 2014, I taught an undergraduate college course entitled "Cultures of Resistance in the Francophone Caribbean." Through a study of texts and films from the French overseas departments of Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guyana, as well as the Republic of Haiti, the course introduced students to the history and culture of the Francophone Caribbean. More specifically, we examined how throughout the twentieth century, culture (including journalistic writing, literature, film, and even radio shows) has been mobilized as a mode of resistance against different forms of racial, economic, and social oppression. While I was teaching this class, street protests erupted in Ferguson, Missouri. Michael Brown, an African-American teenager, was killed by a white police officer, leading to protests across the country and the emergence of the #BlackLivesMatter movement. This was not an isolated case, as Michael Brown was not the only African-American to suffer at the hands of the police and state institutions. In response, Black communities and their allies took to the streets, expressing their outrage over centuries of social and economic inequality maintained by state violence.[1] Since in my

1→ See Monica Davey and Julie Bosman, "Protests Flare After Ferguson Police Officer Is Not Indicted," *The New York Times* (November 24, 2014.), http://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/25/us/ferguson-darren-wilson-shooting-michael-brown-grand-jury.html (accessed June 5th, 2015), and Chris Branch, "Looking Ahead After Ferguson Protests: What Happens Next?" *Huffington Post*

class we were dealing with questions of race, class, gender, and inequality, I wanted to connect what we were reading to what was happening in the country: I asked my students for their opinions on what was happening in Ferguson and for some possible solutions.

My students' reactions were twofold: most of them agreed that Mike Brown should not have died; they were critical of the U.S. justice system and the country's long and troubled history of race relations. Yet, they also thought there was nothing they could do about it. They held a firm belief that it was those in power who needed to instigate change. This led me to reflect on the two core values of our current, neoliberal[2] system of education: critical thinking and diversity. Under this existing paradigm we are increasingly producing students who are critical, but who feel powerless, especially outside of existing institutional frameworks.[3]

In what follows, and drawing on my experience teaching literature and culture of the Francophone Caribbean and Francophone Africa in the United States, I would like to make the following argument: in the framework of a post-neoliberal education, we must embolden students to envision and enact new, different realities. In order to achieve this, we need to begin cultivating utopian thinking and an understanding of diversity based on relation, and not merely on respect. I will begin by discussing the notions of critical thinking and diversity (based on respect for others' differences) as two pillars of neoliberal higher education that perpetuate

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(December 2, 2014), http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/12/02/ferguson-protests-end-goal_n_6256292.html (accessed June 5th, 2015), and Alicia Garza. "A Herstory of the #BlackLivesMatter movement." *The Feminist Wire* (October 7th, 2014), http://www.thefeministwire.com/2014/10/blacklivesmatter-2/ (accessed June 1st, 2015).

2 → When using the term neoliberalism, I rely on David Harvey's definition in *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*: "Neoliberalism is a theory that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve such a framework—if markets don't exist then they must be created and state action is necessary." David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 2.

3 → I should specify that I teach at a private university and that at a different institution students' responses may have been different. I have, however, encountered a similar response in other contexts, outside of the institution where I teach.

the existing system of governance. I will then introduce two Francophone Caribbean texts in order to demonstrate what it would mean to think about utopias/critique/diversity/relation/respect in a different manner. In my discussion of utopian thinking, I rely on the definition of utopia coined by Martinican writer and philosopher Edouard Glissant: "*L'Utopie n'est pas le rêve. Elle est ce qui nous manque dans le monde.*" (Utopia is not a dream. It is what we are missing in the world.)[4] The question I am posing here is this: How can we construct an education based not on what the world is, but on that which is missing in the world, in an attempt to bring it into being?

This question is particularly salient now, as we witness the rise of the neoliberal university. Run under a corporate management model, the neoliberal university relies on an inflated administration and a contingent and part-time faculty. It sees students as consumers and faculty as providers of a commodity: professional skills that can be auctioned off on the free job market after graduation. It buries students so deep in debt that they do not have the time or the energy to thoroughly think about their role in the world.[5] In a recent interview, Henry Giroux declared that "education under neoliberalism is a form of radical depoliticization, one that kills the radical imagination and the hope for a world that is more just, equal, and democratic..."[6] In this context, instead of simply trying to adapt to the existing system and accepting it as inevitable, we must begin to think about a post-neoliberal education. The "post" in "post-neoliberal" does not need to be a continuation or intensification of the current model. It can be a radical break that does not conceive of education as just another

4 → Édouard Glissant, *La cohée du Lamentin* (Paris: Gallimard, 2005), 16. All the translations from French are my own, unless otherwise noted.

5 → See Sheila Slaughter and Gary Rhoades, "The Neo-Liberal University," *New Labor Forum* No. 6 (Spring - Summer, 2000): 73-79, and Leigh Scott, Debra. "How Higher Education in the US Was Destroyed in 5 Basic Steps." Alternet (October 16, 2012), http://www.alternet.org/how-higher-education-us-was-destroyed-5-basic-steps (accessed June 1st, 2015), and Henry A. Giroux, *Neoliberalism's War on Higher Education* (New York: Haymarket Books, 2014).

6 → Victoria Harper, "Henry A. Giroux: Neoliberalism, Democracy and the University as a Public Sphere." *Truthout* (April, 22nd, 2014), http://www.truth-out.org/opinion/item/23156-henry-a-giroux-neoliberalism-democracy-and-the-university-as-a-public-sphere (accessed June 23rd, 2015).

commodity. This "post" will come, and it is up to us, educators and students, to shape it.

This essay, however, does not claim to present a conclusive answer, model, or argument for what a post-neoliberal education could or should be. It should be read as a sketch, an attempt at utopian writing, an attempt to delineate that which is missing in the classroom in order to begin calling it into being. I would also like to make clear that while I am proposing the concept of utopian thinking, I am not actually solving the pedagogical problem of how to move from critical towards utopian thinking in the classroom. That is a question that I hope will be taken up by educators and philosophers reading this piece.

THE CARIBBEAN TEXT AS A SITE OF REEDUCATION

Before focusing more specifically on neoliberal education, I would like to write a few words about literature, philosophy, and education in the Francophone Caribbean. As I will rely on contemporary Caribbean texts in my discussion of utopian, relational thinking, I would like to begin by placing these texts in a cultural history based not solely on criticising that which is, but also on envisioning that which is not. In this article I will focus only on Martinique and Guadeloupe, the situation of Haiti being somewhat different.

Both Martinique and Guadeloupe were colonised by France in the seventeenth century, and became French overseas departments after World War II. As a result, Martinique and Guadeloupe followed the French educational system, with students studying French history, literature, and philosophy. At times, more radical currents in literature and philosophy have perceived this as a Eurocentric form of cultural assimilation, and have tried to resist it by setting up alternative models of education.

Particularly in Paris throughout the 1920s and 30s (which at that time was the predominant meeting place of students from the Francophone Caribbean, Francophone Africa, and African-American artists) we start seeing a challenge to this kind of cultural assimilation,

and efforts instead at radical reeducation.[7] Literary and cultural journals became the primary site of this, as exemplified by the growing popularity of radical student publications such as *La Revue du monde noir*, *Légitime défense*, and *L'étudiant noir*.[8]

For instance, in 1932, a group of Caribbean students including René Ménil and Etienne Léro founded a journal called *Légitime défense*, which altogether published only one issue. Inspired by Marxism and Surrealism, the group offered a powerful critique of French colonialism and the Caribbean bourgeoisie, which strove to act, think, and write like the French. They were particularly critical of a literary style known as "doudouisme," which promoted exotic images of the Caribbean as a paradisiacal setting filled with sexually available black women. In its place, they proposed a new form of surrealist poetry, thus not limiting themselves to a critique of the existing system, but further striving to create a new reality.[9] Surrealist poetry, with its emphasis on the unconscious, the irrational and the oneiric, allowed them to break away from the European tradition founded upon logic and reason. Free from the cultural weight of Europe, they were also able to reintroduce and revalorize African elements in Caribbean cultural production.

Similarly, Aimé Césaire, a Martinican poet and politician, one of the founders of *L'étudiant noir* and the Negritude cultural movement, began to question the Eurocentric nature of his education during his time as a student in Paris. According to Gregson Davis, Césaire was

> [...] experiencing the incipient cultural alienation that afflicted other Third World students thrown together on the metropolitan scene in the latter half of the prewar decade. Students of color, in particular, sooner or later found themselves drawn, if only in self-defense, into a radically critical stance towards European civilization and its arrogant claims to superiority.[10]

7 → By "reeducation' I understand the emergence of new cultural and ideological models; new ways of thinking and being aimed at changing the status quo.

8 → Brent H. Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2003).

9 → René Ménil, *Légitime défense* (Paris: Jean-Michel Place, 1979).

10 → Gregson Davis, *Aimé Césaire* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 7.

Within this context he published, in 1935, in the third issue of *L'étudiant noir*, an article entitled "Conscience Raciale et Revolution Sociale" (Racial Consciousness and Social Revolution) where he formulated his position against cultural assimilation in the Caribbean and used the term *négritude* for the first time:

> *Un mal étrange nous ronge, en effet, aux Antilles: une peur de soi-même, une capitulation de l'être devant le paraitre, une faiblesse qui pousse un peuple d'exploités à tourner le dos à sa nature, parce qu'une race d'exploiteurs lui en fait honte dans le perfide dessein d'abolir "la conscience propre des exploités."*[11]

Negritude's goal was to define the common values of the Black world, in order to create a revolutionary consciousness. The movement was founded upon a strong critique of the Caribbean bourgeoisie's desire, which was promoted in part by the existing education system and its guiding axiom "*Nos Ancêtres les Gaulois*" (Our ancestors the Gauls): to be French; to reproduce French culture; to write and think like the French. It also strived for a new culture, a literature and philosophy based on the revalorization of African influence in Caribbean culture.[12]

I do not want to spend too much time on this particular chapter in history, though it is an incredibly fruitful and influential one. I do want to suggest that throughout the twntieth century and through to this day there have been attempts in the Francophone Caribbean to use philosophy, poetry, and literature as sites of reeducation that challenge official educational systems, as well as our writing and reading of history. Fiction became, and remains, a platform for reintroducing that which had been

11 → A strange disorder is consuming us in the Antilles: a fear of ourselves, a surrender of being to appearance, a weakness that makes an exploited people turn their back on their own nature, because a race of exploiters makes them ashamed of it, with the treacherous purpose of eradicating "the consciousness that belongs to the exploited." Aimé Césaire cited in Christopher L. Miller, "The (Revised) Birth of Negritude: Communist Revolution and 'the Immanent Negro' in 1935," *PMLA* Vol. 125, No. 3 (May 2010): 743-749.

12 → See Gary Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State: Negritude & Colonial Humanism Between the Two World Wars* (University of Chicago Press 2005), and Soulaymane Bachir Diagne, "Négritude." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (May 24, 2010), http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/negritude/ (accessed June 23d, 2015).

erased by official education and official versions of history, including slave resistance and the influence of African traditions.[13]

In light of this historical context, to what extent can we think about contemporary Caribbean texts as sites of reeducation, and as offering us gateways into a vision for a post-neoliberal education? I will begin with my first proposal: in the framework of a post-neoliberal education, we need to move from, or perhaps rather connect, critical thinking to the notion of utopian thinking.

FROM CRITICAL TO UTOPIAN THINKING

The word "critical" in "critical thinking" derives from the Greek *kritikos* (critic) and implies the capacity of judgment or discernment.[14] The literature on critical thinking is extensive, with no consensus on the exact origin, definition, or set of characteristics of the concept and its practice. It has been defined as: "A persistent effort to examine any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the evidence that supports or refutes it and the further conclusions to which it tends,"[15] and "a thinking about one's thinking in a manner designed to organize and clarify, raise the efficiency of, and recognize errors and biases in one's own thinking."[16] While the exact definitions vary, most studies on critical thinking agree that the main skills fostered by this method are: interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, and explanation. It is a form of thinking informed by evidence, involving an "explanation of the

13 → Examples of historical novels of this kind include: Maryse Condé, *Moi, Tituba sorcière--: noire de Salem* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1988), and Daniel Maximin, L'isolé soleil: roman (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1981), and Édouard Glissant, *Le quatrième siècle: roman* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1964).

14 → Lesley Brown, *The new shorter Oxford English dictionary on historical principles* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 551.

15 → Edward M. Glaser, *An Experiment in the Development of Critical Thinking* (New York, Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1941.)

16 → James Elkins,"The Critical Thinking Movement: Alternating Currents in One Teacher's Thinking" Presentation at the session on Reading, Thinking, Writing, at a Workshop on Reading Critically, at the Association of American Law Schools (AALS) (New Orleans, January 7, 1999), http://myweb.wvnet.edu/~jelkins/critproj/overview.html (accessed June 24th, 2015).

evidential, conceptual, methodological, criteriological, or contextual considerations upon which that judgment is based."[17]

These are not bad skills to have. In my classes, I want my students to be able to examine their preconceptions and recognize how ideological systems function. I want them to challenge stereotypes and evaluate given situations. I thus do not intend to say that there is no value in thinking critically or that we should not strive to develop these skills in our students. However, this is not enough. Understanding how "bad" things are, if not combined with a search for alternatives, can and very often does lead to the formation of critical students who do not believe in the possibility of change. While we are training our students to "objectively" analyze and examine their everyday realities, we are not encouraging them to intervene in this reality (aside from in very pragmatic and limited ways) and even more importantly, to re-envision said reality. The re-envisioning or reimagining of a given reality cannot be based solely on rational, analytical, evidence-based thinking. This form of thinking leads us to understand the way things are. It thus has to be combined with the belief that that which is not, that which is missing in the world, can be created through reflection, imagination, and practice. In conjunction to that which is, it has to focus on that which is not but which could be. Our students often enter our classrooms as passive, disillusioned, skeptical observers, and they often leave unaltered. This situation perfectly serves the current power structures. A population of disillusioned, skeptical observers is what upholds the neoliberal system of governance. Critical thinking serves neoliberalism as long as it exists within the framework of an unchanging present. If we are to challenge neoliberalism, we need to resurrect both the memory and the possibility of something different.

A lot has recently been written about the role of "critique" and its limitations in our current socio-economic system. In *The Agony of Power*, French theorist Jean Baudrillard writes that the main characteristic of hegemony is the absorption of all critical negativity: "What

17 → Pater A. Facione, *Critical Thinking: What It is and Why It Counts* (Insight Assessment, 2010), 26. See also P.A. Facione, C.A. Sanchez, N.C. Facione and J. Gainen. "The disposition toward critical thinking." *The Journal of General Education* 44, no.1 (1995): 1-25, and Harvey Siegel,"Critical thinking as an educational ideal," *The Educational Forum* 45, no.1 (1980): 7-23.

is the impact of a film like Darwin's nightmare, which denounces racial discrimination in Tanzania? It will tour the Western world and reinforce the endogamy, the cultural and political autarky of this separate world through images and consumption of image."[18] Baudrillard further uses the example of the BNP (a French bank and financial services company) slogan "*votre argent m'intéresse*" (I am interested in your money) to argue that under global capitalism our ultimate power has been stolen, the power to denounce. The logic of capitalism relies on the constant incorporation of negative elements, the system incorporates criticism by performing its own denunciation. In the face of capitalists who willingly admit that their only interest is profit, "the privilege of telling the truth eludes our grasp."[19] In other words, is there a purpose in denouncing what no one contests?

Fredric Jameson makes a similar argument in *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* when he claims that global neoliberalism admits that people have different values, lifestyles, and opinions, as long as they accept economic globalization as the ultimate, inevitable reality. Criticism is welcome in so far as it remains within the very reality that it criticizes. This is why Frederic Jameson characterizes the contemporary era as "infantile capitalism." Modernism, according to Jameson, is associated with incomplete modernization, a period where the "pre" or the "non" modern could still be remembered. In our current era, the era that could be named both late and infantile capitalism, the memory of something different has been lost:

> Everyone has been born into it, takes it for granted, and has never known anything else, the friction, resistance, effort of the earlier moments having given away to the free play of automation and the malleable fungibility of multiple consumer public and markets: roller skates and multinationals, word processors and overnight unfamiliar postmodern downtown high rises.[20]

18 → Jean Baudrillard, *The agony of power* (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2010), 60.

19 → Ibid.

20 → Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 367.

As far as the system in place is concerned, there is no harm in criticizing global capitalism and representing its negative sides, since this gesture does not challenge it as the unique, irrevocable reality. As Jameson argues, the inefficacy of critique stems in part from our inability to historicize, our belief that we are trapped in an eternal, unchanging present. Neoliberalism promotes this model of development and progress where the present is seen as an overcoming of the past. Past struggles are thus no longer fully relevant since we have progressed beyond them.

In order to free ourselves from this unchanging present, it is the memory of something different that we need to salvage and invent. Such a memory can be the first step towards imagining a different future. And yet we are not working to salvage or invent this memory. As educators and theorists, we are holding onto the tradition of critical thinking in order to claim that it no longer has any use. The notion here is that there is nothing left to criticize, and that even if there was, the critique would remain "within" the reality it is criticizing. Jacques Rancière analyzes this paradox of "the critical paradigm" in his groundbreaking work *The Emancipated Spectator*. Rancière argues that the critical paradigm has always aimed at discovering and ousting the "true" reality behind the reign of images. However, whereas several decades ago this process was used in order to incite action, today it is merely used to denounce its own ineffectiveness, and to assert both that there is nothing left to criticize, and that any criticism is immediately absorbed by the system:

> I have contrasted this right-wing frenzy of post-critical critique with left-wing melancholy. But they are two sides of the same coin. Both operate the same inversion of the critical model that claimed to reveal the law of the commodity as the ultimate truth of beautiful appearances, in order to arm the combatants in the social struggle. The revelation continues. But it is no longer thought to supply any weapon against the empire it denounces. Left-wing melancholy invites us to recognize that there is no alternative to the power of the beast and to admit that we are satisfied by it. Right-wing frenzy warns us that the more we try to break the power of the beast, the more we contribute

> to its triumph. But this disconnection between critical procedures and their purpose strips them of any hope of effectiveness.[21]

Rancière relies mostly on examples from art history in order to support his argument. For instance, he contrasts Martha Rosler's piece from her 1970's series *Bringing the war home* and Josephine Meckseper's 2006 *Untitled* piece. In the former, an image of a happy suburban American family is juxtaposed with images from the Vietnam War. This contrast is meant to raise awareness of how the system of domination functions, and to invoke the viewer's complicity in that system. The war is also waged at home and it must also be fought at home. On the other hand, Meckseper's piece combines images of the Iraq civil war with those of anti-war protests in New York City. In one of them, next to a group of demonstrators is an overflowing dustbin. According to Rancière, an equivalence is thus created between the group of demonstrators and the dustbin: the trash was probably created by the demonstrators underscoring the fact that the protests are themselves caught in the logic of consumption and spectacle. Unlike in Rosler's piece, there is no longer an outside to the universe of images.

I concur with Baudrillard's and Jameson's analysis of the limits of critique. But while theorists are increasingly denouncing the waning effectiveness of social critique, we are insisting on the importance of critical thinking in higher education. We are teaching students to analyze, evaluate, and critique reality while also contending that the mere act of critiquing is futile, since there is no possibility for change. We are left teaching how bad things are and how little we can do about it. If we are to create a post-neoliberal education, maybe it's time to let go of the critical paradigm. Rancière proposes focusing on "a new topography of the possible."[22] I propose cultivating utopian thinking.

I would like to now return to the question of the Caribbean text and how it can be used to foster utopian thinking. I will focus on a

21 → Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator* (London: Verso, 2009), 40.

22 → Ibid, 49.

Guadeloupean historical novel *Isolé Soleil* (*Lone Sun*), written by Daniel Maximin, which proposes a different understanding of time, history, and social change.[23]

Lone Sun forms part of a novelistic trilogy that narrates three centuries of Guadeloupean history through five generations of one family. The title of the novel is an anagram, by rearranging the letters in "isolé" one obtains "soleil." This anagram is also a metaphor for the novel as a whole, which attempts to permute historical events and figures in order to produce a new configuration of history. Due to a lack of official historical sources attesting to modes of slave resistance, it falls to fiction to recreate these forgotten stories. Since official Caribbean history has been written from the point of view of the white master, the novel resurrects marginalized and suppressed voices of slaves, free black men and women, and local revolutionary leaders.

The plot of the novel is difficult to summarize as it operates through an enmeshment of different voices and stories, past and present. It begins in 1962, when 17 year old Marie-Gabriel falls from a tree in the yard of her childhood house in Guadeloupe. At the same moment, her father dies in a plane crash in the vicinity of the Souffrière volcano. This episode inspires Marie-Gabriel to pursue writing. In what follows, the reader is exposed to excerpts from her upcoming novel; her correspondence with Adrien, a friend in Paris; as well as the notebooks, journals, and letters of her ancestors and different historical figures.

The part of the novel entitled "Le Cahier de Jonathan" (Jonathan's notebook) is a reproduction of a notebook of a free black man, Marie-Gabriel's ancestor, who died in 1802. Jonathan's notebook is a record of the lives of two twin brothers, Jonathan and George, and is set against the unsuccessful nineteenth century Guadeloupean uprising led by Louis Delgrès, against Napoleonic troops trying to reinstitute slavery. While Jonathan joins the maroons and from the beginning fights with Delgrès, George stays in the lowlands. Both however

23 → Daniel Maximin is a Guadeloupean novelist, poet, and essayist, born in 1947. As a teenager he moved to France, where he studied at the Sorbonne and served as literary director of the journal Présence Africaine. He returned to Guadeloupe in 1989 as Regional Director of Cultural Affairs.

ultimately die in the famous collective Matouba suicide.[24] At the very end of the novel the reader discovers that the nineteenth century twin brothers were named in homage to the African-American Jackson brothers. Maximin has clarified this connection:

> *Le choix des prénoms, Georges et Jonathan se réfère aux frères de Soledad, les frères Jackson, George et John, militants de la cause des noirs américains, pris dans le même mouvement qu'Angela Davis: l'un mort en prison, le petit frère, assassiné au tribunal où il avait surgi, mitraillette a la main, pour délivrer son frère ainé, George. Les frères Georges et Jonathan de 1802, rendent en quelque sorte hommage, par anticipation, aux frères de Soledad qui ont marqué ma génération. C'est encore l'idée de cycle, l'idée qu'on peut commencer par la fin, qu'on a pas à enfermer l'auteur dans la ligne droite du déroulement chronologique. Suivre la spirale qui n'est pas retour au même point* [...][25]

As explained by Maximin, George Jackson was a member of the Black Panther Party and co-founder of the Black Guerrilla Family while incarcerated in the 1960's.[26] He achieved fame as one of the Soledad Brothers, three African-American inmates charged with the murder of a white prison guard at California's Soledad Prison in

24 → After realizing they could not defeat the French troops, Delgrès and 400 of his men and women set their gunpowder supplies on fire, committing collective suicide in the process. See Laurent Dubois,"Haunting Delgrès" in *Contested histories in public space: memory, race, and nation* 2009, ed. by Daniel J. Walkowitz and Lisa Maya Knauer (Duke University Press, 2009), 312.

25 → The choice of the names, Georges and Jonathan, refers to Soledad brothers, the Jackson brothers, George and John, militant activists for the cause of Black Americans, who belonged to the same movement as Angela Davis: one died in prison, the little brother, killed in the court, where he appeared, carrying a machine gun, in order to free his older brother, George. The 1802 brothers Georges and Jonathan, in a way pay tribute, by anticipation, to the Soledad brothers who marked my generation. It is again the idea of a cycle, the idea that we can begin by the end, that we do not need to enclose the author in the straight line of chronological development. To follow the spiral, which is not the return to the same point [...] Daniel Maximin cited in Christiane Chaulet-Achour, *La Trilogie caribéenne de Daniel Maximin : Analyse et contrepoint* (Paris, Karthala, 2000), 69.

26 → See George Jackson, *Soledad Brother: The Prison Letters of George Jackson* (Toronto, Canada: Longmans Canada Limited, 1970).

1970. His brother, Jonathan Jackson, brought three guns registered to Angela Davis into the courthouse during the trial of the Soledad brothers, which he used to take the judge and three female jurors hostage. Upon exiting the courthouse, he was shot and killed by the police. George Jackson died a year later, killed by guards, during an alleged escape attempt. The courthouse incident led to the famous trial of Angela Davis, a contemporary figure who also appears in the novel. In fact, she appears in three different incarnations: as Angela, a small girl that is murdered at the age of seven in eighteenth century Guadeloupe; as Angela, a girl that Siméa (Marie Gabriel's mother) takes care of in a 1943 asylum; and finally as Angela Davis herself, who Marie-Gabriel meets at the end of the novel.

How can this small gesture of naming two brothers in nineteenth century Guadeloupe after two Black Panthers change our understanding of time, social change, and ultimately post-neoliberal education? As Maximin has himself stated, this is a tribute by anticipation. Maximin embraces the idea of historical cycles but also the fact that we can begin by the end; we do not need to be trapped in the logic of linear development. He is writing against linear history and using instead the model of the spiral, a spatial model which represents a different understanding of time. The spiral conveys chronological movement but also historical return; it is repetition but with a difference. Maximin has written that in his choice of the spiral, he was influenced by the Haitian literary movement known as spiralism. In her groundbreaking work *Haiti Unbound: A Spiralist Challenge to the Postcolonial Canon*, Kaiama Glover explains the meaning of the spiral for Haitian writers:

> From the structure of the double helix that defines every living being, to the swirl of stars, gas, and dust that compose the galaxy, the very foundations of the universe unfold in a spiral, implicitly putting even the most dramatically isolated beings into relation. The spiral is connected, moreover, to certain region-specific elements of Haitian reality. It is present in the bands of the hurricane winds that regularly ravage the island, and it makes up the

structure of the conch shell, an object that functions symbolically to recall the rallying cries of Haiti's revolutionaries.[27]

What does it mean for the lives of two free black men in nineteenth century Guadeloupe to be connected to the lives of two Black Panthers through a spiral? What does it mean for nineteenth century Georges and Jonathan to anticipate the existence and struggles of the Soledad Brothers and Angela Davis? And what would it mean for my students to understand the relation between the two?

What we learn from this juxtaposition is that every rebellion contains the seed of every rebellion to come; that we are in a direct relation with the history of resistance; that we do not ever overcome the past yet are also not at a standstill. This vision of history offers an important role to the imagination. Jonathan, a nineteenth century Guadeloupean Maroon is able to imagine all the futures to come, opening up the opportunity for us to imagine all the pasts that have been. Furthermore, it is important to notice that the tribute by anticipation is transnational; Maximin purposefully does not choose twentieth century Caribbean figures but instead establishes a link with the Black Power movement in the U.S., encouraging us to think about social change across borders.

George and Jonathan Jackson appear at the end of the novel, during their trial. This episode is followed by a letter Marie-Gabriel writes to Angela Davis, announcing their death: "*George et Jonathan sont morts. J'avais prévu les initiales. Il faut réinventer des frères pour la fraternité.*"[28] (George and Jonathan are dead. I had foreseen the initials. We have to reinvent brothers for fraternity). Marie-Gabriel acknowledges that she had predicted the initials of the two brothers while not forgetting to say that the brothers need to be continuously reinvented.

The novel ends with an opening, a hunger to create a future:

Le désir fera ouvrir nos bouches pour continuer notre histoire à livre

27 → Kaiama Glover, *Haiti Unbound: A Spiralist Challenge to the Postcolonial Canon* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010), viii.

28 → All translations are from Daniel Maximin, *Lone Sun* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989).

fermé, au rythme solidaire des tambours de nos veillées, avec le jeu pour liaison, l'amour présent, la faim d'avenir, la peur à dépasser.[29]

This future is not determined in advance, it cannot be decided by the author, but it is there to be created:

Pas de dénouement pas de fin : encore de la soif, avec le feu du cœur et du volcan, le vent des cyclones et des baisers, l'eau des sources et de la mer.[30]

I want to again reiterate that my overall argument is not against the act of thinking critically: Maximin himself has said that the purpose of literature is to provoke questions and raise doubts, questions and doubts that it will not be able to, and need not, answer. However, the questioning proposed in the novel is, I argue, a form of utopian questioning, a questioning that opens a space for an improved, if yet undetermined future. Like Maximin, in order to move beyond the neoliberal model of education we need to begin relating critical thinking to utopian imaginings, to the ability to imagine past and present resistances to come. The refusal of utopias is often seen as a refusal of ideology, a refusal to impose pre-designed, pre-established political models. But to claim the impossibility of change is to impose a political model on the future: the model of the present. Utopian thinking is a thinking that does not predetermine alternatives but embraces their continuous envisioning; it is an open and never-ending process. After offering his definition of utopia, Glissant continues: "*Nous sommes nombreux à être réjouis que le philosophe français Gilles Deleuze ait estimé que la fonction de la littérature comme de l'art est d'abord d'inventer un people qui manque. L'Utopie est le lieu même de ce peuple.*"[31] (Many of us are thrilled that the French philosopher Gilles

29 → Desire will open our mouths to continue our story with the book closed, to the rhythm of solidarity of the drums of our wakes, with play for liaison, love present, hunger for the future, fear to get past. Maximin, *Lone Star* (p.282).

30 → No outcome, certainly no ending: more thirst, with fire at the heart of the volcano, wind in the cyclones and kisses, water of springs and the sea. Maximin, *Lone Star* (p.282).

31 → Édouard Glissant, *La cohée du Lamentin* (Paris: Gallimard, 2005), p.16.

Deleuze considers the function of literature and of art to be the invention of a people that is missing. Utopia is the place of that people.) What if our educational system were also to encourage the invention of that people?

A post-neoliberal education could, and needs to, reignite this hunger for the future, in order to free us from the everlasting frozen present. In order to teach us how to put in conversation a Guadeloupean Maroon and a Black Liberation activist of the twenty-second century. In *Lone Sun*, Marie-Gabriel writes that "*le premier devoir de l'écrivain est d'écrire révolutionnairement, pas de décrire la révolution*" (the first duty of the writer is to write revolutionarily, not to describe the revolution.[32] Similarly, the role of the educator is not simply to describe a past revolution, but to encourage revolutionary thinking.

I would also like to point out that a utopian impulse initially formed part of critical pedagogy. Ben Agger, in his book *The Discourse of Domination: From the Frankfurt School to Postmodernism*, underlines the transformative aspect of critical theory: "As its own political metalanguage, critical theory is a praxis. It talks about the world as it assesses the social potential for freedom."[33]

Similarly, Paulo Freire, considered one of the fathers of critical pedagogy, wrote:

> One of the tasks of the progressive educator, through a serious, correct political analysis is to unveil opportunities for hope, no matter what the obstacles may be. After all, without hope there is little we can do. It will be hard to struggle on, and when we fight as hopeless or despairing persons, our struggle will be suicidal. Hence the need for a kind of education in hope. [34]

For Freire, the task of critical thinking was not to simply reproduce the past and understand the present. It was, above all, to enter

32 → Maximin, *Lone Star* (p.276).

33 → Ben Agger, *The Discourse of Domination: From the Frankfurt School to Postmodernism* (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1992), 226.

34 → Paulo Freire. *Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 1994), 3.

into dialogue with the past in order to transcend the present and construct a different future. It offered a way of producing hope.

Exemplifying a way of producing hope and encouraging relation, *Lone Sun* strives to think the past in relation to the present and to relate different geographical relations, two gestures inherent to utopian thinking.

FROM RESPECT TO RELATION

Another difficulty my students have is thinking relationally. They are often interested in the Francophone Caribbean (or in Ferguson and the #BlackLivesMatter movement for that matter) but they do not see it as directly relating to their lives in any way. They acknowledge that the situation in Haiti or in Ferguson is "bad," and should not be such, but the link between what is happening "over there"and how we live our lives "over here" is difficult to convey. I want to suggest that this is in part due to the neoliberal concept of diversity, which is founded upon respect for differences. This notion also influences predominant modes of teaching: when we teach we focus on bringing the materials to transparency, not necessarily into relation. I would also like to use Glissant's *Poetics of Relation* in order to propose a different way of understanding diversity,[35] one that emphasizes relation and to suggest that this is the type of diversity we need to activate in the classroom.

Critical thinking, diversity, and multiculturalism are current catch phrases of the neoliberal university. We, the faculty in languages and cultural studies, are tasked with providing access to a multicultural education, which is supposed to both respond to and lead to further diversity on campus. Critical thinking and diversity are in turn related.

35 → Édouard Glissant was from the island of Martinique, which he left in 1946 for Paris in order to pursue his studies. In 1959, he established, together with Guadeloupian poet and political activist Paul Niger, the Front Antillo-Guyanais pour l'Autonomie, as a result of which Charles de Gaulle barred him from leaving France between 1961 and 1965. He returned to Martinique in 1965 and founded the Institut martiniquais d'études, a private high-school in Fort-de France. Until his death in 2011, Glissant divided his time between Martinique, Paris and New York where he was Distinguished Professor of French at the CUNY Graduate Center.

Critical thinking is meant to encourage appreciation of diversity; whereas more diversity is meant to offer more opportunities for critical thinking.

But a few words about neoliberal diversity: first of all, it generally does not include class. Because if it did, U.S. universities would have to admit that diversity on their campuses is very limited.[36] Diversity is also most of the time presented as respect and appreciation of differences, be it cultural, ethnic, racial, gender, etc. However, mere appreciation and respect still allow me to occupy a bystander position; they allow me to observe from a distance. I am thus not necessarily urged to think about differences in relation; to understand how my own positionality (social, economic, racial, ethnic, etc.) determines and is determined by other positionalities. I do not need to affect or be affected by these differences. Diversity in this framework becomes a form of tolerant coexistence. We are taught to tolerate the existence of a different other, without necessarily equalizing our social and institutional positions.

This is why, for instance, we prefer to talk about poverty rather than inequality. In order to alleviate poverty, the other simply needs to do better; I can "help" that other but the way I live my life does not affect, and is not affected by, the other's poverty. On the other hand, inequality implies that we are inherently in relation, since remedying inequality requires a redistribution of resources.[37] I am thus inherently involved in this process. In order to circumvent the process of redistribution, we increasingly discuss class (and its interconnection with race, ethnicity, gender, etc.) in the same way as we discuss cultural differences: we have to respect different economic "lifestyles" as we do cultures. We have to show respect to those from low-income backgrounds as we do to those from high-income backgrounds, since coming from the latter is not necessarily better than coming from the

36 → See Richard D. Kahlenberg, *Left Behind: Unequal Opportunity in Higher Education* (New York, N.Y.: Century Foundation, 2008).

37 → See Peter Marcuse,"Poverty or Inequality: Does it Matter?" *Inequality.org* (January 28th, 2015), http://inequality.org/why-economic-language-matters/ (accessed June 24th, 2015), and Peter Marcuse and Ronald van Kempen. *Of States and Cities: The Partitioning of Urban Space* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

former. And since both backgrounds are of equal value, there is no inequality to address. Thus, current power structures and power relations are not questioned.[38]

Walter Ben Michaels makes a similar argument in *The Trouble with Diversity* when he states: "But classes are not like races and cultures, and treating them as if they were—different but equal—is one of our strategies for managing inequality rather than minimizing or eliminating it."[39] I concur with his argument that we increasingly see diversity as the appreciation of and respect for difference, a respect that keeps us at a distance from the other and allows us to avoid questioning our own participation in power structures that maintain different forms of inequality.

Neoliberalism is willing to diversify (to a certain extent) access to ruling institutions, including the university. However, while a more diverse student body and a more diverse faculty are extremely important, in themselves they do not prevent the various forms of exploitation the neoliberal university is founded upon, especially since their power to affect institutional change is waning at a rapid pace.[40] Some of the main issues that still remain unaddressed in this setting are: the massive amounts of debt that leave low-income students of color disproportionately unable to decide their futures;[41] the increasing salary gap between university administrators and low-wage university workers,[42] including construction and food workers; the fact

38 → See Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth. *Redistribution or Recognition?: A Political-Philosophical Exchange* (London: Verso, 2003).

39 → Walter B. Michaels, *The Trouble with Diversity: How We Learned to Love Identity and Ignore Inequality* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006), 10. Missing from Ben Michaels' study is however the notion of intersectionality- the fact that class, race, gender, etc. are mutually constitutive of one another.

40 → See Benjamin Ginsberg. *The Fall of the Faculty: The Rise of the All-Administrative University and Why It Matters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

41 → See Sophia Kerby, "How Student Debt Impacts Students of Color." *Americanprogress.org*. (April 26th, 2012), https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/higher-education/news/2012/04/26/11375/how-student-debt-impacts-students-of-color/ (accessed June 24th, 2015), and Mekela Panditharatne, "What color is your student loan?" *The Huffington Post* (January 16th, 2015), http://www.huffingtonpost.com/mekela-panditharatne/ (accessed June 24th, 2015).

42 → See Jonah Walters, "The Exploitation University," *The Jacobin* (May 23d, 2015), https://

that private universities continuously act as real-estate developers, leading to the displacement of low-income communities.[43] This is a form of diversity that does not strive for systemic change.[44] It is also present in the classroom where students analyze, observe and try to understand culturally diverse materials, without necessarily thinking about how they relate to it. How then can we use Édouard Glissant's philosophy of relation in order to challenge this mode of thinking about diversity?

At the beginning of the *Poetics of Relation*, Glissant contrasts the notion of the rhizome (that he borrows from Deleuze and Guattari) with that of the root. The root is one and unique; it is totalitarian. On the other hand, the rhizome implies a "demultiplied network," the bringing into relation of multiple roots, neither one of which is the center or the origin. The rhizome is at the basis of his poetics of relation. What is particularly important in Glissant's understanding of relation, is that the primary elements do not only create a third element as they enter into relation but are furthermore themselves transformed in this process.[45]

For Glissant, in many ways, the Caribbean is exemplary of this politics and poetics of relation. First of all because of the initial mixing of African, European, and Indigenous populations and cultures. But

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www.jacobinmag.com/2015/05/nyu-abu-dhabi-forced-labor-report/ (accessed June 25th, 2015).

43→ See Laur M. Jackson, "The Hypocrisy of Revitalization: Universities in Black Communities." *The Huffington Post* (December 15th, 2014), http://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2014/12/no-its-not-gentrification-its-something-else/383645/ (accessed June 1st, 2015), and Peter Moskowitz, "Philadelphia Universities' expansion drove wider gentrification, tension," AlJazeera (December 31st, 2014), http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2014/12/31/philadelphia-universitiesexpansiondrovewidergentrificationtensio.html (accessed June 1st, 2015), and Ed Pilkington, "Harlem takes on university in battle of town versus gown," *The Guardian* (November, 20th, 2007), http://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/nov/20/highereducation.architecture (accessed June 24th, 2015).

44→ See Milton Fisk, "Multiculturalism and Neoliberalism," *Praxis Filosofica*, 21 (2005): 21-28, and Deborah Orr. "Diversity and Equality are not the same thing," *The Guardian* (October 22nd, 2009), http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2009/oct/22/diversity-equality-deborah-orr (accessed June 25th, 2015).

45→ Édouard Glissant, *Poétique De La Relation* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990).

also, because according to Glissant, the Caribbean is an archipelagic space where each island can only be understood in relation to other islands. The Caribbean is also the space of rupture; the middle passage created a breach that will forever impede a linear understanding of history. As Michael Dash writes: "It is precisely the inability to restore historical continuities or to assume the smug assurance and insularity of continental masses that represents for Glissant the Caribbean's potential to establish new transversal connections, and be a model for the non-polarised postcolonial world to come."[46] There is thus, in Glissant's work what Dash further calls "a utopian thrust," an insistence on the possibility of new transversal connections; lateral relations between small countries that no longer pass through established centers of power, and where each country is equally affected by the other one. However, for these transversal relations to become possible, we need to begin thinking what Glissant calls "*l'Autre de la pensée*" (the Other of thought.)[47]

Glissant establishes a difference between "*la pensée de l'Autre*" ("the thought of the Other") and "*l'Autre de la pensée*" ("the Other of thought"). The thought of the Other is a thought that accepts the principle of alterity but asserts that we can think alterity without being altered ourselves, without that thought removing us from ourselves. On the other hand, the Other of thought is at the basis of the aesthetics and ethics of turbulence, an ethics and aesthetics that is not predetermined in advance. The Other of thought is the very process of altering; the process of altering oneself, one's thoughts, one's course. It is this Other of thought that leads to transversal relations where each side of the relation is transformed.

Our understanding of diversity is equivalent to Glissant's thought of the Other, an acknowledgment and respect for the other, yet at the same time a removal from the other, in order to preserve our positions and ourselves. Critical thinking encourages the thought of the Other, because it keeps the student at a distance, as the one who

46 → Michael Dash,"Homme du tout-monde," *Caribbean Review of Books* (January 25, 2011), http://caribbeanreviewofbooks.com/crb-archive/25-january-2011/homme-du-tout-monde/ (accessed June 24th, 2015).

47 → Glissant, *Poétique De La Relation*, 183.

evaluates and observes in an objective and detached manner. In order to begin practicing the Other of thought in the classroom, we need to transition to utopian thinking. As suggested earlier, utopian thinking can only be relational; its role is to envision new transversal relations, new solidarities, and new possibilities. A subject who thinks in a utopian fashion cannot remain unaltered, precisely because utopian thinking implies alternative ways of being, living, and relating to others. It encourages the creation of forms of existence outside our current, neoliberal structures.

Glissant's philosophy of relation is also closely linked to his defense of the other's opacity. In fact, in several works Glissant argues against the notion of transparency and opts for what he terms a writing of opacity, a writing that does not strive for full comprehension or explanation. According to Glissant, the act of comprehension is simultaneously an act of violence as it brings the other back to the same, the known. In order to understand you, I have to bring you back to a transparency and thus reduce you to already known norms. On the other hand, opacity, while it doesn't prevent a relation with the other, prevents the reduction of the other to known norms and categories, it prevents the reduction of the other to the same. Opacity is not an enclosure into an impenetrable autarchy, it does not prevent relation, but it's a relation that respects the other's irreducible singularity.

> *Non pas seulement consentir au droit à la différence mais, plus avant, au droit à l'opacité, qui n'est pas l'enfermement dans une autarcie impénétrable, mais la subsistance dans une singularité non réductible.*[48]

As suggested earlier, when we teach, especially for those of us who teach foreign languages and cultures, our focus is on bringing the material to transparency but not necessarily into relation. We could, however, like Glissant, strive to preserve opacity while insisting

48 → Agree not merely to the right to difference but, carrying this further, agree also to the right to opacity that is not enclosure within an impenetrable autarchy but subsistence within an irreducible singularity. Glissant, *Poétique De La Relation*, 203. Translation from Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 190.

on transversal relations. This would prevent us from using the other as a mere object of knowledge, from simply critiquing or approving of it, and would entice us to think of our relation to the other as a site for new historical possibilities.

I do not have a full-fledged answer to how this is to be practically done in the classroom. I do, however, believe that we can use fictional and theoretical texts like those of Maximin and Glisant, to practice new forms of thinking and teaching: ones that allow for the existence of different, better futures; futures which we can inhabit only as interconnected subjects. This type of thinking is already being implemented in the world. Social movements in Quebec, Chile, Turkey, United States, Spain, Greece, are standing up to the neoliberal logic of privatization, austerity and atomization. They are repossessing public spaces, redistributing resources, building collective kitchens, clinics, schools and other ways of being together.[49] It is thus no longer a question of whether the world will move from critical towards utopian and relational thinking. It is a question of whether we, whose role is to educate, will follow course. Without utopias, writes Glissant, "*nous manquons au monde à notre tour. Et maintenant, est-il possible- dans l'aujourd'hui- de manquer au monde?*"[50] (we are, in our turn, missing the world. And now, is it possible, today, to miss the world?). The question we need to answer is: will we continue to miss the world? ■

49 → Marina Sitrin and Dario Azzellini. *They Can't Represent Us!: Reinventing Democracy from Greece to Occupy* (London and New York: Verso: 2014).

50 → Glissant, *La cohée du Lamentin*. Paris: Gallimard,16.