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Lorna Burns, *Contemporary Caribbean Writing and Deleuze: Literature Between Postcolonialism and Post-Continental Philosophy*. London: Continuum, 2012. xvii + 216 pp. Notes, bibliography, and index. \$110 U.S. (hb). ISBN 978-1-4411-1643-7.

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The past five years have seen a flurry of new publications on the subject of French philosophies of difference and immanence in relation to postcolonial theory. Although the poststructuralist origins of postcolonial thought are well known and need not be rehearsed here (e.g. the influence of Derrida on Gayatri Spivak, Foucault on Edward Said or Lacan on Homi Bhabha), the value of Deleuze's singular conceptual apparatus for a politics of liberation continues to be the subject of controversy in Anglophone postcolonial scholarship. The critical use Edouard Glissant makes of the Deleuzian concepts of nomad thought, chaos, and the rhizome, for example, is often invoked, even dutifully praised as a model for non-exclusionary identity formation, but the properly philosophical dimensions of the Caribbean thinker's aesthetic project remain largely misunderstood. Even if his concept of "Relation" has been widely discussed, it has yet to be fully analyzed in terms of its philosophical antecedents and Glissant's unwavering commitment to a non-dialectical and affirmative ontology.

Lorna Burns's book is a welcome addition to an area of investigation that still needs to find its footing in the wake of Peter Hallward's rigorous critique of Deleuze's idealism and the viability of his thought as an enabling instrument for political work or social justice programs. Burns sets out, just as rigorously as Hallward, to demonstrate the opposite. She methodically traces the epistemological affinities and emancipatory potential that contemporary philosophies of immanence share with Caribbean thought, beginning with surrealism's "monistic world-view" and its role as "an important moment in the development of postcolonialism as a positivist critique of difference and becoming" (p. 43).

For Hallward, whose position is congruent with that of many neo-Marxist critics of French thought, Deleuze takes us "out of this world": his philosophy is at odds with the interventionist goals of postcolonial theory and the modes of concrete, specific, active, and embodied resistance that it needs to promote.<sup>[1]</sup> Burns begins, in her introduction, with a careful overview of this ongoing conversation about the relative merits of Deleuze for ethics and politics. She intervenes in the debate from a position that benefits from her strong grounding in European philosophy. She unpacks relevant genealogies and concepts, and offers a lucid scrutiny of what she views as the parallel goals of Caribbean writing and continental thought, thus contributing to the further rapprochement of these two fields.

This rapprochement has been gaining momentum in the wake of studies--either cited by Burns or published quasi-simultaneously with hers--that defend the relevance of continental philosophy for a political understanding of culture and society. Among these recent studies are a number of edited volumes: by Simone Bignall and Paul Patton (*Deleuze and the Postcolonial*); Rosi Braidotti and Patricia Pisters (*Revisiting Normativity with Deleuze*); and Lorna Burns herself and Birgit Kaiser (*Postcolonial Literatures and Deleuze*).<sup>[2]</sup> In addition, John Drabinsky (*Levinas and the Postcolonial*) has tried to reclaim Levinas's ethics of alterity for postcolonial studies, whereas Michaeline Crichlow (*Globalization and the Post-Creole Imagination*) successfully brings the same continental tradition to bear on the politics and

processes of creolization.<sup>[3]</sup> Patrice Haynes (*Immanent Transcendence*) discusses the materialist agendas and theological subtexts of Deleuze, Irigaray and Adorno, whereas Eleanor Kaufman (*Deleuze, The Dark Precursor*) provocatively dwells on the contemplative, static dimensions and scholastic origins of Deleuze's thought.<sup>[4]</sup> John Mullarkey (*Post-Continental Philosophy*), on the other hand, advocates the use of "post-continental" as the label best suited to describe the strain of thought that runs from Spinoza to Deleuze and Badiou via Nietzsche and Bergson, thinkers notable for their embrace of absolute immanence over transcendence.<sup>[5]</sup> Mullarkey demarcates them from the group typically associated with the first poststructuralist wave, underscoring their primary commitment to the production of newness and positivity, the creative life force, and the transvaluation of values through cross-culturality: what Glissant would term the simultaneity of *change* and *échange*--transformation through contact--that occurs when individuals and cultures enter into respectful, mutual exchange.<sup>[6]</sup>

Taking her cue from Mullarkey's promotion of this "post-continental" school of thought, Burns states that she is concerned "with the implications of a philosophical concept of immanence for postcolonial studies" in general (pp. 21-22). She provides a convincing demonstration of her argument by evoking the Cubans Alejo Carpentier and Antonio Benítez-Rojo, but focuses primarily on Francophone and Anglophone writers: the Martinicans René Ménil and Aimé and Suzanne Césaire, in addition to Glissant; the Guyanese Wilson Harris; the St Lucian Derek Walcott; and the lesser-known Trinidadian-American Robert Antoni and Jamaican-Canadian Nalo Hopkinson. The experimental and Nietzschean dimensions of the latter two, in particular, are explored with care and sophistication, and provide insight into this younger diasporic generation's aesthetic goals. Burns argues that these writers' commitment to the active rather than the reactive, to creativity and unpredictability, universality and cross-cultural exchange echoes, on the one hand, the surrealist movement's rejection of rationality and parallels, on the other, the post-continental critique of transcendence and dialectics. She suggests that it is with surrealism that the "artistic and philosophical expression of immanence shifted from Europe to the Caribbean" (p. 22). Hence the importance, for her, of tracing commonalities and illuminating epistemological similarities between the postcolonial and the post-continental, since they both provide the conceptual and literary understanding of "an immanently creative world" (p. 67). She notes that "surrealism remains a marginalized movement within the evolution of postcolonial studies" (pp. 43-44), despite the fact that "the roots of postcolonialism lie in surrealism's anti-imperialist sympathies" (p. 22). Her Caribbean corpus illustrates this investment in experimentation, imagination, vitalism, and desire common to both the so-called "post-continental" philosophical strain and the surrealist movements.

Burns's brief treatment of Pauline Melville's short story "The Parrot and Descartes" makes for a perfect opening allegory for the treatment of well-trod postcolonial themes, namely oppressive rationalism versus orality and marvelous realism; and the hierarchy of mind over matter or binary of thought and extension that was initiated by Descartes, then compounded by Hegel's absolute idealism. The dynamic or positive process of becoming--the actualizing of virtual potentialities--that Deleuze offers by contrast, and with which Caribbean intellectuals have been grappling since the 1930s, beginning with Suzanne Césaire and René Ménil, is Burns's original focus. She shows how Ménil's contributions to *Tropiques* presents us with a conceptualization of identity that marks the "acceptance of an immanently creative, self-diversifying reality" (p. 51). This is a reality that favors the emergence and coexistence of Caribbean multiplicities in which there are no contradictions and "contraries can intimately rub shoulders," as Ménil explains in his essay on the marvelous quoted by Burns (p. 51). Rather than searching for a unified identity, which would be the result of dialectical synthesis, we have instead a "persistence of relative parts" (p. 52) signaling "a philosophy concerned with relation, speeds, and lines of becoming...[which thus] constitute 'an assemblage'" (p. 52) or a multiplicity, in specifically Deleuzian terms, that opens new horizons. Glissant's thought of Relation is similarly concerned with a form of circular nomadism, an *aller-venir* that can result in an ever-evolving multiplicity constituted through expanse (*étendue*) rather than filiation, protective of all forms of life, and promoting an aesthetic of the earth that is very much of *this* world.<sup>[7]</sup> Burns's take on Glissant goes a long way toward countering the prevailing Hallwardian view.

The chapter on surrealism, especially the discussion of Menil's essays, provides a lucid context for understanding what is at stake in the concepts of *élan vital*, hybridity, creolization, and relationality. It moves us beyond both the groundbreaking but philosophically limited approach of James Arnold's *Modernism and Negritude* and the ubiquitous nods to Homi Bhabha's ambivalence and mimicry or Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin's theories of appropriation and "writing back" that have been the staple of Anglophone postcolonialism.<sup>[8]</sup> Burns then folds together brief comments on Jean Rhys, Jamaica Kincaid, and George Lamming within her longer analysis of Harris and Walcott in a chapter that indicates how their treatment of time affirms a process of becoming that does not need to negate the past in order to fulfill its unrealized potential. Walcott and Harris write beyond *resentiment* and the rigid dyads of counter-discourse theory with its all-too predictable oppositional model of center and periphery, oppressor and oppressed. Linking their approach to Deleuze's third synthesis of time and "the eruption of the new" (p. 89), Burns illustrates the inherently active and creative (rather than reactive) processes of differentiation (with a *t*) and differenciation (with a *c*) that run from Nietzsche to Bergson, Fanon, Harris, and Walcott. It is that which enables absolute deterritorialization and the minoritarian becoming that is crucially *of* the domain of art and literature in Deleuze's scheme. Burns excels at elucidating the conceptual abstractions that have eluded many commentators, and she deals with a complex multilingual corpus that brings strong comparative perspectives into play.

It is clear by now that I am in complete sympathy with the goals of Burns's study. It should be required reading for students of postcolonial theory, a field that is becoming asphyxiated under the weight of its own success, limited engagement with non-Anglophone approaches, and predictable methodologies. Burns re-opens pathways traced by canonical, as well as neglected Caribbean writers and critics whose subtle handling of time, identity, imagination, and the virtual eminently deserves the complex treatment she affords them, and will hopefully encourage others to pursue.

I do however want to quarrel with one major point that I find completely unhelpful, and it is her uncritical adoption of the term "post-continental" to describe a group of thinkers who are very much at the core of the continental tradition. Grouping them under the rubric "post-continental," as Mullarkey does, creates an unnecessary division that eviscerates that tradition and hides the continuities to which Burns in fact returns in her careful engagement with early twentieth-century movements, as well as post-1968 thought. In fact, concepts of "relation" and "immanence" have a long history in French feminist philosophy, beginning with Simone de Beauvoir's 1940s essays on biology, ethics, politics, and immanence, in which she diverges from Sartrean existentialism, and develops her own original views on embodiment, gender, and race as Sonia Kruks has conclusively argued.<sup>[9]</sup> Furthermore, as Eleanor Kaufman has beautifully shown, Deleuze's work belongs in a long tradition of European philosophy dating back to the Middle Ages. Whether or not one agrees with Kaufman's reading of Deleuze, to call him "post-continental" as does Mullarkey is to fall into a serious anachronism that does nothing to support the numerous insights, lucid prose, and smart argumentation that Burns's book brings to the fields of Caribbean studies and contemporary theory.

Finally, let me close with a quibble with the field in general, and Burns incidentally. It concerns a rather common problem in Anglo-American critical literature: the limited interest shown for non-Anglophone secondary sources on the Caribbean, even when these are directly relevant and published in Paris (let alone when published locally and aimed at a Caribbean readership). It is often as if the pursuit of cross-cultural dialogue promoted by postcolonial critics could happen without honest efforts at multilingual competence and curiosity: another anachronism in the age of digital access. Recent and acutely relevant studies of Glissant by Dominique Chancé and Alain Ménil, two critics with deep personal knowledge of the Caribbean, are not even mentioned in Burns's bibliography.<sup>[10]</sup> That, for me, is one of the most unfortunate flaws of a book that is nonetheless important, challenging, and a pleasure to read.

## NOTES

[1] Peter Hallward, *Out of This World: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Creation* (London: Verso, 2006).

[2] Simone Bignall and Paul Patton, eds., *Deleuze and the Postcolonial* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010); Rosi Braidotti and Patricia Pisters, eds., *Revisiting Normativity with Deleuze* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012); and Lorna Burns and Birgit Kaiser, eds., *Postcolonial Literatures and Deleuze: Colonial Pasts, Differential Futures* (London: Palgrave MacMillan 2012).

[3] John Drabinsky, *Levinas and the Postcolonial: Race, Nation, Other* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011) and Michaeline Crichlow, *Globalization and the Post-Creole Imagination* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2009).

[4] Patrice Haynes, *Immanent Transcendence: Reconfiguring Materialism in Continental Philosophy* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012) and Eleanor Kaufman, *Deleuze, The Dark Precursor: Dialectic, Structure, Being* (Baltimore, Md.: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012).

[5] John Mullankey, *Post-Continental Philosophy: An Outline* (London: Continuum, 2006).

[6] Edouard Glissant, *Philosophie de la Relation: Poésie en étendue* (Paris: Gallimard, 2009), p. 66.

[7] Edouard Glissant, *Tout-Monde* (Paris: Gallimard, 1993), p. 24, and *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), p. 47.

[8] A. James Arnold, *Modernism and Negritude: The Poetry and Politics of Aimé Césaire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981); Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994); and Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (London: Routledge, 1989).

[9] Sonia Kruks, *Situation and Human Existence: Freedom, Subjectivity, and Society* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990) and *Simone de Beauvoir and the Politics of Ambiguity*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012). See also Françoise Lionnet, "Consciousness and Relationality: Sartre, Lévi-Strauss, Beauvoir and Glissant," *Yale French Studies* 123(July 2013): 100-117. Special Issue on *Rethinking Claude Lévi-Strauss*, ed. by Robert Doran.

[10] Alain Ménil, *Les voies de la créolisation: essai sur Édouard Glissant* (St Vincent de Mercuze: de l'Incidence, 2011); Dominique Chancé, *Poétique baroque de la Caraïbe* (Paris: Karthala, 2001) and *Édouard Glissant. Un traité du déparler* (Paris: Karthala, 2002).

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