John E. Drabinski, *Glissant and the Middle Passage: Philosophy, Beginning, Abyss*.

Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019. xix + 243 pp. (Paper US\$ 27.00)

In this insightfully written, thought-provoking book, John E. Drabinski skillfully unpacks the philosophical dimension of Édouard Glissant's theoretical works, making the claim that he should be read as a philosopher.

Critical essays examining Glissant's aesthetics have emphasized the necessity to consider his fiction, poetry, and essays, where his poetics of opacity and turbulence is equally disseminated. For example, in *Édouard Glissant: Un traité du déparler* (2002), Dominique Chancé points out that the notion of "Tout-monde" first appeared in his novel *Mahogany*. However, Drabinski essentially focuses on Glissant's essays, a choice that philosopher Alain Ménil also makes in *Les voies de la créolisation: Essai sur Édouard Glissant* (2011). For Ménil, the essay is the genre that is most resistant to any "unified definition and generic frame" (2011: 9). For Drabinski however, the emphasis on Glissant's theoretical work limits the scope of his claims and allows him to highlight and clarify the "philosophical nuances" (p. xviii) of Glissant's poetics. In his view, a method that prioritizes careful analysis and interpretation over critical positioning is necessary because of the complex nature of Glissant's theoretical work.

Drabinski sets the stage for his thorough exploration of Glissant's philosophy by asking, "What sort of theoretical leisure, intellectual imperialism, or philosophical conservatism has white Western philosophy won for itself by turning away from, in willful ignorance of, the traumatic experiences embedded in the terms *Americas* and *the New World*?" (p. xiv). He notes that Glissant's most insightful innovation in his transformation of philosophy has been his engagement with and critique of European philosophers, his appropriation and reconfiguration of European epistemological sites, and his reconfiguration of space, time, language, identity, and history through the trauma of the Middle Passage.

Thus, Drabinski recasts a dialogue between Glissant, Heidegger, Benjamin, Deleuze, Derrida, Césaire, Fanon, and Lamming in order to excavate "Glissant's shoreline thinking rooted in the geography of reason," namely, "a way of thinking that is not just attentive but structured by the memory and history of place" (p. 83). This constitutes the bedrock of his *pensée archipélique* in contrast to a White European *pensée continentale*. Hence, because the geography of reason is attached to the "here-ness," it "requires that we think through a notion like trauma in its specificity" (p. 25).

Throughout the book's five chapters, Drabinski circulates around the fundamental notions of origins, ontology, aesthetics, and the agency of the organic and rhizomatic intellectual, as well as the conceptual threads that emanate

from them: abyss, memory, root, rhizome, trauma, traces, opacity, creolization. This allows him to carefully examine the tortured geography of the Middle Passage and the plantation as pivotal motifs in Glissant's archipelagic decentering of White European philosophical conceptions of beginning, being, becoming, and creating.

Similarly, in his astute contribution to the debate on the decolonization of Western trauma theory, Drabinski posits that Glissant's thinking at the shoreline where "memory of the past weaves itself back into the abyss without seeking retrieval or reactivation" (p. 62) fundamentally alters the language and epistemologies of a Western-oriented trauma theory.

"BirthAbyss," "RootAbyss," and "DeathAbyss" become, then, valuable concepts for examining Glissant's philosophical conceptions of creativity after the trauma. Likewise, these concepts are essential to shed light on Glissant's construction of the term *digénèse* (digenesis) in order to disrupt the logics of beginning and linear genealogy and redefine place in the Caribbean as a "post-natural and abysally-born [location that is] non-filial and nomadically traversed" (p. 58). One might wonder if Glissant's scarce engagement with Africanness, which Drabinski discusses in the book's fourth chapter, and his lack of interaction with African philosophers stem from the significance of digenesis in his poetics.

The book's final chapter examines the role of the rhizomatic intellectual in theorizing identity in a global South context. Here, Drabinski analyzes Glissant's perspective in contrast to Fanon's, and asks repeatedly, "what is the Middle Passage to Fanon?" (pp. 200, 201). He then contends that by choosing a noninterstitial approach to analyze colonialism, Fanon, like Naipaul, departs from the potential of the abyssal beginning (p. 205).

In arguing that the intellectual must articulate "non-mimetic senses of creation" (p. 197), Drabinski could have examined Glissant's shoreline thinking and his claim for an opacity in parallel with Kamau Brathwaite's tidalectics, which resists the transparency and fixity of Hegel's dialectics. Nevertheless, his minute analyses make *Glissant and the Middle Passage* an essential reference for anyone keen on bolstering an understanding of Glissant's archipelagic philosophy.

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