Identity can take different forms; subjects identify through different modes. This is no less true of the Caribbean than anywhere else. In the twentieth century alone, Caribbean intellectuals have elaborated various ways to identify themselves racially, religiously, linguistically, historiographically, and geographically. In this paper I approach the concept of identity and the process of identification as functions of the Caribbean subject’s relationship to space and place. Most specifically, the aspect of geography that concerns me is precisely the “island-ness” or insularity of the lands in question.

In privileging the island as a space for analysis, I am not only identifying a tendency in Caribbean (and pan-Caribbeanist) cultural expression, but also pursuing a line of investigation opened by Caribbean cultural theorists such as Édouard Glissant from Martinique, Antonio Benítez-Rojo from Cuba, and J. Michael Dash from Jamaica. Insularity here becomes particularly important because of its impact on the identity not only of its inhabitants but of the whole region as well: the Caribbean is often constituted as an archipelago, and thus defined by the insularity of its composite lands. Perhaps as a result of this, local and international discourse on this region is seemingly hard-pressed to escape the semantic field of the island: insularity, insularismo, bannzil kreyol, etc. The pervasive references to insularity, however, often do no more than serve as the backdrop for analyses of Caribbean society. In fact, interrogations of the notion of “island” or “insularity” are rare. I want to take insularity seriously here, following the proposal of critic Mireille Rosello to see insularity as one of several “systems of explanation that metaphorize the connection between geography and identity” (565). I do so by looking at geographic metaphors for identity in literary works from 1970s Martinique by Georges Desportes and Édouard Glissant. Desportes and Glissant offer contrasting views of the island. Although both authors are critical of
metropolitan France’s control over Martinique, Desportes uses the negative connotations of insularity to criticize Martinique’s dependency, while Glissant subverts the image of the island in order to propose a new way of thinking Caribbean identity. After reading Desportes’s *Cette île qui est la nôtre* and Glissant’s *Le discours antillais* in the context of the 1970s, I turn to an example of insularist discourse in 2004 from Thierry Nicolas, a geographer at the University of the Antilles-Guyana, to show the tenacity of insularity’s hold on Caribbean discourse and to demonstrate how the symbolic field of the island can also be mobilized to express a vision of the Caribbean that is much more oriented towards France than we see in the examples from the 1970s. As I study these texts, I will navigate between the *topoi* of island, sea, and archipelago in order to reach a provisional conclusion about geographic identity and the use of geography to link individual and collective identities.

There are several developments in the 1970s in the Caribbean that give context to writing composed in that time period about the relationship between Martinique and the rest of the world. A large number of workers from Martinique were migrating to metropolitan France, a phenomenon encouraged and facilitated by the French state since 1963 through the BUMIDOM office. As of 1975, official statistics put at 62,265 the number of people born in Martinique living in metropolitan France (Condon and Ogden 506). In 1970, the runway at the Lamentin airport had been equipped for Boeing 747s. In 1972, a telecommunications station was built on the island, and the same year saw the first live television re-broadcast of French programming. These technological developments in the infrastructure connecting Martinique to France (and other places) were instituted in the political environment obtaining after Martinique became a *département d’outre-mer* (“overseas department”) of France in 1946, but before the national decentralization measures of the 1980s.

The first text I would like to analyze from this period is Georges Desportes’s *Cette île qui est la nôtre* (“This island which is ours”), published in 1973. Criticism on this text is difficult to find, perhaps because Desportes has been classified as a follower of Negritude. In fact, this text does bear many similarities to one of the most famous texts of Negritude, Aimé Césaire’s poem *Cahier d’un retour au pays natal* (*Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*). At the same time, the crisis voiced in Desportes’s 1973 text is distinct in many ways from that expressed in Césaire’s poem. Desportes is writing after the implementation of Césaire’s proposal for Martinique (along with Guadeloupe, French Guyana, and Réunion) to leave their colonial status and become French *départements*. Also, since the early 1960s, the French government had sought to bolster a sense of French identity among its West Indian citizens by facilitating temporary or permanent migration from the Caribbean to the metropole through the BUMIDOM office. Desportes continues to write and remains a figure of authority in Martinican letters, despite the comparative lack of international attention his work has garnered. The fact that he was called on to participate in events organized around