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Au-delà du mariage: de l’égalité des droits à la critique des normes

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concentrates on later works not covered in two other monographs on that director). The less convincing readings are the result, as in Chapter 3 on Guédiouanian, of ambitious attempts to address a larger number of films. Although Williams devotes significant attention to a discussion of La Ville est tranquille (2000), starting with a compelling analysis of that film’s remarkable opening panning shot, for this reader the chapter barely scratches the surface of some of the six other films that Williams brings into the discussion as points of comparison (the other major films of the past twenty years, as Williams explains his choice). This aside, however, Space and Being remains essential for specialists of contemporary French cinema and will pique the interest of all scholars working in all areas of contemporary French and Francophone studies.

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Nick Nesbitt’s third book might also be named Theorizing a Politics of Principle – The Twinned Dialogues of the Francophone Caribbean and Europe: From Toussaint to Glissant, from Kant to Hallward. Nesbitt sheds light on his previous work: from the start, he has deliberated what in Caribbean Critique he designates as the troubled domain of a “politics of principle,” which at once binds theory to practice, and as such finds itself constantly at a crossroads of “disjuncture,” between the theorization of democratic principles and how such principles are to be promoted, upheld, and/or imposed (15). It is thus not surprising that a great part of Nesbitt’s meditations include a sustained discussion of the role of violence as a means to enforcing democratic principles, and complements the work of Denis Hollier, for example in Absent without Leave: French Literature under the Threat of War (1993), or the large corpus of research around Fanon.

The “Caribbean” and its most renown thinkers are front-and-center in Nesbitt’s discussion, not because he is a “Francophonist” or a “Caribbeinist,” but because, as he illustrates, without a doubt, the Caribbean has nourished a centuries-long critical dialogue with the European Enlightenment’s project to put into play the Kantian and “neo–Kantian ‘universalisability’ of the principles of justice and equality” (264). Nor is the dialogue only “Caribbean,” it is particularly “French Caribbean,” in that the most brazon attempts to veritably implement a “politics of principle” would take place in France’s varying grapplings with democracy–making: from its revolution, through its “terror” with Robespierre, and on into its empire under Napoleon. To follow Nesbitt’s oeuvre is to realize that a European philosophical tradition can only fully be apprehended if it is accompanied by its parallel Caribbean critique. If Nesbitt’s first book is on how memory is articulated in Caribbean literature, and his second, informed by Jonathan Israel’s work on Spinoza, argues that the Haitian Revolution is the mise-en-œuvre of a Spinozan radical Enlightenment, then this third confidently asserts that Kant, Hegel, Heidegger, Benjamin, and Balibar may only be fully understood if read side-by-side with Césaire, Fanon, Condé, and Glissant; and that, conversely, to better elucidate the contradictory nature of Robespierre’s “Reign of Terror” (meant to undergird the Jacobins’ aspiration towards democracy), one cannot but read through the critical corpus of literature produced by the Caribbean theorists (163). In other words, without Caribbean theory, the varying moments of the European Enlightenment, especially its more violent and “radical” iterations, cannot be fully apprehended. In the same vein, it is impossible to under-
stand the actions of Toussaint, Fanon, and Aristide without comprehending that they were informed, of course, by a legacy of colonial and neocolonial oppressions, but also, in the case of Fanon, Condé, Glissant, and Aristide, by a sustained and intentional dialogue, which actively considers the philosophical undergirdings of both the French and the Haitian revolutions (224).

In line with the work of Susan Buck-Morss or Sibylle Fischer, Nesbitt argues that thinkers such as Hegel or Spinoza wrote in active awareness of the injustice of slavery, and, in the case of Hegel, of the insurrection of the slaves in Saint-Domingue. Nesbitt’s contribution to current scholarship on the “Caribbean Enlightenment” is to read the Caribbean as a discursive and engaged space that has maintained a centuries-long dialogue not just with European thought, but with how this thought will, should, and might (or might not) be put into veritable practice. In a Caribbean constantly under the control of international colonial and later neocolonial powers, the question of “What is to be done?” subdends all forms of Caribbean philosophy: in short, for Nesbitt, “Caribbean critique” is “to grapple with the problem of decolonization as a politics of principle” (156).

The artfulness of Nesbitt’s book is how it may be read. For the most part, each chapter clearly identifies the “theorists” and “agents” with whose writings and lifework he engages: Jacobins, Black Jacobins, the Baron de Vastey, Schoelcher, Tocqueville, Césaire, Condé, Sartre, Fanon, Glissant, and Aristide. Although unmentioned in the chapter titles, G.W. Friedrich Hegel, Walter Benjamin, Martin Heidegger, Léon-Gontran Damas, René Ménil, and Peter Hallward also weave themselves into the theoretical fabric that informs the actions especially of Césaire and Glissant. As such, the book serves as a survey of both Caribbean and European thought since the implementation of slavery in the Americas. It quietly reminds that slavery and colonialism are the pillars of many of the major sources of wealth of Europe and North America, that to “philosophize” Europe is to undoubtedly contend with a less than “enlightened” past. Yet, while Nesbitt’s book may be read as a survey, it also offers extremely succinct, complex, and compelling new perspectives on polemical issues that inhabit our work as professors, pedagogues, and intellectuals today: notably, the viability of the “postcolonial” as a veritable prism of analysis as regards the legitimacy of doing away with the notion of “Universality” in favor of “specificities” and the role of violence in realizing democratic principles. Another of Nesbitt’s provocative arguments is to refute Césaire’s supposedly compromised role in “acquiescing” to a French neocolonial order, in his choice to encourage Martinicans to opt for departmentalization.

While Nesbitt’s work deals primarily with Caribbean and European political philosophy, his interrogations apply to more far-reaching questions involving a contemporary world order, complementing the recent scholarship around the history of human rights by Peter de Bolla, Samuel Moyn, Martha Nussbaum, and Eric D. Weitz. While he explains that issues such as the “Arab Spring” are beyond the reach of this book, it only takes noting the prominent role that Samia Kassab-Charfi’s and Mohamed Bahi’s edited volume Mémoires et imaginaires du Maghreb et de la Caraïbe (2013) gives to Fanon and Glissant to ascertain that the interrogations that Nesbitt’s work leads us through, as well as the deliberations of these questions by some of the most prominent writer-poet-political philosophers of the production of knowledge in French, are of utmost currency in our work as scholars of the contemporary world.

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