



The Facticity of Blackness

A Non-conceptual approach to the Study of Race and Racism in Fanon's and Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology

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Abstract: This essay seeks to interrogate Frantz Fanon's phenomenological descriptions of embodied experience of anti-black racism and his appropriation and critique of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception. I begin this essay by arguing for an embodied understanding of racism rather than the dominant intellectualist account of race which posits an objective racial knowing. Racial knowing privileges race as a discursive formation—as the only definitive and legitimate account of race and racism. An outcome of privileging of objective racial knowledge marginalizes subjective experience of race as always leaning towards an essentialist understanding. Since the linguistic turn in Continental and Anglo-American thought the move has been to disassociate power from the body but this has been only made possible by an Enlightenment universal humanism that indemnified European man's humanity against all others. In a triple move the linguistic turn jettisons, takes for granted the human and with great hubris declares it non-operative. This European universal subject's humanity is normatively guaranteed while those whose possibility of a subject position is not a given, those with black and brown bodies', their humanity is dead on arrival. What is interesting is that for Frantz Fanon the body under racism poses a problem while for Merleau-Ponty the body is a solution to the existential crisis of Western man. For Merleau-Ponty to address the crisis, Western man must get back to the things themselves which is the already promised gift of the body in its primordial givenness. Fanon on the other hand sees that a radically new conception of the human is needed even to begin to address this crisis.

*The idea of **epidermalization** points toward one intermediate stage in a critical theory of body scales in the making of "race". Today skin is no longer privileged as the threshold of either identity or particularity.*

—Paul Gilroy in *Against Race*, 47

*I am overdetermined from without. I am the slave not of the **idea** that others have of me but of my own **appearance**.*

—Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin White Masks*, 116

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The first philosophical act would appear to be to **return to the world of actual experience which is prior to the objective world**, since it is in it that we shall be able to grasp the theoretical basis no less than the limits of that objective world, restore to things their concrete physiognomy, to organisms their individual ways of dealing with the world, and to subjectivity its inherence in history.

—Maurice Merleau-Ponty in
Phenomenology of Perception, 66

REPRESENTATIONS AND PRESENTATIONS OF BLACKNESS

This essay is an attempt to flesh out the significance of embodied perception of race in lived experience. What I argue in this essay is the need for a non-conceptual understanding of race, racialization, and racism. The two previous quotes, the first taken from Paul Gilroy's book *Against Race* and the second from Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin White Masks*, are included to elucidate the marked difference in scholarship in theorizing race today. The third quote from Maurice Merleau-Ponty points to where science would indeed need to go in order to describe the relation between theory and practice, as Lewis R. Gordon¹ announces as the space of experience and situation.

Gilroy makes an explicit critique of Fanon's understanding of the process of racialization and declares it no longer relevant. Gilroy understands Fanon's concept of *epidermalization*² of race as being synony-

¹ Lewis R. Gordon writes in his essay on Fanon's *Black Skin White Masks* "Between Reason and History, Theory and Practice, there is *experience* which in this case is the realization of a situation that stimulates an existential struggle against sedimented, dehumanized constructions" ("Through the Zone of Nonbeing" in *The CLR James Journal* vol 11:1 Summer 2005).

mous with skin color as a referent to the idea or concept of race. In this way one's skin color designates³ or refers to a concept or idea and it is in that concept which holds the meaning for that skin color. For Gilroy, Fanon's privileging of skin color is not relevant today because what Gilroy and many of his contemporary critical race theorists have done is to primarily locate post modern racialization in the space of what is representable generally and in genomic⁴ representations in particular. However Fanon is actually not concerned with (re)presentations of race, as concept or cogitation but its immanence in lived experience from the position of one who shows up as black in an anti-black world. Rather than (re)presentations, Fanon sheds light on the *presentation* of race; meaning how racial intelligibility is manifest to us immediately in perception. To dismiss the quotidian way racial minorities in the West experience the violence of race and racism as no longer critical in contemporary theory on the subject is incredibly disconcerting and shows the investment that scholars

² In *Black Skin White Masks* Fanon utilizes what can be understood as pathological metaphors to describe the colonial condition. Fanon deploys '*epidermalization*' to characterize the phenomena both perceptual and psychological of anti-black racism and the primacy of vision that in a sense metastases as a cancer on the body of blacks who must live with that skin never being able to escape it. Epidermalization is the processual intertwining of the 'historico-racial schema' and 'racial epidermal schema.' The 'historico-racial schema' are the sedimented and knotted fabric of self experiences of anti-black racism and its interpellating discourses, sort of the pre-reflective consciousness memory of lived experiences of racist violence. The 'racial epidermal schema' is the immediately manifest intelligibility of blackness or showing up as such.

³ See Charles Taylor's influential essay "Theories of Meaning" where he describes two areas of theorizing meaning in the philosophy of language, 1) designative and 2) expressive.

⁴ The significance of bio-technological articulations of race is not to be dismissed yet genetic concepts of race help little in situations of DWB (driving while black) or looking Arab in a U.S. airport.

have in the detachment of their research from the real world and their continual disparagement of experience as a foundational and valid and form of knowledge. In a double move this peculiar Western rationality has condemned 'lived experience' and condemned those that are understood as only experiential beings (not mindful), that is people of color, to be non-existent in history.

In *Black Skin White Masks* Fanon compares the existential crisis of being Jewish with that of being black. For a Jewish person whose appearance is immediately like that of his white Aryan oppressor, he can conceal for at least a moment his Jewishness because his Jewishness is but a collection of objective facts about him.... that he is from Warsaw, from the ghetto, that his name is Goldstein etc..... The Jew appears to white others immediately as they are, another white person, in other words, a human. Fanon concludes that for a black person there is no such possibility in an antiblack world because a black person is immediately caught out there by white eyes in the visual field of human perception as either hypervisible or invisible as Ralph Ellison articulates in *Invisible Man*.⁵ Therefore it's not the *idea* of race but the immediate pre-reflective and pre-linguistic appearance of what we call blackness or more generally 'racedness.' Contrarily (re)presentations of race must be cognizable and therefore within the positive sciences there is a tendency toward the rationally and explanatory models of race theory. What Fanon argues is that ideas of race as abstracted representations of lived experience miss the gravity of the phenomena of showing up as a "nègre" and the formation of the self-consciousness of person who appears to others this way. I would

⁵ Ellison writes "When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination—indeed, everything and anything except me" (p 3); in *Invisible Man*, 20th Century Library, New York 1993.

argue that the relevance of a phenomenology of race is as much a contemporary issue as it was in post war France. Gilroy's honest mistake is that he confuses the lived experience of race for its (re)presentation. It is the representation of blackness and its commoditization in popular culture that Gilroy sees as shifting in the history of 'raciology' and not the lived experience of showing up black which has been durable in the long history of racism in the West.

Gilroy is probably not alone here and one can argue that the bulk of race theory leans toward the privileging of mind in idea, concept and cognition rather than including bodily experience of being perceived as such and such a race. How we live the process of racialization and showing up such and such a racial way is difficult to describe because as Linda Martín Alcoff⁶ argues the process of being raced appears to us as self evident; a sort of common sense which occurs for us without resorting to categories and classifications, in other words without calling to mind (re)presentations. This does not simply mean that racial intelligibility is sublimated to unconscious and therefore unrecoverable. Merleau-Ponty writes "I can experience more things than I represent to myself.....there are feelings in me which I do not name, and also spurious states of well-being to which I am not fully given over" (2002 p345). We can say that the fund of perceptual experience is pregnant with meaning but meanings that are not always readily articulable in cognition and through language. To pass over the most mundane experiences such as the intelligibility of human bodies seems to implicate that its depths go far deeper than mere thought but are somehow sedimented layers of experience which impinge on our ability to see others as who they really are,

⁶ See Linda Martín Alcoff's essay titled "Toward a Phenomenology of Racial Embodiment" in *Race* ed. Robert Bernasconi 2001.

as human. If race and racism were simply ideas and ideologies⁷ it should stand that we could rationally rethink our way out of it but, as I argue, racial perception is implicated at a more fundamental level of who we are and how we experience the world.

Philosophers Linda Martín Alcoff (2001), Athena Coleman (2005) Lewis R. Gordon (2005) and Jeremy Weate (2001) are but a few scholars who take up Fanon's phenomenology and his re-articulation and challenge to Merleau-Ponty's descriptions of corporeal existence. In this essay I attempt to extend Merleau-Ponty's theory of perception and his subsequent development of a radical primordial ontology to the study of racial difference and racism. What makes Merleau-Ponty's existential phenomenology interesting here is that we can take a close look at the experience of race and racism from the fact that much of what we understand race difference to be is lived by the body. Much of the theorization of race theory privileges abstract epistemological concepts of racialization that explain structural and discursive formations of racial ideology and representation. This area of race scholarship, objective racial knowledge, can be seen as an epistemological approach to the study of race. Meaning

⁷ Representational racial politics in a sense assumes such a reality or rather ideality ; meaning that once civic, state and corporate institutions are peopled with 'representative' minorities in all levels of these institutions racism, it will have the effect of making race cease to be an issue or at least significantly diminishing it. However taking a non-representational or non-conceptual approach to understanding the reality of racism it is conceivable that an anti-black world is more than possible even when these institutions are replete with minorities at all levels of institutional authority. In other words simply having blacks in positions of authority doesn't mean that anti-black racism will go away. One could conceive of a white supremacist nation being run by an executive branch that was predominantly filled with racial minorities. The implication of this possibility is the pervasiveness and embeddedness of racism at a fundamental way in which we not only see the world but inhabit and dwell in the world.

that race is reducible to a concept that is cognizable by mind on an abstract de-worlded level. However emphasis on the abstract objective constructions of race that appear at the structural level such as through media, juridical, and institutional, neglect the problem that race is lived and experienced through the body both individually and generally as our bodies. It can be said that aside from the objective knowing of the positive sciences there is also a bodily knowing that founds the possibility of any knowing at all—certainly the objective and abstracted knowing of the positive sciences. Merleau-Ponty would say, we are existent in the world and we are already thrown into a shared world. For Merleau-Ponty these abstractions of race would be a sort of intellectualism that cannot account for the phenomena of racism as experienced in our average everydayness. Quotidian experience of racism from everyday people we share our world with is far distant from the racism exercised by the nation, state, and institutions yet this everyday intelligibility of race permeates these modern structures. Sociological data such as statistics showing infant mortality, income distribution, joblessness rates or home ownership between white Americans and African Americans is extremely useful but really only show a part of the picture of how race is lived in the body that is already in the world.

THE PITFALLS OF INTELLECTUALISM

Fanon describes a point in his intellectual career where he maintained an objective view of racism but he found that it was not sufficient and in fact that turning point was not of his own volition. Fanon writes in *Black Skin White Masks* "I have talked about the black problem with friends, or, more rarely with American Negroes...But I was satisfied with an intellectual understanding of these differences. It was not really dra-

matic...And then the occasion arose when I had to meet the white man's eyes. An unfamiliar weight burdened me. The real world challenged my claims" (pp 110). What Fanon reveals here is that even though he had an objective and critical view of racism once he experienced racial discrimination in the *flesh*, intellectualist accounts of racism in no way prepared him for the subjective experience. It seems that Fanon doesn't necessarily jettison an objective account of racism but more importantly that the objective general account needs the subjective⁸ individual account in order to get a comprehensive interpretation of racism(s). The linguistic turn in Anglo-American Euro-centric scholarship has conflated

⁸ In her essay "Toward a Phenomenology of Racial Embodiment" (in *Race* ed. Robert Bernasconi 2001), Linda Martin Alcoff writes about this difference between objective and subjective accounts of race and racism and calls for the combined approach in order to gain a richer understanding about how racial intelligibility functions in society and for the individual consciousness. My understanding of Fanon and Merleau-Ponty is quite similar to that of Alcoff except the marked distinction in what subjectivity is for human perception. Beginning with Merleau-Ponty I move in a different direction from Alcoff's notion of "body image" and "body schema." The two are not interchangeable and "body image" refers to one's conscious reflection on how they see their own bodies and the type that it is for them. For example the "body image" is that which is a self-conscious representation like an anorexic's view that they are always too fat and never thin enough. Our "body schema" on the other hand is tacit yet unreflective knowledge about our body, its movements, its generation of space—as being-in-the-world. This is not out of habit or mere repetitive movement in the world but out of implicit knowledge of our own space and movement toward objects and humans that is anterior and foundational to cognition. So I fundamentally differ with Alcoff on two key aspects of Merleau-Ponty, the conflation of "body image" with "body schema" and "Perceptual practices or habits" with tacit bodily knowledge and bodily skill. This by no means voids her argument but fundamentally shifts to an overt subjectivism of the kind that Merleau-Ponty explicitly argued against throughout his career calling this Kantian anthropocentric account of subjectivity the *préjugé du monde* or prejudice of the world.

experience as a move towards identity essentialism where personal, ethnic, racial, gender, class identity becomes a rigid and bounded set of discursive categories with exclusive characteristics. These rigid boundaries when policed include some but exclude others therefore reproducing the same levels of violence that the groups' members were trying to avoid in the first place. However not all meaning is discursively produced, so to say that experience and personal identity is always already a discursive formation is problematic. This narrow view of experience as 'condemned to language' inhibits the possibility for a comprehensive interpretation of existence and experience. Merleau-Ponty phenomenology is critically important on this account because taken seriously the body as the locus of meaning rather than just language and mind, the lived body amongst other beings in the world offers radical perspective on experience.

I would argue that dismissing the body and experience has come to pervade even post-colonial studies, which ironically has the project of elucidating the violent experience of colonial, neo-colonial, and imperial racism. In the following passage from *Culture and Imperialism* Edward Said invokes Gramsci to describe the problems of essentialism and essences in regards to ethnic identity. "If one believes with Gramsci that an intellectual vocation is socially possible as well as desirable, then it is an inadmissible contradiction at the same time to build analyses of historical experience around exclusions, exclusions that stipulate, for instance, that only women can understand feminine experience, only Jews can understand Jewish suffering, only formerly colonial subjects can understand colonial experience." Said goes on to write "if at the outset we acknowledge the massively knotted and complex histories of special but nevertheless overlapping and interconnected experiences---of women, of Westeners, of Blacks, of national states and

cultures--- there is no particular intellectual reason for granting each and all of them an ideal and essentially separate status" (31-2). Said is correct in pointing out the pitfalls of overinvested and essentialized identities but for Said essentialism seems to be an inevitable outcome of privileging a specific experience whether it being Jewish, a woman, black etc...

What is striking is that Said invokes Gramsci's notion of an intellectual, one that Gramsci expands from the notion of the traditional intellectual to include the organic. A close reading of Gramsci's section on intellectuals in *Prison Notebooks* reveals that in order for Gramsci to obliterate the bourgeoisie's monopoly on intellectual life he needed first to obliterate the dominant Cartesian mind/body split. In the Marxian dialectical sense mind would refer to the bourgeois intellectual while body refers to the proletarian factory wage worker. Gramsci does this by bringing the body and mind back together where the body and bodily skill were also part and parcel to mind and thinking. Once this dualism is shattered it becomes possible to see that the craftsman and worker have as much to bear on intellectual life as the professional philosopher. Said does not take Gramsci's expanded notion of intellectual to bear on experience and resigns himself to the Cartesian one.

Said's schema of an 'intellectual' is one made in his own image where only cognitive understanding of bodily experience is sufficient in understanding what it means to be racialized, colonized, or oppressed. This I would argue is a one dimensional view of identity and experience as only discursively produced rather than co-dependent on identity as lived. In short, Said only proffers an intellectualist approach to the interrogation of identity and one that nominalizes experience to always be 'condemned to language' and therefore subordinate to it.

BLACK TO THE THINGS THEMSELVES

In the preceding paragraph I wanted to bring the body back to experience and Merleau-Ponty becomes extremely helpful in this project.

It must be stated here that Merleau-Ponty never applied his theory of perception and primordial ontology to an interpretation of the colonial situation. Merleau-Ponty's project was to establish a universal ontology irrespective of society, culture, and institutions. From his 1945 work *Phenomenology of Perception* to his last working notes compiled together in *The Visible and the Invisible* published in 1964, Merleau-Ponty consistently placed the perceiving body⁹ as the center piece to his new ontology. It would be this primordial ontology that would then explain epistemology, culture, society, etc.

As alluded to, Merleau-Ponty starts with the perceiving body, the bare minimum biological pre-personal being, therefore human perception is a prerequisite for his ontology. It is necessary for Merleau-Ponty to keep his eye on the phenomena so to speak in order to ground human existence. For Merleau-Ponty's philosophical project it becomes important to make a link to primalness of perception as something universal to all of human kind. Anthropology is ripe with these empirical data that can be drawn upon as reference to man and the 'state of nature.' What I mean here is

⁹ What is critical to note is that according to Merleau-Ponty human perception and one's body as the locus of the origin of meaning for humans as *being-in-the-world* is a subjectivity without anthropocentrism, meaning that the subject or as Sartre would call the *for-itself* (pour-soi) is not our normative and general way of *being-in-the-world*. Our general way of existence is neither subject nor object but as our bodies. Some have translated this to be 'body subject' but this is incorrect because designating the body as some sort of subject drags perception into a privatization of experience to a mere psychologism.

that contemporary anthropology delivered the concept of the primitive necessary to embark on perception as first philosophy that was put forth in *Phenomenology of Perception*. True perceptual experience in which man could perceive things and space as they were themselves was something that modern European man had in a sense lost. In this way Merleau-Ponty is in the shared company of French Enlightenment thinkers Jean Jacques Rousseau and Etienne Condillac both of whom made thorough critiques of Cartesian dualism, Rousseau in his *Essay on the Origin of Human Languages* and Condillac in his *Essay on the Origin of Human Knowledge*.

The inability to see, feel, hear, taste, and smell the things as they appeared to the perceiving body, was in effect the foundational part of the crisis of European man. This crisis was only made visible by looking and comparing oneself to non-European man, essentially primitive man. Merleau-Ponty writes “a primitive man in the desert is always able to take his bearings immediately without having to cast his mind back, and add up distances covered and deviations made since setting off” (2002 115). No doubt this is a fantastical image of the savage. He goes on to write “Primitive peoples, in so far as they live in a world of myth, do not overstep existential space, and this is why for them dreams count just as much as perceptions” (2002 332). In much like Rousseau’s ‘savage’ the primitive here functions as means to show how the world should appear as it is to the prepersonal corporeal schema or at least a schema that is unfettered by the “crypto-mechanisms” of the modern perceiving European subject. The problem of the modern intellectual European man is that he cannot see the thing as it appears to his body because he has allowed reason to colonize his very perception of himself, others and world. Merleau-Ponty writes “We must therefore stop wondering how and why red signifies effort or violence, green restful-

ness and peace; we must *rediscover* how to live these colours as our body does, that is, as peace or violence in concrete form” (2002 243).

The power to see things as they really are is the already contained promise of our perceiving body; we need only to ‘rediscover’ it. Merleau-Ponty makes the rediscovery of bodily perception the primary project of the *Phenomenology of Perception*. Merleau-Ponty was deeply influenced by the anthropology of Claude Levi-Strauss¹⁰ both of whom are Rousseauian in their deployment of the anthropological category of the ‘primitive’ as a means to critique European man and rationalism.

MERLEAU-PONTY’S NORMATIVE BODY

In the following pages I want to describe Fanon’s appropriation and critique of Merleau-Ponty’s description of bodily perception that he articulates in *Black Skin White Masks*. In this text devoted almost exclusively to ‘being’¹¹ or more correctly *non-being* in the colonial situation, Fanon appropriates and challenges Western phenomenological and psychoanalytical traditions—the Hegelian ontological position of Jean-Paul Sartre and Freudian view of the unconscious of Jacques Lacan respectively. As well Merleau-Ponty’s theory of perception figures prominently in *Black Skin White Masks*, which Fanon challenges. Though Fanon is critical of these Western concepts of being, I argue that his phenomenology is not entirely incommensurable with that of Merleau-Ponty.

There are two fundamental philosophical themes in which Fanon and Merleau-Ponty agree on, the phenomenology of appearances and human freedom. Freedom is for both philosophers derivative of the phe-

¹⁰ See Levi-Strauss’s *Savage Mind*, a book dedicated to Merleau-Ponty after his death in 1961 and extremely critical of Jean Paul Sartre.

nomena of perceptual world disclosing. As is probably clear at this point, the issue of the appearance of race in everyday lived

¹¹ The subject of ontology or doing ontology (the science of being) is problematic for Fanon because as he correctly argues the black has no ontological resistance to the self/Other dialectic of whites and therefore has no possibility of appearing as human at all in an anti-black world. However Fanon is clearly doing ontology and describing a postcolonial ontology. Therefore it is not ontology as a science itself that he rejects but the ontological assumptions of the West in general and Sartre and Merleau-Ponty in particular. Even more fundamentally, Fanon critiques implicitly Heidegger's fundamental ontology of *Dasein* because if we understand generally the entity of *Dasein* as 'being-there' then for the black, according to Fanon, is 'nicht-sein,' 'not being' or 'not-there.' Fanon articulates this exactly when he writes 'I moved toward the other.....and the evanescent other, hostile but not opaque, transparent, *not there*, disappeared. Nausea.....' (1991 pp 112). If we can say that the anthropological invention of the *primitive* shares the same precarious existence as do postcolonial blacks then the implications of Heidegger's *Dasein* are far reaching as he writes about primitive man's use of language as equipment or technology,

...for primitive man, the sign coincides with that which is indicated. Not only can the sign represent this in the sense of serving as a substitute for what it indicates, but it can do so in such a way that the sign itself always is what it indicates. This remarkable coinciding does not mean, however, that the sign-Thing has already undergone a certain 'Objectification'—that is has been experienced as a mere Thing and misplaced into the same realm of Being of the present-at-hand as what it indicates. This 'coinciding' is not an identification of things which have hitherto been isolated from each other: it consists rather in the fact that the sign has not yet become free from that which it is a sign. Such a use of signs is still absorbed completely in Being-towards what is indicated, so that a sign as such cannot detach itself at all. This coinciding is based not on a prior Objectification but on the fact that such Objectification is completely lacking. This means, however, that signs are not discovered as equipment at all—that ultimately what is 'ready-to-hand' within-the-world just does not have the same kind of Being that belongs to equipment. Perhaps even readiness-to-hand and equipment have nothing to contribute as ontological clues in Interpreting the primitive world; and certainly the ontology of Thinghood does even less. (*Being and Time*, 113)

experience is my primary concern. The fundamental critique that Fanon indirectly levels against Merleau-Ponty is the argument that there is a normative pre-personal corporeal schema that all humans share and it is this corporeal schema as a biological given that cannot be fundamentally altered by society, culture and language. Fanon argues that if we take this normative corporeal schema and subject it to a history of anti-black racism and anti-black existence, Merleau-Ponty's universal corporeal schema loses some of its universal givens. In short, Fanon implicitly charges that Merleau-Ponty's theory of the normative corporeal schema¹² is based upon European man, a white man.

Merleau-Ponty does show that the universal corporeal schema can be subtended by other cultural schemas, such as a sexual schema; yet, these second order schema's only influence or impinge on the corporeal schema and never have the capacity to overtake the primordially of perception. Fanon argues in an antiblack world a black person has these other schemas, a "historico-racial schema" and a "racial epidermal schema." The historico-racial schema is the sedimented personal experiences of anti-black racism that a black person endures. These are not memories imprinted on the brain but predelineate the exterior horizons of what is possible and what to anticipate in an anti-black world. The historico-racial schema are a set of dispositions about how to accept the world and live in it. The racial-epidermal schema is the interior horizon of self and others in immediate perceptual experience of the world. The racial epidermal schema impacts a black person's tacit sense of self. The racial epidermal schema immediately in play in the phenomena of appearing or showing up as black in an anti-black world.

¹² Iris Marion Young and Don Ihde make similar critiques of Merleau-Ponty's normative corporeal schema. See Iris Marion Young's "Throwing Like a Girl" and Don Ihde's *Bodies in Technology*.

For Fanon the historico-racial schema and the racial epidermal schema tacitly inform a black person's sense of self. The question of "who am I" or "what am I" becomes an everyday pre-reflective existential. The question is to what extent, if any and in what relation, do the "historico-racial schema" and "racial-epidermal schema" colonize the biological perceptual system, the system that according to Merleau-Ponty establishes the possibility for any level of consciousness (pre-reflective, reflective, intersubjective consciousness etc.). As we shall see for Fanon racism can at times overrun the normative formation of the self, as one with self consciousness that does not negate itself but is always already intersubjective.

First it is necessary to look at the phenomenological description of bodily perception that Merleau-Ponty articulates in *Phenomenology of Perception*. Merleau-Ponty writes "its [the perceiving body's] spatiality is not, like that of external objects or like that of 'spatial sensations', a *spatiality of position*, but a *spatiality of situation*. ...If I stand holding my pipe in my closed hand, the position of my hand is not determined discursively by the angle which it makes with my forearm, and my forearm with my upper arm, and my upper arm with my trunk, and my trunk with the ground. I *know* [my emphasis] indubitably where my pipe is, and thereby I know where my hand and my body are" (2002 p 114-5). What Merleau-Ponty argues against is a cognitivist or intellectualist perspective on how the lived body forms its own space and has a tacit sense of self. The intellectualist perspective on perception holds that our bodies are like any other object that we re-present, that in our minds we calculate the dimensions, distance, and movement our bodies have, and then act. For the intellectualist the act of smoking a pipe is purely a mental activity where mind determines through calculation what the body can and should do in an atomistic fashion. This Kantian metaphysical conception of the human and the body

where a conscious knowing subject represents the world including one's body through mentalist activities as representable objects splayed out before the knowing subject. However, Merleau-Ponty's challenge is that the lived human body in everydayness does not exist as subject¹³ or object but what he calls the "third term" or the perceiving body. In this view the body perceives the world and objects holistically in unity rather than as discrete and atomic sensations that are compiled together by the mind then represented to the knowing subject.

Merleau-Ponty's bodily "knowing" is tacit knowing or what he calls the 'tacit cogito,' a pre-reflective consciousness of the body in its own spatial field, a certain sense of itself in the world, but not one that implies a subject formation or an "I." For Merleau-Ponty the perceiving body is not simply another object in the world of objects, even in the pre-personal biological sense of perception. Merleau-Ponty's notion of this pre-reflective consciousness of one's own body in space, its own space is an important aspect of how Fanon experiences his own body but with additional schemas, what he calls the "historico-racial schema" and "racial-epidermal schema." Merleau-Ponty's corporeal schema is for him a universal given of human being. For Merleau-Ponty human perception is foundational for human existence and being-in-the-world, that most primordial point where human being becomes possible at all.

FANON'S BODY AS ALWAYS FOR OTHERS

Next let us look at the problem of the black body for Fanon. Fanon introduces us

¹³ The issue of the *subject* is fundamental for Merleau-Ponty. Some have incorrectly called the perceiving body or "third term" the '*body-subject*' but this is misleading because it implies in the word usage a 'subject.' Merleau-Ponty never actually uses such a description as 'body subject'.

to these issues by way of his own experience in France as a black Caribbean immigrant in a white world. It's worth here quoting Fanon in full to reveal his position on a post-colonial situation:

In the white world the man of color encounters difficulties in 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 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 myself 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 the world—definitive because it creates a real dialectic between my body and the world... Below the corporeal schema I had sketched a historico-racial schema. The elements that I used had been provided for me not by “residual sensations and perceptions primarily of a tactile, vestibular, kinesthetic, and visual character”, but by the other, the white man, who had woven me out of a thousand details, anecdotes, stories. (1991, 111)

Taking a cue from Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* and Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* Fanon describes phenomenologically the establishment of his body in space and time and the body's use

of tacit knowledge of abstract movement. Much in the same way as Merleau-Ponty describes tacit knowledge of the human body in the spatio-temporal world. Fanon concurs with Merleau-Ponty that this givenness of the body and knowledge of itself “seems to be the [body] schema.” This givenness of the body is for itself, not given by the other. At the same time the “historico-racial schema” is “imposed” by white others; therefore, consciousness of himself is subtended in such a way that the pre-personal biological schema has no autonomous bearing on Fanon's consciousness of himself. Fanon is forced to only see himself through the white others' eyes, through their stories about Negroes and savages. Directly challenging Merleau-Ponty's theory of the general existence of the lived body, Fanon himself as a consciousness of himself places a historico-racial schema below that of the corporeal schema. The historico-racial schema is not discursively produced but are the sedimented experiences of racism that subtend one's corporeal schema; which as Fanon writes is the affective field (Merleau-Ponty's phenomenal field) “the definitive structuring of self and of the world, one that is not ‘imposed’” on Fanon but given by the body and being-in-the-world. The body is the locus of the “tacit cogito,” the primordial pre-reflective consciousness of self and world.

Merleau-Ponty would certainly agree with the possibility of the existence of the ‘historico-racial schema’; however, the assertion that it could nullify the pre-personal corporeal schema would be generally rejected but, as I will show later, can be overrun. Fanon was conscious of himself but through the eyes of whites as a body always for others. It could be argued that Merleau-Ponty's pre-personal corporeal schema was in fact subtended by this historico-racial schema in a similar way that Merleau-Ponty argues the *sexual schema* subtends it (2002, 178-99). Yet Fanon argues adamantly that the corporeal schema for

the black man is obliterated and never able to establish itself as it can for whites. However, Fanon in the situation he describes can still stand and act and his body continues to be the primary locus of this action. Fanon continues on writing... "Then assailed at various points, the corporeal schema crumbled, its place taken by a racial epidermal schema. In the train it was no longer a question of being aware of my body in the third person but in triple person. In the train I was given not one but two, three places. I had already stopped being amused. It was not that I was finding febrile coordinates in the world. I existed triply: I occupied space. I moved toward the other... and the evanescent other, hostile but not opaque, transparent, not there, disappeared. Nausea..." (1991 112).

How can Fanon assert that what he calls the "corporeal schema," a description that is commensurable with that described by Merleau-Ponty, be trumped by the "historico-racial schema" and then later a "racial-epidermal schema"? One could argue that what Fanon is describing are two separate phenomenal descriptions of consciousness. The first being the pre-reflective tacit knowledge of one's own body in the world, at least not fully a reflecting subject. The second being the "third person" consciousness of self that is imposed by the white other's gaze, where Fanon is conscious of himself towards becoming a subject. So rather than a corporeal schema, what Fanon may be describing is his own subjective body image, a reflection of himself through white others' eyes. Perhaps Fanon is conflating two types of consciousness, one that is a universal biological given and originates at the level of the perceiving body and the other reflective consciousness of himself that is discursively produced by a racist culture out of "thousands of anecdotes and stories" of the Negro. The question is, is the latter so called reflective third person consciousness of the self really a reflective consciousness of the self or directly

linked to the pre-reflective consciousness of body-schema?

The racist phenomena has its root in the visual field of perception when the white other directs his/her gaze upon Fanon. Making a hard and fast distinction based upon state and content of consciousness seems problematic because for Fanon if the second phenomena, generated by the white gaze is a pure reflective consciousness then this would require, in a sense, a shut off subject, one who is removed from the world. This is not the case with the phenomena that Fanon describes, which is existential phenomena, active being-in-the-world and being with others. The phenomena that Fanon experiences is not an intellectualist conceptual articulation of racist stories and anecdotes but rather the interpretation of these stories projected onto his epidermis by the white gaze. If recognition of human being or what a human being is were simply the phenomena of the corporeal schema then Fanon is certainly that, because he possesses, as every other human entity, tacit knowledge of his body at some fundamental level but this other layer of significance (historico racial schema to racial-epidermal schema) does not allow for possibility of complete human recognition and in fact negates the possibility of intersubjectivity or being with others in a direction towards reciprocity. Fanon shows up for whites in postwar France not as human being and not object but something quite outside of the subject/object relation. It is the one way street of the white's gaze that articulates the uncanny ontological status of Fanon. Fanon is not a subject as is European man nor an Other or an object, but a thirdly thing; that is there as a living body but not there as human. Fanon is almost an object because he quite simply exhibits the behavior not of a thing but of a human that is caught out there living in the world while at the same time he is not afforded a self-consciousness of the normative subject. So for Fanon inter-

subjective consciousness of the self with others is not simply posterior to pre-reflective consciousness of the corporeal schema. Therefore for him biology is not always anterior to sociality. Referring back to the earlier hypothesis that Fanon, in describing the phenomena of self consciousness as two different types of consciousness, one pre-reflective consciousness or tacit perceptual knowledge of his body and the second, perception of others and others of him, is incorrect. Rather, anonymous biological existence and personal human existence are interwoven, one effecting the other in both directions, simultaneously.

Merleau-Ponty is for the most part clear about the distinction of the biological facticity of the body as comprehensively determinant of the pre-personal corporeal schema, that for him is universal to humans and is anterior to personal and cultural human existence. For Merleau-Ponty the pre-personal corporeal schema is fundamental to the historico-racial schema and racial epidermal schema that subtends Fanon's body. The crisis of modern being for Merleau-Ponty is that personal human existence is thought to overrun the primordial perceiving body. If getting back to the things themselves is the phenomenological spirit for Merleau-Ponty then it becomes necessary to get back to primal perception. Merleau-Ponty does see our biological existence in synchronization with our human or social existence as a general way of existing. Merleau-Ponty allows for exceptions or aberrations of this order where the synchronization of the pre-personal to personal is not always seemingly given, he writes...

...so it can be said that my organism, as a pre-personal cleaving to the general form of the world, as an anonymous and general existence, plays, beneath my personal life, the part of an *inborn complex*. It is not some kind of inert thing; it too has

a something of the momentum of existence. It may even happen when I am in danger that my human situation abolishes my biological one, that my body lends itself without reserve to action. But these moments can be no more than moments, and for most of the time personal existence represses the organism without being able either to go beyond it or to renounce itself; without, in other words, being able either to reduce the organism to its existential self, or itself to the organism. (2002 p. 97)

Here it seems that in 'moments' of danger the human situation can overrun the biological anonymous existence of the body. Merleau-Ponty stresses that these moments of danger can only be fleeting moments. His description of the phenomenon of mortal danger, of life and death in times of war are one of the few, if not the only places in the entire of *Phenomenology of Perception* where Merleau-Ponty concedes to an abolition of the pre-personal corporeal schema, the foundation to his thesis on perception. For realists who take seriously the thesis of lived bodily perception that Merleau-Ponty expounds, the possibility of domination of human existence over its synchronicity with biological existence will be seen as an aberration.

Is the phenomenon of racism that Fanon describes an exceptional moment in his everyday life or perhaps serialized exceptional moments? Perhaps, rather than focus on the moment as anomalous, we should look to the essence of that moment. In average everydayness, different than the exceptional moment of mortal danger, Saint-Exupéry says that "meaning is not at stake." So it is not death itself but the possibility of death that evokes meaning, the essence of the moment is the contingency of life and meaning itself as presented to the self. Is then meaning at stake for Fanon? In

that terrible moment of racism Fanon writes “Look at the nigger!...Mama, a Negro!...Hell, he’s getting mad....Take no notice, sir, he does not know that you are as civilized as we...” Fanon then describes his experience of himself and being with white others.

The white world, the only honorable one, barred me from all participation. A man was expected to behave like a man. I was expected to behave like a black man—or at least like a nigger. I resolved, since it was impossible for me to get away from an *inborn complex*, to assert myself as a BLACK MAN. Since the other hesitated to recognize me, there remained only one solution: to make myself known. (BSWM, pp 112-4)

Does the violence of the phenomena that Fanon describes of his own experience constitute a challenge to existential meaning for him? It is clear that the enduring effects of white racism that Fanon describes call into question consistently the meaning of being human, of human existence. The experience of racism by the racialized seems inevitably to always put one’s existence at stake. The further question to push forward is, are these racist experiences simply anomalous moments or is the general existence of the racialized one that calls into question the meaning of being of human?

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