



What specific concepts, theories or approaches can comprise Caribbean Cultural Studies, making it distinct from other kinds of Cultural Studies?

by Marsha Pearce

Cultural Studies is a discursive formation, in Foucault's sense. It has no simple origins...it was constructed by a number of different methodologies and theoretical positions, all of them in contention...Now, does it follow that cultural studies is not a policed disciplinary area? That it is whatever people do, if they choose to call or locate themselves within the project and practice of cultural studies? Although cultural studies as a project is open-ended, it can't be simply pluralist in that way...it does have some stake in the choices it makes. It does matter whether cultural studies is this or that...It is a serious enterprise, or project, and that is inscribed in what is sometimes called the 'political' aspect of cultural studies...Here one registers the tension between a refusal to close the field, to police it and, at the same time, a determination to stake out some positions within it and argue for them...It is a question of positionalities.

– Taken from Hall, Stuart. “Cultural Studies and its Theoretical Legacies.” The Cultural Studies Reader. 1993. Ed. Simon During. London and New York: Routledge, 1999. 97-109.

In order to locate a specific perspective or distinct foothold for Cultural Studies in the Caribbean, it is important to first establish how the region has been investigated via other fields of analysis. The social science called Caribbean Studies makes this archipelago the

subject of a kind of intelligence gathering initiated by the West (Euro-America) at the end of World War II. Non-Western societies, including the Caribbean were put under a “socio-cultural microscope [to support] reports on the curious customs and cultural practices of non-Western indigenous peoples.”¹ Fred Riggs writes, “area studies came into existence based on the premise that outsiders with a ‘scientific’ point of view could best understand and explain the situation in countries lacking the necessary infrastructure of universities and research institutes to study and explain themselves.”² Study of a geographical area in this way can give a view from outside that is skewed by preconceived notions of a society’s inferior difference. Non-Western societies are thus seen as an “Other.” Also, the study of geographical areas – if it can in fact be scientific or objective – often gives a broad sense or understanding of a place that can obscure its specific nuances.

In Postcolonial Studies, the Caribbean becomes a key character in a counterdiscourse to colonialism. The academic field recognises the region as missing from “the plot of Western Modernity”³ and its literature seeks to write the Caribbean back into a Euro-American construction of history.⁴ Use of the term “postcolonial” makes colonialism the master signifier in all analyses under this field and therefore, also ties the Caribbean to “Otherness.”

I propose that if the field of Caribbean Cultural Studies can be envisioned as a forest, it can serve to make a space for the Caribbean that exists beyond the confines of references to colonialism. Hiepmann observes that Glissant uses the metaphor of the forest to discuss opacity as a form of resistance against the objectifying gaze of the coloniser. The forest is characteristically

¹ Fred W. Riggs, *Social Science in a Global Context*, 28 Apr. 2005 <<http://www2.hawaii.edu/~fredr/glosci.htm>>.

² Ibid.

³ Mimi Sheller, *Consuming the Caribbean: From Arawaks to Zombies* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003) 1.

⁴ Georg M. Gugelberger, “Postcolonial Cultural Studies,” *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory & Criticism*, 1997 The Johns Hopkins University Press, 15 Mar. 2005 <http://www.press.jhu.edu/books/hopkins_guide_to_literary_theory/postcolonial_cultural_studies.html>.

dark and impermeable: "...[it] was a realm in which the pursuit of runaway slaves turned out to be impossible and a quasi-autonomous society could be established."⁵ Within the forest of Caribbean Cultural Studies (see fig. 1) can exist a diversity of species, or rather, concepts/approaches that are unique to the region. Specific theories can form canopies, which keep Caribbean difference impenetrable. Hiepko describes Western transparency as an understanding of the "Other" that denies his/her difference. The Other is pulled into "an organic whole."⁶ I argue that in this academic forest (Caribbean Cultural Studies), Caribbean difference flourishes. I also propose that concepts including rhizomatic thinking, the meta-archipelago, the machine, improvisation, creole identity, along with the theories of space and place and subjectivity, can constitute a distinctive, thriving Caribbean Cultural Studies ecosystem – one that provides the "necessary infrastructure" to study and explain the region.



Fig.1 The forest of Caribbean Cultural Studies. Personal photograph by author. June 2006.

⁵ Andrea Schwieger Hiepko, "Creolization as a Poetics of Culture: Edouard Glissant's 'Archipelagic Thinking,'" *A Pepper-Pot of Cultures: Aspects of Creolization in the Caribbean*, eds. Gordon Collier and Ulrich Fleischmann (Amsterdam and New York: Editions Rodopi, 2003) 247.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 245.

Underlying various forms of Cultural Studies is the active analysis of power relations, the examination of the effects of everyday social practices which produce and circulate meaning. British Cultural Studies was formulated on concerns with power within the sphere of mass culture; it examined the resistance of capitalist hegemony through working class culture then youth culture⁷. North American Cultural Studies is distinguished by an emphasis on power in terms of audience response – the appropriation of texts; it incorporates “the ‘textualist’ turn of ...theory.”⁸ The early phase of Australian Cultural Studies is marked by concerns with film/screen theory, feminism, the construction of national identity and race (“particularly indigeneity”) and “the Foucauldian concept of governmentality – the relation of culture to government.”⁹ Canadian Cultural Studies is made distinct by its concern for “the role of communications technologies in organising socio-spatial relationships derived from the work of Harold Innes.”¹⁰ What sets each type of Cultural Studies apart is the theoretical base chosen as a pivoting point for investigating relationships of power.

The dense flora of a Caribbean Cultural Studies can take root in the theories of “space and place” and “subjectivity.” It can also have as its reference points for analysing power relations, such ideas as *transformation*, *transcendence*, *transculturation* and *transplantation*. These words have a prefix in common which suggests movement and helps to characterise the region as one that is in flux. Stuart Hall describes the Caribbean as a “diaspora” because all Caribbean people were *transported* from somewhere else.¹¹

⁷ Douglas Kellner, *Cultural Studies and Ethics*, 18 Dec. 2006
<<http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner/papers/CSETHIC.htm>>.

⁸ *Cultural Studies*, 18 Dec. 2006 <<http://www.wsu.edu/~amerstu/tm/cultstud.html>>.

⁹ John Frow, *Australian Cultural Studies: Theory, Story, History*, 18 Dec. 2006
<<http://www.ched.uq.edu.au/docs/HoTseminarpapers/Frow.doc>>.

¹⁰ Tony Bennett, *Culture: A Reformer's Science* 11 May 2005
<<http://www.allenandunwin.com/extracts/pdfs/1864485914.pdf>>.

¹¹ Annie Paul, “Culture as always a Translation,” *Caribbean Beat Archive: January/February 2005 Issue No. 71*. 12 Apr. 2005 <<http://www.meppublishers.com/online/caribbean-beat/archive/article.php?issue=71&id=cb71-2-36>>.

Space & Place and Subjectivity

When thinking of the Caribbean as a diaspora, understandings of the region as a place and space are naturally linked. W. J. T. Mitchell distinguishes between place and space by establishing them in a binary opposition. He suggests that place is a stable, specific location marked by boundaries while space is more abstract, amorphous. He quotes Michel de Certeau who sees space as “a practiced place.”¹² It is all of the daily activities and practices – a meaning echoed in descriptions of culture.

If the question *what is the Caribbean?* is asked, the answer can include obscure definitions that draw upon both geography and culture. Byron Blake observes that “there has been confusion ... with a geographic definition ever since the mistaken identity attributed to the area by the lost European mariner, Christopher Columbus, as the West Indies or lands on a western route to the Indian subcontinent.”¹³ He notes that the Caribbean Sea is essential to a physical definition of the region and therefore questions where Barbados, The Bahamas and Guyana fit into a notion of the Caribbean. He also asks whether countries like Colombia, Mexico and Venezuela – with “a relatively small part of their perimeters washed by the Caribbean Sea” – can be considered Caribbean. Byron attempts to give a cultural definition and describes it as challenging. He writes: “the Caribbean now has, in addition to indigenous ‘Amerindian’ cultural roots, strong cultural ties with Europe, Africa and Asia. The boundaries of this cultural Caribbean are not easily demarcated.”¹⁴

¹² W. J. T. Mitchell, “Preface to the Second Edition of *Landscape and Power: Space, Place and Landscape*,” *Landscape and Power*, ed. W. J. T. Mitchell (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2002) viii.

¹³ Byron Blake, “The Caribbean – Geography, Culture, History and Identity: Assets for Economic Integration and Development,” *Contending with Destiny: The Caribbean in the 21st Century*, eds., Kenneth Hall and Denis Benn (Mona: Ian Randle Publishers, 2000) 46.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 47.

Such a lack of clarity in coming to an understanding of the region in both physical and cultural terms makes space and place an important theoretical base for examining power relations and analysing the politics of representation with respect to the Caribbean. A Caribbean Cultural Studies becomes necessary for these islands, which are in search of a place in a world with increasing threats to nation-states via border porosity and marked by a neo-colonialism borne out of globalisation. Sadowski-Smith notes that globalisation can be regarded as “the advent of new forms of transnational domination by private capital.”¹⁵ The Caribbean also needs a Caribbean Cultural Studies as it looks for a unique space within what Heidegger describes as a “world-space.”¹⁶ Using Heidegger’s nesting or container metaphor of the world-space (where something is in something else) with reference to the Caribbean, a question is raised: What distinctive cultural space can the Caribbean occupy within the phenomenon of global cultural interconnectedness? The answer to this question lies in another of Heidegger’s terms: region. Wollan describes Heidegger’s region as “the space we are in through our daily influence...Region is linked to our use associated with things.”¹⁷ This suggests that the Caribbean as a region can exist beyond the Caribbean Sea. A person can respond or use what is available in any environment in a specifically Caribbean way and therefore s/he can always find herself/himself in a Caribbean region. Benitez-Rojo’s concept of the meta-archipelago expands on this idea and this, along with the topic of improvisation, is discussed later.

Cultural Studies involves the politics of meaning production and circulation. In order to locate meaning, Jon Berquist observes that geography is not sufficient: “we cannot say that something comes ‘from Israel’ (or a given city, or region)...we need to rethink what we mean by

¹⁵ Claudia Sadowski-Smith, “Border Studies, Diaspora and Theories of Globalization,” Globalization on the Line: Culture, Capital and Citizenship at U.S. Borders, ed. Claudia Sadowski-Smith (Palgrave Macmillan, 2002) 4.

¹⁶ Gjermund Wollan, “Heidegger’s Philosophy of Space and Place,” Norsk Geografisk Tidsskrift Vol. 57 (Taylor & Francis, 2003) 36.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 36.

‘where.’ The question of where is not answered on a map.”¹⁸ He sees the need to be more particular and suggests that space as a “practiced place” or context for class, gender, age, economics and other elements is a more appropriate zone to examine meaning and its effects. Berquist writes: “...geography hypnotizes scholarship into forgetting the people involved as well as the social relations and modes of production. If something is ‘in Israel,’ where is its location in terms of society?”¹⁹ The Caribbean is a fragmented place of many islands but it is also a “fractal space” (Berquist). A Caribbean Cultural Studies can offer a more spatially accurate (Berquist) interrogation of the region.

The concept of space can also be used to resist Western hegemony. A Caribbean Cultural Studies is useful in the investigation of Caribbean Thirdspace. Edward Soja talks about the “trialectics of space”²⁰ where the notion of space is three tiered. All territories have three aspects of space at once. One aspect is called the Firstspace, which is concerned with the physical place, while another – called Secondspace – is the perceived, mental/cognitive representation of a place. Thirdspace is the combination of the physical and the perceived place – it is the lived experience. Dominant Western constructions or representations of space – that is, Euro-America’s control of Firstspace and Secondspace (for we see what we think or perceive / the physical is shaped by our perceptions) – can be challenged through an exposure of the Caribbean’s self-perceptions and actual experiences. A Caribbean Cultural Studies can expand the region’s space: Gavan Titley writes that “the delimiting of social space can be seen as the attempt to force the referent [the Caribbean] to second-guess the interpretant [the West]”²¹ The

¹⁸ Jon L. Berquist, “Theories of Space and Construction of the Ancient World,” 3 May, 2005 <<http://www.cwru.edu/affil/GAIR/papers/99papers/jberquist.html>>.

¹⁹ Ibid., 6.

²⁰ William Deal, “Simulating Pure Land Space: The Hyperreality of a Japanese Buddhist Paradise,” 4 May, 2005 <http://www.cwru.edu/artsci/r1gn/deal/aar2002/pure_land_space.htm>.

²¹ Gavan Titley, “Global Theory and Touristic Encounters” *Irish Communications Review Vol. 8, 2000*, 3 May, 2005 <<http://www.icr.dit.ie/volume8/articles/79-87Titley.pdf>>.

Caribbean can use the imagination (or poetics, which is discussed later) to confront reigning Western views with alternative visions/perceptions of the region – visions, which can then be performed.²² A Caribbean Cultural Studies can offer exposure of such visualisations.

The concept of “Space and Place” intertwines with that of “Subjectivity” to provide fertile ground and a distinctive foundation for a Caribbean Cultural Studies. Berquist observes that “the question of ‘where’ always requires the question ‘according to whom.’ Space is not neutral or objective; there is no magical space to stand from which one can observe space without perspective.”²³ Forms of representation (texts) are used to create and call persons into a specific location or ideal space in a social system (Althusser) and according to Foucault, the subject is produced within discourse and is subjected to discourse.²⁴ The West has gazed upon the Caribbean and has constructed a dominant perspective that positions Caribbean people as friendly, happy objects in an exoticised, idyllic geographical place. This view from outside is perpetuated in the industry of tourism and in popular media such as film. Gavan Titley observes how the Caribbean is represented in the North American film *I Still Know What You Did Last Summer*:

A group of college students are lured to a large anonymous Caribbean island by a radio contest staged by their prospective killer. When they arrive there is a hurricane warning, a hotel with the mandatory faulty wiring and to introduce our cast, a drug guy and a voodoo guy. It is approaching the end of the tourist season and luckily for the slasher, the island is deserted apart from the stock characters that provide the decontextualised ciphers of Caribbeanness in the market imaginary. As there are no consumers, there is no service and hence no need for a local population. The notational roles are so heavily circumscribed that there is no ambiguity to this absence; presence is purely functional to the romantic vision. What are important are the cultural connotations of the empty space and the proximity to nature, where the film’s protagonists are free to act without social

²² Jon L. Berquist, “Critical Spatiality and the Uses of Theory,” 4 May, 2002
<<http://www.cwru.edu/affil/GAIR/papers/2002papers/berquist.html>>.

²³ Jon L. Berquist, “Theories of Space and Construction of the Ancient World,” 3 May, 2005
<<http://www.cwru.edu/affil/GAIR/papers/99papers/jberquist.html>>.

²⁴ Stuart Hall, ed., Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices (London: Sage, 1997) 55.

constraint. In these terms, the island acts within a historical narrative of place-myths, where the host culture is somehow responsible for the exoticisation of the normal.²⁵

Subjectivity is bound up with the topic of authenticity. If the question of place also raises the consideration of perspective, John Urry's observation that "the objects of [a] tourist gaze will not necessarily bear putative similarity to an 'authentic' architecture or geography of local culture"²⁶ is understandable. In tourism, the Caribbean tourist worker becomes the subject of a discourse that positions the region and its peoples as a leisure product to be sold – the Caribbean tourist worker becomes subjected to the meanings, power and regulations of this discourse. Titley writes: "Locals in their fragmented space, cannot ...expect to be recognised as a member of the global community unless they step into the perspectival framework which sees the Caribbean in a very particular way...the romantic construction of the land and environment dictates a performance of culture."²⁷ This "performance" can place Caribbean people outside their natural cultural tendencies as they try to act out a preconceived notion of Caribbeanness and a difference that is not authentic. Titley sees this performance of the Caribbean subject as a kind of authenticity that is "sought and simulated in the Caribbean" and calls it "the search for a pre-cultural space" (p. 84). A Caribbean Cultural Studies can be useful to investigate possible movements of Caribbean peoples beyond this space and to look at other definitions of Caribbean authenticity.

The issue of voice is linked to ideas of subjectivity and perspective in terms of the Caribbean. The region must offer its own audible view of itself in response to dominant knowledge about the Caribbean. Yet Kenneth Ramchand in his piece, *The Lost Literature of the*

²⁵ Titley, op. cit., 85.

²⁶ Alex Tickell, "Footprints on *The Beach*: Traces of Colonial Adventure in Narratives of Independent Tourism," *Postcolonial Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (London: Routledge, 2001) 43

²⁷ Titley, op. cit., 84 and 85.

West Indies, sees the difficulty in creating a collective / regional voice that is loud enough for the West to hear. He notes: “In the modern period, the islands have only incomplete information about one another’s literary productions.”²⁸ While Caribbean writers have been offering perspectives that contribute to postcolonial discourse, Ramchand still regards such efforts as not being able to raise Caribbean consciousness:

Most of the literature of the West Indies is lost because hardly anyone ever reads it; there are few occasions or opportunities for the mass to experience it; it has had no practical effect on socioeconomic policy or political behaviour; where it is read, particularly by social scientists, it is not engaged with as if it has new or different perspectives, but is treated merely as supplementary material.²⁹

What is required is a confident knowledge of self that includes both the positive and negative aspects (Cultural Studies critically examines the full range of culture without prior prejudice toward specific texts, institutions or practices³⁰ and therefore the study of negative social acts, along with positive practices, can contribute to a comprehensive self critique). What is also necessary is a knowledge that incorporates an understanding of the region’s Anglophone, Francophone, Hispanic and Dutch socio-cultural idiosyncrasies. Ramchand writes “cultural confidence is knowing who you are and why you are in the midst of all the convulsions that are changing your life. It is a difficult knowledge to achieve...and it can never be fixed or final...Knowing who you are and why you are in a dynamic and provisional way makes it easy for you to be open to, and selective about, influences from outside yourself. At the same time, it makes it very difficult for those who want to tell you what you should be.”³¹ This calls for greater

²⁸ Kenneth Ramchand, “The Lost Literature of the West Indies,” *Contending with Destiny: The Caribbean in the 21st Century*, eds., Kenneth Hall and Denis Benn (Mona: Ian Randle Publishers, 2000) 522.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 526.

³⁰ Douglas Kellner, *Cultural Studies, Multiculturalism and Media Culture* 11 May, 2005 <<http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner/papers/SAGEcs.htm>>.

³¹ Ramchand, *op. cit.*, 515 and 516.

“Self” rather than “Other” awareness so that Caribbean people become subjects of their own discourse.

In order to be positioned in discourses that originate within the Caribbean, language (both written and spoken) is a significant factor for the Caribbean person. Language shapes thought, expression, interpretation and therefore meaning. “English or French or Hindi speakers have, over time, and without conscious decision or choice, come to an unwritten agreement, a sort of unwritten cultural covenant that, in their various languages, certain signs will stand for or represent certain concepts.”³² The region is divided by several languages (the English-speaking Caribbean is less than one-fifth of the population³³) and therefore the islands are separated by varying ways of conceptualising and communicating the world around them. In order to truly interrogate the Caribbean with a great degree of accuracy, access to the various conceptual maps (or ways in which different language speakers organise, arrange and classify concepts) must be granted for a critical understanding of the entire place to be achieved. A Caribbean Cultural Studies can contribute to an ‘integrated regional voice’ (Ramchand: 517) by questioning the mechanics of representation, that is, what meanings are made visible/invisible among the islands and the power relationships involved in determining which islands are heard.

What the Caribbean gives voice to is also important within a Caribbean Cultural Studies. While the topic of memory – a remembering of history, cultural origin and the region’s role in Western modernity – is a concern of Postcolonial studies, a Caribbean Cultural Studies can use the topic of creativity to begin to separate the Caribbean from a restraining reference to colonialism. In the piece *Interrupting Identities: Turkey/Europe* Kevin Robins observes that the West imposes a choice between two possibilities for societies seen as the subaltern: either

³² Hall, op. cit., 22.

³³ Norman Girvan, “Creating and Recreating the Caribbean,” *Contending with Destiny: The Caribbean in the 21st Century*, eds., Kenneth Hall and Denis Benn (Mona: Ian Randle Publishers, 2000) 31.

imitation / assimilation of Western culture or a return to authentic, traditional origins. Yet Robins describes this choice as impossible. The result of either option is “a borrowed mind” (Adonis). Robins notes that “the past cannot be recovered.” Repeated references to psychological and social vestiges of a colonial past and the need to rebuild connections with ancestral traditions hamper projects of development and autonomy. Robins cites Adonis who writes that a return to origins represents “a dependency on the past, to compensate for the lack of creative activity by remembering and reviving...in this dependency...there is an obliteration of personality.”³⁴ Glissant suggests that a Caribbean cultural identity can be built on the region’s mixed culture.³⁵ The Caribbean personality can be derived from all the creative possibilities that can come from new amalgamations of cultural practices and this new personality is what the region must give voice to in order to free itself from the disempowering trap of the West. A Caribbean Cultural Studies can be used to find answers to questions posed by Robins: “what are the possibilities for transcending this impossible choice imposed by the West? What political and intellectual developments have the potential for destabilising and deconstructing this dualistic logic?”³⁶

Transformation, Transcendence, Transculturation and Transplantation

Turning now to the reference points of transformation, transcendence, transculturation and transplantation (all taking root in the theories of “Space and Place” and “Subjectivity” within a Caribbean Cultural Studies), these can be examined in the poetic visions of the Caribbean offered by Glissant and Antonio Benitez-Rojo. In a tropical rainforest, canopy trees provide a surface for epiphytes to live and get sunlight. In the forest of a Caribbean Cultural Studies,

³⁴ Kevin Robins, “Interrupting Identities: Turkey/Europe,” *Questions of Cultural Identity*, eds., Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (London: Sage, 1996) 63.

³⁵ Hiepko, op. cit., 240.

³⁶ Ibid., 63.

poetics or the imagination can act as a surface for socio-political change to come to light. Poetics form part of what Arjun Appadurai calls an ideoscape – a concept that can act as a “building block of imaginary worlds, which may be able to be used in constructing real worlds.”³⁷

Using transformation as a point for considering a Caribbean Cultural Studies, the topic of the creole identity is raised. According to Homi Bhabha, the process of creolisation is a complex, unequal combination of elements that resists an essential identity and creates a subject who is neither African, nor European, nor East Indian, nor Asian but who exists in a new “third space.”³⁸ Glissant sees the Caribbean people as having no need to search for ancestral lines or origin. The creole identity is open-ended, adaptive, continuously forming new constructions which are “guided by the principles of movement.”³⁹ Its power lies in its potential as a counter-hegemonic force. Glissant suggests that the outcome of the process of creolisation is always unknown, therefore the creole person is able to shift and evade a Western gaze, to resist a pull into homogeneity by a “diffraction”⁴⁰ of elements in innumerable, possible ways. The result is an ever-changing identity that holds tightly to difference. Glissant notes that the idea of creolisation is situated in the Caribbean experience but he proposes that it can be seen as a global phenomenon. A Caribbean Cultural Studies can look at the region as a model for other areas around the world that are demonstrating this phenomenon.

The creole identity also allows authenticity to be considered within a Caribbean Cultural Studies. The new, “third space” created by the process of creolisation helps to erase the trait of mimicry often associated with non-Western societies. Zygmunt Bauman in the piece, *From*

³⁷ Jon L. Berquist, “Critical Spatiality and the Uses of Theory,” 4 May, 2002
<<http://www.cwru.edu/affil/GAIR/papers/2002papers/berquist.html>>.

³⁸ Eve Stoddard and Grant Cornwell, “Cosmopolitan or Mongrel? Creolite, Hybridity and ‘Douglarisation’ in Trinidad,” *European Journal of Cultural Studies* Vol. 2(3) (London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi: Sage, 1999) 338.

³⁹ Hiepko, op. cit., 240.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 245.

Pilgrim to Tourist – or a Short History of Identity, offers four life strategies in support of the postmodern problem of keeping identity open and unfixed, but the creole identity presents a fifth option. Bauman describes “the stroller” who has encounters that are seen as episodes without consequences, “the vagabond” who is never settled in any place, “the player” whose world is one of risk and “the tourist” who moves on purpose but has a home that acts as both shelter and prison.⁴¹ These types work as metaphors of real-life manifestations of unstable identities. The creole practices what Glissant calls “circular nomadism”⁴² where identity constantly changes as Caribbean people move and develop relationships with others. Stoddard and Cornwell cite *Eloge*: “Creole cultures are fixed in a state of openness, primed to appropriate, incorporate, synthesize and play with cultural forms whatever their source.”⁴³ The concept of the creole can move from the realm of the poetic to the everyday space by its application to the social transformation of the Caribbean from a region marked by imitation of the West to a place that bears authentic features.

Transcendence and transculturation, as other reference points for discussions about power relations within a Caribbean Cultural Studies, can be linked to an archipelagic or rhizomatic way of thinking (Deleuze and Guattari). Glissant uses the rhizome from the theory of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari and expands the metaphor so that it shatters or transcends the Western hierarchical relationship bound up in the binaries of “Self” and “Other.” Caribbean Cultural Studies as a forest of variegated methodologies can be used to investigate other options for constructing the Caribbean. Hiepko writes: “for [Glissant], the immense diversity of the tropical rainforest and

⁴¹ Zygmunt Bauman, “From Pilgrim to Tourist – or a Short History of Identity,” *Questions of Cultural Identity*, eds., Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (London: Sage, 1996) 26-32.

⁴² Hiepko, op. cit., 248.

⁴³ Eve Stoddard and Grant Cornwell, op. cit., 338.

the constant proliferation of vegetation reveals a rhizomorphic rather than binary construction.”⁴⁴ Glissant envisions a mode of thinking for Caribbean people that is characteristic of the rhizome, which maintains a rootedness but the single source of its branching, interconnected roots cannot be traced. He labels this theory the poetics of relations and sees all identity as extending “into a connection with the other.”⁴⁵ Glissant’s reworking of the idea of the rhizome acts as a counter-hegemonic force as it suggests the possibility of the disintegration of the dividing line between the West and East and attempts to reconfigure the locations of societies at the centre and those at the periphery. Hiepko adds in reference to Glissant’s proposal: “the Caribbean becomes the prime model of an identity whose existence as a unified whole does not depend on segregation from all outside influences, but which constitutes itself only when blending with its environment.”⁴⁶

Sylvia Wynter echoes this way of thinking by proposing a transcultural approach to a Caribbean Cultural Studies. She cites Epstein’s concept of the space of transculture, which is a space that is open to all cultures: “transculture frees us from culture, from any one culture.”⁴⁷

Glissant’s poetics of relation suggests this openness. It offers a freedom that resists or challenges the notion of cultural imperialism. It gives the Caribbean permission to transcend its cultural territory by allowing other cultures to “interrupt” (not destroy) the region’s cultural spaces and create new practices and experiences. Kevin Robins observes that with this kind of connection or cultural flow between societies, non-European countries can play a recognisably legitimate role in shaping European culture and vice versa, without having the need to defend

⁴⁴ Hiepko, op. cit., 242.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 243.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 244.

⁴⁷ Sylvia Wynter, “On the Relativity, Nature-Culture Hybridity and Auto-Institutedness of Our Genre(s) of Being-Human: Towards the Transculturality of a Caribbean/New World Matrix.” Distinguished Lecture. Caribbean Cultural Studies Institute, Faculty of Humanities, The University of the West Indies, 10-26 Nov. 2002.

borders. A Caribbean Cultural Studies can be useful in pinpointing the effectiveness in the performance of this vision - whether the poetics translates into reality or whether elements of mimicry and cultural conquest become the actual results of such proposed relations.

Antonio Benitez-Rojo extends Glissant's idea of relations. He maintains that there is Caribbean specificity. Using transplantation as a reference point within a Caribbean Cultural Studies, Benitez-Rojo's concept of the Caribbean as a "meta-archipelago," – one, grand repeating island without boundaries – can be examined. He sees the Caribbean as having the power to branch out, to reach and affect various spaces and exist anywhere in the world. Like the rhizome, the meta-archipelago has no source or centre:

Thus the Caribbean flows outward past the limits of its own sea with a vengeance and...may be found on the outskirts of Bombay, near the low and murmuring shores of Gambia, in a Cantonese tavern of circa 1850, at a Balinese temple, in an old Bristol pub, in a commercial warehouse in Bordeaux at the time of Colbert, in a windmill beside the Zuider Zee, at a café in a barrio of Manhattan, in the existential saudade of an old Portuguese lyric.⁴⁸

Yet, for Benitez-Rojo, a specific quality of the Caribbean is repeated or transplanted. This repeated quality is a specific response to whatever place and space in which the Caribbean finds itself. He applies Chaos theory and sees that Caribbeanness has an apparent randomness but it obeys rules. The Caribbean holds to a "certain kind of way" (Benitez-Rojo) in the coming together of seemingly disparate elements. "Unusual parallels" (Benitez-Rojo: 15) can be found within the Chaos:

The cult of the Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre can be read as a Cuban cult, but it can also be reread...as a meta-archipelagic text, a meeting or confluence of marine flowings that connects the Niger with the Mississippi, the China Sea with the Orinoco, the Parthenon with a fried food stand in an alley in Paramaribo.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Antonio Benitez Rojo, "Introduction: The Repeating island," *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective*, Trans. James Maraniss (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1992) 4.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 16.

What the Caribbean obeys is the rule of improvisation. Whatever the circumstance, or interaction, the Caribbean response is to reflect or refract, as Benitez-Rojo says, but the Caribbean “light keeps on being light” (Benitez-Rojo: 21). He describes this specificity of the Caribbean’s indefatigable spirit:

The notion of the apocalypse is not important within the culture of the Caribbean. The choices of all or nothing, for or against, honor or blood have little to do with the culture of the Caribbean. These are ideological propositions articulated in Europe which the Caribbean shares only in declamatory terms, or, better, in terms of a first reading. In Chicago a beaten soul says: “I can’t take it any more,” and gives himself up to drugs or to the most desperate violence. In Havana, he would say: “The thing to do is not die.”⁵⁰

Rather than choose death, the Caribbean perpetuates itself, transplanting its uniqueness, adapting and creating variants or different copies that maintain “Caribbeanness.” A Caribbean Cultural studies can investigate the breeding of such differences. It can also offer the possibility of a second reading or perhaps several close readings of the region in search of connections with others, for as Benitez-Rojo observes, with all first readings the reader only reads himself (Benitez-Rojo: 13).

Benitez-Rojo’s notion of the machine is also important to a Caribbean Cultural Studies. A machine is a device or construction that can change the direction of power or force. Cultural Studies critically examines the constructions or machinery behind the positioning of such concerns as ethnicity, race, class and gender. Benitez-Rojo speaks of Columbus’ small machine, a type of vacuum cleaner, which sucked products and data from the Caribbean and deposited them in the West. This machine was modified and updated to that of the fleet system. The machine then evolved into the “Grandest Machine on Earth” (Benitez Rojo: 6) – one

⁵⁰ Ibid., 10.

encompassing such working parts as “a bureaucratic machine, a commercial machine, an extractive machine, a political machine, a legal machine, a religious machine” (Benitez Rojo: 7). Benitez Rojo calls this grand machine, a Caribbean machine and sees it as still in existence today. He writes: “...this extraordinary machine...repeats itself continuously. It’s called: the plantation.”⁵¹ The plantation is characterised by structural transparency and symbolises the platform of order and hierarchy occupied by the master.⁵² A Caribbean Cultural Studies as a forest can act as a place for the region to run to in its effort to escape from the plantation and therefore rupture its repetition. Much like the world of “The Matrix” established by the Wachowski brothers in their film trilogy, a Caribbean Cultural Studies can operate as a kind of Zion, a natural space that exposes the machines at work upon the psyches and socio-cultural spaces of the Caribbean. A Caribbean Cultural Studies, therefore becomes the important red pill (The Matrix) that the region’s academics, theorists, writers must swallow.

Yet, the term “Caribbean” in the label of this proposed inter-disciplinary field for the region, poses a problem. According to Norman Girvan, the significance of the word “Caribbean” may not be entirely applicable to those from this archipelagic space and therefore any analyses under the banner of a Caribbean Cultural Studies must be sensitive to this detail. Girvan writes about the word:

The Caribbean defined as a basin was the product of US expansionism – the area at the turn of the nineteenth century as argued persuasively by the Puerto Rican historian Antonio Gaztambide-Geigel. It was around this time that the word ‘Caribbean’ came into general use to refer to the region. If this name was taken from one of the indigenous people of the region... Gaztambide-Geigel argues that its superimposition on a zone that was in reality extremely diverse and heterogeneous reflected an imperial conception and design...It was not at first accepted by the actual inhabitants of the region – who in the main continued to speak of ‘Central America,’ ‘the Isthmus,’ the ‘Antilles’ and the West Indies...while we anglophones see ourselves as being at one and the same time Caribbean and West Indian, Hispanics might see themselves as Caribbean and Latin

⁵¹ Ibid., 8.

⁵² Hiepko, op. cit., 247.

American. Moreover, for anglophones ‘West Indian’ might also incorporate elements of pan-Africanism or even pan-Hinduism that are either muted or non-existent in the Hispanic Societies⁵³

Berquist refers to social labeling theory in his observation that labels for places that we imagine “are hotly contested political decisions.”⁵⁴ Terms affect what is included and excluded. A Caribbean Cultural Studies has to avoid an exclusivity of spaces and places in its approach to investigating the region.

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⁵³ Girvan, op. cit., 32-33.

⁵⁴ Jon L. Berquist, “Theories of Space and Construction of the Ancient World,” 3 May, 2005
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