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Autrement: Thinking and Feeling Disalienation in Francophone Fiction

ABSTRACT:

This talk gives an overview of my current book project, which aims to theorize the role of impossible worlds created in “unnatural” Francophone narratives from the decades following independence from French colonial rule to the present. Unnatural narratives, following the work of cognitive narratologists, are narratives that involve metaphysical impossibilities, violate physical laws, or feature characters, temporalities, or spaces which could not exist in the real world. In my project, this means focusing on characters such as the revolutionary who refuses to die in Sony Labou-Tansi’s groundbreaking 1979 novel, *La vie et demie* [Life and a Half], or the deceased migrants who return from their fatal voyage across the Atlantic to possess the bodies of the women they left behind in Mati Diop’s recent film *Atlantique* [Atlantics]. The talk will focus on the methodological introduction to the book, which aims to synthesize literary studies and radical decolonial theory with research on cognitive processes. I’ll explore the way in which Fanon tries to enact and bring about what he calls “disalienation,” and how this might entail the unsettling of the default mode network. I aim to discuss how these unnatural fictions might have their effect on their target audiences given an embodied understanding of the process of reading and watching fiction.