



# To Dream of Fanon

Reconstructing a Method for Thought by a  
Revolutionary Intellectual

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# To Dream of Fanon

## Reconstructing a Method for Thought by a Revolutionary Intellectual<sup>1</sup>

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The dreams of the native are always of muscular prowess.

– Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*

The birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author.

– Barthes, “The Death of the Author”

Intellectual Activity [...] modif[ies] its relationship to the muscular-nervous effect towards a new equilibrium [...] and ensur[es] that the muscular-nervous effort itself [...] becomes the foundation of a new and integral conception of the world.

– Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*

The half-century, which is the time that has elapsed since the publication of *Wretched of the Earth*, seems such a short period when one imagines its author in all his intellectual magnificence, his anguish, and the many details we all know of his short-lived reality. Dare one say, after the concept has long been declared “dead” that we imagine him as having been a live “author”? As I write this, the idea of various notable intellectuals and revolutionary movements could come to mind in order for them to serve as interesting comparisons while we discuss and remember Fanon, his analyses of the colonial aftermath, and his many predictions, both explicit and implicit. However, the “death” of the author is, in fact, as Barthes’ polemical

essay showed, a premise that empowers the text in its full potentiality well beyond the god-like authority vested in the identity of the author.<sup>2</sup> Here, the liberation of the text joins up the enunciation with its “content” so to speak, or in Barthes’ words, reveals how Fanon “made of his very life a work for which his book was a model.”<sup>3</sup> It is from this idea that I wish to see Fanon as incomparable. The reason to do so does not stem from some esoteric form of admiration, but rather a conviction that Fanon’s narration itself is both indicative and exemplary of a process of thinking that, for me, remains unparalleled in theorizing the role of the intellectual. Such a conviction requires us to read beyond the content of *Wretched* and be “reborn” in the Barthesian sense as readers.<sup>4</sup> In essence, such a task entails following the way Fanon himself allows us to actually trace how he dreams of “the native” or “the people” and thus accomplishes an affective leap, arguably, more completely than any other intellectual has done. This reading is, thus, an invitation to dream – even momentarily – of Fanon.

Fanon’s narrative burst on the intellectual scene quite literally with *Black Skin, White Masks*,<sup>5</sup> which exemplified “commitment” in the classic Sartrean sense in ways that cannot be taught and which are hard to enumerate. They can only be experienced because they are, in the final instance, movements of thought as much as they are movements of affect. In reflecting upon *Wretched of the Earth*,<sup>6</sup> then, I seek to follow the method of thought/affect that its narrative carries, written as it is from the quite explicit perspective of an “intellectual.” Although substantial attention has been given to the narrator of *Black Skin, White Masks*,<sup>7</sup> the narrator in *Wretched* has somehow evoked less interest because he is more easily identifiable with the author’s identity in prosaic rather than narrative terms. To see Fanon’s *Wretched* as incomparable is also to listen, just for a moment, even provisionally, to the narrator of *Black Skin, White Masks* and hear the totality of that text’s thought/affect, thus allowing our most sincere response to it to fashion this reading. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon’s narrator sought his humanity in a world that denied it, demanded recognition of his originality while it became a copy in his own eyes, reached for Infinity even as he failed to transcend what, in the end, was his black skin. In *Wretched*, Fanon’s narrator leads us through a lesson in the very method for intellectual thought while ably taking on the role of a revolutionary intellectual. Nevertheless, the truth is that Fanon’s absolute conviction and what we might somewhat abstractly call “love,” in the totality of his engagement in the enterprise of thought and writing, as such a narrator, are inseparable from his conviction as a revolutionary actor in the Algerian war of independence.

Painfully aware of his distorted place within colonial culture, Fanon ironized, with anguished elegance in *Black Skin, White Masks*, his own unavoidable duplicity that arose from his structural position within colonial culture and which he took to the point of caricature as a black non-French

Frenchman. This awareness from *Black Skin, White Masks* is carried through to *Wretched* in Fanon's analysis of the suddenly appearing national middle class, which is propped up by the elitism of its members. This position, in turn, affords the group a particular place in the national structure. Although the narrator in *Black Skin, White Masks* laid out the anguish of the *évolué* under French colonialism, in *Wretched*, which has a more programmatic tone, the elite intellectuals and intelligentsia who form the bourgeois class in the new nation are harshly viewed. This middle class "remembers what it has read in European textbooks and imperceptibly it becomes not even the replica of Europe, but its caricature."<sup>8</sup> The challenge of the intellectual, then, is to act otherwise than the middle-class of which he is a part, having read the same European textbooks and thus sharing the culture and aspirations of the whole *Weltanschauung* of the European middle class that these books create and project. In Antonio Gramsci's terms, it is not possible to reduce the intellectual to his activities pertaining to thought alone but rather he must be seen within the "ensemble of the system of relations" within which all his activities can be placed within the "general complex of social relations."<sup>9</sup>

Fanon had an instinctive awareness that the "national" structure, which he, as an intellectual, might envision for his native Martinique was an utter unfeasibility owing to the lack of any identifiable "people" whose cause could be taken up. The extent of Martinican culture's Frenchness, its lack of a reasonable number of "natives" who could be mobilized in the name of the nation against such Frenchness, and, perhaps, also its geographical isolation were all sources of desolation for Fanon and are suggested in his first work, *Black Skin, White Masks*. Fanon's career, in the sense of *métier*, and his role as an intellectual could never be realized in/for Martinique, whose continued departmental status well after Fanon's death can only vindicate his life choices, the most salient one here being to become, through action, an Algerian and an African. In fact, at the time of his writing *Wretched*, Fanon's Caribbeanness seems to hardly figure in his thought, unless we note a passing reference in discussing the Guinean, Keita Fodeba's dramatic poem, "African Dawn,"<sup>10</sup> after which the narrator suggests that the hero Naman who is finally coming back home to his country of birth is returning to anywhere in the Third World: "this is Sétif in 1945, this is Fort-de-France, this is Saigon, Dakar, and Lagos. All those niggers all those wogs who fought to defend the liberty of France for British civilization recognize themselves..."<sup>11</sup> The intellectual is not supposed to remember "home" except in the service of his cause: Fort-de-France figures simply as part of the larger Third World. In an essay originally for *Les Temps Modernes*, Fanon's Algerianism is clear and explicit: "It is as an Algerian that I have done all these things. I do not have the impression of having betrayed France. I am an Algerian, and like any Algerian I have fought and I continue to fight colonialism. As a conscious Algerian citizen, I felt I must take my place by the side of the patriots. This is what I have done."<sup>12</sup> This justification to

France as a public intellectual within French culture already erases his Caribbeanness for reasons we need not pursue.<sup>13</sup> A true student of Sartre's existentialism, Fanon *is* what he does: his Algerianness is a result of having fought colonialism alongside other Algerians. However, Fanon's text is acutely conscious of the process by which its narrator proceeds from point to point and how each point relates to his primary constituency: the people. The author ("Fanon") then becomes, in Foucauldian terms, a "function" of the discourse.<sup>14</sup> Such a function is articulated in what I am calling, quite programmatically, a revolutionary manner, and iterated in affective readings, which I have aligned to the theme of dreaming in *Wretched*.

## Narrating the Intellectual

A revolutionary intellectual, one might say, is steeped in discourse only with the idea that at some point the latter must be abandoned for political praxis. Intellectuals do not maneuver such a dual role so easily precisely because it is most often the case that their social grounding, firmly anchored in bourgeois education and its attendant cosmopolitanism and language advantage, resists abandoning such a structural position in favor of adopting, entirely, that of the class their thought serves. The jump from discourse to action, to put it somewhat crudely -- and against postmodernist notions of the all-encompassing "text," that actually does not quite live up to the Barthesian idea of the "model" text in the sense we have just seen -- is not a smooth nor natural one without the specific exigencies brought along by extreme situations such as literal decimation of the entire group, threats of and/or actual incarceration or death itself owing to severe censure, for example.

In many senses, the historical circumstances surrounding Fanon's intellectual development, his position as a brilliant young Martinican touched by the idealism of Aimé Césaire at the École Schœlcher, being a young black man in France before World War II, his training as a psychiatrist, and his being sent to Algeria to head the Psychiatry Department of Blida-Joinville, along with his incredible sensitivity of mind, all come together seamlessly in his writing. In hindsight, keeping in mind Fanon's more literal exit from discourse (without playing down his actions or writings prior to this), which his dramatic letter of resignation from Blida-Joinville records, is impressive in its decisiveness for a different register of action.<sup>15</sup> Given how his role as a psychiatrist in colonial Algeria opened up his awareness to an even greater realization of his contradictory role,<sup>16</sup> it is fascinating to study the way his avoidance of simplifying colonial "badness" and native "goodness" plays out in an exquisite form of alternating focalization, skepticism, dramatization, and affective argument. Elsewhere I have commented in detail on the role of that narrator in *Black Skin, White*

*Masks*.<sup>17</sup> Here, I draw attention to Fanon's heightened awareness in *Wretched* of his intellectual and affective commitment to thought and action.

One of the ways in which intellectuals, who are necessarily separated from the group or class they take on to represent, do stay focused on their task is through affective connection with their adoptive class. This empathy plays out primarily in the ways in which the intellectual privileges the perspective and concerns of the class in question. The usage of pronouns implicating the narrator ("we" or even "I" in dramatic role-playing) that effectively focalizes the thought process is crucial to delineate the space from which the theorizing occurs. At the same time, the use of these pronouns within the theoretical discourse of the intellectual while signaling its authoritative nature, also frames the intellectual as its "author function" in the terms outlined by Foucault.<sup>18</sup> The pedagogical impulse in *Black Skin, White Masks* directed itself as much to the mostly metropolitan audience that comprised its first readers as it did to an ideal audience of non-white readers well beyond the elite that Fanon himself reluctantly, but perfectly, epitomized. Already there, the critique was "double" in the particular sense in which the term was used by Abélkébir Khatibi, the late Moroccan sociologist/philosopher, for whom a new "unthought thought" or a *pensée autre* could spring from a critique of both Western sociology and the history of Moroccan and Arab metaphysics and scholarship.<sup>19</sup> Fanon's notion of empathy alongside a doubly launched critique, against the system opposed and the one to be destroyed, brings newness and constitutes the revolutionary potential of the discourse being created. Such a view accords with Antonio Gramsci's conception of the organic intellectual, who is the ideal one because he arises from within the class that is to be represented in a particular problematic, and therefore is an appropriate, "authentic" (although this is not Gramsci's term) intellectual for that class precisely because he is not autonomous from it. With Fanon, in alluding to an ideal audience, as I have above, it is also possible to detect the author's keen awareness of not just an ideal reader but also an ideal self (as intellectual and narrator) whom the writing subject tries to approach through the narrative. In some senses, Fanon claims authenticity as an Algerian by his refashioning through action with and on behalf of the Algerian revolution alongside other Algerians who similarly *remade* themselves through the same process.

A fascinating way, and perhaps a quite obvious one in Fanon's case given his profession, in which the narrator of *Wretched* approaches his subject, the "native" Algerian, is by entering his dreams. Although one of the chapters in *Wretched* actually reproduces some of the narratives of clients, both Algerian and French, where dreams are evoked,<sup>20</sup> it is in the dramatic element of imagining the native's dream that we can locate a further step in the method laid out for what I am quite straightforwardly calling revolutionary intellectual thought (which seeks action) in this text.

For example, in describing the separation of space between the settler's town and that of the native, the town itself takes on the nature of the native for it is "a hungry town, starved of bread, of meat, of shoes, of coal, of light. The native town is a crouching village, a town on its knees, a town wallowing in the mire."<sup>21</sup> However, if the town is simply metonymic with the crowd of natives that populates it, the look of the native, though generalized, accesses his "dreams of possession – all manner of possession: to sit at the settler's table, to sleep in the settler's bed, with his wife, if possible."<sup>22</sup> The poetic gesture of metaphor (personification) and metonymy is not one to be simplified by falling back on the biography of the author and thus referring to the role of the psychiatrist-author behind the narrator. Rather, it is part of the method to reach revolutionary agency by which the intellectual must step into the skin of the people in order to understand, speak to, and speak for it. Referring to the many physical and psychological restrictions placed on the native in the colonized country, the narrator explains: "This is why the dreams of the native are always of muscular prowess; his dreams are of action and aggression."<sup>23</sup> Soon after, in the very next sentence, the narrator provides a startling series of actions within the native's dream. However, they are recounted without warning or interruption, while the intellectual/narrator *is* seamlessly his people. "*I dream I am jumping, swimming, running, climbing; I dream that I burst out laughing that I span a river in one stride, or that I am followed by a flood of motorcars which never catch up with me*" [my emphases].<sup>24</sup> The return to his pedagogical narrative "self" is equally seamless as the paragraph ends with the next and final sentence: "During the period of colonization, the native never stops achieving his freedom from nine in the evening until six in the morning."<sup>25</sup> The narration thus takes the highly subjective, personal and individual dream of the native into the analytical realm essential to forging the path of action. On the other hand, when demystifying the role of the leader, the narrator takes on the authority purely related to the conventional formulation of the text: "We have more than once drawn attention to the baleful influence frequently wielded by the leader," he writes, referring to the previous pages.<sup>26</sup> Using the English word "leader" [also in English in the original French text], the narrator makes the remark that the verb "to lead" is often translated by "to drive" ["conduire" in the French text] and concludes that "[t]he people are no longer a herd; they do not need to be driven."<sup>27</sup> Immediately following this observation, the narration changes to first person usage (in the voice of "the people"): "If the leader drives *me* on, I want him to realize that at the same time I show him the way..."<sup>28</sup> In laying out the necessity for the people to recognize and seize their own agency, the intellectual must be one of them, in other words, he must give up his privilege to such an extent that he will have to reclaim it *as* something else. This move is recorded in the narrative shift to "I."

As already evident, despite the crucial importance given to the movement between "we" and "I", standing in the shoes of the people,

however, is not the intellectual's only task. He must simultaneously be able to see the people as part of a greater totality, for he is an "enlightened observer,"<sup>29</sup> who is able to make connections beyond what might be visible in the local contexts of the people in their daily lives. Such a connection is, for example, that "[e]ach *jacquerie*, each act of sedition in the Third World makes up part of a picture framed by the Cold War."<sup>30</sup> It is the intellectual who can "situate [...] violence in the dynamics of the international situation" and show how "it constitutes a terrible menace for the oppressor."<sup>31</sup> The intellectual, then, is responsible for taking the people beyond themselves so they become conscious of themselves as part of a greater human purpose as they come to their moment of revolution:

For in a very concrete way Europe has stuffed herself inordinately with the gold and raw materials of the colonial countries: Latin America, China, and Africa. [...] Europe is literally the creation of the Third World. The wealth which smothers her is that which was stolen from the underdeveloped peoples. The ports of Holland, the docks of Bordeaux and Liverpool were specialized in the Negro slave trade, and owe their renown to millions of deported slaves. So when we hear the head of a European state declare with his hand on his heart that he must come to the aid of the poor underdeveloped peoples, we do not tremble with gratitude.<sup>32</sup>

Fanon's act of love, which remains the ultimate poetry of his life, is to have, even imperfectly, shared the fate of the "we" that his thought posited. Thus, the intellectual reminds the people of the common cause shared with other peoples, identifies the oppressor and demystifies him, while giving courage and pride to the group into which he inserts himself. The narrator unabashedly situates himself as an intellectual of the Third World, beyond African specificity, committed to the national struggles that are essential to liberate the most disenfranchised. He remarks that "[i]n those underdeveloped countries which accede to independence there almost always exists a small number of honest intellectuals"<sup>33</sup> who are against easy profits that exclude the people. The narrator places himself with the Third World intellectuals of his time: "We must know how to use these men in the decisive battle that *we* mean to engage upon which will lead to a healthier outlook for the nation."<sup>34</sup> Forging solidarity does not afford a modest or ambiguous approach. At the same time, the narrator's ability to call upon his own humility and selflessness in thought alongside an ethical commitment to use his circumstance in the service of something greater than what it might offer him in the immediate (even as an intellectual) characterizes the method for transcending intellectualism as a career in order to thoroughly transform it into the kind that is truly a vocation. Such are the revolutionary terms set out by the narrator, which are matched only by the revolutionary action of the author. It is this that makes of Frantz Fanon an incomparable



intellectual in terms of the narration we read fifty years since and beyond the publication of *Wretched*.

One of the most important tasks that the intellectual has before him in the newly decolonizing nations, as Fanon sees it, is to dissociate the aims of the middle class from those of the people and to understand the national bourgeoisie as one that disastrously imitates the bourgeoisie of the mother country but whose economic clout and true entrepreneurship it completely lacks. He lambasts the national middle class for its “intellectual laziness,” “its spiritual penury” and “the profoundly cosmopolitan mold that its mind is set in.”<sup>35</sup> Fanon’s objection is, of course, to the ends to which such cosmopolitanism leads, for much of the work delineated for the intellectual in this text is indeed dependent upon his cosmopolitanism. To be sure, the intellectual himself must brutally rip himself apart from that middle class because he springs from it in formation and shares its very cosmopolitanism. Where the national bourgeoisie shuns ideas, the intellectual produces ideas by returning to the people:

Because it is bereft of ideas, because it lives to itself and cuts itself off from the people, undermined by its hereditary incapacity to think in terms of all the problems of the nation as seen from the point of view of the whole of that nation, the national middle class will have nothing better to do than to take on the role of manager for western enterprise, and it will in practice set up its country as the brothel of Europe.<sup>36</sup>

The crucial role of reuniting with the people and becoming a conduit between their space and the totality of the nation is, for the intellectual, an urgent calling because of the obstruction that the bourgeoisie erects between these two entities by virtue of its “false” arrival at the hour of independence. What the national bourgeoisie does, in fact, is to prevent unity amongst the peoples of Africa and thus it thwarts the efforts of “fifty million men to triumph over stupidity, hunger, and inhumanity at one and the same time.”<sup>37</sup> Fanon writes resolutely as an African intellectual: “This is why *we* must understand that African unity can only be achieved through the upward thrust of the people, and under the leadership of the people, that is to say, in defiance of the interests of the bourgeoisie” [my emphasis].<sup>38</sup> His portrait of the well-intentioned leader shows the latter going from embodying the aspirations of the people before independence only to turn into a defender of the combined interests of the national bourgeoisie and the ex-colonial companies. But the portrait is insightful in that such a metamorphosis erupts from an emotional reaction in the case of the leader rather than from a calculated desire to exploit as in the case of the national bourgeoisie:

His contact with the masses is so unreal that he comes to believe that his authority is hated and that the services that he has

rendered his country are being called in question. The leader judges the ingratitude of the masses and every day that passes ranges himself a little more resolutely on the side of the exploiters. He therefore knowingly becomes the aider and abettor of the young bourgeoisie which is plunging into the mire of corruption and pleasure.<sup>39</sup>

This passage is no doubt important in its critique of the bourgeoisie and the relationship of the leader to that group. However, the insightfulness from which the narrator understands the evolution of the dictator in all his complexity, as an emotive human being, also records Fanon's strong awareness of the elite intellectual's brotherhood with that bourgeoisie. It is, therefore, as much an admonition to the narrator/intellectual himself (and thus also to the reader) to be clear in his alliance against the "he" [sic] of the leader. Fanon is well aware of the need for political leaders on the stage of international politics, the only place where the battle for nationalism can be ultimately won. It is in service of this paradox, where the fight has to be local but the battle global, that the intellectual is called to redeem the world and that he finds his own purposefulness rather than allow his paradoxical identity to turn into either falsehood or nostalgia. The leader's dangerousness is couched very much in the tone and style that Marx used to describe how the capitalist and capitalism mystify reality for the worker and particularly how the laborer is estranged from his own labor because it does not belong to his essential being, because in laboring he denies rather than affirms himself.<sup>40</sup> The people, for Fanon's narrator is similarly alienated from the nation by the fact that its acts do not affirm its own existence although nationhood is built upon it. The narrator explains that the leader takes on the task of "mystifying and bewildering" the masses.<sup>41</sup> Further: "Every time [the leader] speaks to the people he calls to mind his often heroic life, the struggles he has led in the name of the people and the victories that in their name he has achieved..."<sup>42</sup> His job is to get the people to "obey," and so he "pacifies them."<sup>43</sup> Luckily the intellectual is the watchdog, even as he merges into his chosen collectivity, and gives discursive and explicit form to the collective, critical mind of the people, who are too busy living and acting to additionally bear that burden. In this vein, the intellectual/narrator writes: "We see [the leader] incapable of urging on the people to a concrete task [...] we see him reassessing the history of independence."<sup>44</sup> The disillusioned people are "put to sleep" by the leader in the way the latter frames their past and their role in the present. His addresses to the people try to "calm" and "bemuse" them.<sup>45</sup>

The most dramatic moment in pronoun usage as we have been following it comes when the narrator decides to turn the reader into the bourgeoisie under fire:

It is true that if care is taken to use only a language that is understood by graduates in law and economics, you can easily

prove that the masses have to be managed from above. But if you speak the language of everyday, if you are not obsessed by the perverse desire to spread confusion and to rid yourself of the people you will realize that the masses are quick to seize every shade of meaning...[...] Everything can be explained to the people, on the single condition that you really want them to understand. And if you think you don't need them [...], then the problem is quite clear."<sup>46</sup>

To make quite clear where the "I" is located, the narrator writes further, fusing with the collectivity of the new nation: "We Algerians have had the occasion and the good fortune during the course of this war to handle a fair number of questions."<sup>47</sup> More explicitly, in referring to how Algeria figures in his theorization about the Third World, the narrator indicates that he evokes Algeria "not at all with the intention of glorifying *our own people*" [my emphasis].<sup>48</sup> At the same time, "we" is also used to invoke the more purely conventional function as in: "We shall look at some of these situations."<sup>49</sup>

In all this, Fanon's ideal intellectual, who knows how to put himself in the place of "the native" and, at the same time, can see beyond the everyday of the people engaged in fighting for freedom amidst eking out a living, is one who is absolutely required to be connected to the circumstances of the people. After having taken a look at poets, writers, and other artists and how their roles evolve in the nationalist moment, the narrator spells out more clearly what exactly the role of the intellectual would be: "[W]e must join [the people] in that fluctuating movement which they are just giving a shape to, and which, as soon as it has started, will be the signal for everything to be called into question."<sup>50</sup> Having dismissed gods and God early on in this chapter, Fanon reserves for the people a mythological space: "Let there be no mistake about it; it is to this zone of occult instability where the people dwell that we must come; and it is there that our souls are crystallized and that our perceptions and our lives are transfused with the light."<sup>51</sup> This mystical space, though, is one of transformation very similar to that of the indigenous storyteller, who transformed his methods and the content of his stories to capture and participate in the exigencies before him during colonialism.<sup>52</sup> As a consequence, the storytellers were systematically arrested.<sup>53</sup> In other terms, such mysticism and the idea of ascending to a superior form of existence in the act of joining, the people are saved from becoming a form of nostalgia today when we keep the full perspective of such a daring act in view: it is so because it is full of *danger*. The danger lies in thinking from the space of (and acting with) a group to which one does not belong, *a priori*. Forging such belonging through thinking that ends in acting defines the totality of Fanon's life, and this particular narration as unambiguously revolutionary.

## By Way of Conclusion

Fanon's intellectual/narrator superbly incarnates Sartre's idea of freedom vs. facticity when it comes to occupying a place with the people. In the first instance, recognition of the place of theorizing in its essential meaning: "this place which I am is a relation" as Sartre noted,<sup>54</sup> is not bypassed. What Fanon's narrator recognizes is the realization, apart from knowing "I have to be there," is that "[i]t is necessary as well that I be able to be not wholly here so I can be over there, near the object which I locate at ten feet from me and from the standpoint of which I make my place known to myself."<sup>55</sup> The narrator of *Wretched*, whom we might recuperate to the author much more easily than has been possible in *Black Skin, White Masks*, keeps his discourse at the level of enunciation rather than allowing it to turn into content (*énoncé*). In other terms, the narrator keeps the reader conscious of the exercise we agree to enter into, through various tactics of narration, while at the same time not just telling the story of the people, but rather, showing *how* to tell it into action.

In recognizing his facticity the narrator moves beyond it: "I must be able to *escape what I am and to nihilate it* in such a way that what I am, although it existed can still be revealed as the term of a relation" [emphases in original].<sup>56</sup> However, for any transcendence, such a relation between "what I am and what I am not" in order to enable freedom "must be established."<sup>57</sup> At the same time, this relation is not in the contemplation of objects but rather, "[i]t is given in our contemplating our immediate action."<sup>58</sup> The author's visibility in the narrator's movement and the latter's awareness of it, from being what and where he is, the educated middle-class (Martinican/French) person to transforming himself in relation to the (Algerian) people he wishes to espouse and indeed become is fittingly played out in a parallel. The parallel is the theoretical movement of the people going from being mystified and helpless to discerning and revolutionary through the intellectual agency spearheaded by the intellectual but stemming from and through the agency of the people, which constitutes their identity. What Fanon's affective narration actually exemplifies is the much-touted, and indeed brilliantly arrived at notion of "strategic essentialism" associated with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, in the ways in which the narrator exploits the contingency of grammar to make meaning from different "identities," which are, in any case, revealed to be "places," which in their turn, are "relations." The ability to actually become "other" as Fanon did remains fundamental, it would seem, to casting oneself in the revolutionary role of a hero. For Sartre, "*to change* implies something to be changed, which is precisely my place. Thus *freedom is the apprehension of my facticity*" [emphases in original].<sup>59</sup> Our admiration for Fanon, in Sartre's terms, is thus for his willingness to reveal to himself "what he is" and "what he is not" (thus apprehend his facticity) in order to ultimately change and become a freedom by "dreaming" in an act of love that transforms his acts to

accord with his thought in totality. But we learn from *Wretched* that this is not as simple as carrying out this or that life-threatening role (active terrorism, for example) because Fanon's narrator, occupying the place of revolution clings to the *then* more difficult process of affective thought from the turbulence of revolution to see not just himself but others (the people, the leader, the bourgeoisie) as they are and as they are not in order to effect change. Perhaps, for our part, we might, at least momentarily, in remembering *Wretched* in its most Fanonian affect, see its author's dazzlingly meteoric existence and brilliantly affective thought as exemplifying a life we have only encountered, fittingly, in a dream: "a hero of a new type who has still not been entirely created by our culture, but one whose creation is absolutely necessary if our time is going to live up to its most radical and exhilarating possibilities."<sup>60</sup> Such a conception that focuses on the shifting narration of *Wretched* gives endless extension of, and possibility to, the moment of the hero-intellectual and is the grounds for hope well beyond the heroism of Fanon himself. As a Fanonian dream, if dreamt from a place of constraint, it would necessarily lead to Gramsci's idea of the muscular-nervous effort itself that becomes a new conception of the world.

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<sup>1</sup> This essay is for Ato Quayson.

<sup>2</sup> Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," *Image Music Text*, trs. Stephen Heath. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977): 142-48.

<sup>3</sup> Idem, p. 144. Although Barthes is speaking of Proust, whose life could not have been more different from Fanon's, it is the relationship of the enunciation of the text with the notion of "author" that is interesting to us here.

<sup>4</sup> Idem, p. 148.

<sup>5</sup> *Peau noire, masques blancs*. (Paris: Maspero, 1952); Translated as *Black Skin, White Masks*, trs. Constance Farrington. (New York: Grove Press, 1994).

<sup>6</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, trs. Constance Farrington. (New York: Grove Press, 1968). Hereafter *Wretched*.

<sup>7</sup> Jane Hiddleston, "The Perplexed Persona of Frantz Fanon's *Peau noire, masques blancs*" *Postcolonial Text* 4 (2008): 1-16; Anjali Prabhu, "Narration in Fanon's *Peau noire masques blancs*: Some Reconsiderations," in *Hybridity: Limits, Transformations, Prospects*. (Albany: SUNY Press, 2007): 123-46; Ato Sekyi-Otu, *Fanon's Dialectic of Experience*. (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1996); Homi Bhabha, "Interrogating Identity: Frantz Fanon and the Postcolonial Prerogative," *Location of Culture*. (London: Routledge, 1994): 20-39. Of these it is Sekyi-Otu who deals with both *Black Skin, White Masks* and *Wretched* more extensively.

<sup>8</sup> Fanon, *Wretched*, 175.

- <sup>9</sup> Antonio Gramsci, "The Formation of Intellectuals," in *Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. Ed. Vincent Leitch (New York: Norton, 2001): 1140.
- <sup>10</sup> Quoted in Fanon, *Wretched*, 227-231.
- <sup>11</sup> Fanon, *Wretched*, 231.
- <sup>12</sup> Frantz Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism*, trs. Haakon Chevalier. (New York: Grove Press, 1965), 178.
- <sup>13</sup> In this Fanon shares his compatriot Glissant's view of alienation in Martinique. See esp. 81-85 in Anjali Prabhu, "Interrogating Hybridity: Subaltern Agency and Totality in Postcolonial Theory" *Diacritics* 35, no. 2 (2005): 76-92.
- <sup>14</sup> Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?" trs. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon, in Donald F. Bouchard, ed., *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*. (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1977), 124-127.
- <sup>15</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Toward the African Revolution*, trs. Haakon Chevalier. (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 52-54.
- <sup>16</sup> "For many months my conscience has been the seat of unpardonable debates. And their conclusion is the determination not to despair of man, in other words, of myself. The decision I have reached is that I cannot continue to bear a responsibility at no matter what cost, on the false pretext that there is nothing else to be done. For all these reasons I have the honor, Monsieur le Ministre, to ask you to be good enough to accept my resignation and to put an end to my mission in Algeria." In Fanon, *Toward*, 54.
- <sup>17</sup> Prabhu, "Narration in Fanon's," op. cit.
- <sup>18</sup> Foucault, "What is an Author?"
- <sup>19</sup> Abdelkébir Khatibi, *Maghreb pluriel*. (Paris, Denoël, 1983).
- <sup>20</sup> Fanon, "Colonial War and Mental Disorders," in *Wretched*, 249-310.
- <sup>21</sup> Fanon, *Wretched* 39.
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>23</sup> Fanon, *Wretched*, 152. It is not surprising at all to find such a close parallel with Gramsci's idea for the birth of the new intellectual, which must come from a "muscular-nervous effort" that becomes the "new and integral formation of the world." See Gramsci, "The Formation," 1141.
- <sup>24</sup> Fanon, *Wretched*, 52.
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>26</sup> Idem, 184.
- <sup>27</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>28</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>29</sup> Idem, 75.
- <sup>30</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>31</sup> Idem, 79; see also 70-73 for a similar global consciousness demanded of the intellectual.
- <sup>32</sup> Idem, 102.

<sup>33</sup> Idem, 177.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. My emphasis.

<sup>35</sup> Idem, 149.

<sup>36</sup> Idem, 154.

<sup>37</sup> Idem, 164.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Idem, 166.

<sup>40</sup> Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844 (and the Communist Manifesto by Marx and Engels)*, trs. Martin Milligan. (New York: Prometheus, 1988), 74.

<sup>41</sup> Fanon, *Wretched*, 168.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Idem, 169.

<sup>46</sup> Idem, 188-89. The French uses “*on*” (one) rather than “*nous*” (the more literal “we”) although it clearly takes on the (self) accusatory tone that rings somewhat differently by the use of “you” in English.

<sup>47</sup> Idem, 189.

<sup>48</sup> Idem, 193.

<sup>49</sup> Idem, 189.

<sup>50</sup> Idem, 227.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Idem, 240-41.

<sup>53</sup> Idem, 241.

<sup>54</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trs. Hazel E. Barnes. (Boulder: U of Colorado Press, 1958), 631.

<sup>55</sup> Idem, 631-32.

<sup>56</sup> Idem, 632.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Idem, 635.

<sup>60</sup> Ernesto Laclau, *Emancipations*. (London: Verso, 2007), 123. See 123 for how Laclau ends his book with the idea that a true (and tragic) hero would be one who, when faced with the horror of Auschwitz, “has the moral strength to admit the contingency of her own beliefs, instead of seeking refuge in religious or rationalistic myths.”