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Anjali Prabhu

Research in African Literatures, Volume 37, Number 4, Winter 2006,
pp. 189-210 (Article)

Published by Indiana University Press
DOI: [10.1353/ral.2006.0099](https://doi.org/10.1353/ral.2006.0099)



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Narration in Frantz Fanon's *Peau noire masques blancs*: Some Reconsiderations

ANJALI PRABHU
Wellesley College

ABSTRACT

Frantz Fanon's writings are evoked in a variety of disciplines where groups of disenfranchised or marginalized peoples can be identified. More recently, his work has spawned discussion of the negotiating between such margins and more centrally identifiable locations of power. Fanon figures prominently in the notion of hybridity as it has been debated in postcolonial studies, particularly as a form of resistance that can be discerned in culture. In this reading of crucial passages taken mostly from chapter five of *Black Skin White Masks*, I suggest some significant ways in which the narrative shifts of this text operate an aesthetic and ethical pressure on salient understandings of hybridity.

Frantz Fanon's writings remain one of the most influential *œuvres* from which postcolonial criticism draws. His work is referred to in discussions on, among other things, violence, nationalism, inequality, racism, capitalism, elitism, sexuality, and ethnicity in both the postcolonial nation state and various metropolitan contexts. Given that the essays in *Black Skin White Masks* (hereafter BSWM) are all about the unremitting opposition of black and white as ontologically incompatible spaces, the keen interest in Fanon by theorists of hybridity requires further thought. One of the pitfalls of Homi K. Bhabha's appropriation of Fanon has been to read hybridity in Fanon in ways that are untenable, undoing or at least playing down the oppositionality upon which much of Fanon's thinking is predicated even in this earlier text.¹ As Neil Lazarus has noted, the appropriation of BSWM by this influential theorist of hybridity has been from "back to front" "thereby falsifying the testimony of Fanon's own evolution as a theorist" (87). Nevertheless, for Paul Gilroy, Fanon is less helpful in the current world because "his thinking remains bound to a dualistic logic we must now abjure" even to ask how cultural analyses and politics "might contribute to the new humanism he called for thirty years ago" (253). I will show the continuing relevance of Fanon's thought

owing, precisely, to the multiplicity of strategies he employs, which could potentially tie it to a notion of hybridity. Critics have also demonstrated that, in general, Fanon has been read out of context by theorists and isolated from the body of his entire work.² Here, I provide a close reading of parts of *BSWM* to show the ways in which Fanon's text (a) could give a different profile and understanding to the notion of hybridity and (b) requires keen attention to its narrative processes. In doing so, I will also draw attention to the manner in which the affect of this text becomes central to its theoretical moves.

Some Specifications for the Following Reading

My interest in this text is to first note how a certain conception of agency is programmatically laid out. This idea is of central importance to contemporary notions of hybridity, for which agency is a central preoccupation. Stuart Hall and Homi Bhabha, to take the most prominent readers of Fanon in such a context, pay little attention to Fanon himself *as* providing a coherent theorizing on the in-between. Rather, the metaphors, language, and tone of *BSWM* are extended and even adopted in a re-reading in which, particularly with reference to Bhabha, it is hard to see where Fanon's discourse ends and the later critics' begins.

As the title of his book indicates, Fanon's writing is about two radically different spaces: the space of the white colonizer and that of the black (often specifically Antillean) native. Fanon writes from his experience of being a black man in France in *BSWM*. The poignancy of these inspiring, poetic, personal essays comes, in effect, from such a separation between black and white. The fact that the black skin and white mask are configured from the *same* subject position—simultaneously or alternately—generates the need for negotiation that theorists such as Bhabha or Stuart Hall have rightly seized upon in their readings of Fanon.³ The idea of delaying the definitive interpretive moment, suggested early in this text by the "perpetual question" (*BSWM* 29), is a seductive invitation to acknowledge in Fanonian thought the precursor of postmodernist deferral and holds great possibility to read Fanon through Bhabha's notion of hybridity; however, I will further explore Fanon's text in an attempt to elucidate the wider implications for, and critique of, this dominant conception of hybridity in relation to Fanon.

Hybridity, in its colonial version was predicated upon the superiority of the white race. Hybrid examples of humans were seized upon to either reiterate that humans formed one species (by the monogenists) or to contest this conception by suggesting these different groups were incompatible and therefore to be considered naturally distinct (by the polygenists). Hybrids were of interest and presented a challenge to the colonial administration in its categorization of the different groups to be administered in the colonies (Dubois 99). Still, whether monogenist or polygenist, whether the argument was used for or against slavery, race subordination remained a constant. Robert Young defends hybridity (or hybridizing readings) as theorized by Bhabha, against the bulk of criticism of the latter's work. Such criticism focused on aspects of Bhabha's work in general (along with that of Said and Spivak in postcolonial criticism) that privilege textuality without paying sufficient attention to a politics of action. According to Young's defense, Bhabha's work is not incompatible with, and does not preclude, a more politically engaged form of analyses or indeed opposition, providing instead a "significant framework for that other work" (Young 163). What becomes evident in my reading of Fanon's

narrative, however, is that at a more basic textual level, Bhabha's hybridity, despite the latter's ceaseless return to Fanon, is indeed incompatible with Fanon's central ideas about the encounter with otherness. Relying upon what he calls the "language metaphor," which he identifies in the work of Cornel West and Stuart Hall in contemporary cultural studies, Bhabha shifts the emphasis from a more bland idea of cultural diversity to cultural difference. While this reorientation is indeed powerful, his development of the notion of agency "outside the sentence," (180) remains unconvincing. This is because it is unclear how the specification of the "enunciative present [. . .] provide[s] a process by which objectified others may be turned into subjects of their history and experience" (178). Without engaging in a full discussion of this issue, we may note with others the conflation of the realm of interpretation with the realm of other forms of action that occurs consistently in Bhabha's book. Fanon's disagreement with Sartre, which we will examine, clearly indicates the inadequacy to him of a notion of agency that could be "deprived of subjectivity" (Bhabha 191). Agency, for Fanon, is deeply intertwined with, and can only proceed from, a feeling of "authentic" subjectivity. Bhabha's picture of totality as constraining and non dialectic in the association he makes between this concept and the epistemological (177) as opposed to a more processual description of the enunciative is also incompatible with another basic requirement of Fanon's analyses. This lack of any notion of totality in Bhabha as well as his unwillingness to name the subject cannot be reconciled with the fundamental impulses of Fanon's work.⁴ For Fanon, on the other hand, the black man's subjecthood within the totality of colonial domination becomes the substructure of BSWM.

In what follows, I will examine two key passages that, to my mind, present Fanon's writing (BSWM in particular), as not just an inviting text upon which hybridity can be projected, but one where there occurs a specific dramatizing of the moves essential to a theory of hybridity. My close reading of parts of Fanon's text will show that neglect of the specific chronology and tactics in the narration, particularly of "The Fact of Blackness," makes for rather inaccurate assertions regarding statements that are attributed to Fanon's authorial "I."

Theorizing from Fanon: Consequences for Hybridity

Fanon lays out how a reading of interactivity must proceed from the level of the individual consciousness. Such a conception cannot be overlooked by those allying Fanon's thought with hybridity because the latter concept in postcolonial studies is concerned with theorizing and enabling the agency of subaltern subjects, which can be seen as the main impetus of intellectual and political activity in this field. In this framework, Fanon gives a very clear articulation of a notion of totality. This is the first of two key passages I wish to signal in relation to a theoretical discussion of hybridity via Fanon:

L'homme est mouvement vers le monde et vers son semblable. Mouvement d'agressivité, qui engendre l'asservissement ou la conquête; mouvement d'amour, don de soi, terme final de ce qu'il est convenu d'appeler *l'orientation éthique*. Toute conscience semble pouvoir manifester, simultanément ou alternativement, ces deux composantes. Énergétiquement, l'être aimé m'épaulera dans l'assomption de ma virilité, tandis que le souci de mériter l'admiration ou l'amour d'autrui tissera tout le long de ma vision du monde une superstructure valorisante." (33)

Man is motion toward the world and toward his like. A movement of aggression, which leads to enslavement or to conquest; a movement of love, a gift of self, the ultimate stage of what by common accord is called *ethical orientation*. Every consciousness seems to have the capacity to demonstrate these two components, simultaneously or alternatively. The person I love will strengthen me by endorsing my assumption of my manhood, while the need to earn the admiration or the love of others will weave, consistently along my vision of the world, a validating superstructure. (41; trans. modified; emphasis added)⁵

As mentioned at the beginning of this essay, the possibility to assume both the black skin and the white mask simultaneously or alternately is what has been seized upon in dramatization hybridity in the very existence of the *évolué* under colonialism as described by Fanon. Here, Fanon describes aggression, which leads to enslavement and conquest, and love, which is the final stage in one's ethical orientation. Both these basic impulses of every consciousness for Fanon play out, first, in the inter-subjective space. Manliness, or the more neutral idea of strength, is produced at the level of the individual in assuming such a characteristic in one's identification with the other. Still, the desire to be worthy of the other's love or admiration—in other words in one's identification as a consciousness—presupposes an overarching totality of coherence for the self's perspective. While still quite definitively in the context of the black man, these remarks suggest a wider notion of struggle for an ethical orientation in interacting with otherness both within oneself and between individuals or groups.

Fanon's conception of the healthy encounter between the black man and the world implies the same kind of ethical engagement. After showing to what extent the black Antillean has absorbed white perspective even in relation to negative stereotypes of blacks, he remarks that the black "vit une ambiguïté qui est extraordinairement névrotique. [. . .] [L']Antillais s'est connu comme nègre, mais, par un glissement éthique, il s'est aperçu (inconscient collectif), qu'on était nègre dans la mesure où l'on était mauvais, veule, méchant, instinctif" (155) / "lives an ambiguity that is extraordinarily neurotic. [. . .] [T]he Antillean has recognized himself as a Negro, but, by virtue of an ethical transit [slip], he also feels (collective unconscious) that one is a negro to the degree to which one is wicked, sloppy, malicious, instinctual" (192). This is an interesting idea drawing from Sartre's notion of responsibility in that the black man can be a "nigger" only through such a lapse in his *own* ethical mode. It is for this reason that such cultural hegemony can occur in Martinique: "L'imposition culturelle s'exerce facilement en Martinique. Le glissement éthique ne rencontre pas d'obstacle" (156) / "Cultural imposition is easily accomplished in Martinique. The ethical transit [slip] encounters no obstacle" (193). I have modified the English translation to better express this idea of an ethical slip (in the sense of a mistake or a lapse in concentration in the process of reasoning, as well as the idea of "glisser sur" or to "skim over" something without properly entering into the detail). The black man's compromise or lapse in ethics, which then allows him to ratify and hold up the white man's lie, is not compensated in the end by any privileges gained by him.

In fact, his ethical slip is facilitated by the relationship between blacks and whites in colonial culture, whereby his negative image of himself as a nigger is validated all around him. Instead of being compensated he is rudely reminded

of the falsity of his white mask by the white man who chides him that “it is not enough to try to be white, but that a white totality must be achieved. It is only then that I shall recognize the betrayal” (193). The latter is the betrayal of the French promise of assimilation in the colonial relationship. In the end, black skin comes back to haunt the Antillean and crudely marks his exclusion from white culture. It is to an already constituted totality that he was first invited and then denied a proper space within it because he has no agency in its construction. The monumental ethical and material engagement to undo such a situation will be theorized as revolution in Fanon’s later work.

In the passage cited at the beginning of this section, Fanon draws attention to a notion of totality within which the individual engages with another. Here, this totality is sustained by a certain logic by which the individual seeks to be loved and admired; such love from a partner sustains and strengthens the position of the self. A complex web of interdependency thus holds the entire conception of the world together. Already in this early work, even (or especially) at the level of the individual, Fanon is keen to establish how liberation involves a strong comprehension of totality. Interdependency with the other who “endorses” his “assumption of his manhood” and the need for acceptance and “love” become the bases for the self’s understanding of both its place in the world and the limits and contours of that world. His close attention to the necessity of radical difference (distance) between the self and other in this, and to their mutual dependency in this process of identification were also evident in the two movements he describes of aggression and love.⁶ Although “The Fact of Blackness” is an inexact rendering of the French title, “l’expérience vécue du noir” ‘the lived experience of the black man,’ it captures quite accurately the facticity against which the black man poetically forges a mode of thinking.⁷

The chapter begins with a dramatic presentation of this fact (of blackness) as it is lived in the person of a black man. The narrative opens with the oft cited confrontation of the “I” of the black man by the eye (gaze) of the white world that fixed him in the form of an object. This draws much from Jean-Paul Sartre’s theorizing of the formation of selfhood in its relation to otherness and the struggle for claiming subjecthood. The interesting part about this introduction is that the other is the source of both anguish and liberation; of both objectification and the bestowal of subjecthood. This twin function of the other’s gaze is noted by Fanon below. This is the second quotation I find pertinent to a theory of hybridity available from Fanon:

“Sale nègre!” ou tout simplement: “Tiens un nègre!”

J’arrivais dans le monde, soucieux de faire lever un sens aux choses, mon âme pleine du désir d’être à l’origine du monde, et voici que je me découvrais objet au milieu d’autres objets.

Enfermé dans cette objectivité écrasante, j’implorai autrui. Son regard libérateur, glissant sur mon corps devenu soudain nul d’aspérités, me rend une légèreté que je croyais perdue, et, m’absentant du monde, me rend au monde. Mais là-bas, juste à contre-pente, je bute, et l’autre, par gestes, attitudes, regards, me fixe, dans le sens où l’on fixe une préparation par un colorant. Je m’importai, exigeai une explication . . . Rien n’y fit. J’explosai. Voici les menus morceaux par un autre moi réunis. (88)

Dirty nigger! Or simply, "look, a Negro!"

I came into the world imbued with the will to find a meaning in things. My spirit filled with the desire to attain to the source of the world, and then I found that I was an object in the midst of other objects.

Sealed into that crushing objecthood, I turned beseechingly to others. Their attention was a liberation, running over my body suddenly abraded into nonbeing [transformed into smoothness] endowing me once more with an agility [a lightness] that I had thought lost, and by taking me out of the world, restoring [restores] me to it. But just as I reached the other side, I stumbled, and the movements, these attitudes, the glances of the other fixed me there, in the sense in which a chemical solution is fixed by a dye. I was indignant; I demanded an explanation. Nothing happened. I burst apart. Now the fragments have been put together again by another self. (109)

Thus, the black man becomes a nigger under the white gaze. From such a position of objecthood, he implores the other to alter this state. It is the searching gaze of the other that paradoxically discovers and delivers the subject that is contained in the body of the narrator. This momentary attention to his specificity lifts him out of objecthood, allows the gaze to pass smoothly over him, separating him from the thickness of the world, and endowing him with a lightness that he so craves. But then, the culturally charged look (now buttressed by attitudes and gestures) "fixes" him within a limited sphere of personhood that cannot match his own enthusiasm, his own understanding of the vastness of his soul as a being-in-the-world. Once again, it becomes clear that the metaphysical encounter of these two entities is forced into its "worldliness," by a grounding in the cultural context (here defined by colonialism) in which it occurs. Surprisingly, Fanon uses the term "dye" recalling Mayotte Capécia's attempt to negrify the world by throwing black ink on those who were unkind to her at school. In her case, he dismisses it as an ineffective and ridiculous act. In this dramatic presentation of the encounter with the other, Mayotte's disparaged metaphor avenges its author by appearing in Fanon's text and recalling, despite Fanon's harsh criticism of Mayotte, their common story of being "French" Martinicans. It is, of course, ironic that this metaphor becomes the most adequate form Fanon finds for expressing the pigeonholing that negatively defines the narrator's very existence, given Fanon's refusal to understand affectively Mayotte's use of the very same. In the above quotation, no rebellion is capable of dislodging this pigeonholing except that of explosion.

I wish to restore the significance of the last line quoted above to the narrative of this chapter in following what it means to speak of hybridity through Fanon. Re-assemblage of the body that is split apart enables the black man's subjectivity. All possibility of subjecthood lies in the narrator's willingness and ability to accept that point of explosion, which blasts apart the black male body as it is known within colonial culture: *Y'a bon banania*; the grin; the obsequious attitude that structures this body noted elsewhere by Fanon. It is in a conscious and conscientious reconstruction of the idea itself of the body of the black man that any kind of legitimate subjectivity can occur. Since the black man is always to assume responsibility for his body, for his race, for his ancestors (BSWM 112), which all come to rest in the singular black man when he is encountered, one of the ways in which hybridity intervenes as a method of resistance to this is in privileging the individual black man in his multiplicity. All attempts by white

culture and history to “fix” the black man in his blackness are blasted open by an explosion that comes from the ethical agency of the black man’s consciousness. The subsequent construction, in this chapter, of a coherent, but multiple, narrative “I,” which will be examined shortly, is a lesson in this hybrid project. While this multiplicity can easily be compatible with Bhabha’s ideas of negotiation and ambiguity, the ethics that guide such a project and their origin seem to sit less comfortably with his theory of hybridity. In Fanon, the urgency of recognizing the black man’s subjectivity is tied to an ethics he prescribes, which comes from his own bodily experience. In this way, because of the responsibility placed on the black man for his agency, Bhabha’s privileging of unconscious and fortuitous resistance enabled through ambivalence collapses under the greater project of emancipation envisioned by Fanon. Hybridity as a response to reductive stereotyping replays that troubling aspect of the *métis*, which is to disturb the terms of the hierarchy in place, an aspect of hybridity that is central to Bhabha’s analyses. However, simply disturbing them is not an end in Fanon. Fanon’s project is tied to a more explicit project of liberation from specifically colonial subjugation, which begins at the level of subjecthood. Young’s defense of Bhabha cited earlier picks up on the fact that a more clearly political activism would be the “other work” that Bhabha’s theory does not purport to fulfill. In considering Fanon’s narrative here, it is evident that hybridity is called up in the necessity of a double response to stereotyping. This double response is accomplished here through the strength of the collective in the assumption of what I have called the historical-universal narrator and through simultaneously reclaiming the affect of the individual, idiosyncratic narrator. Bhabha’s vision of hybridity prompts him to chide Fanon for his belief in a human essence: “Fanon is not principally posing the question of political oppression as the violation of a human essence, although he lapses into such a lament in his more existential moments” (42). This is to misunderstand that for Fanon it is impossible even to pose the question of political oppression unless it employs the idiom of existential impossibility arising from the black man’s experience of de-subjectification.

Re-reading BSWM

Here, I reconsider several important passages that illustrate the historical-universal position of the narrator and privilege the overall affect of this chapter. With such a focus, I suggest some reconsiderations for its interpretation via Markman’s translation. What Fanon demonstrates so clearly here is that Sartre’s notion of existentialism is rendered impossible from the subject position of the black man. While Sartre writes, for example, in defense of his version of existentialism that existence precedes essence, or you have to begin with subjectivity (*il faut partir de la subjectivité*) (*L’existence* 17), Fanon provides us the terms within which this is impossible with regard to the black man’s subjectivity:

J’arrive lentement dans le monde, habitué à ne plus prétendre au surgissement. Je m’achemine par reptation. Déjà des regards blancs, les seuls vrais, me dissèquent. Je suis fixé. Ayant accommodé leur microtome ils réalisent objectivement des coupes de ma réalité. Je suis trahi. Je sens, je vois dans ces regards blancs que ce n’est pas un nouvel homme qui entre, mais un nouveau type d’homme, un nouveau genre. Un nègre, quoi! (93)

I move slowly in the world, accustomed now to seek no longer for upheaval. I progress by crawling. And already I am being dissected under white eyes, the only real eyes. I am fixed. Having adjusted their microtomes, they objectively cut away slices of [structure the contours of] my reality. I am laid bare [betrayed]. I feel, I see in those white faces that it is not a new man who has come in, but a new kind of man, a new genus. Why, it's a Negro [nigger]! (116)

In the passage above, with no illusions of erupting into the world, the black man enters unobtrusively, crawling slowly. Still he is captured, fixed and dissected by the white gaze, under which he is not at liberty to construct his own reality. I have modified the translation in square brackets (while leaving the original English intact), suggesting here that it is not that his reality is "cut away" but that it is structured—a point we have examined previously. Thus, I evoke the verb "réaliser" in the sense of making something real or concrete. I suggest the term "betrayal" to connect this passage to a lack of acknowledgement of the individuality and emotional reality of this black man (see the word "objectively" and note the metallic coldness of the microtome) who has been dissected. It also connects to betrayal through the broken promise of assimilation, which remains out of reach for the black man in the real encounter with whiteness. The word "betrayal" itself, as we shall see later, is used elsewhere in this chapter to record the narrator's dismay at being ultimately rejected by the white culture that he has systematically interiorized. Although "laid bare" accords very well with the sense of violence from the white gaze and the more general Sartrean idea of the gaze of the "other," I have preferred to evoke the idea of betrayal from the word "trahi," thus connecting it urgently through affect to the following sentence, where such betrayal is tied to stereotype.

Following from this betrayal, the black man remains nothing but a "type"—a Negro (nigger). It is from this point that we must understand the desire for absolute originality and the numerous assertions of independent personhood, despite, in other places, the clear recognition of the dialogism within which it has to be claimed. The historical lack of recognition in the self-other relationship is at the base of these efforts. The "I" in this chapter is that of the black man trying to be original, full of enthusiasm, and a complete human being in encountering the world, but being deprived of all such possibility by the white gaze. This gaze has been held up by dominant structures historically and has fixed and limited him: "I came into the world imbued with the will to find a meaning in things, my spirit filled with the desire to attain to the source of the world, and then I found that I was an object in the midst of other objects" (109). This is followed by the passage quoted earlier when the "I" explodes by seizing its agency in response to the fixing accomplished by the culturally loaded white gaze. Next follow a series of observations and statements about the Black (man) (*le Noir*). Before resorting back to the generic black "I" there is a slip into a "we" that could easily be missed, but which clearly points to a purposeful forging of a collective consciousness based on this experience of blackness that can be known through the bodily experience of the white gaze:

Et puis, il nous fut donnée d'affronter le regard blanc. Une lourdeur inaccoutumée nous oppressa. Le véritable monde nous disputait notre part. Dans le monde blanc l'homme de couleur rencontre des difficultés dans l'élaboration de

son schéma corporel. La connaissance du corps est une activité uniquement négatrice. C'est une connaissance en troisième personne. Tout autour du corps règne une atmosphère d'incertitude certaine. Je sais que si je veux fumer, il faudra que je me recule [. . .]. (89)

And then the occasion arose when I [*we*] had to meet the white man's eyes. An unfamiliar weight burdened *me* [*us*]. The real world challenged *my* [*our*] claims. In the white world the *man of color* encounters difficulties in the development of *his* bodily schema. Consciousness of the body is solely a negating activity. It is a third-person consciousness. The body is surrounded by an atmosphere of certain uncertainty. *I* know that if *I* want to smoke *I* shall have to reach out [. . .]. (110–11; emphasis added)

What Fanon underscores is that even though the black man's body is given to him through the harsh gaze of the white man through a cultural lens informed by stereotypes inherited from colonialism, there remains a knowledge of the body in space that is purely physical, which can only be experienced singularly by each individual. It is unfortunate that the English translation does not record the use of "we" in the first three sentences. Although in and of itself, this might be a legitimate translation, I do believe that in this particular instance the movement from "we" to the general "he" and then to "I" is quite significant. Even though, for the black man, consciousness of the body is in the "third person," re-knowing the self as body consists in re-claiming through action as a means of knowing. The full possibility of this re-knowing is suggested in the notion of "certain uncertainty" that each claim to the self as body actualizes differently, but necessarily individually. We have already encountered the passage where a lapse in ethics at this point will lead back to cultural hegemony in which the black man is stereotyped. It is in relation to this consciousness, to this certain uncertainty that a move toward a collectivity has to occur. As we have seen, such a connection between the body and its experience of itself by the black man is central to Fanon's development of an individual ethics that is fundamental to any kind of political action. In the same manner, Fanon is at pains to indicate that marking black collectivity through stereotype has to be properly responded to through the black man's reassertion as a consciousness, full of possibility, recalling Sartre's words: I am a freedom or I am a project:

Et tous ces gestes, je les fais non par habitude, mais par une connaissance implicite. Lente construction de mon moi en tant que corps au sein d'un monde spatial et temporel, tel semble être le schéma. Il ne s'impose pas à moi, c'est plutôt une structuration définitive du moi et du monde—*définitive*, car il s'installe entre mon corps et le monde une dialectique effective. (89)

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—such seems to be the schema. It does not impose itself on me; it is, rather, a definitive structuring of the self and of the world—*définitive* because it creates a real dialectic between my body and the world. (111; emphasis added)

Therefore, this passage from "we" to "I" indicated in the previous passage becomes significant. While colonialism stamps the other in such a way that, within the group, one is indistinguishable from the other, the more primeval drama of the

self-as-body and the experience of literally being-in-the-world in interacting with space and time are so purely individual that any idea of agency for Fanon has to proceed from this level of subjecthood. The central modality of dismay in this chapter comes from a realization that access to this basic relationship to the self is blocked for the black man; and it is all that blurs the path to this experience of selfhood that dismays him, because it is from this point of selfhood that some agency in participating in the process of structuring a totality can be theorized. Here inheres a reciprocal form of interactivity between self and world in which the body encounters space, and space is reoriented through the agency of this body-subject. This process involves knowledge of the self that the self, alone, can attain through experience. It is here that one can find an effective delivery of the basic Sartrean formulation that existence precedes essence. Much is at stake, then, in this quest for the black man's most basic encounter with himself: his body as structuring his experience, and thus a reestablishment of his selfhood outside the various constraints that have been actualized through the history of colonialism. Access to this, if we follow Fanon, has been blocked for the black man as he is "epidermized" and fixed in a negative generality before he can think of experiencing his positive particularity. Working exclusively from the English translation, as we have seen, we would be unable to track the movement of the narrative subject in its accounting of the most basic construction of the self.

Accosted as a nigger, the narrator is first amused, and then laughs openly at the white child's fear, but is not able to sustain this reaction, because, "assailed at various points, the corporeal schema crumbled, its place taken by a racial epidermal schema" (112). Referring to, and even assuming, the move made by the poets who would be called the authors of *négritude*, Fanon writes: "Since the other hesitated to recognize me, there remained only one solution: to make myself known" (115). Fanon clearly had a more ambitious project, which was at odds with such a reductive image producer of the black man as the claims of *négritude* when articulated simplistically. However, the narrator's dependency on *négritude* as politics and aesthetics shows how indispensable it remains in the story of black liberation. In fact, in this very chapter the narrator assumes a historical-universal "I" of the black man in tracing out, before the white man's gaze, his many tactics, one of which is, indeed, the "I" of *négritude*. In what follows I will show that such a reading of the narrative here speaks to Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s early identification of two aspects of Fanon's thought in any possible "Fanonism." The first—drawing from Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's reversal of Derrida's notion of "writing" to mean "colonial discourse"—being that in this context, "all discourse is colonial discourse" (Gates 466) and the second being the interminable relationship between the individual and the collective in BSWM already identified by Stephan Feuchtwang (Gates 46).

Fanon's Historical-Universal Narrator

Our narrator remarks, "Je hélais le monde et le monde m'amputait de mon enthousiasme. On me demandait de me confiner, de me rétrécir" 'I had been shouting a greeting to the world, and the world severed from me all inspiration. I have been instructed repeatedly to confine myself, to contract my infinitude' (92; my trans.) (see BSWM 114–15 for the English: "I shouted a greeting to the world and the world slashed away my joy. I was told to stay within bounds, to go back where I

belonged"). I have worked substantially with the English translation here. First, the use of the imperfect tense becomes consequential to this historical narrative I have privileged. Here, the theoretical historical-universal narrator and his struggles gain poignancy from the long history of repeated crushing of the spirit. The alienated black man with the inferiority complex is not one who was created from one day to the next. Therefore, I have chosen to emphasize the long period of domination ("had been shouting" and "have been repeatedly instructed"). Second, it is not that white domination simply slashed at his joy; the situation is far worse. It systematically cut off all connections he could make with his joyful self. Thus it is agency at the primordial level of being in touch with oneself that is amputated. The reductive aspect of the words "confiner" and "se rétrécir" are not conveyed properly in the translation by "stay within bounds" and "go back." These words and their meaning (in their connection to dismemberment, severing from wholeness, longing for the accomplishment of the potential for the absolute) resonate throughout the chapter. It has been my aim to follow the affect of this narrative and, here, to give greater amplitude *within* Fanon's text to the metaphor of dismemberment. Over and over in this chapter, Fanon returns to the idea of a shrinking of the black man's spirit by various machinations of colonialism.

Next follows a passage that is characterized by its indignant tone but which is also full of resolve to assume agency against the numbing, reductive, and generalizing white gaze. It ends with: "Since the other hesitated to recognize me, there remained only one solution: to make myself known" (115). But this aggressive stance is short-lived. In contemplating nineteenth-century theories of race that advocated racial separation to avoid "contamination," the historical-universal black narrator decides that the best reaction is to wait. "Quant à moi, je saurais bien comment réagir. Et en un sens, si j'avais à me définir, je dirais que j'attends" (96–97) / "For my own part, I would certainly know how to react. And in one sense, if I were asked for a definition of myself, I would say that I am one who waits" (120). This is another well-known characterization of Fanon—as the one "who waits." But in following the narrative thread of this chapter, it should be properly recognized as a specific tactic of the black man in relation to the white man that Fanon is historically recounting.⁹ The clue that it is not an aside (quite common in Fanon's writing), and therefore a more general statement of the characterization of the black man, is the use of the conditional (*saurais*) that can be read as an anticipation (the future in the past). Given these racial theories at the time, the narrator anticipates (in the present of the narrative) what the reaction of the black man was going to be—it would be to wait. My suggestion is that in taking this statement out of context, one is discounting "waiting" as a provisional tactic of the black man at a particular historical juncture. For the next sequence is important: with the end of slavery he feels his "tenacity" (waiting and surviving) pays off as this historical-universal black "I" has gone forward (121). But then he comes crashing down with the realization that it was: "[t]rop tard. Tout est prévu, trouvé, prouvé, exploité" (97) / "[t]oo late. Everything is anticipated, thought out, demonstrated, made the most of" (121). Thus, waiting has now made him "too late." This situation, tracing the continuing impossibility of the position of the black man through a chronological narrative, is completely discounted by Bhabha when he remarks that "it is one of the original and disturbing qualities of *Black Skin, White Masks*, that it rarely historicizes the colonial experience" (42).¹⁰ This chapter is all about historicizing the experience

of the black man; and of understanding the history into which he must erupt as a subject. Confirming Fanon's recognition of the use of the ideas of *négritude* as a resistive tactic of survival, the narrator states: "*On comprend que, devant cette ankylose affective du Blanc, j'ai pu décider de pousser mon cri nègre*" (98) / "In the face of this affective ankylosis of the white man, it is understandable that I could have made up my mind to utter my Negro cry" (122; emphasis added).

Specifically, Senghor and Césaire's appropriation of blackness and frequent return to precolonial richness of black culture, even if seen as an act of "unreason" is ratified by the "necessities of the struggle"; in fact, this move is also subsumed in the narrative of BSWM and assumed by the historical narrator: "Since no agreement was possible on the level of reason, I threw myself back toward unreason" (123). Of course one cannot miss the irony of the end of the following quotation: "Out of the necessities of my struggle I had chosen the method of regression, but the fact remained that it was an unfamiliar weapon; here I am at home; I am made of the irrational; I waded in the irrational. Up to the neck in the irrational. And now how my voice vibrates!" (123). Still, the narrator couches his irony in the realization (from hindsight) that this reaction was one of necessity and circumstance. His narration, after all, assumes the folly of such a tactic.

Next the narrator traces, through the voices of Senghor and Césaire, this irrational step: a return to a good primitivism that shows that black culture was independently rich and developed. The quotations are punctuated with an ironic evocation of the excesses of *négritude* whose aim it is, nevertheless, to "rehabilitate" the image of the black man (see 127). I must stress again that this irony has to be put into the context of the present of the particular narrative in its historical evocation of the different tactics for the survival of black subjecthood within the constraints of colonial domination. In the introduction to Victor Schoelcher's famous text, Césaire rejoices in precisely this rehabilitation of the black man by a white man; a white man who points out various specifics of the richness of the Africa that Europeans would then plunder and destroy. It is in this context that the narrator proclaims: "Get used to me, I am not getting used to anyone" (131). Again, this quotation is often used to characterize Fanon's general stance toward white culture, while it is actually one he dramatizes in recounting the processes by which blacks have been subjugated in recent history.

Nevertheless, even this step has the black man cornered. It seems that the white man then takes him at his word, and swallows his story about rhythm and the occult, which can be associated with black culture: "Black Magic! Orgies, witches' sabbaths, heathen ceremonies, amulets. Coitus is an occasion to call on the gods of the clan. It is a sacred act, pure, absolute, bringing invisible forces into action" (126). He has to accept, as well, the bond between the earth and the black man: "Between the world and me a relation of coexistence was established" (128). Césaire's poetry allows the black man to claim, "I made myself the poet of the world" (129). All this is short-lived. The white man's response is to instruct the black man to study white history, where, he claims, he will find that all this fusion with the earth has already been a stage in the white man's own evolution. For the white man, that is now a thing of the past (see 129). He's been there, done that! Faced with this, our black historical narrator can only weep: "My originality had been torn out of me. I wept a long time, and then I began to live again" (129; emphasis added). This sentence is another convincing moment for the recognition

of this chapter as being held together with a specifically historical thread, as I have been arguing here.

What I hope to have shown above in highlighting some of the moves in the narration is that Fanon's text performs what we might call a hybrid reading: on the one hand there is a universalizing "I" that stands in for "the" black man—an implausible concept but one which is reclaimed by the individual black man as a tactic before the stereotypes that precede him as he enters the world. This is the sense of the term being "fixed." It is against this fixing that the agency of the black man has to be engaged. As Fanon writes later, "The object of lumping all Negroes together under the designation of 'Negro people' is to deprive them of any possibility of individual expression. What is thus attempted is to put them under the obligation of matching the idea one has of them" (*Toward the African Revolution* 17). Thus, agency is recognized by Fanon as having to do first with the very basic step of asserting a subjectivity through thought, speech, action—existence. As we have seen, it is asserted that this has to occur at the level of the individual in his [sic] recognition of his self-as-body. Such an assertion of the individual is proved impossible at each turn as the black man is fixed as the stereotypical flesh-eating, white-toothed, grinning, big-footed, earth loving, mother-fucking nigger. His very survival has therefore necessarily depended upon privileging a collective, strong, and positive image of blackness; the narrative has necessarily unfolded under the aegis of the historical-universal black narrator. However, Fanon recognizes that there remains a tremendously difficult task of reclaiming the existence of the individual, sensuous, original black man that he heroically (or tragically) wishes to undertake. The tragic role in which the narrator is cast cannot be reconciled with Bhabha's reading of this text: this role implies a conscious understanding and activation of this double role by a specific and specifiable subject, who envisions for itself and for a particular collectivity an escape from precisely the hierarchical situation in which it accomplishes such hybrid moves.

The struggle between the universal, collective, historical "I" and the force of the more subjective personal and still-in-formation "I" makes for a narrative process that can be recognized as hybrid. Hybridity, then, as it emerges from the narrator's project arises not only from simply negotiating between white and black but also from a dramatic struggle with himself and with a construction of his identity. The black narrator locates his selfhood in the process of reconstituting his own body through experience. In this chapter, the tension arising from this dual force is recorded in the irony with which this "I," although assuming the moves of *négritude* in granting a large part of its narration the first person rather than the third person, still notes the "un-truth" of *négritude*, according to the beliefs of the individual "I." The movement between the "I," the "he," and the "we" examined earlier also produces a more expanded framework to the various statements, requiring greater care in the extraction of the many that might stand in for a "Fanonism."

This theoretical text rests on the authority of the narrating author. Here, the author periodically abandons the authority of his investigative narrative position to recuperate the general self of the experience of the black man under colonialism. This makes it particularly important to follow the moves undertaken in the fluidity of the narrating entity. Still, such a position is not assumed without reservation. These reservations are voiced through the ironical considerations of the narrator

that I have emphasized. They point to the necessary solidarity in preserving the collective "I" even with the element of dissent being figured within it. But it also shows the possibility to forge such a discourse of political significance, which does not imply a simple, strategic silencing of difference. Yet, the suggestion is that this collective self must explode at some point in the individual's existence in order to assert a true agency.

The two passages I have pointed to earlier set out the premises and specifications for a methodologically sound reading of interactivity, which is central to the notion of hybridity. They also include a consequential articulation of totality and suggest an ethics that can be tied to the self-as-body before theorizing agency. Further specification included the assertion of the individual's subjecthood as a point from where to re-know itself against colonial stereotyping through its body's interaction with the world. There is no doubt that a certain delineation of colonial culture is taken as the limit that needs to be exploded; but the moves of the narration and the negotiations of the narrating entities occur within the structuring totality of the relationship of the black man to white colonial culture. Fanon's insistence upon totality is underscored by Eileen Julien's examination of the speech he made at the 1956 "First International Conference of Negro Writers and Artists in Paris." Julien notes in this context that "while Fanon on the whole privileges 'national' culture, which is for him a culture born of political struggle, here he seems to admit the vital capacity of 'ethnic' culture, *before* colonialism at least" (159).

Without proper recognition of these narrative moves in Fanon's text, the strong criticism of Sartre's introduction to Senghor's anthology that is frequently commented upon loses the sense of poignancy and the deep anguish I wish to restore to it. Fanon expresses dismay that Sartre's text takes away the originality of the black man's struggle in drawing a parallel between the black man and the collective of the proletariat. Following Sartre, just as the struggle of the proletariat is to reach a classless society, so too the authors of negritude wish to render the category of race null and void. The period of negritude, then, becomes a stage in this historical movement rather than an ultimate end. From the reading above, it becomes quite clear that Fanon's thinking does not necessarily clash with such an interpretation. Fanon's hybrid "I" has sufficiently alerted us to the way in which this criticism of Sartre must be read: as a *necessary* response, for all the veracity and perspicacity of Sartre's analyses, in countering the effect it has on the *individual* black man. In fact, the narrator *must* attack Sartre, given the history he has just outlined and the position from which he has outlined it. All this is clear because the irony noted in the assumption of the rhythm-claiming "I" would acquiesce with Sartre's assertion of the transitory nature of this phase. The narrator himself has suggested that this was a phase in the tactics of the strategic survival of the black man under conquest, slavery, colonialism, and the subsequent pigeonholing through stereotypes. It seems, then, following from this, almost an act of bad faith to proclaim that "I needed to lose myself in negritude" (135), when our narrator showed quite clearly that he was skeptical of its truth. This contradiction is not really one, when we are able to validate the multiple functions of the narrating entity, who both mitigated the "I" of negritude with ambiguity through irony, and who now claims before Sartre that negritude needed to be an absolute for the black man.¹¹

Sartre's Preface and Fanon's Reaction: Another Look

The anger evident in the narrator's confrontation with Sartre's preface is an emotion that we can pause to consider. As we have seen, at the level of the historical-universal black subject, Sartre's accounting is not altogether implausible. The narrator's rage stems from a much more complex source. It is the rage of the individual black "I" that has strained throughout this narrative to dislodge the universal position, which was the only effective tool against the totalizing discourse of colonialism or at least its totalizing ambition. The poignancy arises from the fact that as readers we have already, if sporadically, encountered the narrator's deep desire to escape the historicity which frames such an assumption of the universal "I," and yet we encounter and follow the moves made in the narration that take it on. This is a remarkable performance of the struggle at the very heart of Fanon's entire project, positioned resolutely between reality and Utopia.

Sartre's claim that historical circumstance propelled the black French poet of *négritude* to assume a position of poetic grace that made it superior to all other poetic attempts of the time (qtd. in BSWM 134), causes Fanon to protest that: "and so it is not I who make a meaning for myself, but it is the meaning that was already there, pre-existing, waiting for me. It is not out 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, but it is the torch that was already there, waiting for that turn of history" (134). He turns on Sartre: "Jean-Paul Sartre has destroyed black zeal. Jean-Paul Sartre had forgotten that the Negro suffers in his body quite differently from the white man" (138). Here, we must pay attention to the source of the voice that pronounces Sartre's sympathetic, enlightened engagement with the question of the black man to be necessarily inadequate, even inaccurate. Such inadequacy and inaccuracy do not stem from any kind of essentialism but rather from overdetermination by external factors.¹² Fanon's narrative voice speaks from a point in history when only a black man (of "epidermalized" blackness) can restore his subjecthood through his own agency. He continues: "I defined myself as an absolute intensity of beginning. So I took up my *négritude*, and with tears in my eyes I put its machinery back together again" (138). The repudiation of Sartre has to be accomplished somehow from the point of view of this historical-universal black "I." But within this repudiation also lies the despair of the individual black man who has been cut off from his joyous, individual self and who recognizes that *négritude* does indeed offer a miraculous weapon.

Given this overdetermination, the narrator must turn on this existentialist whom Fanon so greatly admires and whose work provokes a ceaseless dialogue for his own intellectual reasoning. This narrative act underscores the poignancy of the narrator's tears. Sartre's comments become, at the simple level evident from the text, deeply offensive to this narrator. But the tears also signal the other muted "I" whose discourse is as yet (at least in evoking this historical, collective black experience) to be properly articulated. Fanon himself gives us a clue elsewhere: "Whenever a man of color protests [proteste], there is alienation. Whenever a man of color rebukes [réprouve], there is alienation" (60). The alienation of the black man from his own psyche, the impossibility to escape the interiorization (specifically for the Martinican) of white cultural values in which he himself is denigrated, and, in the end, the difficulty of assuming an individual subject position, all

channel dismay as his required reaction as the historical-universal black man to Sartre's pronouncement. Such an emotional response can be retraced to both the individual and the universal identities of the narrator. This complexity is evident when we recall that Fanon made great efforts to return to Sartre, this time in person, for the preface to the *Wretched of the Earth*. Fanon will later explain why acts of "love" at the individual level must be rejected because of the overarching structure of colonialism in which the black man is denied his individuality.¹³

The gratefulness that we experience toward Fanon, then, despite his oversights indicated by many, is for having somehow given us the experience, through the narrative, of an affective encounter with the reality of the black man's history, but *also* of all the possibility of an individual "I" within it—a possibility that, nevertheless, this narrative cannot actualize. The reasons for this, of course, as we have already indicated, go well beyond the aesthetic of this text and point to the realities that Fanon will more directly address in his future work and life.

Movement to and fro between a recognition of reality (of the fixing of the black man that is transformed into the historical-universal black "I") and a struggle for utopia (as the assertion of the singular, unique, original, "I" that happens to be black) characterizes the impetus of the narrative in this entire chapter. The narrative positions assumed correspond to historical moments that specifically refer to the subjugation of the black man under colonialism and the as-yet-to-occur full inscription of each individual black man (or at least such a potential) in the societies Fanon describes. The frequent breaking down of the narrative position through the interception of irony as well as references to breaking down by the narrator (weeping), characterize this impossible task of reclaiming black subjectivity that Fanon dramatizes for us in this chapter. Such impossibility within the narrative exceeds the text in its correspondence with the impossibility to express black subjectivity as credible agents in colonial society. Fanon's take on irony in the specific context of the Antillean is an indication of the power of his unremitting analyses of culture. It also confirms our reading of irony in BSWM.

In reflecting upon the relationship between "West Indians and Africans" in an essay published in *Esprit* in 1955, Fanon writes that while irony in Europe "protects against existential anguish, in Martinique it protects against the awareness of Negritude" (*Toward* 19). The Antillean's cultural anxiety plays out in his relationship with Africa and Africans, with reference to which he constantly needs to reaffirm his difference. Whites, with whom the Antillean (believed he) shared the same culture would, of course, never be mistaken for Africans. "But what a catastrophe if the West Indian should suddenly be taken for an African!" (*Toward* 20). It was Césaire who first articulated that "it was fine and good to be a Negro," which created a "scandal" (see *Toward* 21). But a second event in 1939 would turn the tables on Césaire's fate, which seemed to indicate he would be dismissed for a lunatic. For four years, the French sailors (of the Vichy government) from the ships *Béarn* and *Emile-Bertin* flooded Fort-de-France at a time when the economy was already suffering. The sailors, many who were accompanied by their families and brought into contact with the Martinicans who resented their presence due to the particular, added strain of supporting them at this time, inaugurated a "racist" encounter (*Toward* 22–23).

The Martinicans' experience of these sailors' racism allowed them to exercise an interesting intellectual maneuver in order to cling to Frenchness. Before the

French racist sailors for whom he was a nigger, the Martinican reasons thus: "Since these men did so consider him, this meant that they were not true Frenchmen. Who knows, perhaps they were Germans?" (*Toward* 23)! If in BSWM Fanon showed how it was through his own ethical lapse that the black man could become a nigger, here he shows how he escapes being a nigger by a maneuver that the narrator presents with scathing irony: "[. . .] [T]he West Indian felt obliged to defend himself. Without Césaire this would have been difficult for him. But Césaire was there, and people joined him in chanting the once-hated song to the effect that it is fine and good to be a Negro! . . ." (*Toward* 23). The Antillean's strategic valorizing or devalorizing of his blackness continues to be a source of Moliéresque irony for Fanon:

Fifteen years before, [the West Indians] said to the Europeans, "Don't pay attention to my black skin, it's the sun that has burned me, my soul is as white as yours." After 1945 they changed their tune. They said to the Africans, "Don't pay attention to my white skin, my soul is as black as yours, and that is what matters." (*Toward* 24)

It is at the close of this essay that we have a reflection upon the irony of the historical-universal black narrator from the specific positioning of the Antillean. "It thus seems that the West Indian, after the great white error is now living in the great black mirage" (*Toward* 27).

The frequent citations made from this much-read chapter of BSWM that we have examined here, such as "I am the one who waits," in postcolonial criticism need to better account for the careful positioning of this "I" that pronounces them within the text. The charge (or praise) that Fanon does not historicize should be carefully reconsidered in that the entire chapter is an historical evocation of the possibilities of the black subject dramatized in the narrative position. The poetic evocation of the enthusiasm, individuality, originality, and vastness of the individual black soul who can assume the role of a legitimate interlocutor is constantly cut down by the reality of his existence within the totality of white colonial culture. The black man's entry, through assimilation, into white colonial culture occurs through a disavowal, an ethical slip, or, in properly Sartrean terms, an act of bad faith. It is in this way that Fanon ratifies Sartre's idea of responsibility. As we have seen, although it is evident that it is colonial culture that stereotypes the nigger, Fanon is at pains to reclaim and reassert the agency of the black man within that paradigm: it is *his* ethical slip that allows himself to become a nigger, because it is the same agency that will have to refuse niggerhood through an explosion—at the level of the individual and also, theorized later, at the level of entire, socially coherent totalities. Fanon's engagement with the problem of the black man's subjectivity is revealed through a hybrid narrative where the terms between which the hybrid appears are clearly stated while, as we have seen, an accounting of both history and totality are properly figured within it. After the somewhat ambiguous critique of the writers of negritude as well as of Sartre's assessment of them, the final lines of this chapter adjust this position by an oblique homage paid to both:

I feel in myself a soul as immense as the world, truly as souls as deep as the deepest of rivers, my chest has the power to expand without limit. [. . .] I wanted to rise but the disemboweled silence fell back upon me, its wings paralyzed. Without responsibility, straddling Nothingness and Infinity, I began to weep. (140)

The first sentence is an assumption of the language, rhythm, and spirit of the Césairean paradigm while the last is a nod to Sartre's text. The weeping with which the chapter concludes evokes, in the same sentence, the revised title of Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*. The struggle for transcendence plays out in the first sentence, but it is cut short by the paralysis of silence: speech is Fanon's primary site of analytic operation. Fanon's impossible desire to create a subject without dialogism is related to a need to be without compromise (suggesting a notion of "authenticity") and precisely to escape this hierarchic relationship with the white man. Yet, a fundamental understanding of the dialogism of thought and existence itself is based in his training as a psychiatrist. The primacy of speech for Fanon becomes a point of anguish because it presumes a dialogic quality. The primacy of speech, and its bases in dialogism on one hand, and the need to break out of a dialectical relationship with the white man on the other characterize much of the tautness of the text of BSWM. It is also with the negotiation of these two positions that an account of Fanonian hybridity might proceed.

The full import of the end of the quotation above requires further unpacking. We have examined the sense in which the black man is, first and foremost, for Fanon, an ethical being whose responsibility includes a proper recognition of who he is "outside of" or despite white culture. Such recognition would necessarily entail engagement with the structure of white culture within which his lapse turns him into a nigger. While Fanon recognizes that an individual's agency is not sufficient to oppose such a structure, he also realizes, as we have shown, that is essential for the individual to record an ethical stand in his interactions at this level. Such ethical behavior has implications for the totality within which it operates and without which it would have no meaning.¹⁴ It is a lapse in such an ethical duty that allows the black man, and specifically the Antillean, to succumb to an inferiority complex. This entire chapter has been about the tactics of the universal-historical black "I" within an overarching colonial structure. If the black man's being has been under threat in this chapter, the latter ends by showing how he is not grounded in being, but rather uncomfortably placed between Nothingness and Infinity. Because transcendence presupposes immanence, the impossibility of the black man's existence within colonial culture renders absurd any aspirations to transcendence.

Figuring Fanon within the rhetoric of hybridity could be instinctively rejected precisely because we have come to associate with him more revolutionary ideals of anti-colonial struggle. If the many criticisms of the appropriation of a hybrid Fanon in a dominant strain of postcolonial studies with a strong influence of postmodern theory are to be taken seriously, I propose it is time to do so in the name of this hybridizing text. It is my hope that the reading I have provided here can suggest interesting leads into the rest of the body of Fanon's work. I have also suggested, proceeding from an effective engagement with Fanon's text, some concrete theoretical adjustments and limits to the notion of hybridity, specifically with regard to totality and the relationship of the self/body to ethics and agency.

For Fanon, "[t]he characteristic of a culture is to be open, permeated by spontaneous, generous fertile lines of force" (*Toward* 34). Yet, the importance of the notion of "structure" in the identification of a culture is evident: "Exoticism is one of the forms of [. . .] simplification. It allows no cultural confrontation. There is on the one hand a culture in which qualities of dynamism, of growth, of depth can

be recognized. As against this, we find characteristics, curiosities, things, never a structure" (*Toward* 35). In this way, Fanon's positive vision of cultural contact privileges the idea of confrontation within historical specificity. Following his thought, viewing dynamism, expansion, and depth in a culture is insufficient and simplistic if individual elements cannot be connected to some kind of overarching logic or totality.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I would like to thank Bart Moore-Gilbert for critical comments on an earlier version of this paper. A section of this paper was presented at the 2005 ALA meeting in Boulder, CO. Thanks to Nicholas Brown and Mark Sanders for thoughtful engagement with some of the questions raised at this panel.

NOTES

1. Among others, Gautam Premanth has noted that in glossing the importance of nationalism and national consciousness to Fanon's theoretical endeavors, especially in his later work, the notion of struggle becomes decontextualized into a principle of negotiation rather than retaining any connection to organized movement in the process of decolonization (see esp. 65). See also Parry's criticism of this tendency in postcolonial criticism (esp. 35).

2. Ato Sekyi-Otu, for example, takes to task Christopher Miller's reading of *Wretched of the Earth*, and shows that Miller quotes Fanon too simplistically. He argues that Miller lifts sentences on violence out of context, thereby losing the subtlety with which Fanon analyzes the new national culture and lodges his criticism of its darker side (42–43).

3. See esp. Bhabha, "Interrogating Identity" 40–65 in *Location* and Hall.

4. See Bhabha 176–77 for a discussion of the language metaphor. The lack of analytical distinction between interpretation and other forms of agency is suggested in a sentence such as: "There is the more complex possibility of *negotiating meaning and agency* through the time-lag in-between the sign [. . .] and its initiation of a discourse or narrative [. . .]" (183; emphasis added). But the idea that "the question of agency [. . .] emerges" (182) rather than that agency itself is created through individual struggle does not help to illuminate how something located outside the sentence, and which is "not quite experience, not yet concept" (181) becomes translated into action by sentient human actors.

5. The translation reads "will erect a value-making superstructure on my whole vision of the world." Rather, I want to emphasize here that this superstructure cradles, validates, and gives coherence to every moment of a particular vision of the world and that it sanctions the two movements of aggression and love.

6. Fanon's ironic lack of attention to such a totality in his vituperative arguments against Mayotte Capécia in this chapter can be seen as a demonstration of an improperly conducted analysis as per his own indications, which we have just examined. What played out there methodologically, as well, was the erasure of the black woman as a complete sensuous subjectivity in that it is only an amputated version of the black woman as well as one severed from an engagement with a larger reality that are framed in Fanon's analyses of Capécia.

7. For David Macey, this unfortunate translation betrays Fanon's text, by mistaking a lived experience for a fact, "to such an extent as to make it almost incomprehensible" (29). While it is evident that the translator has taken some liberty in changing the title of the chapter, I found it quite persuasive in following this narrative. In this chapter,

Fanon illustrates how, through the black man's lived experience, he is historically faced with his blackness, which is presented to him as a "fact," by white culture and eventually becomes validated by his own internalization of white culture.

8. Fanon's remarks, although made here on heterosexual love between a man and a woman, will be taken up in the context of a wider sense of love, one for which Bhabha feels called upon to apologize for its humanist tendency. Fanon's version of love between "men" is not a bland love of easy brotherhood. Like all Fanonian affect, it is demanding and ethical. His essay, "The North African Syndrome" that was published in *Esprit* and then included by Maspero in *Pour une révolution africaine* ends with: "If YOU do not demand the man, if YOU do not sacrifice the man that is in you so that the man who is on this earth shall be more than a body, more than a Mohammed, by what conjurer's trick will I have to acquire the certainty that you, too, are worthy of my love?" (*Toward an African Revolution*16).

9. Other examples of the narrator's preoccupation with an historical account can be evoked: "With enthusiasm, I set to cataloguing . . ." "As times changed . . ." "After much reluctance, scientists had conceded . . ." "I put all the parts back together. But I had to change my tune" "That victory played cat and mouse; it made a fool of me." "But on certain points the white man remained intractable" (see pp. 119–20). This is followed by a quotation taken from Alan Burns who quotes a certain Jon Alfred Mjoen's presentation on Race Crossing at the Second International Congress of Eugenics. At this point, the historical-universal black narrator is able to anticipate what the strategy was to such a discourse.

10. Although J. P. Riquelme tries to resuscitate this remark of Bhabha's that has been critiqued by E. San Juan Jr. through a proper resituation of the remark within Bhabha's *Location of Culture* (see Riquelme 566), I remain unconvinced of the mindfulness of Bhabha's reading. "Fanon is not principally posing the question [What does a black man want?] of political oppression as the violation of a human essence, although he lapses into such a lament in his more existential moments. He is not raising the question of colonial man in the universalist terms of the liberal-humanist. [. . .] Fanon's question is addressed not to such a unified notion of history nor to such a unitary concept of man. It is one of the original and disturbing qualities of *Black Skin White Masks* that it rarely historicizes the colonial experience. There is no master narrative or realist perspective that provides a background of social and historical facts against which emerge the problems of the individual or collective psyche" (Bhabha 42). First, it is not Fanon who lapses into lamenting the violation of a human essence. However, in narrating the history of "the" black man, this narrator is confronted by this phase in the black man's tactics, a tactic his narrator assumes in dramatizing the anguish of the black man of his day in the face of white culture. It is clear that Fanon does not believe in the existence or the unquestioned need for the idea of "the" black man—yet, his historical narrator assumes such an entity as it has been created through the unfortunate reality of colonialism. What is disturbing is that a critic of the sophisticated intelligence of Homi Bhabha fails to note the "historicity," which has been bequeathed to the black narrator and that Fanon has the courage to assume, with the idea of changing it. There is a master narrative into which Fanon's narrator is forced to enter. *Black Skin, White Masks* is all about reclaiming the right to enter the field of discourse created by colonial culture in the era in which he writes, and which was constructed as History even before the height of the colonial period. Such entry is complicated by the desire of the narrator as an individual black subject to forsake this collective narrative position for a properly individual "I." The hybridity of the text, as we have seen, arises, in part, due to the tension between such an idiosyncratic, personal, unique narrative position, and one that is already oriented, making it respond to a unitary, stifling reality in which the black man can be nothing but a generic nigger.

11. In his later writing (and, no doubt, referring specifically to *négritude*), Fanon writes: "No neologism can mask the new certainty: the plunge into the chasm of the past is the condition and the source of freedom" (*Toward* 43).

12. Of the various comments upon Fanon's critique of Sartre, I found most persuasive Sonia Kruk's subtle analysis.

13. "The racist in a culture with racism is therefore normal. The idea that one forms of man, to be sure, is never totally dependent on economic relations, in other words—and this must not be forgotten—on relations existing historically and geographically among men and groups. And even greater number of members belonging to racist societies are taking a position. They are dedicating themselves to a world in which racism would be impossible. But everyone is not up to this kind of commitment. One cannot with impunity require of a man that he be against 'the prejudices of his group.' And, we repeat, every colonialist group is racist" (*Toward* 40).

14. "Psychologists, who tend to explain everything by movements of the psyche, claim to discover [racist] behavior on the level of contacts between individuals: the criticism of an original hat, of a way of speaking, of walking. . . . Such attempts deliberately leave out of account the special character of the colonial situation" (*Toward* 33).

15. Fanon looks back, in his letter of resignation, at the notion of individual enthusiasm that he theorized in BSWM: "But what can a man's enthusiasm and devotion achieve if everyday reality is a tissue of lies of cowardice, of contempt for man?" (*Toward* 52). This act is one that both ratifies individual agency as well as records its insufficiency.

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