



Atlantic Theory and Theories

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A bit tardy. But, so it goes late in this pandemic. Or at least we hope it's "late."

I am exceptionally happy to present this issue, the second for the publishing year of 2022, of *Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy*. It is the second issue to come out after the departure of Scott Davidson and Kris Sealey as co-editors and collaborators. We miss you both and offer this issue in further recognition of what we built in the decade-plus of work together.

This issue includes a review of Jill Jarvis' important book *Decolonizing Memory* by T.S. Kavitha, three long essays that reflect the diversity of concerns and figures in the Francophone and adjacent worlds, and a forum on Frantz Fanon's first book *Black Skin, White Masks*. The range of what we can call Atlantic theory, theory made in and from the swirl of history and memory in the Atlantic world, is present across this volume, tapping into historical and contemporary resources from Europe to the United States to the Maghreb to the Caribbean. Overlapping worlds. Entangled worlds. Entangled theory and theories forged inside, outside, and in tension with staged, historical, and comparative overlaps.

The long essays: Angela H. Brown's essay "A definite quantity of all the differences in the world': Glissant, Spinoza, and the Abyss as True Cause" opens the volume with a searching and important reflection on the function of the abyss in the work of Édouard Glissant. Brown's reflections are oriented around Baruch Spinoza's work as an interpretative frame, opening up new horizons in thinking about Glissant, and also contributes to a now substantial body of scholarship revisiting Spinoza's work and its relevance for contemporary scholarly, political, and philosophical questions. Urgent and compelling. We are also living under pandemic conditions, in the wake of millions of deaths and long-term impacts on human health, community, and senses of finitude. In that frame, we can see how Ryan Crawford's contribution "Into the Looking Glass: The Mirror of Old Age in Beauvoir and Améry" could not be more timely. Crawford explores the meaning of aging and agedness in the work of Simone de Beauvoir and Jean Améry, linking

those ideas to the history of Western philosophy and it contains so many insights into finitude, embodiment, and vulnerability. Read alongside Habiba Ibrahim's *Black Age* from 2021 and other texts, I think we can see a broadening and immensely important horizon of scholarship emerging around the most human of human issues: *we age*. What does that mean? Gratitude for days because Crawford has made this important contribution. Ruthanne C. Kim's essay "Returning to the Point of Entanglement: Sexual Difference and Creolization" rounds out our essay section with a fantastic piece on gender, creole modes of thinking, and embodied relations to the world and the social imaginary. Working through Glissant and Luce Irigaray, Kim's essay brings fresh insights into work on both figures while staging an important comparative study. This is one essay, but it opens up so many questions for further work – the mark of important writing, I think, and Kim helps us understand elements of Caribbean theory differently from the perspective of French feminism, elements of French feminism from the perspective of Caribbean theory. It recalls Max Hantel's work on sexual difference in Glissant's work from a 2014 issue of the *Journal*, and I am so happy to host work pushing this series of questions forward.

Following these three essays is a collection of short pieces on Frantz Fanon's classic text *Black Skin, White Masks*, which turned seventy years old in 2022. In 2011, we published a collection of pieces in recognition of the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of *The Wretched of the Earth*, and it is a real treat to read these reflections on Fanon's earliest work and mark such important differences. The political resonance of *The Wretched of the Earth* is famous and forever important. Such enduring importance is a tragedy of the world and the result of colonialism's persistent presence and violence, to be sure, but it is also indicative of Fanon's particular kind of genius. What is the resonance of *Black Skin, White Masks*? That is a very different question.

Black Skin, White Masks is an exemplary mixed-methods work, moving across (and with) elements of psychoanalysis, sociology, literary criticism, existentialism, phenomenology, Négritude, Marxism, and Hegelian dialectics. Fanon blends the personal with the philosophical, producing a text that is both fecund in and through our moment and limited to its author and his moment. We see all of that in the pieces from the forum. We see how Fanon's work is part of his particular moment, situated before the postcolonial and embedded in the anticolonial. That embeddedness gives fresh insights, always, into the persistence of the colonial and colonial modes of thinking, framing, writing, and imagining. I am thinking here of the contributions by M. Shadee Malaklou on bell hooks and Fatima Seck on the cultural politics of Black women's hair, where the persistence of the white gaze is understood to be the limit built into the very being of the world, and, so, how liberation around matters of gender and the aesthetics of selfhood require a complete reimagining of the world, who looks and how, and in what ways the gaze is racialized – or, in a revolutionary or post-revolutionary future, is outside the

racial gaze. I am also thinking about how Fanon's work helps Tony Alessandrini think about the present struggle over the right to teach, maybe even necessity of teaching, about the history and present conditions of antiblack racism – debates and political meltdowns in the United States around “critical race theory” – or how for Tacuma Peters the work in *Black Skin, White Masks* reframes and challenges practices of historiography. Both short essays display the fecundity of Fanon's early work for framing, unframing, and reframing social, political, and writerly tasks in the long age of antiblackness. Keisha Allan's piece on Chauvet's *Amour* extends the same sort of interpretative frame to revisit questions of race, color, and the vicissitudes of subjectivity in a literary piece – but also, by extension, a whole cluster of similar literary sub-genres, aesthetic approaches to art and resistance, and existential questions of incarnation and belonging.

But there is also the limit to what Fanon has to say in *Black Skin, White Masks*. It is, after all, a seventy years old text. Written post-World War Two, but before the massive waves of independence across the global south, *Black Skin, White Masks* asks its own questions about limited mobility and everydayness – Fanon on public transit, Fanon in a café, Fanon speaking in France or upon return to Martinique – and sits in the late-colonial moment. It is such a different text than *The Wretched of the Earth*. The 1961 text is ambitious and grand in its vision, encompassing the entirety of the global south in the anti- then post-colonial moment, collapsing the question of Algeria into the global south or the question of the global south into Algeria. (The order of those things remains forever unclear, but so it is with a text that bequeaths so many scholarly horizons.) Fanon is here to tell *all* the stories in *The Wretched of the Earth*. And tell a very specific story in *Black Skin, White Masks*, however broadly we might want cast his insights.

Black Skin, White Masks is a story about blackness. This locates Fanon's work in a more specific geography, and with important consequences, particular insights, and fecundity for thinking about the black Americas. That story about blackness works deeply within a pessimistic horizon, anticipating – with the insistence on a sociogenic ontology – many of the insights we now see in terms of “afropessimism.” A pessimism with limits, for sure, because Fanon's work from the beginning was in search of a new kind of humanism, a humanism, as Aimé Césaire put it in *Discourse on Colonialism*, made to the measure of the whole world. Michael Sawyer's essay on *Black Skin, White Masks* helps us understand this chiasm of pessimism and what comes next with a sustained reflection on the context and conditions of Fanon's notion of the zone of non-being, and Grant Farred's reflection on tarrying and staying-with, Fanon's persistence *and* withdrawal of both in the 1952 text and after, pushes us to see a certain Fanonian *decision* to pull back from certain insights and conceptual maneuvers. Fanon's exploration of colonialism's abject space is further explored by John E. Drabinski in his piece on the perhaps unexpected proximity of Fanon and V.S. Naipaul on the question of the

Caribbean and decolonial futures – a negotiation between the afropessimism of *Black Skin, White Masks* and the complicated affective lives of that pessimism in melancholia, the time of resistance, and the time of hope.

In all, then, it is a real pleasure to present these short essays in recognition of the seventy-year anniversary of the publication of *Black Skin, White Masks*. The collection, this special forum, is what you get when you ask for reflections with no boundaries, but instead request a response, as I did to each author, to what is striking, seventy years later, about such an important text. What does *Black Skin, White Masks* call us to think? How does Fanon help us reframe and rethink critical issues in everyday and expressive culture, politics, and historical memory?

Reading through these essays – the long essays, the pieces in the forum, the review of Jarvis' book – I was struck again and again by the fecundity of theory in the Atlantic world. We have internal conversations from Europe, the reach of Caribbean theory back into relation with the 17th century, the exchange between France and Martinique, the many travels of Fanon in Europe, the Caribbean, the United States, and parts of Africa – all clustered together to make something both coherent and eclectic. That is what's so interesting about thinking theory in the Atlantic context, the critical tensions and massive differences and coherent lines of interpretation and comparison. These all work from fractured histories of relation.

There is much to be learned in these pages. Many thanks to each author for their work, and to each reader for the time spent thinking-with and boosting the conceptual work done in these pages. Read and share. We publish without a paywall for a reason: to maximize access to important theoretical interventions. And as I close this Editor's Note and settle into the volume, it is worth a bit of a teaser for the first issue of 2023, due in June: a collection of essays on the work of Édouard Glissant. That is something to look forward to, for sure. Until then, enjoy these reflections, stay safe, and be good and generous to those around you.