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The Racial Gaze: Black Slave, White Master

For my part, I refuse to consider the problem from the standpoint of *either-or* . . . what is all this talk of a black people of a Black nationality. I am a Frenchman. I am interested in French culture, French civilization, the French people. We refuse to be considered “outsiders,” we are fully part of the French drama.

Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*

When Frantz Fanon arrived in France in 1947 the nation was in flux; shaken by the war, it now faced radical movements for change, including a new “Third World” struggling for independence, as well as the solidifying of the Cold War into spheres of influence. Two years after the end of World War Two French radical critics, no longer outsiders, were becoming a dominant group among the literati and public opinion.¹ The participants in Alexandre Kojève’s lectures on Hegel’s master/slave dialectic of the late 1930s (Aron, Bataille, Breton, Lacan, Merleau-Ponty, among others) were part of this emergent intelligentsia, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty’s *Les Temps Modernes* was the journal of discussion² and *Présence Africaine*, founded in 1947,³ expressed the bringing of the African presence into the very center of French civilization.⁴ The African “presence,” putting Western civilization on trial, represented a new kind of postwar anticolonial militancy, while Paris “became one of the theaters in which the political and cultural future of Africa was being prepared.”⁵ In the French constitution of 1946 colonialism disappeared, replaced by a new union of citizenship and parliamentary representation supposedly ending forced labor and the colonial

education. Yet the reality of this union was made clear in Madagascar a year later when 100,000 Malagasy were slaughtered.

Black Skin was written in this context. Published in 1952, with references to philosophy, politics, literature, psychoanalysis, film, and popular culture, combined with what seems like an authorial and autobiographical "I," it can create in the reader a certain uneasiness. Nevertheless, the book represents Fanon's profound ability to both synthesize and critically engage phenomenological and psychoanalytic theory through the prism of race.⁶ In fact, Fanon's methodology in *Black Skin* is fairly straightforward; race becomes the lens through which social relations and theories of the time are judged. The honesty of his approach is illustrated in his description of the "lived experience" of the Black who "has two dimensions," two ways of being, "one with his fellows, the other with the White man." In other words, Blacks behave differently among Whites than among Blacks. This behavior is not ontological but a product of colonial relations. Among Whites, the Black experiences no intersubjectivity, no reciprocity. The Black is simply an object among other objects. Why is this? How does it happen? These are two questions Fanon tries to ask and which express his quest for reciprocal human relations.⁷

The specific subject of *Black Skin* is the disalienation of the Antillean who, mired in a "dependency complex," wishes to turn White. Fanon's conceptualization of alienation is essentially medical, a neurosis (see *BS*, 204), but he employs it in a social context so that donning a White mask is equated with a false self, an inauthentic self in Sartre's terms, or a false consciousness in Marxian terms. Establishing a process of "disalienation" moves Fanon away from a medical model toward a radical social conception of praxis, which is based on a belief that human beings are reflective and actional, beings of praxis. *Black Skin* can be seen as a painstaking examination leading in myriad ways to the same conclusion, namely the necessity of uprooting the conditions that cause alienation. Disalienation calls for a nihilation, the ripping away of the masks and a *reintegration* of the human being's presence:

I have been led to consider their alienation in terms of psychoanalytical classifications. The Black's behavior makes him *akin* to an obsessive neurotic type, or, if one prefers, he puts himself into a complete *situational* neurosis. In the man of color there is a constant effort to run away from his own individuality, to *annihilate* his own presence. (*BS*, 60, emphasis added)

Because the Black needs White approval, it is impossible to defend against the lack of reciprocity through ego withdrawal. Consequently the Black's behavior – which is not necessarily neurotic – appears neurotic.

Fanon's attempt to get out of the bind of the inferiority complex is at first psychoanalytic, but then he immediately declares that because the Black's alienation is not an individual question, his approach will be "sociodiagnostic," entailing "immediate recognition of social and economic realities" (BS, 11). Thus, diagnostically and proscriptively, the analysis shifts from the individual to the social realm. Thus we begin with Fanon's engagement with the phenomenologies of Sartre, Merleau-Ponty and especially Hegel's master/slave dialectic before moving to psychoanalytic theories.

The Black is a "crucified person," maintains Fanon, who "has no culture, no civilization, 'no long historical past.'" Thus stripped, the existence and Being of the Black is an inferiority complex (BS, 216, 34). Such a complex is created in *every* people experiencing the death of their own local cultural originality (BS, 18). Civilization is solely French and the Antillean's culture is French.⁸ On the scale of humanity, those who write and speak proper French are more civilized. In Paris the Martinican is at the top of the Black pecking order, but it is a *Black* pecking order. The Antillean is seen as Black but the intradistinction of the Antillean pecking order means that the Guadeloupan tries to "pass" as Martinican. The Senegalese is at the bottom and on the other side is the White, the transcendental Other.

Speaking "proper" French is a symbol of authority. Dialect not only places one geographically and socially, but it is a way of thinking. The problem was exemplified by the Martinican in France. Here was a group of people who had grown up speaking, thinking, and looking French. How could Antilleans look French? Because they believed they were, having fully internalized French culture. They had grown up reading Tarzan stories and talking about "our ancestors the Gaul," identifying themselves not only "with the exploiter and the bringer of civilization," but with "an all-white truth" (BS, 146–7). At school in Martinique children wrote essays like little Parisians: "I like vacations because then I can run through the fields, breathe fresh air, and come home with *rosy* cheeks" (BS, 162 n25). The young educated Martinicans considered themselves White and dream themselves as White. Though Lacan's "Mirror Stage" is clearly suggestive here, it was Sartre's analysis of *The Anti-Semite and the Jew* that provided an important beginning for

Fanon's thinking through of this problem. What attracted Fanon to Sartre's work was both his phenomenological descriptions and his call for action. Authenticity is manifested in revolt, not by accepting the objectification of oneself by others.⁹

The Jew and Black Consciousness

The Jew is a Jew because the Jew is determined by the Other, argues Sartre: "the Jew has a personality like the rest of us, and on top of that he is Jewish. It amounts to a doubling of the fundamental relationship with the Other. The Jew is over-determined."¹⁰ For Fanon this spoke directly to the problematic of the Black.

Fanon found resonances with the types plotted in *The Anti-Semite and the Jew*. He drew out similarities between the anti-Semite and the racist as a Manichean, irrational type and he explicated the French democrat's insistence that the Jew should assimilate in terms of racism. He found equally important Sartre's description of the Jew's attempted flight from others and himself. Alienated from his own body, and "his emotional life has been cut in two," the Jew pursues "the impossible dream of universal brotherhood in a world that rejects him."¹¹ Sartre argued that Jewish authenticity could not mean assimilation. Assimilation would amount to inauthenticity because it cannot be realized as long as there is anti-Semitism. The same could be said of the goal of assimilation of the educated Black, the évolué, into a racist society. It leads to the inferiority complexes analyzed in *Black Skin*.¹² The assimilation proposed by the White liberal (Sartre's democrat) is, as Steve Biko put it, like "expecting the slave to work together with the slave-master's son to remove all the conditions leading to the former's enslavement."¹³ A nonracial approach pretends that racism doesn't exist and ignores its denigrating and derisive psychological effects. In contrast to assimilation, authenticity means realizing one's condition and asserting one's being as "untouchable, scorned, proscribed" and standing apart.

Sartre's claim that the Jew derives pride from humiliation might seem a strange and psychologically damaging basis for subjectivity, but "this haunted man [is] condemned to make his choice on the basis of false problems and in a false situation." Truth is mediated by the anti-Semitic situation. The choice is between the anti-Semite's congenital lie and the Jew's own lie which, in an anti-Semitic society, acquires a dimension of truth. The possibility of authenticity, therefore, can only be fully understood by

understanding inauthenticity as a flight from the accusations of Jewishness through a Jewish type of anti-Semitism.¹⁴ This flight powerfully prefigures the action of the educated and alienated Black *évolué* in *Black Skin* whose life is nothing but a long flight from others and from themselves. As Sartre says, "he has been alienated even from his own body; his emotional life has been cut in two; he has been reduced to pursuing the impossible dream of universal brotherhood in a world that rejects him."¹⁵

To be a Jew is to be "abandoned to the situation of a Jew," yet to "realize one's Jewish condition" in an anti-Semitic world requires a struggle. The authentic Jew fights and "makes himself a Jew, in the face of all and against all." Just as inauthenticity is a flight from the world, authenticity can only be realized in the world and though every response has to begin with the individual, there can be no authentic response to anti-Semitism at an individual level. Thus made social by the anti-Semite, the Jew becomes the social man *par excellence*, because "his torment is social."¹⁶

Putting the Black in the place of the Jew and racist in place of anti-Semite, Fanon felt the power of Sartre's argument. The authentic Jew is condemned to make a choice and "ceases to run away from the obligation to live in a situation that is defined precisely by the fact that it is unlivable . . . [and] derives pride from his humiliation."¹⁷ What is a Jew? The Jew is one whom others consider a Jew. To Sartre's famous quip, "it is the anti-Semite who makes the Jew," Fanon adds that it is the White who makes the Black.

How could the Antillean Black make a choice? In the Antilles¹⁸ the Black was French but in Paris the Black found it impossible to be French because, despite arguments to the contrary, Frenchness was equated with Whiteness. The Black was at best a "Black." The characteristic "wandering" diasporic Jew, "never sure of his possessions," found its apogee in the Black who had been systematically enslaved and uprooted.

Authentic assimilation is created not from external pressure but through an openness to the Other as a meeting of equals. In other words, an assimilation which risks self-certainty, which tears off the mask, but in which the self is challenged and sustained. Action implies risk, and authenticity requires giving up insularity. Authenticity needs to be grounded in the historical context, which itself is changing and changeable. Stasis would indicate the end of authenticity.

At the beginning of *Black Skin* Fanon asserted that he didn't think that the Black could accomplish an "authentic upheaval." He realized that such a possibility was itself based on the fact that the Black

had not struggled for freedom but had had freedom given by the colonial master. The "liberation of man of color from himself" requires a "descent into a real hell" (BS, 10), and an "internal revolution" (BS, 198) that had to make meaning for itself, and from the depths of that descent reclaim the subjugated and ongoing history of revolt.

Unlike the Jew, who still has a sense of being unknown, or being able to "pass" in White society, the Black is overdetermined from the outside. The possibility of an existence outside of external appearance is denied to the Black. The Jew is "overdetermined from within," the Black from without.

By becoming an intellectual the Jew can transcend the body. Why can't the Black do the same? "The Jew is disliked from the moment he is tracked down," Fanon says, "but in my case everything takes on a *new* guise. I am given no chance. I am overdetermined from without. I am the slave not of the 'idea' that others have of me but of my own appearance" (BS, 115–16). The Jew can escape through a disembodied intellectualism, but there is no escape for the Black. Condemned to the life of the body, there is no memory and no history. The Black is body and the body's death *is* death. The Black is penis. How can you associate Rodin's thinker with an erection? The Black cannot become Phaedro.¹⁹ "The Black symbolizes biological danger; the Jew, the intellectual danger" (BS, 165). The Jew is the internal Other, the Black the external Other.

At first this difference, based on skin color, seems obvious. But isn't the Jew spoken of in the same terms? *Because* the Jew cannot be "seen" their ability to pollute gentile society could be far more threatening. They must be marked out. Both the Jew and the Black have to be constructed. The eye does not assign value, "the image of the biological-sexual-sensual-genital-nigger" is a result of socialization. The fact that the site and the sight of difference, the circumcised penis, is also overdetermined signifies more than a fear of castration. Circumcision marks the Jewish male as sexually apart. The Jew is anatomically different, but the Black is purely anatomical, purely sexual, utterly different. Fanon agrees with the Freudian psychoanalyst Marie Bonaparte that the anti-Semite projects onto the Jew all "his own more or less unconscious bad instincts." The same function of "fixation" is assumed by the Black in the United States, adds Bonaparte. What the Jew and the Black share, admits Fanon, is that both stand for "evil."

The association of the Jew with making money (the fetish of money begetting money as if it were alive) is linked to an anthro-

pomorphized phallus, as though it is alive and “out of control.” It is “deviant genitalia,” as Sander Gilman puts it. The parallel between the Jew and prostitute, both economically and sexually, is mapped on top of an older European topos of Jew as polluting. The Jew, of course, is also behind the prostitute in more ways than one. Driving women to prostitution, they are the pimps, brothel owners and infectors of women: “The prostitute is little more than a Jew herself . . . Both are on the margins of ‘polite’ society.” The Jew is the outsider. Associated with disease, the Jew “becomes the surrogate for all marginal males.”²⁰ The Jew has long been associated with sexual pollution, with syphilis and with other sexually transmitted diseases, just as the Jewish body has long been associated “with the image of the mutilated, diseased, different appearance of genitalia.” From the Jew’s phallus to the Jew’s nose, Jews bear their diseased sexuality on their skin. The stigma of syphilis is dark skin. Like leprosy, syphilis supposedly turns the skin “Black.” In the Manichean world of anti-Semitism, Blackness marks the syphilitic and separates the Jew from the White Christian. Because the Jew is naturally syphilitic, the Jew is “naturally” Black: “their sexual pathology is written on their skin.”²¹ Through syphilis the Jew is associated with Blackness. The Jew is the medium of sexual contagion. The Jew is not Black but *becomes* Black and by turning Black the Jew is the frightening link to the African’s savage and bestial degenerate sexuality.²² Thus we are back to the Blackness of the Black as the mark of the absolute Other. From the standpoint of European civilization the Black is not a stand-in for the Black, the Black is Black: “Wherever he goes the Black remains a Black” (*BS*, 173). In the Manichean world of anti-Black racism Blackness marks and separates the Black.

Enlightenment privileges sight as the basis for calculating difference. Even if it is mapped onto older models, such as the Jew or the leper, as outsiders within European society, epidermalization is essential to the “racial gaze.” Hegel’s description in *Reason in History* is a remarkable archetype of the colonial project of seeing the “Negro” and Africa as an absolute Other. Africa is described as a place of energy and sensations but also as motionlessness and stuck in time. To describe Africa necessitates a journey not from sense to reason but rather from reason to sense:

The Negro is an example of animal man in all his savagery and lawlessness, and if we wish to understand him at all, we must abstract from all reverence and morality, and from everything which we call

feeling. All that is foreign to man in his immediate existence, and nothing consonant with humanity is to be found in his character. For this reason, we cannot properly feel ourselves in his nature, no more than into that of a dog.²³

And what is Africa? A continent cut off from history, at least south of the Sahara – the Sahara which “naturally” cuts the continent in two – cut off from the world and determined by its inhumane geography, fauna, and flora: the endless thick forests, climbing creepers, and strangling quick-growing vegetation. The traveler’s tales of wild beasts, reptiles, snakes, mosquitos, and especially gorillas, that “hybrid animal par excellence,”²⁴ provide not only the backdrop but the essence and meaning of Africa.²⁵ The African is the embodiment of the absolute Other, and the racial gaze of the White judges, humiliates, and deliberately and cruelly denies human recognition to the Black. Paradoxically, the racial gaze produces a twisted recognition. The White racist, who subjugated, enslaved and colonized African peoples, transfers domination into sexual fantasy. He desires and fears the Black, who is perceived as the source of virility. White civilization’s sublimation of libidinous drives, primarily sexual, finds an outlet in the production of the Black as sexual Other – deviant, oversexed, and sensuous. The Black is body, a set of external organs – woolly hair, flat broad nose, thick lips, and especially an oversized penis – living in immediacy and sensuousness, which cannot be controlled and thus is beyond morality. The Black male is synonymous with the penis, to be set alongside the “Hottentot venus” with an enlarged clitoris and buttocks, and the veiled Algerian woman with an unseen exotic erotic.²⁶ The gaze is simultaneously haunted by hate, fear, anxiety, and sexual desire of the Black body. The racist gaze thus suffers from double consciousness, the consciousness of superiority and the consciousness of inadequacy, incompleteness, an incompleteness that is manifest in the visual desire of the Other, the Black Other. For Fanon, the focus is not the revolt against this representation, but its life as it is internalized by “the Black.” For example, Sarjie Baartman (“the Hottentot venus”) died at 26. Desiring to return home, she could no longer live as an object of the racial gaze; in contrast the alienated Blacks of *Black Skin* do not want to escape the anti-Black world but escape Blackness. Black intersubjectivity is mediated by the White Other even if the White Other is absent.

The racial gaze of the White seals the Black into a “crushing objecthood.” “Look a Black,” says the French child to its mother. It

objectifies and seals the Black's fate as a Black. The White Other puts the Black together as a phobogenic object which expresses the repressed desires of European society:

In the remotest depths of the European unconscious an inordinately Black hollow has been made in which the most immoral impulses, the most shameful desires lie dormant. And as every man climbs toward whiteness and light, the European has tried to repudiate its uncivilized self, which had attempted to defend itself. When European civilization came into contact with the Black world, with those savage peoples, everyone agreed. Those Blacks were the principle of evil. (BS, 190)

Following Freud, Fanon notes that European civilization has an "irrational longing for unusual eras of sexual license." Through the Black, Europeans can realize their imaginary selves, discover their "inner selves," like Joseph Conrad's Kurtz, in the heart of darkness. By projecting these desires onto the Black, and behaving as if the Black really has the desires that the White has projected onto them, these desires and neuroses are allowed expression. The Black is a creation of the White, and in these projections "everything takes place on the genital level." In the White's mind the Black has tremendous sexual powers. The racial gaze is both a polymorphous perverse sexual desire, and sexual projection. The innermost repressed and sadistic and masochistic desires are externalized and projected onto the Black. Lynching is a sexual revenge, and the Black, who is always a threat to White women, is cruelly beaten and castrated.

The racial gaze operates at the level of the body's surfaces. Its size and differences are measured and catalogued with a special interest in the sexual organs. The image of the Black is not only biological but unambiguously sexual. In the colonial world, the colonizer thinks in terms of the phallus and projects it onto the Black: "The black man's sword is a sword. When he has thrust it into your wife, she has really felt something. It is a revelation. In the chasm that it has left, your little toy is lost. . . . Four Blacks with their penises exposed would fill a cathedral" (Michel Cournot's *Martinique* quoted in Fanon, BS, 169). The Black is a penis. The preoccupation with the bestial, with sexual prowess, and with the length of the penis expresses the innermost secrets, fears, and desires of the European. "Negrophobia" expresses the European's neurosis and complexes.

The racial gaze operates in the Manichean frame. The Black is the symbol of evil, of Sadism, of Satan, of moral dirtiness, of sin. These symbols, projected onto the Black over and over again, create the basis for an inferiority complex where the White Other becomes the "mainstay of his preoccupations."

The literal translation of "L'expérience vécue du Noir," chapter 5 of *Black Skin*, "the lived experience of the Black," indicates the influence of phenomenology. The lived experience as a "body-subject" facing the world explicates how colonial racism has affected the corporeal existence of the colonized Black and presented "him" with "difficulties in the development of his bodily schema" (*BS*, 110).²⁷ The idea of "lived experience" alerts us to Fanon's appreciation of different starting points in Sartre's and Merleau-Ponty's methodology. For example, where Sartre argued that the fundamental struggle between consciousnesses creates social relations, for Merleau-Ponty it is the social nature of consciousness that creates the possibility of conflict. This methodological emphasis is repeated in Fanon's critique of psychoanalysis, where he puts the emphasis on the *social* character of the inferiority complex and nonrecognition in an anti-Black racist society.

The Triple Person: Merleau-Ponty, Sartre, and Lived Experience

The Black is aiming for the universal, but on the screen his Black essence, his Black "nature," is kept intact: always a servant / always obsequious and smiling / me never steal, me never lie / eternally "y'a bon banania." (Fanon, *Black Skin*)

At the conclusion of this study, I want the world to recognize with me the open door of every consciousness. (Fanon, *Black Skin*)

By myself I cannot be free, nor can I be conscious or a man; and that other whom I first saw as a rival is my rival only because he is myself. I discover myself in the other. (Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception*)

Fanon opens "L'expérience vécue du Noir" by arguing that ontology alone does not "permit us to understand the being of the Black man" because there is not really a Black being or essence. "Being," for Merleau-Ponty, is the sense of a body in a spatiality of situation, or as Fanon puts it, "a definitive structuring of the self and of the

world." It is definitive, Fanon adds, because it creates a real dialectic between my body and the world (BS, 111).

Merleau-Ponty's description of the spatiality of situation²⁸ is repeated by Fanon. There is no question of a Black bodily essence:

I know that if I want to smoke, I shall have to reach out my right arm and take the pack of cigarettes lying at the other end of the table. The matches, however, are in the drawer on the left, and I shall have to lean back slightly. And all these movements are made not out of habit but out of implicit knowledge. A slow composition of my *self* as a body in the middle of a spatial and temporal world. (BS, 111)

What happens when the condition is that of Black in an anti-Black situation?

At the end of chapter 5, Fanon refers to a statement in the film *Home of the Brave* (released in France as *Je suis un Nègre*) about the shared perception of the amputee and the Black. "The crippled veteran of the Pacific war says to my brother 'Resign yourself to your color the way I got used to my stump; we're both victims'" (BS, 140). In the film the Black character has undergone a psychological trauma. The setting is the South Pacific during World War Two, and five American soldiers (four White and one Black) take part in a dangerous mission. Whereas the White soldiers suffer physical wounds, the Black's wounds, expressed as paralysis and amnesia, are the result of an inferiority complex triggered by racial remarks made by his friend during a firefight. The feelings of betrayal are exacerbated by a feeling of guilt. His friend is shot, but the Black character is unable to help him. Eventually the injured White makes it back to camp, only to die in the Black man's arms.

"Underneath we're all guys" is the positive multiracial message at the end of the film. But behind that message is another message, that the Black's neurosis is an individual not a social problem, created by the individual's sensitivity to racism. Blacks must simply get over these "feelings" and become resigned to their color. Fanon rejects the advice: "I refuse to accept that amputation." Why should he? But should the amputee?

In the *Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty spends some time discussing the way the amputee refuses to accept amputation, questioning the creation of and feeling in the phantom limb. The body image of the amputee and that of the Black in racist society is a shared one insofar as there is a degree of collapse of bodily projection. For both, the body (or non-body) becomes a "third" person;

one's relationship to it is like Sartre's "bad faith." What marks the difference between the amputee and the Black, however, is their status in the world. This is not to say that the amputee is not likely to be objectified in the eyes of the Other (though a prosthetic limb may occlude the objectifying gaze), but that for the amputee the task is to *reacquire* an ongoing subject-object relationship between the body and the world.²⁹ Blacks, on the other hand, wholly determined by the Other, are locked into their Blackness because they are locked into their body *qua* Blackness. Reestablishing a new relationship between body and the world cannot be created prosthetically: for the Black acquiring a White mask expresses a decomposition rather than a recomposition of bodily projection because one cannot hide how one is *seen* by an Other. Racism is a social problem that requires a solution at the societal level.

Thus the phenomenology of being in the world changes when the situation is saturated by color. Where for Merleau-Ponty, "the body image is finally a way of stating that my body is in-the-world,"³⁰ for Fanon there are times when the Black is not in the world but "locked into his body" (*BS*, 225). Where for Merleau-Ponty, "one's body is the third term . . . as far as spatiality is concerned,"³¹ for Fanon the fact that the Black "must be Black *in relation* to the White" means that the consciousness of body for the person of color is not only a "third person consciousness," but a person triply split.

When "the Black man is among own" (which assumes a certain level of equality and recognition), Fanon argues that Merleau-Ponty's conception of intersubjectivity appears correct, yet in a colonial society "every ontology is made unattainable" (*BS*, 109). There is a tension because the relation of Being and Other is determined by the absolute of color and is thus *inauthentic*.

In a racist society where the image of Whiteness has been powerfully internalized, Sartre's conflictual and dualistic philosophy appears a powerful explanatory tool to understand the causes and effects of the child's statement, "see the Black! I am frightened!" (*BS*, 112). Driven back, as it were, into "race," an ontology based on mutual reciprocity is, by definition, sealed off. Though the existence of the Black is dependent on the White, the Black has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the White.

While it is true that for Fanon as for Sartre, existence precedes essence, the Black's existence is defined by the essence of Blackness (evil, lazy, bestial, and biological). The Being is reduced to a corporeal malediction and the body has been snatched away and in its

place is put a "racial epidermal schema." Thus, in contrast to what Merleau-Ponty describes as being aware of the body as a "third person,"³² Fanon replies, my body is "a triple person. . . . It was not that I was finding febrile coordinates in the world. I existed triply. I occupied space" (*BS*, 112). Blacks are not simply individual actors responsible for themselves, they are responsible for their race (culture) and their ancestors (history). Quite an existential load. On top of that there is the racist caricature, the smiling Black who says "sho enough good eating," the smiling Senegalese on the popular breakfast cereal *Banania*, saying "y'a bon Banania."

From the perspective of the Black, Sartre's proposal of an absolute freedom in *Being and Nothingness*, projecting a consciousness which can, as an act of sheer will, tear through inferiority complexes that have structured one's life appears eminently concrete. In the Manichean world of colonialism that Fanon depicts, the very fact that Sartre allows no other perspective, and no space to quibble about shades of gray, is a plus. On the other hand, Merleau-Ponty's perspective that the lived body cannot be divorced from the world as experienced complicates things. These relationships are, according to Merleau-Ponty, "the third term between the for-itself and the in-itself" which Sartre lacks.³³ For Merleau-Ponty, freedom is rooted in the world and mediated through the body. The body appears to limit the possibility of freedom, but it actually makes such a possibility concrete in that it is the relation to other bodies and thus freedom and the limits to freedom that are confirmed through intersubjective relations. Freedom is a social act, not simply an act of individual will (itself a product of social relations), just as values are socially constructed and thus changeable. Where the social world is crucial to Merleau-Ponty's conceptualization of freedom and intersubjectivity, for Sartre the essence of all intersubjective relations are the same "not *Mitsein*, but conflict."³⁴ For Merleau-Ponty the truth of "the hell of other people" is understanding that the perceiving subject is already an interrelation of subject and object, of self and Other, of body and mind, and is already "open" to other bodies and minds. "The world is not what I think, but what I live through," writes Merleau-Ponty in *Phenomenology of Perception*, "I am open to the world, I have no doubt that I am in communication with it, but I do not possess it; it is inexhaustible." Because consciousness is mediated by lived experience in a social environment, it does not mean that *mutual* recognition exists. In his reading of Hegel's master/slave dialectic, for example, Merleau-Ponty sees the necessity of the struggle for recognition to get

beyond “unilateral recognition.” Unlike Sartre, and indeed Kojève, who make unilateralism an ontological principle, Merleau-Ponty recognizes there is a processual character in Hegel’s master/slave conflict. The conflict is a *moment that must be experienced*. The goal of “mutual recognition” is given content by the drama that consciousness experiences in getting there.

One’s experience of the body is part of one’s experience of the world. This is no doubt true for the Black who, “walled in by color,” has two different experiences of body and being in the world. When race is added to the subject/object dialectic of self and the world, it seems to fall apart, replaced by a dualism that looks remarkably like Sartre’s ontology of self and Other: two different species, the Black and the White. In the Manichean colonial world there are no choices, only a series of double binds. If Blacks renounce their bodies as products of their internalization of the gaze of the Other – in other words, the third (who in this case is White) – one is forced into a bad faith³⁵ either by creating a solipsistic community before consciousness, or creating a make-believe world of assimilated colorless angels (*WE*, 218). In such a bind, how does one become conscious of oneself and in doing so change the world? Merleau-Ponty, grounding consciousness in the social world, offers an insight.

For Fanon, Sartre’s dialectic in *Black Orpheus* leads to an intellectualized rather than existential project. Privileging the subjective, existential, over the objective dialectic, Fanon accuses Sartre of forgetting concrete Black experience. Sartre had forgotten that “The Black suffers in his body quite differently from the White man” (*BS*, 138). Though Fanon had almost essentialized the difference between the body experience of the Black and the White, it was grounded in a social and historical context and was the result of a lived experience not an ontological flaw: one is not born Black but becomes Black, to rephrase de Beauvoir. While Fanon criticized the possibility of reciprocity in Hegel’s master/slave dialectic when color was added, he rejected Sartre’s radical dichotomy between being-for-self and being-for-others. There is a power relation making Sartre’s radical dichotomy between myself and others, which he posits as an absolute, seem correct. But Fanon’s position is purely contextual, whereas Sartre precludes one *ever* experiencing the Other as intersubjective and reciprocal, seeing it as an expression of inauthenticity and bad faith.

The idea of mutual intersubjectivity is not possible in Sartre’s existentialism. For Fanon, mutual recognition remains a goal but because recognition is closed off by the Other (who is White), Fanon

is “driven back” into race. He makes reference to Black consciousness but notes that it doesn’t change the situation: “The few working-class people whom I have had the chance to know in Paris never took it on themselves to pose the problem of the discovery of a Black past. They knew they were Black and they knew they had to struggle” (BS, 224).

Dialectical Impasses: Hegel and the Black

The disaster of the man of color lies in the fact that he was enslaved.
(Fanon, *Black Skin*)

“Since the Black man is a former slave,” Fanon writes at the end of chapter 2 of *Black Skin*, “we will turn to Hegel” (BS, 62).³⁶ Though his penultimate chapter contains Fanon’s most sustained critique of Hegel’s master/slave dialectic, Fanon’s concern with reciprocity and his claim that “man is only human to the extent to which he tries to impose his existence on another man to be recognized by him” (BS, 216) are central features of the radical humanist project that is repeated throughout *Black Skin*. This section investigates some of the issues posed by the introduction of race into a dialectic of recognition.

The question, “who am I?” is implicit in his first chapter, “The Black and Language,” when he writes that “To speak is to exist absolutely for the Other” (BS, 17). To possess a language assumes a culture and a world expressed by that language. Just as Hegel cites language as the crucial element of reciprocity, Fanon also finds it necessary to begin with this medium by which the Black experiences “the Other.” In Hegel’s scenario, reciprocity between individual consciousnesses requires a common tongue. Language and recognition presuppose each other. To speak to others is to recognize them, to acknowledge them as persons. Where this type of language is not present there will be struggle.

Hegel’s master/slave dialectic is initially a struggle to the death, and the victor expects service not discourse. In the colonial situation the language used indicates that no real reciprocity obtains. Because the colonizers do not respect the Other’s culture, the only language the colonizers speak is the language of violence: “Every colonized people – in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its

local cultural originality – finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation” (BS, 18). If language is one way in which the human being “possesses the world [and] . . . take[s] on the world” (BS, 18, 38), in the colonial relationship it is intimately connected with the absence of recognition. The master’s language is a *means* of advancement within the White world, but the Black who speaks White is still deprived of recognition. Whiteness is still the measure by which to judge the mastery of *correctness*. Consequently recognition, grounded in an awareness of similarity, is blocked. The slave who embraces the logos of the master can at best hope for only a pseudo-recognition – a White mask.³⁷ In these circumstances, the master’s language does not proceed from a recognized commonality; the imposition of the master’s language is a violence whose victim is the indigenous culture. Therefore, the reciprocity at the heart of the Hegelian dialectic is not forthcoming when viewed in terms of Black/White relations.

Fanon has been viewed as simply a Kojèvean interpreter of Hegel. While Alexandre Kojève’s influential reading of Hegel is part of the context, Fanon’s critique of Hegel is original. An aspect of that originality is his describing the dialectic as “untidy,” or open-ended. Fanon’s introduction of race into the master/slave dialectic is a profound though largely overlooked original contribution developed in the context of the postwar “Hegel” renaissance in France.³⁸ Rather than simply dismissing Hegel as a philosopher of imperialism, he engages the methodological core of this key thinker of European modernity – the dialectic.

A Negative Dialectic?

Fanon’s project to get beyond Manicheanism also acknowledges that the inversion of colonial Manicheanism is Manichean. Fanon loudly proclaims that Europe is built on the backs of African slaves, that Europe is a Third World creation, but rather than simply dismissing European thought, Fanon critically engages it. Unwilling to be defined by the Other, Fanon does not shy away from it but embraces a Manichean reaction to the construction by Other, following it through to its conclusion. By embracing the reaction to the White construction of the Black, or the colonial construction of the colonized, Fanon believes he can get beyond it. Though the reaction to the Other’s construction remains within the ground of the first, that is, it is a reactive action, Fanon believes that it can produce

a new moment of self-knowledge and thereby the possibility of exploding Manicheanism.

Just as the eye is not simply a mirror but a "correcting mirror," the racial gaze is not a human condition but a social construction that can be resolved by "correcting cultural errors." The basis for such a correction is by "returning" to what Fanon considers the phenomenologically "real," the lived experience of the Black in a racist society. The method, which Fanon calls a "method of regression,"³⁹ parodies the colonial ideologue's notion of the primitive Black, a being of sense not reason: "Since no agreement was possible on the level of reason, I threw myself back to unreason . . . out of the necessities of my struggle I had chosen the method of regression" (*BS*, 123). Just as Fanon argues that to get to the source of the Black's alienation psychoanalytically requires going to the stage "preceding" the Oedipus complex, namely the pre-Oedipal stage of socialization, to get to the source of the master/slave dialectic through the prism of race requires "returning" to the moment of self-certainty preceding desire. Paradoxically this "return," while appearing to reproduce the colonial, and typically Hegelian, attitude toward the African as a child mired in sensuousness, is rearticulated in the dialectic of Black consciousness where Fanon insists that consciousness be posited from itself.

In proclaiming the certainty of self in the world of racial Manicheanism, Fanon argues that the dialectic is forced back to a stage "preceding" desire (*BS*, 134–5) and in doing so, "has to create its normativity out of itself," as Habermas puts it. In terms of Black consciousness, Fanon declares, "The dialectic brings necessity into the foundation of my freedom and drives me out of myself." In other words, the movement from self-certainty derives from the historical necessity to struggle for freedom but its form is not already mapped out by Europe's "development." It is, instead, a history posited absolutely from itself which finds its own meaning (*BS*, 134). "Without any possibility of escape," says Habermas, speaking of modernity, it must make a beginning from itself. Thus, moving to a preceding stage does not mean consequently following a prepared route. The originality of this new beginning is Fanon's addition of race, which resituates the struggle of self-consciousness in an unequal situation. Rather than giving up the dialectic, Fanon shifts it, intimating his dialectic of liberation in risk,⁴¹ which "means I go beyond life toward a supreme good that is the transformation of subjective certainty of my own worth into a universally valid objective truth" (*BS*, 218).

The first recasting of Hegel's dialectic in *Black Skin* is negative because, for the Black, dialectical development is blocked off in non-reciprocity; the Black is frozen by the gaze of the White. Sartre's "look,"⁴² therefore, seems far more suggestive for Fanon's conceptualization of the racial gaze than Hegel's dialectic of reciprocity. With Sartre, the Other's look becomes a way in which one apprehends oneself as being seen in the world from the standpoint of the world. Sartre's "look" can freeze the Other, but the process is mutual. For Fanon, Sartre is right insofar as one apprehends the world from the standpoint of alienated consciousness, but unlike Sartre, for whom the idea of mutual recognition is a tragic farce, an example of "lack" and impossibility in the human condition, Fanon believes in its possibility (*BS*, 41). Reciprocity has been blocked through the racial gaze but the racial gaze is not an ontological absolute. Implicitly disagreeing with Sartre's position in *Being and Nothingness* that love amounts only to frustration, Fanon connects the idea of "authentic love" with an ethic of reciprocity, "wishing for others what one postulates for oneself" as one of "the permanent values of human reality" (*BS*, 41).

Fanon's discussions of the woman of color's "Manichean conception of the world" (*BS*, 44) are grounded in a belief in genuine reciprocity. That is why, he says, "I endeavor to trace its imperfections, its perversions" (*BS*, 42), which he then attempts to do in the discussion of heterosexual love between Black and White. One particularly striking perversion of reciprocity is his description of how the woman of color's simple "Manichean conception" of reality leads to magical thinking, investing with supernatural powers the topography of the colonial city. Her dream of turning White, of becoming one with the White world and high society, embodies Hegel's "subjective certainty made flesh" (*BS*, 44). The truth of this sense-certain consciousness reflects an inverted world where the view from above dominates life below. The racial economy of the colonial city, which has been experienced since childhood, becomes flesh in the woman of color's Manichean "subjective certainty." She wants to live in a mansion on the hill, dominating the city, and that can be made real by magically turning White. Fanon notes that it would be easy to see the dialectics of being and having in this behavior; for the Black, there is no way out of the social structure except through the White world. Thus the dialectic is insular, anti-social, and blocked off and described by social atomism and alienation: "the Black man is on his own [with] no occasion . . . to experience his being through others," because "every ontology is

made unattainable in a colonized and civilized society" (BS, 109). In other words, being Black comes into being and has meaning only in relation to the White, though the converse is not so. "This is a form of recognition that Hegel had not envisioned," comments Fanon. The unequal relationship is based on the fact that the indigenous cultures were "wiped out." The dialectic becomes motionless.

Since freedom is "given" by the White, recognition is only possible if the Black man becomes White, or at least extremely light-skinned, but definitely unlike the "real Black" (BS, 69). The only realm of freedom for the French Black therefore is the "inner life." Yet the Black does not exist alone, but only in terms of the White: "As everyone has pointed out, alterity for the Black man is not the Black but the White man" (BS, 97). Defined in the context of the White, the Black is "an object in the midst of other objects," meaning that the Black has been stripped of identity and "abraded into nonbeing." What is finally at stake in the colonial situation is the replacement of the indigenous consciousness by "an authority symbol representing the master" who is charged with maintaining order and control (BS, 145). It is this harsh reality that pervades Fanon's discussion of "The Black and Hegel."

The Black and Reciprocity

A Negro is a Negro, only under certain conditions does he become a slave. (Marx, *German Ideology*)

Fanon's "The Black and Hegel" begins with a quote from Hegel to support his claim that absolute reciprocity exists at the heart of the Hegelian dialectic: "Self-consciousness exists *in itself* and *for itself*, in that and by the fact that it exists for another self-consciousness; that is to say, it *is* only by being acknowledged or recognized" (quoted BS, 216). This absolute reciprocity involves mutual recognition and reason where "I am immediately," according to Hegel, "self-related."⁴³ But the stage of consciousness achieved in the master/slave dialectic arrives only at the threshold of realizing that self-consciousness has to be a unity of "different self-consciousnesses, each for itself . . . An I which is we and a we which is I." The process appears contradictory because the master/slave dialectic starts with the idea of genuine reciprocity, though it does not come to fruition there but only begins its journey. It is the failure to attain reciprocity that drives the dialectic on.

The idea of mutual recognition remains central to Fanon's understanding of Hegel: "Man is human only to the extent to which he tries to impose his existence on another man in order to be recognized by him." Without recognition, the individual remains focused on the Other as the theme of action (BS, 216–17). Fanon pursues the question by asking, what would happen if action came from only one side? "If I close the circuit, if I prevent the accomplishment of movement in two directions, I keep the Other within himself. Ultimately, I deprive him even of his being-for-self" (BS, 217). Here Fanon interjects: "There is not an open conflict between White and Black. One day the White master, *without conflict*, recognized the Black slave" (BS, 217). The turning point of Fanon's discussion of Hegel comes when this is repeated: "Historically, the Black steeped in the inessentiality of servitude was set free by the master. He did not fight for his freedom" (BS, 219). The Black slave was acted upon: "The upheaval reached the Blacks from without" (BS, 221). The White masters had decided to "be nice to the niggers" (BS, 220).

The absolute reciprocity that Fanon emphasizes as the foundation of the Hegelian dialectic appears impossible in the world of Black and White relations. Rather than struggle, the White master grants freedom to the Black slave. Not having "risked" life, the slave cannot attain the truth of "recognition as an independent self-consciousness" (BS, 219). Because freedom here is not a result of struggle, new values are not created, nor is the "cost of freedom" known. Instead of embarking upon a changed life where every relationship is radically altered, the Black merely goes from one "way of life to another." Fanon's slave is far different from Hegel's: "Steeped in the inessentiality of servitude," how could there be an affirmation of human possibilities?

Though Fanon returns to the issues of freedom and independence, he believes that any chance for reciprocity is utterly ruptured when color is introduced, because there is absolutely no recognition of the slave by the master. Any relationship between the "civilized" (White) and the "colonized" (Black) is quite unattainable (BS, 109). For Fanon, the Black/White division is both naked and absolute. The fact that the White world has barred the Black from all participation is something that has not been given enough attention.

Risking one's life is emphasized in Fanon's citation from Hegel: "The individual who has not staked his life, may, no doubt, be recognized as a *person* but he has not attained the truth of this recognition as an independent self-consciousness" (BS, 219). When Fanon argues that a major difference between the Black slave and Hegel's

slave is that the former has neither struggled nor risked life for freedom, he assumes that Hegel refers to a physical conflict between the slave and master in the slave's struggle for freedom. However, Hegel maintains that the slave first achieves a "mind of his own" not through a physical confrontation *with* the master but by subverting immediate "desire" and working on the "thing" *for* the master. Yet Fanon argues that when the slave is Black, work provides no opportunity for self-development. Color becomes the sole determinant. Whatever the Black works on, immediacy takes over. The specific experience of Black servitude to the White master induced in the slave a "double consciousness" where everything solid and stable is continually being shaken to its foundations.

In this double life, the Black slave is subservient not only because of servitude but also because of color. Or rather, the slave becomes synonymous with the Black, and vice versa, and the impossibility of changing this position and becoming like the master is enforced by the color line, so that the Black slave's quest for recognition is expressed by remaining dependent on the White master who defines the slave's existence. Unlike the Hegelian slave, the Black slave's slavish regard of the master means that the slave abandons the things worked on as a source of self-awareness. Consequently, Fanon implies that when color is involved the slave cannot "lose himself," as Hegel puts it, "in the object and find in his work the source of liberation." For the dependent Black slave, the only way out of this dilemma is to fantasize about joining, or emulating, the White world. Instead of their own mind there are constant attempts to gain White attention and White approval (*BS*, 51). But this approval never comes, and the Black slave arrives at an impasse which creates ego withdrawal. Fanon records his difference with Hegel in a footnote:

For Hegel there is reciprocity; here the master laughs at the consciousness of the slave. What he wants from the slave is not recognition *but work*. In the same way, the slave here is no way identifiable with the slave who loses himself in the object and finds in his work the source of his liberation. *The Black wants to be like the master*. Therefore he is less independent than the Hegelian slave. In Hegel, the slave turns away from the master toward the object. Here the slave turns toward the master and abandons the object. (*BS*, 220-1; emphasis added)

Reciprocity in the colonial experience is not so much deformed as closed off by the color barrier. Fanon further maintains that the

slave cannot win recognition through labor; since the master wants only work and is not at all interested in recognition. Similarly, in his reading of Hegel, Kojève argues that if the master is not a brute, he will never be satisfied and the master eventually reaches an essentially tragic impasse. He wants service, of course, but he also wants recognition. However, the only recognition he receives is from a slave who is "not a truly human being." "The victor in the bloody struggle for pure prestige will therefore not be 'satisfied' by his victory."⁴⁴ Kojève adds that the master's desire incites the pursuit of new conquests, but each subsequent subjugation leads to the same result. Since the master would rather die an honorable death than receive recognition from a slave, there are only two ways to get beyond this impasse: "The Master can either make himself *brutish* in pleasure or *die* on the field of battle as Master, but he cannot *live consciously* with the knowledge that he is satisfied by what he *is*."⁴⁵ In Kojève's terms, the colonial master is that very "brute" who just wants work. Not interested in recognition, the colonial master reaches no existential impasse. Instead, he is content to profit from the slave, in whom the possibility of consciousness would be a laughable prospect. Money, in the modern world, has totally displaced honor, or, perhaps more accurately, he knows that money can buy honor and recognition.

The French didn't acquire colonies out of a desire for recognition, unless perhaps from British competitors; from the colonies, however, they sought raw materials and cheap labor. For the colonized, just as for Marx's proletariat, there could be no dignity in labor when labor represented nothing but pure unadulterated exploitation. In Fanon's view, labor unions and reformist parties are only manifestations of a continual turning to the master, who in turn only laughs at the slave and the quest for recognition. The colonial situation presents a polarizing and paralyzing dilemma, immune to reform. The Black slave must eschew the White world and its approbation if he is to find some way to reciprocity.

It is worth pausing to consider why, in Fanon's account, the Black slave doesn't turn toward the object of labor. In Hegel's schema, the turn toward the object is at first compelled through absolute fear and dread of the master. Then, in the course of continued service, consciousness comes to the slave. For Fanon, the Black slave only experiences a general dissolution of being, the wretched result from the prolonged and dehumanizing fear and dread of the master. There is dread but no new beginning through labor. Unlike Hegel's Lord, the colonial landlord or entrepreneur does not want personal

service, but only labor that ensures profit. Like the capitalist, he has no immediate interest in the product of the slave (for instance, whether it is bauxite or linen) nor does he recognize anything special about the slave's relation to "nature." He only cares that the "slave" work hard. What Fanon describes seems to have more in common with the "wage slave" than Hegel's slave.

One could argue that Hegel's slave also wants to emulate the master. However, for the Black slave to be like the master means something quite different, namely, *looking like* the master – in other words, becoming White. This internalization of the desirability of being White, Fanon notes, is "a form of recognition that Hegel had not envisaged": the dilemma for the Black slave is that he ideally must "turn White or disappear" (BS, 63). How then can the Black recognize the possibility of existence? How then can the Black escape this circle, this "genuinely Manichean concept of the world" where White and Black represent two poles of a world in perpetual conflict? (BS, 44).

If we grant the point that the goal of the Hegelian system is mutual recognition, its significance becomes *more not less* important for Fanon. Fanon implicitly agrees with Hegel that what still "lies ahead for consciousness is the experience of what Spirit is." One has to consider the "series of displacements in which self-consciousness fails to recognize itself in another self-consciousness."⁴⁶ The inability of the Black to gain recognition from the White necessitated, for Fanon, a displacement, or a "retreat" to a mind of one's own, Black consciousness as a possible ground for mutual reciprocity.

Unchaining the Dialectic

Fanon describes the dialectic of master and slave using the same terms with which Hegel discussed the initial struggle of two equal self-consciousnesses seeking recognition.⁴⁷ After portraying the initial "quest for absoluteness" within each self-consciousness which leads to the struggle for mastery, Fanon reintroduces the physical struggle into the later discussion after the master and the slave have been established. For him, color has already determined the outcome and made it absolute. There does not exist a prior moment of two equal self-consciousnesses. In the colonial situation, the Black has no capacity to enslave the Other. Fanon uses the following comment from Hegel, which refers to the initial period

of struggle, as the centerpiece of his critique of the master/slave dialectic: "It is solely by risking life that freedom is obtained" (BS, 218). Without such risk in the slave's struggle against the master, there can be no genuine recognition, independence, or freedom.

Because Fanon insists on the impossibility of self-consciousness coming to the Black slave through "forced labor" (BS, 238), he would seem to agree that the master/slave situation is "only the repetitive fulfillment of the master's wants."⁴⁸ Fanon's narrative is dominated by the master because with freedom granted, the slave has no impulse to transcend the slavish condition. As Hegel puts it, "Independence without absolute negativity . . . remains without the required significance of recognition."⁴⁹ What is at issue for Fanon is that when the Black slave has occasionally fought, the fight has always been driven by "values secreted by his masters," values such as "White liberty and White justice" (BS, 221). The Black slave is "whitewashed" (as it were) and has no memory of the struggle or anguish of liberty. Inasmuch as servility represents an attitude to consciousness, Hegel holds that any emancipation granted by the master, or any other party, does not create freedom for the slave (not even the partially empowering attitude to freedom found in stoicism). Without the slave's own self-secured self-consciousness, no "liberty" will, in fact, create freedom. The Black slave is "doomed" (BS, 221)⁵⁰ not because self-development through labor is blocked but because the slave has not "aimed for the death of the other."⁵¹ Hegel similarly argues that the slave who has not experienced "absolute fear" will be "still enmeshed in servitude."⁵²

What Kojève calls slave ideologies conform with Fanon's idea of the Black slave who has not fought for freedom. For example, Kojève argues that the skeptic "without conflict, without effort . . . obtains – in and through God – equality with the master: equality is but a mirage, like everything in this World of the senses in which Slavery and Mastery hold sway."⁵³ For Fanon the world of master and slave continues because, instead of an open conflict, the White master acts as God and "grants" freedom: "One day the White master, *without conflict* recognized the Black slave" (BS, 217). Just as for Hegel stoicism and skepticism are attitudes that can be assumed by either masters or slaves, Fanon adds that the Black does not become a master, but a "slave who has been allowed to assume the attitude of the master," at a moment when there are no longer supposed to be masters or slaves.

In the Black/White context, a Black consciousness that posits itself as self-certain, even if it does not physically confront colo-

nialism, can to a degree transcend the colonial mind set. As Hegel puts it, free self-consciousness becomes aware of its own truth by the experience of being “forced back into itself” and thereby being “transformed into a truly independent consciousness.”⁵⁴ Black consciousness, Fanon writes in *Black Skin*, “is its own follower” and at the same time the very dialectic of internalization “brings necessity into the foundation of my freedom and drives me out of myself” (*BS*, 135).

The imperative now becomes one of recollection and the rediscovery of the suppressed. Yet Fanon concludes *Black Skin* wondering what the existence of a Black philosopher as great as Plato would mean to the eight-year-old child working in the sugar fields? It would not change the child’s life. He also speculates whether a change in the self-consciousness of the eight-year-old in the sugar field would make a difference. Fanon praises the worker who knows that Black consciousness is not enough and knows the necessity of a physical struggle. In Hegel’s scenario, self-consciousness of freedom only presents a new attitude toward freedom; it does not equal freedom. But this attitude to self, at the same time, denies or rejects the power of the Other. It is a discovery, Fanon argues, that “shakes the world” (*WE*, 45). And, at the conclusion of “The Black and Hegel,” he speaks of the different situation of young Africans who “sought to maintain their alterity. Alterity of rupture, of conflict, of battle.” The former slave, Fanon adds, “needs a challenge to his humanity” (*BS*, 222). This challenge returns us, in a sense, to the initial stage of the master/slave dialectic where two equal self-consciousnesses fought for recognition. This dialectic is replayed in *The Wretched*:

He finds out that the settler’s skin is not of any more value than a native’s skin . . . All the new, revolutionary assurance of the native stems from it. For if, in fact, my life is worth as much as the settler’s, his glance no longer shrivels me up nor freezes me. I am no longer on tenterhooks in his presence. (*WE*, 45)

“The native’s” certainty during the modern period of decolonization is not really a return but a leap to a reason far more critical than the White master’s. This reason, where consciousness is “the certainty of being all truth,”⁵⁵ is characterized by the fact that the master must be expelled. Only then can the question of human reciprocity, where consciousness opens up to the multiplicity of I’s, begin.

While *Black Skin* laments the dependence of the Black slave “historically set free by the master” and therefore “content in thanking him for his freedom,” *The Wretched* asserts that the colonized has been in constant, though not always apparent, revolt. It is true that in both books the specificity of the colonized slave adds a new dimension. In both, Fanon emphasizes the absence of reciprocity. Yet if in *Black Skin* this absence denotes the lack of something desirable, in *The Wretched* it becomes the grounds for an absolutely new beginning from which a new humanity is established. Genuine reciprocity, he now argues, can only be achieved by leaving Europe. In a turning of the tables on Hegel, Fanon argues that the dialectic has become motionless in Europe. Europe has reached the master’s impasse and becomes the “unessential consciousness,”⁵⁶ whereas Africa, the site of the slave’s revolt, best expresses the project of human reciprocity.

In marked contrast to the former slave who, Fanon complained, is bereft of even a “trace of the struggle for liberty,” the colonized peasant, “embodying history,” is endowed with a “mental picture of action” to “wreck the colonial world” (*WE*, 40). In the context of the Algerian revolution, Fanon does not address action in general terms but instead locates a specific revolutionary subject, willing to “risk” life and work for the cause of liberation. Yet before turning to Fanon’s work in the Algerian revolution, we must go back to the “internal revolution” promoted in *Black Skin*, especially the dialectics of Black consciousness.

The addition of race to the master/slave dialectic first appears to take us outside of the dialectic itself toward a Manichean conception of the world, but consciousness is, in fact, forced back into self-certainty and the dialectic reappears in Black consciousness which becomes a basis for a new cognition. At the same time, the method of regression appears contradictory, especially in light of Fanon’s quotation from Marx as the epigraph for his concluding chapter, “The social revolution . . . cannot draw its poetry from the past, but only from the future” (quoted *BS*, 223). However, Fanon’s return to the problematic of “authentic disalienation,” as a revolutionary reordering “in the most materialistic meaning of the word” (*BS*, 12), is in quite a different register when the “method of regression” is understood *not* as a return to or invention of the past but as critical self-reflection. In other words, the method of internalization, or inwardization, gives action its direction. Rather than a timeless human essence, Fanon’s humanism emerges from the multilayered struggle for *self*-determination. So understood, an “authentic alien-

ation" has to "find its own content" (Marx, quoted *BS*, 223). Rather than look to the Other, self-critical reflection understood socially rather than contemplatively necessitates a development out of itself. Fanon is not simply a man of action, he is also a critic of reactive action. The development of self-determining actional human beings, however, is central to his thinking and to the "method of regression," understood as part of an untidy, open-ended dialectic. Self-emancipation, a central tenet of the radical humanist project, is never automatic; for Fanon it requires a fundamental and continuous change in the nature of subjectivity, which in the colonial world means a fundamental shift in the situation of the dialectic.