

Reading questions April 3

Remember that Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) was a French phenomenological psychologist. His best known work is *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945).

Frantz Fanon (1925-1961) was an anti-colonial psychiatrist and philosopher from Martinique (a French Caribbean colony). His best known works are *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961). He also wrote an essay called “Algeria Unveiled” (1959) [on the website] in which he discusses the attitudes of French colonizers to the veiling of Algerian women and the role of women in the Algerian revolution of independence.

Alia Al-Saji, “The Racialization of Muslim Veils: A Philosophical Analysis”

1. “My aim...is to describe a representational schema that predominates in discourses on the veil—one whereby gender oppression is naturalized to the Muslim veil—and to point to the perils that attend such representations” (876). This schema is summarized on p. 877. Review.
2. The French debate around the acceptability of the veil in public institutions (especially schools), Al-Saji argues, took its shape from an *a priori* equation of gender oppression with Islam (and the veil as a symbol of Islam), and the *a priori* equation of gender equality with the allegedly secular French state. Explain what evidence she marshals to reach this conclusion.
3. In the second section of the paper, Al-Saji echoes and develops Linda Alcoff’s argument (both of them reading through Merleau-Ponty and Fanon) that seeing is a learned practice, a set of habits, and that the “visual register” is key to understanding racism and colonialism. How is the veil “seen”—by the French male colonizer, by the Algerian man?
4. How does the seeing of race and gender come together in representations of the veil? What is cultural racism, and how is it wrapped up with representations of gender oppression?

Gayle Salamon, “‘The Place Where Life Hides Away’: Merleau-Ponty, Fanon, and the Location of Bodily Being”

1. Read p. 97 carefully. Salamon outlines her argument and presents her thesis statement in a way you could all emulate (in shorter, simpler form) in your final papers.
2. What is *proprioception*? How, according to Salamon, does Merleau-Ponty describe proprioception in a way that creates a middle ground between the body as material and as ideal (“the physiological and the psychic,” as she puts it)? What point do the examples of the blind man’s cane and the phantom limb make?
3. What is the example of the mute girl whose mother has forbidden her from seeing her lover (p. 104) supposed to show?
4. “Fanon’s description exceeds Sartre’s...in his description of the effects of the racist gaze; the man of color is lent a new consciousness that *takes the place* of an anonymous relationship to his own body...What is foreclosed with this movement is the body’s interiority, and the body that Fanon

describes is primarily characterized by its lack of interiority, which is thereby shown to be a cultural achievement rather than a naturally given attribute of the body” (109). This is Salamon’s theoretical punchline. What does she mean?

Gayle Salamon will be talking to us over Skype about her work. Think of something you’d like to ask her!