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Alan Lopez

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Alan Lopez

Kindred spirits: Fanon's postcolonialism

This essay concerns the significance of phenomenology in Frantz Fanon's thought and its influence on the autobiographic and ethnographic contours of his study, *Black Skin, White Masks*. Of note is Fanon's movement between metaphor and phenomenology, especially as concerns figures of the hand and the body, and how his narratological treatment of these figures, both with respect to himself and the Antillean, reveals to us a new understanding of the place of language, time and action in Fanon's thought and contemporary literature and postcolonial race theory and criticism.

Keywords

Frantz Fanon; *Black Skin, White Masks*; Mikhail Bakhtin; T.S. Eliot; ethnography; autobiography; postcolonialism; time and personhood; language acquisition; political philosophy

'O my body, make of me always a man who questions!'¹ And with his 'final prayer' Frantz Fanon concludes the last page of his *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) (B, p. 232). Yet if this is our coda, our journey begins, chiasmatically, in its introductory pages, where, Fanon cryptically writes, '[t]he black is not a man' (p. 8). Fanon will later find more correct, if not true, its antithesis, which is that '[t]he black is a black man' (p. 8). Fanon explains this troubling semiology 'as the result of a series of aberrations of affect', one consequence of which is the presumed distinction between '[w]hat . . . a man want[s]', and '[w]hat a 'black man want[s]'' (p. 8). Because of these aberrations, Fanon explains, the black man finds himself 'rooted at the core of a universe', and it is from this universe 'which he must be extricated' (p. 8). 'The problem', Fanon insists, 'is important' (p. 8). Yet if this is our 'problem', '[h]ow', Fanon asks, 'do we extricate ourselves?' (p. 10). Fanon's explanation arrives a few pages later, with his 'beli[ef] that only a psychoanalytical interpretation of the black problem can lay bare the anomalies of affect that are responsible for the structure of this complex' (p. 10). Fanon's emphasis on hands and excavation, as a type of exegetical autopsy in their own right, is notable, if not entirely surprising, Fanon's writing, on the penultimate page of *Black Skin, White Masks*, '[t]hat the tool' should 'never possess the man' (p. 231).² 'Man', according to Fanon, 'is what brings society into being', thus is 'the prognosis in the hands of those who are willing to get rid of the worm-eaten roots of the structure' (p. 11). And with this sentence Fanon finds himself alongside Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Friedrich Nietzsche and at odds with Jean-Paul Sartre and Jacques Lacan.

Published in 1948, four years before Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*, Sartre's tempestuous 'Orphée Noir' (*Black Orpheus*) is arguably the clearest introduction to the two 'problem[s]' which would 'face' both Fanon and 'the Negro of the Antilles', which are the 'problem[s]' of 'time' and '[a]ction'.³ Indeed, though Fanon closes his Introduction with the claim that '[s]ince [he] was born in the Antilles, [his] observations and [his] conclusions are valid only for the Antilles – at least concerning the black man *at home*', he redacts this narrow province four pages later, 'broaden[ing] the field of this description' to 'include', via 'the Antille[an]', 'every colonized man' (pp. 14, 18; emphasis in original). Still, we lose sight of these two problems if we fail to acknowledge the overarching third one through which Fanon expresses them: 'language' (p. 18). 'I ascribe a basic importance to the phenomenon of language', Fanon writes, and '[t]hat is why I find it necessary to begin with this subject' (p. 17). 'To speak', Fanon observes, 'means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that culture' (p. 17). '[B]ut it means above all', Fanon emphasizes, 'to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization' (p. 18). 'What we are

getting at', Fanon continues, 'becomes plain': '[a] man who has a language consequently possesses the world expressed and implied by that language' (p. 18). If Fanon wears his phenomenology on his sleeve, it is because what is critical to Fanon, both 'in this chapter' and in the entirety of *Black Skin, White Masks*, is this 'retaining-wall relation between language and group', which for Fanon takes as its 'historical' basis the 'underst[anding]' that, as Jacques Derrida explains, '[t]here is no social institution before language'.⁴

Language, according to Derrida, 'is not one cultural element among others'.⁵ On the contrary, 'it is the element of institutions in general, [and] includes and constructs the entire social structure' (O, p. 219). Derrida is instructive. The Antillean 'wants to speak French', Fanon writes, and this because he believes that in speaking that language so will he, in turn, 'comprehen[d] the dimension of *the other*' (B, p. 17; emphasis in original). The Antillean's phenomenological understanding of language and culture turns upon Jean-Jacques Rousseau's 'distin[ction] between language and speech' (O, p. 230). Although '[s]peech belongs to man', Derrida writes, and hence 'is universally human', 'languages are diverse' (p. 230). It is this distinction Rousseau has in mind when he observes, in his 1852 manuscript, *Essay on the Origin of Languages*, that '[l]anguage distinguishes nations from each other' (qtd. in O, p. 230). '[O]ne does not know where a man comes from', Rousseau writes, 'until he has spoken' (*ibid.*). Rousseau's is the insistence that language's relation to culture is proprietary: 'each learns the language of his own country' '[o]ut of usage and necessity' (*ibid.*).⁶ It is Rousseau Fanon refers us to in his account of the Antillean's assumption that by mastering that French language, hence by mastering the French culture, so will he find himself in possession of that 'key' by which he may 'open doors which were still barred to him fifty years ago' (B, pp. 18, 38).

Not that the Antillean would easily find the key. Though beginning in Fanon's introductory pages, the key's troubled story reaches its denouement in his closing ones, where we find Fanon reading a few passages from Spanish playwright Andre de Clarmunte's *El valiente negro de Flandres*, itself within a larger book read by Fanon, Oliver Brachfeld's *Inferiority Feelings in the Individual and the Group* (1936) (p. 213). In the former we are introduced to Juan de Mérida, whose soliloquy, beyond ventriloquizing the Antillean's existential angst in the face of those myriad closed doors, so cleanly cuts into Fanon's own narrative as to cleave an opening wide enough for the enveloping of all three stories: Fanon's, the Antillean's and de Mérida's. 'What do souls matter?' de Mérida innocently asks, only to find himself, two lines down, in 'despair', the realization, though spaced between just two lines, weighted with the significance of many more (pp. 214, 215). He was wrong all along. Not that the soul is

not inviolable, but that the soul does not matter. 'What is it, really, . . . to be black', de Mérida discovers, can indeed be reduced to 'being that color' (p. 214). The 'anguish' was palpable (p. 215). 'For that outrage', de Mérida 'will denounce/fate, [his] times, heaven, and all those who made [him] black!' (p. 214). Yet the 'taint', as Fanon puts it, would remain untouched, and this regardless of how often de Mérida apostrophized to 'heaven': 'O . . . what a dread thing' (pp. 213, 215). For this 'thing', which de Mérida calls a 'curse', is a curse not of fate, nor heaven, but of 'color' (p. 214). And it is why, Fanon observes, his soul 'cannot save him' (p. 214). What 'saps, invalidates, all his actions', Fanon writes of de Mérida, hence what 'burden[s]' his body with 'shame', prompting de Mérida to ask, in his soliloquy, 'Are black men not/men?' is indeed not his soul, though something equally inviolable, something which he 'cannot change', nor from which he may 'flee' – it is his 'being black'.⁷ Like the colonized figure in the hands of Sartre and M. Mannoni, de Mérida similarly finds himself with 'only one solution . . . : "furnish proofs" of his whiteness to others and above all to himself' (p. 215). de Mérida, along with the Antillean, had found the key, which, though figured through the '*apparence*' of the 'individual', 'lies not in the . . . individual but rather in that of the environment' (pp. 214, 213; emphasis in original). If the Antillean cannot pass through those doors as an Antillean, he will pass as a European. Not that the Antillean is unaware of the difficulties. '[I]t is no use painting the foot of the tree white', Fanon had learned from Aimé Césaire, while 'the strength of the bark cries out from beneath the paint . . . ' (p. 198).

Fanon broadens the scope of his analysis to include the Antillean's experience as an index to all colonized people. He does this because he believes that by 'study[ing] the language of the Antille[an]' so will he discover, via that language, 'some characteristics of his world' (p. 38). What Fanon discovers is a 'quest for subtleties, for refinements of language', all of which constitutive of 'so many further means of proving to himself that he has measured up to the culture' (pp. 38–39). Thus Fanon's example of the Antillean 'lock[ed] . . . into his room and read[ing] aloud for hours' (p. 21). For the Antillean knows this all too well, what Fanon calls 'the myth of the *R*-eating man from Martinique', and will 'go to war against it', 'suspicious' especially 'of his own tongue – a wretchedly lazy organ'.⁸ Because he cannot trust his tongue, the Antillean will 'practice not only rolling his *R* but embroidering it'.⁹ But he will also take care with such embroidery, lest he falls into the trap of another Antillean, who, though 'he had acquired a fine supply of them [Rs] had allocated [them] badly', embarrassingly calling out '*Waiterrr!*' when 'waiter' would have sufficed.¹⁰ Furtively observing the slightest reactions of others, listening to his own speech', he will, in short, betray a 'desperate determination to learn *diction*'.¹¹ For the Antillean also knows this, that he 'who wants to be

white will be whiter as he gains greater mastery of the cultural tool that [the French] language is' (p. 38). This is the key, de Mérida's, which will unlock that 'magic vault of distance' between the Antillean and the Parisian (p. 23). 'The black man who arrives in France changes', Fanon explains, 'because to him the country represents the Tabernacle; he changes not only because it is from France that he received his knowledge of Montesquieu, Rousseau and Voltaire, but also because France gave him his physicians, his department heads, his innumerable little functionaries – from the sergeant-major "fifteen years in the service" to the police-man who was born in Panissières' (p. 23). '[T]he man who is leaving next week for France', in short, 'creates round himself a magic circle in which the words *Paris, Marseille, Sorbonne, Pigalle* become the keys to the vault' (p. 23; emphasis in original). Within this dizzying kaleidoscopic (en)culturation lies the Antillean's apotheosis: 'Yes, I only have one language, yet it is not mine'.¹²

'Division' Derrida insists, quoting from the Introduction to Abdelkber Khatibi's *Du bilinguisme* (1985) (M, p. 8). 'Active division' (p. 8). 'And that is why', Derrida writes, 'there are two motivations instead of one, a single reason but a reason wrought by said "division"' (p. 8). '[T]hat is why', Derrida continues, 'one recollects, one troubles oneself, one goes in search of history and filiation' (p. 8). 'In this place of jealousy', Derrida explains, 'in this place that is divided between vengeance and resentment [*ressentiment*], in this body fascinated by its own "division", before any other memory', the body 'destines itself, as if acting on its own, to anamnesia' (p. 8). Yet why 'anamnesia'?¹³ Because 'this monolingualism', Derrida explains, which 'I call . . . my dwelling', and which the Antillean calls his Paris, which 'feels like one to me', which 'inhabits me', this 'monolingualism', 'in which I draw my very breath', and which is, 'for me, my element', 'will never be mine' (pp. 1, 2). '[T]his language', Derrida laments, 'the only one I am thus destined to speak, as long as speech is possible for me in life and in death . . . never will this language be mine. And, truth to tell, it never was' (p. 2). Yet there is another truth, which is that 'outside of' this 'absolute habitat', 'I would not be myself' (p. 1). 'It constitutes me', Derrida insists, 'prescrib[ing] a monastic solitude for me; as if, even before learning to speak, I had been bound by some vows' (pp. 1–2). Yet however strongly Derrida insists 'this monolingualism is me', just as strongly does he put lie to this 'vow': 'it never was' (p. 1). Within this 'antimony', the voyaging Antillean dreams to forget the division between himself and the Parisian.¹⁴

But the Antillean will not forget, for 'there is [always] a myth to be faced', a myth that, to borrow Derrida's language, 'summons itself from memory'.¹⁵ The significance of the myth is that the Antillean 'is unaware of it as long as his existence is limited to his own environment'

(B, p. 150). Things change, however, in the Antillean's first encounter with the European, where the Antillean feels, as if for the first time, 'the whole weight of his blackness' (p. 150). And what is the outcome of this 'oppress[ion]' (p. 150)? The Antillean's separation from his (French) language. The myth's origin lies in the fact that the Antillean 'does not think of himself as a black man; he thinks of himself as an Antillean. The Negro lives in Africa' (p. 148). For all intents and purposes, Fanon explains, 'the Antillean conducts himself like a white man' (p. 148). 'But', Fanon interrupts, he is not, and in fact 'he is a Negro' (p. 148). This the Antillean 'learn[s]', for instance, 'once he goes to Europe', which is that the word 'Negroes' 'includes himself as well as the Senegalese' (p. 148). Such is the 'permanent rub', laments Fanon, the 'hidden subtlety', which the Antillean discovers, for example, in 'Charles-André Julien introducing Aimé Césaire as a "Negro poet with a university degree", or ... "a great black poet"', but above all, in the glaring disjunction therein: 'Aimé Césaire', 'a poet', 'is really black' (p. 39). Fanon, recalling French writers Jean Paulhan and Roger Caillois, of whom he knew only by their 'interesting books', spells out his retort, which is that 'there is no reason why André Breton should say of Césaire, "Here is a black man who handles the French language as no white man today can"' (p. 39). After all, Fanon insists, 'M. Aimé Césaire' also really is 'a Martinique and a university graduate' (p. 40). Nevertheless, the 'paradox', 'underline[d]' through Breton's language, remains: in the black man's hands, the French language becomes a prop, a masquerade, indeed 'artifice': a relic of 'something learned' – the move very subtle – though not 'properly theirs'.¹⁶ In other words, a mere prosthetic, which, as a prosthetic, is 'use[d]' and 'handl[ed]', though never 'authentic[ally]'.¹⁷ This artifice doubles as the logic of the 'and' between Césaire and the French language, the former remarking not a coupling between two but a constitutive divide. Yet, the Antillean's 'genealogical impulse find[s] its moving source, its force and its recourse in the very partition of this double law, in the antinomial duplicity of this clause of belonging: we only ever speak one language – or rather one idiom only; we never speak only one language – or rather there is no pure idiom'.¹⁸

Nor is Fanon unaware of the irony in the Antillean's usage of that cultural tool of language, whose progressive usage will result in the smashing away of that cultural difference constitutive of the possibility of picking up that tool in the first place. On the contrary, this is why the Antillean picks up that tool, which is to smash away his former existence qua Antillean. What interests Fanon in pursuing the phenomenology of language is not what it means '[t]o speak a language', but rather what it means to speak, hence 'to take on', 'a world, a culture', of another (p. 38). And again Fanon draws the reader in, as if by his own hands, to the 'magic[al]

substitution' he imagines transpiring between language and the world, where to speak a language is to grab hold, as if by the 'breath' of one's own 'hands', the very world itself.¹⁹ Still, this observation does not address why the Antillean places such a premium on a phenomenological understanding of language, hence why the Antillean 'adopts such a position, peculiar to him, with respect to European languages' (p. 25). While it is perhaps true, at least in the Antillean's view, that he 'will be proportionally whiter . . . in direct ratio to his mastery of the French language', Fanon understates the significance of passing in likening it to a move from an 'inferior' race to 'the superior race' (p. 18, 215). On the contrary, what this becoming whiter means to the Antillean is something more fundamental. 'Let me point out once more', Fanon writes, 'that the conclusion I have reached pertain to the French Antilles; at the same time, I am not unaware that the same behavior pattern obtains in every race that has been subjected to colonization' (p. 25). 'I have known – and unfortunately I still know – people born in Dahomey or the Congo who pretend to be natives of the Antilles; I have known, and I still know, Antilles Negroes who are annoyed when they are suspected of being Senegalese. This is because the Antilles Negro is more "civilized" than the African, that is, he is closer to the white man' (p. 26). And who is the white man? A 'human being', Fanon replies (p. 18). Fanon could not be clearer: the Antillean desires to come closer to the white man, so that he may 'come closer to being a real human being' (p. 18). The Antillean is not (yet) human. The weight of the Antillean's tool could not be heavier, nor more necessary.

Indeed, it is through the Antillean's unsteady handling of this tool that Fanon discloses, via the vignette of an Antillean's boat-ride to and from Paris, just how deep those waters can be, which lead one closer to becoming a real human being. 'He leaves for the pier', Fanon tells us of the seafaring Antillean, 'and the amputation of his being diminishes as the silhouette of this ship grows clearer. [For] [i]n the eyes of those who have come to see him off he can read the evidence of his own maturation, his power. "Good-by bandanna, good-by straw hat . . ."' (p. 23). Yet problems confront the Antillean upon his return 'home from France', where 'if he wants to make it plain that nothing has changed', he 'expresses himself in dialect' (p. 37). Fanon's setting of the scene is complex, but critical is the equivocal reception Fanon imagines for the returning Antillean, all of which hinges on what 'the voyager tells his acquaintances' (p. 37). In the obvious sense of 'waiting', Fanon tells us, 'his family and friends are waiting for him' 'at the dock' (p. 37). In another sense, however, they are '[w]aiting for him' not only because his physically arriving, but in order to 'strike back [at the European]' (p. 37). Needless to say, the waiting will take only 'a minute or two' (p. 37). 'If', Fanon writes, 'the

voyager tells his acquaintances, "I am so happy to be back with you. Good lord, it is hot in this country, I shall certainly not be able to endure it very long", they [will] know' (p. 37). And what they will know is that '[a] European has got off the ship' (p. 37).

That the Antillean's failed attempt at passing can be boiled down to his mismanaging of a dialect is revealing. Yet, this criticism misses the point, for the Antillean's failed passing is attributable not to an essentialism at the root of the European, but rather to what Fanon, quoting, 'Professor D. Westermann, in *The African Today*', describes as a 'frequent naïv[ete]' on the Antillean's behalf: 'The wearing of European clothes, whether rags or the most up-to-date style; using European furniture and European forms of social intercourse; adorning the Native language with European expressions, using bombastic phrases in speaking or writing a European language' (p. 25). Where for Fanon the Antillean is naïve in his belief, returning to Westermann, that 'all these contribute to a feeling of equality with the European and his achievements' (p. 25). On the contrary, just the opposite is true. What the Antillean finds, for instance, in adorning the native language with European expressions, using bombastic phrases in speaking or writing a European language, is less that he is European than that he is both more and less European than the European. The Antillean's failed passing lies not in his appropriation of the European language, but rather in the adorning and bombastic way in which he speaks and writes that language, which, through those embroidered gestures, belong less to the European and still less to the Antillean. Though the Antillean's feeling of equality with the European and his achievements are sincere, they are feelings invariably embodied by an abstract European. Because exemplary of an abstract European, the Antillean, in his manner, identifies with no European.

The Antillean's crisis parallels Marcel Griaule's *Conversations with Ogotemmêli*.²⁰ David E. Johnson writes: 'Ogotemmêli – or rather his "thick lips" – "spoke the purest Sanga language"' (A, p. 103; trans. Johnson's). 'Ogotemmêli', in other words, 'is an exemplary Dogon, and as such he is both the most and least typical Dogon' (p. 103). '[I]n as much as he speaks the best and purest Sanga', Johnson explains, 'a language Griaule [European ethnographer] could not understand, he best exemplifies the Dogon' (p. 103). On the other hand, insofar as Ogotemmêli is 'the most exemplary Dogon, he is at the same time the worst example of the Dogon', and this on the basis of that incommunicable insularity (p. 103). Ogotemmêli and the Antillean differ in the former's being a problem of understanding and the latter's one of recognition. Yet, the anthropological conclusion is the same: language, hence understanding, takes place on the basis of its being able to communicate, at some minimal level, its exemplarity. Longevity, not to say understanding,

requires communicability with the other. Not in order that the other may belong to the group, but rather that the group may identify it as its other – as, precisely, not belonging to the group.²¹ This identification stymied, as with Ogotemmêli and the Antillean, the implication is clear: they are not even other. Fanon's conclusion, an interpolation of Mannoni's Malagasy 'dilemma, *turn white or disappear*', is not surprising, if not too late, for the Antillean, if not Ogotemmêli, has already disappeared.²² And yet, despite the other's excoriation, neither has disappeared. Indeed, it is their refusal to assimilate, which is to say, their insistence to define themselves, to in fact define the other, outside the proprietary categories of alterity provided by the other, that is so threatening to the other, and this on the basis of its revealing the artificiality at the base of the European's understanding of difference. The European acknowledges the difference of the Antillean, just not this difference, which reveals, in the form of passing for the European, the constitutive codification of that European identity. Thus does the other intervene again, this time more stridently: 'throw off [your] "Parisianism" or die of ridicule' (B, p. 25). Finally, the Antillean has no choice. Outside of '[t]hese two solutions . . . there is no salvation' (p. 93). Just as the Antillean is robbed of the 'time to "make it [drama] unconscious"', the racial drama, Fanon explains, 'played out in the open', so does the Antillean again encounter time, though this time in the form of a temporality with which 'there is . . . no forgetting: when he marries, his wife will be aware that she is marrying a joke, and his children will have a legend to face and to live down' (pp. 150, 25).

Fanon's likening the Antillean's passing, in all its saturnalian foibles, to the putting on of a costume, is telling, and is the reason why the Antillean's friends and family strike back at him; for the Antillean traveller is no longer one of them but is rather the European other; and not even authentically, but rather via a Parisian costume, thrown on by himself. Neither Antillean, nor Parisian, nor even human, the passing Antillean, finally, does not even exist.²³ Nevertheless, the Antillean's recriminations would not be so severe were he not ignorant of the fact that, in dropping his own culture, he is adopting less another culture than another mythology²⁴: not 'Sho' good eatin', but the 'self-aggrandiz[ing]' and laughingly bifurcating 'I am so happy to be back with you' (pp. 112, 37). The Antillean inevitably finds himself in the same fictive position as before. Yet whereas the previous mythology is born out of a genealogy of enslavement, his present one is born out of a genealogy of luxuriance. However, both are false. Whether he is 'answer[-ing] only in French, and often . . . no longer understanding Creole', or ever-so 'slight[ly] depart[ing]' from the French, the Antillean is always 'reveal[ing]' this slight departure between himself and the culture for which he is passing, and, hence, 'reveal[ing] himself at once'.²⁵ The Parisian costume is 'not opaque' at all, but all too

‘transparent’ (p. 112). Yet this is what, according to Fanon, they know and he does not know (those observing the passing), which is that ‘with [us] this game cannot be played’ (p. 36). What for one Antillean is passing is for another simply ‘put[ting] on the white world’ (p. 36).

In figuring his drive to become a real human being only through the horizon of the European, the Antillean had forgotten his Rousseau: ‘The language called maternal’, Derrida writes, ‘is never purely natural, nor proper, nor inhabitable’ (M, p. 58). ‘[O]ne never inhabits’, Derrida explains, ‘what one is in the habit of calling inhabiting’, as in the case of his ‘foreign’ ‘mother tongue’.²⁶ Derrida’s reading picks up on the ‘equivocal’ meaning of habitation, the idea that ‘habitat’ is ‘possible’ only with the concomitant ‘difference’ of its ‘exile’, this difference in turn creating ‘nostalgia’ for that ‘exile[d]’ maternal language (p. 58). This coupling of exclusion and nostalgia is for Derrida the ‘a priori universal’ ‘twist to this truth’ of habitation, which is the idea of an ‘originary’, ‘essential alienation’ at the heart of ‘language’ (pp. 58, 63, 58). Such alienation remarks the extent to which ‘every language’ is ‘a language of the other’ (p. 63). Yet while such ‘ambiguity’ is ‘[u]nsettling’, we misread Derrida if we attribute our uneasiness to the fact that ‘this ambiguity will never be removed’ (p. 62). On the contrary, Derrida explains, our discomfort lies in the fact that this ambiguity in habitation is, in fact, ‘constitutive’ (p. 25). ‘This structure of alienation without alienation’, Derrida writes, ‘this inalienable alienation, is not only the origin of our responsibility, it also structures the peculiarity ... and property of language’, which is, as Derrida explains several pages later, ‘the impossible property of a language’ (pp. 25, 63). ‘[T]he prior-to-the-first language’, for example, ‘can always run the risk of becoming or wanting to be another language of the master’, or even ‘sometimes’, as evidenced by the Antillean, ‘that of new masters’ (p. 62). The point being, as Derrida writes a few pages back, that language’s essential alienation is, in fact, an alienation constitutive of ‘all culture’ (p. 58). The French language is no more the Parisian’s than it is the Antillean’s. Returning to the Antillean, the shape that would emerge, after the Antillean had smashed away his previous identity, could only ever be a ‘replica’, and an ‘[in]complete’ one at that, ‘of the white man’ – and this because his, the European’s, is simply a replica of a replica (B, p. 36). ‘How’, Derrida asks, ‘does one account for this logic?’ (M, p. 67). Again we return to this constitutive alienation. ‘Although’, Derrida writes, ‘I have often made use of the expression “the given language” in order to speak of an available monolanguage – for example, French – there is no given language’ (p. 67). ‘[O]r rather’, Derrida continues, ‘there is some language, a gift of language, but there is not a language. Not a given one. It does not exist’ (p. 67). Derrida gives the example of ‘the hospitality of the host’, how, for instance, the

expectation of hospitality turns out rather to be the obligation of ours (p. 67). Language, in this instance the French language, is 'given', may even be called one's mother tongue, 'only' to the extent that it is given as this language of another (p. 67).

Passing takes place at the level of language, though begins at the level of perception. This is borne out in Fanon's own understanding of passing, itself indebted to Lacan's mirror stage lecture, originally delivered by Lacan in 1949.²⁷ Fanon's thesis is that '[t]he colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards' (B, p. 18). Fanon's argument, in other words, proceeds by analogy. In much the same way as Lacan's 'infant in front of the mirror' finds himself 'caught up in the lure of spatial identification', 'overcom[ing], in a jubilant activity, the obstructions of his support and, fixing his attitude in a slightly leaning-forward position, in order to fix its gaze, bring[ing] back an instantaneous aspect of the image', so does the Antillean, before the 'culture of the mother country', undergo his own 'orthopaedic' 'elevat[ion]', 'becom[ing] whiter as he renounces his blackness, his jungle', the 'obstructions of his support'.²⁸ Fanon and Lacan part ways in Fanon's recognizing that the colonized finds himself 'face to face' as much with the other as 'with the language of the civilizing nation' (p. 18).

Not that Fanon, at least until a certain 'white winter day', had more than 'an intellectual understanding of these differences' (p. 113, 110). Fanon had certainly conversed with friends and colleagues over these troubling differences, finding in these discussions the conviction to 'assert the equality of all men in the world' (p. 110). Yet if Fanon was 'satisfied', at least on a psychoanalytic level, with Lacan's thesis that the ego 'prefigures its alienating destination', that 'consciousness of the body', as Fanon observes, 'is solely a negating activity', that intellectual understanding would reveal its limitations when 'the occasion arose', our recalling Fanon's above conceit, 'to meet the white man's eyes'.²⁹ Fanon understood the 'asymptotic' way ego and I 'rejoin' one another (E, p. 2). But such asymptoticity, Fanon would insist, could not account for the 'difficulties' 'the man of color encounters' 'in the development of his bodily schema ... [i]n the white world' (B, p. 110). While Lacan's logic of asymptoticity was sound, what Lacan could not know, and this because Fanon did not know, is the 'moment' the Antillean's 'inferiority comes into being' (p. 110). Yet it is this moment Fanon would 'discover' in the discovery, as if for the first time, of his own 'blackness' (p. 112). Fanon found how the Antillean's inferiority comes into being: 'through the other' (p. 110).

³⁰In Fanon's encounter with the European, he finds his body 'sprawled out, distorted', 'given back to [him]', his message of compassion, earlier given to the Algerian Muslims, 'flung back in [his] face' (pp. 113, 114).³¹ 'I wanted to come lithe and young into a world that was ours',

Fanon recalls himself writing, 'and to help build it together' (pp. 112–113). But this recognition would remain troubled in his later encounter with the European, and this because of an avowed tendency, on both sides, to 'apprehend the existence of the other' not as a 'natural reality' but as an instance of 'thematization' (pp. 217, 112). Fanon is only too well aware of the consequences of 'clos[ing] the circuit' of 'reciprocity' (p. 217). By 'prevent[ing] the accomplishment of movement in two directions', Fanon had learned from Hegel, hence by denying the other's ability to go 'beyond [his] own immediate being', 'I keep the other within himself' (p. 217). Indeed, Fanon continues, '[u]ltimately I deprive him . . . of this being-for-itself' (p. 217). The 'stakes are high', and Fanon would soon discover just how high.³²

'Look, a Negro!' (p. 111). Fanon will again hear these words from the child. The words are a source of forced identification; Fanon is forced to acknowledge, both to himself and the other, his 'corporeal' difference from the European (p. 112). This sense of public shaming is what resonates in the passage, a spectacle before which Fanon can only confess: 'it was true' (p. 111). Fanon appropriately directs the comment not to the child, but to the legitimating witness to this spectacle: the child's mother. Though the child breaks Fanon's 'anonymity' and 'invisibility', 'notices' him and draws him out of the 'corners' and into the 'world', the mother reveals to those 'white faces' the emergence of this 'new . . . man' (p. 116). Yet not simply a new man, but a 'new kind of man, a new genus' (p. 116). What appears before mother and child is not Fanon 'the black physician', but 'always the Negro teacher, the Negro doctor' (p. 117). But nor is the birth painless. '[L]aid bare' before the 'white eyes' of mother and child, the 'only real eyes', Fanon can only clutch at his own eyes as the European 'dissect[s]' and 'cut[s] away slices of [his] reality' (p. 116). Stripped of his 'refined manners, . . . knowledge of literature, or understanding of the quantum theory', only truth speaks here: 'Mama, a Negro!' (pp. 117, 113). Fanon, though, would seem to have little room to manoeuvre, 'the evidence' already 'there, unalterable' (p. 117).

Fanon cannot cover what is already there, what 'pursue[s]' and 'disturb[s]' him, for this 'dark and unarguable' truth is his own 'blackness' (p. 117). It is why, for instance, Fanon finds an affinity in de Mérida, who similarly speaks of being 'fixed', 'overdetermined from without' (p. 116; emphasis removed). Like de Mérida, Fanon is also 'given no chance', though not because he is 'the slave . . . of the "idea" that others have of [him]', but because he is a slave 'of [his] own appearance' (p. 116). Fanon's imagery of imprisonment is notably ironic, since at its core, at least as Fanon is 'told', 'there is no wish, no intention to anger him' (p. 32). There is only 'understanding', the sense that '[t]hat's just

the way they are' (p. 33). But this 'paternal' (p. 33) fixity cuts both ways, and is why, as Fanon reveals in the vignette of '[t]he physicians of the public health care services', there is a difference in the reception of '[t]wenty European patients, one after another', and the sudden appearance of 'a Negro or an Arab' (p. 32). It is not the somatic difference that interests Fanon, but the linguistic one that follows therefrom. Whereas, for example, the physician capaciously tells the European patient, 'Please sit down . . . Why do you wish to consult me? . . . What are your symptoms? . . .', he cuts the Antillean to the quick: 'Sit there, boy . . . What's bothering you? . . . Where does it hurt, huh? . . .' (p. 32). Both 'manner[s] of classifying' are 'automatic', European and Antillean (p. 32). But the Antillean's stands out. What takes place between Antillean and physician is indeed understanding, but understanding in the service of 'primitivizing' and 'decivilizing' the Antillean, who is expected to sit passively before: 'G' morning, pal. Where's it hurt? Huh? Lemme see – belly ache? Heart pain?' (pp. 32, 33). No answer will be forthcoming, nor will the physician wait for one, for the physician already understands: that's just the way they are. But behind 'this lack of interest, this indifference', is a very particular imperative, which, even if not explicitly 'express[ed]', is felt all the same: 'You'd better keep your place' (pp. 32, 34). Though Fanon 'knew that these statements were false', that he was not 'savage, brut[ish], illiterate', in the main there was only truth: 'Mama, see the Negro! I'm frightened!' (pp. 117, 112).

'Frightened!' Fanon exclaims, less out of incredulity than exasperation; for this was now also true: not that the child was afraid, but that the mother was '[n]ow . . . beginning to be afraid of [him]' (p. 112). But now a third voice slowly enters the picture, 'Hell, he's getting mad . . .', only to be joined by a fourth, as we find ourselves 'in a bar, in Rouen or Strasbourg' (pp. 113, 33). The location is not important. 'You – Africa?' an interlocutor breaks in, as if with a question (p. 33). But this is not a question; this is an index into Fanon's composition: 'Dakar, Rufisque, whorehouse, dames, café, mangoes, bananas . . .' (p. 33). As the drunk continues to rattle off names, Fanon quickly departs, though not without a 'torrent of abuse' (p. 33). Still, the location does not matter. Whatever the European's reply, whether the punitive, 'You didn't play big shot like that in your jungle, you dirty nigger!' or the cool, 'Take no notice, sir, he does not know that you are as civilized as we . . .', his retort to his companion will always be the same: 'You see? I wasn't kidding you. That's just the way they are'.³³

Though Fanon has 'the same morphology, the same histology' as the European, the tell-tale signs of his being 'a human being' will 'very soon disappear' as he discovers that the only thing he shares with the European is that 'he has his heart on the left side'.³⁴ In one respect, Fanon is simply

'the neighbor across the street', a 'cousin' on some 'mother's side' (p. 118). But from another view, he is nothing of the kind, a difference drawn out as easily as a change in the weather. Fanon returns us to the scene between himself and the boy. Both are 'shivering', for it is 'cold' outside (p. 114). But when Fanon turns to the boy he finds he is not 'shivering with [that] cold that goes through you', but with the fear of being 'afraid' (p. 114). For when the boy himself turns to Fanon he sees not a shivering figure but a figure 'quivering with rage' (p. 114). The 'handsome little boy', Fanon's contrast intentional, subsequently 'throws himself into his mother's arms' (p. 114). Fanon is the boy's neighbour, he is his cousin. But at the moment he is that terrible 'archetype' come to life, whose 'great big hands' and 'incisors' 'eat . . . up' 'magnificent blond child[ren]'.³⁵ Fanon will indeed not 'go unnoticed' but be 'catalogu[ed] and prob[ed]', the easier to be 'classified', 'tucked away', 'hid[den]' from sight.³⁶ The easier, in other words, to return him to the innocuous anonymity of the neighbour across the street. But Fanon is 'a good tactician'; he will not be taken by surprise (p. 118). Still, he will fail to understand: '[t]he white world, the only honorable one, barred me from all participation' (p. 114).

Though Fanon 'demand[s]' 'an explanation', there will be none, save the movement of this figure as he 'stumble[s]' 'out of the world' (p. 109). Yet Fanon will not be denied as he 'reach[es to] the other side' to try to 'restore' himself to that world (p. 109). He will be successful, though not in the way he intended. In reaching back to the European's world, the only real world, Fanon will find 'his Negro essence, his Negro "nature"' (p. 186). But this essence, of course, belongs not to him but to the other, whose 'science', for instance, tells Fanon he is 'the foundation of cannibalism' (p. 120). Nor is this an 'intact' essence, as Fanon discovers he is as much always a cannibal as 'always a servant, always obsequious and smiling, me never steal, me never lie, eternally "sho good eatin" . . . ' (p. 186). Fanon can only stare, transfixed, as the 'movements, the attitudes, the glances of the others fix [him] there', like an image 'on the screen' (pp. 109, 186). For this is an image on the screen. Fanon 'is a human being', but a human being who 'ha[s] no culture, no civilization, no "long historical past"', at least not outside 'the history that the others have compiled for [him]' (pp. 120, 34, 120). Nothing seemed real, and though 'the circle was drawing a bit tighter', Fanon's only urge was to 'laugh [him]self to tears' (p. 112).³⁷

'Everything that makes us laugh', according to Mikhail Bakhtin, 'is close at hand', by which he means 'all comical creativity works in a zone of maximal proximity'.³⁸ In order for an object 'to be made comical', Bakhtin writes, 'it must be brought close' (D, p. 23). Bakhtin's example of the converse is a 'distanced image', whose 'subject', 'qua distanced'

‘cannot be comical’ (p. 23). Laughter, for Bakhtin, is thus a kind of ethnographic heuristic. In laughing, we ‘make’ the distant and strange into ‘an object of familiar contact’, thus bring the object close to ourselves (p. 23). Bakhtin is even more pointed a few sentences later, describing ‘[l]aughter’ as ‘a vital factor in laying down that prerequisite for fearlessness without which it would be impossible to approach the world realistically’ (p. 23). But though laughter works toward familiarity, we misread Bakhtin if we understand familiarity as a means to an end rather than a pawn within a larger contest between two heteroglossic planes: a ‘distanced plane’ and a ‘plane of laughter’ (p. 23). Laughter’s goal, Bakhtin explains, is the ‘removal of an object from the distanced plane’ onto that plane of laughter (p. 23). Familiarity is not to be sustained, for laughter’s purpose is not understanding. Its purpose, rather, is ‘abuse’, indeed, ‘ridicule’ (p. 23).

Laughter brings about this abuse through the same mechanism by which it does the familiar: the ‘destr[uction]’ of ‘any hierarchical (distancing and valorized) distance’ between self and other (p. 23). The difference is Bakhtin’s revealing the true aim of that propinquity. What materializes in laughter’s zone of maximal proximity is what Bakhtin describes as laughter’s ‘zone of maximal familia[rity]’, a zone recalling what David E. Johnson, in critique of Johannes Fabian’s *Time and the Other*, describes as ‘[t]he absolute reduction of time and space in order to institute the *co* of *coevalness* and *collaboration*’ between ‘ethnographer and informant’³⁹ Unlike our earlier understanding of laughter, in this zone of ‘crude contact’, the familiar, recalling what Johnson describes as ‘the horizon of immediacy and simultaneity’, is turned against itself, merely the means by which laughter may ‘demolish fear and pity before an object, before a world, making it an object of familiar contact’.⁴⁰ By ‘assault[ing]’ and ‘destr[oing]’ the ‘distanced plane’, laughter achieves Fabian’s ‘coevalness’, which Fabian defines as ‘sharing of present Time’, and this toward the ‘exclu[sion]’ of ‘any spatial or temporal gap between ethnographer and informant’.⁴¹ This is notable. Without this gap, equally ‘foreclose[d]’ is ‘the possibility of the arrival of the other *as* other’.⁴² There is, literally, no time for the other, who is immediately seized. Still, this is merely preparatory toward laughter’s higher goal: ‘clearing the ground for an absolutely free investigation of it [object]’ (D, p. 23). ‘As it draws an object to itself and makes it familiar’, Bakhtin writes, laughter ‘delivers the object into the fearless hands of investigative experiment – both scientific and artistic – and into the hands of free experimental fantasy’ (p. 23). Just as the object falls from the hands of the familiar into those of the fantastic, so it is delivered from the plane of distance and onto the plane of laughter. Not that this is a reprieve, at least not in any meaningful sense of the term, the object immediately seeing, upon its descent, a whole panoply of macabre possibilities opening up before it, possibilities which, like the

now-‘dismember[ed]’ and ‘dead object’, are all too-readily ‘la[in] bare’ (p. 24).

But we are not surprised, for what takes place on this plane ‘is a comical operation of dismemberment’, the object ‘broken apart, laid bare’ (p. 24). What suddenly ‘assumes special importance’, for instance, is ‘the back and rear portion of an object’, which, like ‘its innards’, which are also ‘not normally accessible for viewing’, are now visible ‘whole objects’ around which ‘one can . . . walk’ (p. 23). Bakhtin calls this ‘ridiculous’, which is ‘the naked object’, ‘stripped and separated from its . . . “empty clothing”’, now also ‘separated from its person’ (p. 24). ‘What remains supreme here’, in short, on the plane of laughter, is this ‘artistic logic of analysis, dismemberment’, which turns on ‘turning things into dead objects’ (p. 24). ‘One ridicules’, according to Bakhtin, ‘in order to forget’ (p. 23).

After being ‘assailed at various points’ by the other, Fanon realizes why, though tempted, he did not laugh: not because to do so would be to laugh with those already laughing at him, but because the European, accordingly, was never laughing at him, Frantz Fanon, to begin with: the object of the European’s fear was indeed only an object: not the body of Frantz Fanon but the ‘legends, stories, history, and above all *historicity*’, out of which that body is constituted (p. 112; emphasis in original). The European’s fear lay within a schema that, while figured through the ‘corporeal’, has its basis in the deeper yet more ‘opaque’, ‘racial’ and ‘historic[al]’ (p. 112). Yet nor was Fanon’s discovery easy: ‘I thought that what I had in hand was to construct a physiological self, to balance space, to localize sensations’ (p. 111). But Fanon could not ‘localize’ the ‘external stimulus that flicked over [him]’ as he ‘passed by’ the European ‘[o]n that day’ (pp. 111, 112). For what Fanon had ‘take[n] hold of’, in his ‘trembling hands’, indeed, what was too big for his hands, was a psychical rather than a phenomenological problem (p. 121). This is why, when Fanon grabs hold of himself he takes hold of ‘nothing’: not because the ‘vein has been mined out’, but because there was never a vein to begin with (p. 121). Finding himself rehearsing a modern-day Frankenstein’s Monster come to life, the ‘elements’ out of which Fanon discovers he is constituted, as he retraces his ‘move[s] toward the other’, lie not within the ‘residual sensations and perceptions . . . of a tactile, vestibular, kinesthetic, and visual character’, but within ‘the other, the white man, who ha[s] woven [him] out of a thousand details, anecdotes, [and] stories’ (pp. 111, 112, 111). Wilting under the perdurance of its historicity, the black body, less in Fanon’s hands than those of history’s, is a body dislocated not so much in time but through time.

In the shift from a corporeal to a 'racial epidermal' understanding of his body, Fanon moves from a spatial to a temporal awareness of his body (p. 112). This means not the eschewal of the corporeal but its mediation through the temporal. Fanon discovers what T.S. Eliot calls his 'historical sense', which Eliot describes as 'perception' 'not only of the pastness of the past but of its presence'.⁴³ Eliot's historical sense distinguishes itself from a synchronic understanding of time in collecting within itself 'a sense of [the] timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timelessness and of the temporal together' (ADE, p. 44). Fanon evokes Eliot's historical synergy in finding himself, in his encounter with the other, moving in 'spa[tial] terms', 'existing', as says, 'triply' (B, p. 112). 'I was responsible at the same time', Fanon writes, 'for my body, for my race, for my ancestors' (p. 112). In the shift to an epidermal awareness, Fanon acquires what Eliot, in the vernacular of poetry, calls a 'write[r's] comp[ulsion]' (ADE, p. 44). Yet whether defined as responsibility, as Fanon does, or as compulsion, as Eliot does, the diachronic composition of the colonial encounter unfolds just the same: the writer, encountering the other, suddenly overwhelmed with a 'comp[ulsion] . . . to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country had a simultaneous existence and compose[d] a simultaneous order' within him (ADE, p. 44). His body stitched together as much by European as Francophone hands, the hybrid pens of which had already staged his encounter with the other, Fanon bears witness to this temporal cathexis in the only way he can: the 'batter[ing] down' as much 'by tom-toms' as 'cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetichism, racial defects [and] slaveships' (B, 112). We understand Fanon's account when we recognize, along with Lokangaka Losambe, that Fanon's 'uncanny journey into [his] own interiority', insofar as a journey precipitated by what Diana Fuss calls an 'imaginary relation of fractured specularity', is a journey that moves along less synchronically than diachronically.⁴⁴ Fanon's interiority, as Eliot's historical sense makes clear, while figured through the body of Fanon, ultimately refers not to the body but to its race and ancestors; Eliot's logic turns on the understanding that Fanon's body is as much a body as a temporal 'menagerie', which, when pulled apart, reveals the linings less of history than of historicity.⁴⁵

His message, now his body, properly returned to him, Fanon's attention is not on the 'burden of that corporeal malediction' but the 'rhythmic attitude' opened in him by the other, whose 'sensitiv[e]' strings, reaching as far down as Langston Hughes' 'deep rivers' as the 'soul[s]' 'grown deep' therein, will 'set [Fanon] on his feet again' (pp. 111, 127).^{46,47} Fanon's encounter with the other is generative, giving him the courage to reach within himself, grab hold of the compassionate roots he had planted in

Algeria, '[t]o understand and to love', and to shake out the memories of their meaning (p. 7). 'Superiority? Inferiority? Why not the quite simple attempt to touch the other, to feel the other, to explain myself to the other?' (p. 231). Fanon's 'welcoming of the other', to borrow Theodore W. Jennings, Jr's language, whether 'the stranger, the foreigner', differentiates itself from Hegelian appropriations in that it does not 'wish to reduce the other to an extension or echo of oneself'.⁴⁸ What drives this openness is not a desire 'to integrate or assimilate them (in that case to Europeanize them), but [to] respect, indeed in a way [to] celebrate, their otherness or alterity' (R, p. 112). And yet, as Fanon discovers while reading Sartre, the former recalling Hegel, the inability 'to see them as myself' is often also the basis of Europeanization.⁴⁹

Describing Hegel's dialectic within the colonial world, Sartre had found that 'negritude', '[i]n fact', 'appears as the minor term of a dialectical progression' (qtd. in B, p. 133). 'The theoretical and practical assertion of the supremacy of the white man', Sartre had written, 'is its thesis; the position of negritude as an antithetical value is the moment of negativity' (*ibid.*). Having explained this, however, Sartre could not help but observe that 'this negative moment is insufficient by itself' (*ibid.*). Sartre's conclusion was all too clear. Indeed, as if to rub salt in the wound, this is what Fanon, Sartre implies, 'knew very well; they know that it [their negritude] is intended to prepare the synthesis or realization of the human in a society without races' (*ibid.*). Fanon, finding himself 'robbed of [his] last chance', could not have been more disappointed (*ibid.*). 'Help had been sought from a friend of colored peoples', Fanon writes, 'and that friend had found no better response than to point out the relativity of what they were doing' (*ibid.*).

Before *Black Orpheus*, Fanon understood 'black consciousness' in terms entirely opposite those of Sartre's: 'immanent in its own eyes', without appeal to 'potentiality' or 'universal[ity]' (p. 135). 'No probability', Fanon insisted, 'has any place inside me' (p. 135). After Sartre, everything changed. Whereas Fanon had claimed 'My Negro consciousness does not hold itself out as lack. It *is*. It is its own follower', Fanon now found himself forced to accommodate an opposite view: that it is 'not I who make a meaning for myself, but it is the meaning that was already there, pre-existing, waiting for me' (pp. 135, 134; emphasis in original). The black consciousness Fanon embraced as his own, he now found 'held out' in front of him 'as an absolute density' (p. 134). Sartre had misunderstood. While an individual might 'proclaim the oneness of the suffering', as in Jacques Roumain's 'Bois-d'ébène', this did not mean that 'Negro experience is . . . a whole', or that 'there is . . . merely *one* Negro'.⁵⁰ On the contrary, Fanon insisted, the totality of that 'suffering', found in 'Bois-d'ébène', revealed the degree to which 'there are *Negroes*' (p. 136; emphasis

in original). Yet while Fanon was proclaiming the 'mortar of the age of brotherhood' is 'mix[ed] ... /out of the dust of idols', Sartre had already replied: black consciousness is merely a 'transition', 'a means and not an ultimate end'.⁵¹ Fanon and Sartre were speaking at cross-purposes. Though Fanon would claim Sartre misread Hegel, having 'forgotten that consciousness has to lose itself in the night of the absolute, the only condition to attain to consciousness of self', the damage was done: 'Jean-Paul Sartre, in this work, ha[d] destroyed black zeal'.⁵²

Fanon's response to Sartre parallels Simone de Beauvoir's several years later in *Que peut la littérature?* (1965) in her critique of 'the absolute reality' of 'the literary work'.⁵³ Just as Fanon finds in Sartre a passivity merely fulfilling history's role for itself, so does de Beauvoir find, in claims to know the absolute reality of the literary work, 'an alienated creature, whose only task is to realize the pre-existing order of the text' (WC, p. 190). De Beauvoir's passivity is Fanon's, from the position of the literary critic: one recognizes oneself not as 'the author [who] writes the score (*partition*)', but 'the reader [who] provides the concert performance' (p. 191).

Fanon's own example is Sartre's *Black Orpheus*. 'Today', Fanon writes, reading from Sartre's text, 'let us hail the turn of history that will make it possible for the black man to utter [quoting Césaire] "the great Negro cry with a force that will shake the foundations of the world"' (B, p. 134). While Sartre had found in Césaire that enviable turn of history by which the black man would utter the great Negro cry, Fanon, turning his eyes to that turn, found a different view. Such a turn belonged not to Césaire, not to the Negro cry, but to history. '[I]t is not out of my bad nigger's misery, my bad nigger's teeth, my bad nigger's hunger that I will shape a torch with which to burn down the world', Fanon found himself reading, 'but it is the torch that was already there, waiting for that turn of history' (p. 134). The Negro cry, Fanon came to understand, revealing Sartre's bastardization of Césaire, would not shake the foundations of the world, for it was merely the minor term of a dialectical progression. In the attempt to 'grasp [his] own being', Fanon found his 'name', but at the expense of his being (p. 137).⁵⁴ While Fanon was telling Sartre, 'My negritude is neither a tower nor a cathedral/it thrusts into the red flesh of the sun/it thrusts into the burning flesh of the sky/it hollows through the dense dismay of its own pillar of patience ...', Sartre was developing his 'commonplace' bildungsroman narrative: 'You'll change, my boy; I was like that too when I was young; ... you'll see, it will all pass'.⁵⁵

What interests us in de Beauvoir and Fanon is their theorization of loss. Fanon, 'need[ing] to lose [himself] completely in negritude', 'need[ing]', as he explains, 'not to know', finds, instead, Sartre's dialectic (p. 135; emphasis in original). The outcome is as expected. While '[i]n

opposition to historical becoming, there had always been the unforeseeable', [t]his struggle' had now 'tak[en] on an aspect of completeness' (p. 135). By 'bring[ing] necessity into the foundation of ... freedom', as Sartre had done, Fanon could only find in Sartre the opposite of what he was looking for: being 'driv[en] out of himself' (p. 135). Fanon was only getting in his own way.

If Fanon's language is betrayed by a muscularity at its roots, it is a muscularity attributable to the heavy 'task' Fanon set before himself: a 'complete lysis' as much of these aberrations as the 'morbid body' to which they belong (pp. 222, 10). This is what Fanon, in contradistinction to Sartre, though in agreement with Nietzsche, finds to be 'the prime task of him who, having taken thought, prepares to act', which is '[t]o educate man to be *actional*, for '[m]an', as Fanon continues, 'is not only reactional' (p. 222; emphasis in original).⁵⁶ Against the backdrop of Emerson's call to self-reliance, a strain of thought picked up by Nietzsche, Fanon would 'define [himself] as an absolute intensity of beginning' (p. 138). It is with this absolute intensity that Fanon would 't[ake] up [his] negritude, and with tears in [his] eyes ... put its machinery together again' (p. 138). Fanon's fashioning of the body, branching out, on the one hand, toward the somatic, and, on the other, toward the machinic, is telling, not least because of how it dissolves the schism, reimagining the hand as the basis of human and machine.

Not that Fanon reserves his hands for the clearing away of tears, so that machinery may be put together again. If Sartre had 'shattered [Fanon's] last illusion', 'broken' his 'Negrohood' 'to pieces', Fanon would simply 'rebuil[d]' and 'reconstruct' himself, but 'by the intuitive lianas of [his] hands' (pp. 137, 138). If tears need not be cleared away by the hands, it is because those hands, like roots, are intuitive. Fanon's hands would be guided not by sight but by sense and touch. Yet if hands are Fanon's conceit, we need to understand them within their context, which is Fanon's defining them, in opposition to history, as the 'the meaning of [his] destiny' (p. 229). 'Mankind find[s] a meaning', according to Fanon, only by 'digging in its own flesh' (p. 9). This is what Fanon reserves for his hands: 'endless creat[ion]' of '[him]self' (p. 229). Though Fanon initially identifies his 'propos[al]' as 'the liberation of the man of color from himself', he modifies the phrasing on the next page, recognizing as his broader aim 'to set man free' (pp. 8, 9).⁵⁷ Fanon would remain true to his emancipatory philosophy, inscribing, on the same penultimate page of *Black Skin, White Masks*, his 'only' wish as 'the man of color': 'the enslavement of man by man cease forever' (p. 231). Fanon believed that if this reciprocal goal could be achieved, 'of one by another', so could his larger dream: '[t]hat it be possible for me to discover and to love man, wherever he may be' (p. 231).

'Ideally', Fanon insists, 'the present will always contribute to the building of the future' (p. 13). 'And this future is not the future of the cosmos but rather the future of my century, my country, my existence' (p. 13). Though Fanon opens *Black Skin, White Masks* with the insistence that we 'belong irreducibly to [our] own time', as in we are irreducibly 'connected to the present', it is a gesture that much more open in his closing pages (p. 13). While Fanon says, early on, 'In no fashion should I undertake to prepare the world that will come later' (p. 13), I read these words alongside his later, closing 'prayer' (p. 232), the juxtaposition of which finds me organizing my reading around the profound sense of responsibility found in that prayer, that if Fanon 'connect[s us] to the present', it is in order to reveal our responsibility to it qua 'belong[ing]' (p. 13). What opens as the narrow claim, *Black Skin, White Masks*, that 'I belong irreducibly to my time', becomes the 'prayer', Fanon's, that we recognize our responsibility thereto, a prayer that we acknowledge the present, but also see it 'in terms of something to be exceeded', what we presumably do, as Fanon closes his prayer, when we see the 'future' 'always', as an 'edifice' 'supported', hence 'question[ed]' (or not), 'by' the 'living' (p. 13).

Independent Scholar

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Notes

- 1 Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967), p. 232; hereafter B.
- 2 Laura Christian identifies the extent to which Fanon's method of writing does complicate attempts to recuperate his emancipatory study toward cosmopolitan concerns with respect to gender and representation. See 'Fanon and the

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- trauma of the cultural message', *Textual Practice*, 19.3 (2005), pp. 219–241 (no. 7, 239–240).
- 3 B, pp. 230, 13, 14, 226.
 - 4 Ibid., pp. 18, 38; Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), p. 219; hereafter O.
 - 5 O, p. 219.
 - 6 On barbarism's relation to discourses of culture and captivity in the travel literature of the Americas, see David E. Johnson, 'Pirates, Captives, Barbarians, and the limits of culture', *American Literary History*, 14.2 (2002), pp. 358–375.
 - 7 B, pp. 214, 215.
 - 8 Ibid., p. 21, emphasis in original.
 - 9 Ibid., emphasis in original.
 - 10 Ibid., emphasis in original.
 - 11 Ibid., emphasis in original.
 - 12 Jacques Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other; or, The Prosthesis of Origin*, trans. Patrick Mensah (Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 2; hereafter M.
 - 13 We need to distinguish Derrida's anamnesia from 'affective amnesia' (B, p. 150), the former of which Fanon disqualifies as a descriptor of the Antillean; the former refers not to forgetfulness, but to an active '(re)collection' (TheFreeDictionary.com). Accessed: c. 9 June 2011.
 - 14 M, p. 7, emphasis removed.
 - 15 B, p. 150; M, p. 8.
 - 16 Ibid., p. 40; Fanon is quoting a passage from Michel Leiris.
 - 17 Ibid., p. 39.
 - 18 M, p. 8, italics removed.
 - 19 B, pp. 128, 127. On the temporal significance of the suspension of the 'as if' in Agamben and Derrida, see David E. Johnson, 'As if the time were now: deconstructing Agamben', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 106.2 (2007), pp. 265–290.
 - 20 Scott Michaelsen and David E. Johnson, *Anthropology's Wake: Attending to the End of Culture* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), p. 103; hereafter A.
 - 21 My reading of this logic of exclusion within the European is indebted to David E. Johnson's critique of the same dynamic within Enrique Dussel's *Ethics of Liberation in the Age of Globalization and Exclusion* (trans. from Spanish, Madrid: Editorial Trotta, 1998). See A, esp. pp. 211–215.
 - 22 B, p. 100, emphasis in original.
 - 23 Cf. A, p. 202.
 - 24 For an incisive discussion on the problem of passing in the Antillean psyche, what Shu-mei Shi calls the Antillean's need to 'live the lie of his fictive whiteness', see Shu-Mei Shi, 'Comparative racialization: an introduction', *PMLA*, 123.5 (2008), pp. 1347–1362.
 - 25 B, pp. 23, 24.

- 26 M, p. 58; Jacques Derrida and Catherine Malabou, *Counterpath: Travelling with Jacques Derrida*, trans. David Willis (Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), pp. 87, 86.
- 27 As Laura Christian explains, 'Fanon is not citing Lacan's famous essay on the mirror stage, which in 1952 had not yet been published, but an earlier formulation of this concept found in the *Encyclopédie française*'. See Christian, p. 22; no, 12.
- 28 Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W.W. Norton, 1977), pp. 1, 4, 1–2; B, p. 18; E, p. 4; E, p. 1; hereafter E.
- 29 B, p. 110; E, p. 2.
- 30 For a brilliant discussion of this phenomena in a different context, focusing on the medieval epistolary exchanges between Abelard and Heloise, see Branka Arsić, 'Afterward, "On Leaving No Address"', in Peggy Kamuf (ed.), *Book of Addresses* (Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), pp. 282–316.
- 31 See, for instance, Françoise Verges, 'Chains of Madness, Chains of Colonialism', for an excellent discussion on difficulties Fanon overcomes in working with the Algerian Muslims. *The Fact of Blackness: Frantz Fanon and Visual Representation*, ed. Alan Reed (Seattle: Bay Press, 1996), pp. 46–75.
- 32 Johnson, 'Deconstructing Agamben', p. 4.
- 33 B, pp. 33, 113.
- 34 B, pp. 119, 120, 118.
- 35 B, pp. 189, 160, 115, 114.
- 36 Ibid., pp. 119, 113.
- 37 My arrangement of this reading owes a great deal to Salah el Moncef bin Khalifa's reading of a similar series of events in the US movie *The Truman Show* (1998; dir. Peter Weir). See 'Life after "Truman"? The televisual imaginary and the symptomatic eruption of the real in Peter Weir's *Truman Show*', *Revue française d'études américaines*, 4.102 (2004), pp. 117–125.
- 38 M.M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), p. 23; hereafter D.
- 39 D, p. 23; A, p. 193; Johnson's emphasis.
- 40 Ibid.
- 41 D, p. 23; Fabian quoted in A, pp. 191, 193.
- 42 A, p. 193; Johnson's emphasis.
- 43 In Lokangaka Losambe, 'Internationalizing the English studies curriculum: some thoughts on why and how', *ADE Bulletin*, 146 (Fall, 2008), pp. 42–45. All passages of Eliot drawn from Losambe.
- 44 ADE, p. 45; Diana Fuss, 'Interior colonies and the politics of identification', *Diacritics*, 24.2–3 (Summer–Fall, 1994), pp. 22–42.
- 45 I am drawing my wording from Nietzsche's 'The Case of Wagner', Nietzsche's use of 'menagerie' referring to Barthold Georg Niebuhr's likening Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* to a 'menagerie of tame animals'. See *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: The Modern Library, 2000), p. 618.

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- 46 Fanon is quoting from Léopold Senghor's 'Ce que l'homme noir apporte' and Senghor's reading of Hughes (B, p. 127, no. 15).
- 47 My reading of Fanon's emancipatory philosophy is again gratefully indebted to Françoise Verges' 'Chains of Madness, Chains of Colonialism'.
- 48 Theodore W. Jennings, Jr., *Reading Derrida/Thinking Paul: On Justice* (Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), pp. 111, 112; hereafter R.
- 49 Frederick G. Weiss, ed., *Hegel: The Essential Writings* (New York: Harper Torch Books, 1974), p. 82.
- 50 B, p. 136, emphasis in original; 'Bois-d'ébène' qtd. in B.
- 51 Ibid., p. 133.
- 52 Ibid., pp. 134, 135.
- 53 Toril Moi, 'What can literature do? Simone de Beauvoir as a literary theorist', *PMLA*, 124.1 (2009), pp. 189–199 (191). All passages from Beauvoir are drawn from Moi; hereafter WC.
- 54 My reading of Fanon's sense of being as loss owes a great deal to Gregg Lambert's analysis of the same in the context of academic modes of production. See Gregg Lambert, 'John Guillory and that obscure object of English desire', *Slought Foundation Online*, 26 January 2000. Accessed 20 October 2008. URL: <http://www.slought.org/content/11035>. A printed version of the talk is also available: 'What do graduate students want? John Guillory and that obscure object of desire', *Minnesota Review* n.s. 52–54 (2001), pp. 249–262.
- 55 B, pp. 137–138, 135. Fanon is quoting from Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (*Return to My Native Land*). Online: Accessed 24 February 2013. URL: http://writing.upenn.edu/library/Cesaire-Aime_bio.html
- 56 See 'Self-Reliance' and 'American Scholar'. Emerson writes: 'Few and mean as my gifts may be, I actually am, and do not need for my own assurance or the assurance of my fellows any secondary testimony'. *The Essential Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Brooks Atkinson (New York: The Modern Library, 2000), p. 136.
- 57 My reading is once more gratefully indebted to Françoise Verges' 'Chains of Madness, Chains of Colonialism'.