

## FANON AND THE VALUE OF THE HUMAN

### Paul Gilroy

(London School of Economics)

*Why should we care about humanism: rejected as it has been so virulently in the academy and the media, co-opted into the service of western military secularists, while simultaneously being rendered empty and compromised by UNESCO-style liberalism? In order to achieve what Sylvia Wynter calls “humanism’s re-enchantment”, Paul Gilroy argues for a return to the non-racial, anti-colonial, and ultimately reparative humanism articulated by Franz Fanon – unfashionable though this may be in many contemporary scholastic circles*

*All forms of exploitation resemble one another. They all seek the source of their necessity in some edict of a Biblical nature. All forms of exploitation are identical because all of them are applied against the same “object”: man. When one tries to examine the structure of this or that form of exploitation from an abstract point of view, one simply turns one’s back on the major, basic problem, which is that of restoring man to his proper place ...*

*Colonial racism is no different from any other racism. Anti-Semitism hits me head-on: I am enraged, I am bled white by an appalling battle, I am deprived of the possibility of being a man.*



The Entrance

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Fanon’s preparedness to speak in humanity’s name is a striking feature of *The Wretched of The Earth* but his humanism has proved to be a tricky subject. It is discussed only rarely. I would like to consider it because there are ways in which his arguments towards what I want to call a reparative humanism (configured by the overcoming of colonial statecraft and its racial orders), can help with contemporary political problems. In particular, his distinctive figure of the human is able to illuminate some of the difficult issues that derive on one side, from the post-colonial politics of multicultural/alterity and on the other, from the belligerent civilisationism that has lately come to define our geopolitical predicament.

Exploring that figure of the human is deepened by a degree of familiarity with the French intellectual

and political scene in which the discussion originally unfolded, but the currency of *The Wretched of The Earth* shows that the significance of these issues extends beyond that historic setting. I cannot reconstruct that debate in its entirety now, though I should say that it involved arguments about phenomenology, subjectivity, corporeality and temporality that were conditioned by and addressed to the aftermath of war against the Nazis, which left France fractured, and also to the immediate context of the new war with the Vietminh that began in 1945 just as French Foreign Legion was moving into Sétif, Guelma, Kherrata and other Algerian towns to exact punishment for the pro-independence sentiments evident among soldiers returning from Europe’s battlefields – the Thiaroye problem. These different wars were the catalyst for the complacent anti-humanism Fanon’s arguments repudiated. The nature of the connection between them was the trigger for Fanon’s reflections on the human framed by the political morality of anticolonial resistance.

Several other aspects of Fanon’s work related to this distinctive humanism have proved equally untimely and perplexing. They too are usually passed over. His non-immanent critique of race (which is presented, among other things, as a problem of modern political ontology) is fundamental. It counterpointed a vociferous attachment to the idea that this humanism was novel. Like his early identification of what he called “the real dialectic between my body and the world”, that claim has usually either been ignored or, more usually, treated as an embarrassment.

The original formulation of this authentic, dialectical possibility arose in a difficult passage from *Black Skin White Masks* that repays careful study.

There, Fanon was at his closest to both Merleau-Ponty (as Sekyi-Otu argues in his 1996 volume *Fanon's Dialectic of Experience*) and Césaire. A racialised modality of being in the world: “the corporeal-racial schema” was contrasted negatively with the altogether different kind of existence evident in the ordinary operations of bodily schema outside of – or more accurately, either prior to, or after – the sociogenesis of racial orders. This alternative mechanism for assembling human subjectivity itself provides a cue for the curiosity that Fanon invested with revolutionary force towards the end of that book. It involves selves being composed slowly as bodies move through time and space.

Manichaeism, colonial domination and the racial orders they create and support (their precarious ensembles of spectacular brutality and extractive economic activity as well as what we can call their pseudo-politics and parapolitics) disrupt that process which is both natural and social. Their obstructions culminate in a deep estrangement from the human, an alienation which differs substantially from the Hegelian and Marxist understanding of that idea. In an example of what it meant, practically to stretch Marxian analysis until it became adequate to colonial settings, Fanon's emphasis falls, not upon domination, mystification and recognition, but on misrecognition and a sharpened sense of interrelation which can pave the way to, what he described in his 1956 essay “Racism and Culture”, as “the reciprocal relativism of different cultures, once the colonial status is irreversibly excluded”. Fanon's view of this profound – we can call its racialised – alienation shares something with the disturbing work undertaken on this topic by one of his African-American influences, Richard Wright, who had steered similar

paths through Marxism. Both of them acknowledge the metaphysics of race that is inscribed in the unsettling process of systematically seeing oneself being misrecognised and of being coerced into becoming reconciled with the object with which one has become confused: the Negro, nigger or *nègre*. Expressed in his book *12 Million Black Voices*, this is how Wright understood the problem in the 1940s while still fighting his way out of Communist orthodoxy:

The word “Negro”, the term by which ... we black folk in the United States are usually designated, is not really a name at all nor a description, but a psychological island whose objective form is the most unanimous fiat in all American history; a fiat buttressed by popular and national tradition ... which artificially and arbitrarily defines, regulates, and limits in scope and meaning the vital contours of our lives, and the lives of our children and our children's children.

This island, within whose confines we live, is anchored in the feelings of millions of people, and is situated in the midst of the sea of White faces we meet each day; and, by and large, as three hundred years of time has borne our nation into the twentieth century, its rocky boundaries have remained unyielding to the waves of our hope that dash against it.

The resulting damage to humanity accumulates. Eventually, it creates something like a habitual culture of its own. For Fanon, as expressed in *Black Skin White Masks*, the undoing of those bloody formations could only commence once the liberating

refusal to “accept the present as definitive” became shared and the door of every consciousness opened by “the real leap” that introduces “invention into existence”. This great transformation involves decisionistic acts of freedom-seeking that refuse the diminished, in terms Fanon offers in *The Wretched of The Earth*, the “amputated” or “mutilated” humanity offered by Europe's “constant denial of man” and its symptomatic accompaniment an “avalanche of murders”.

*The Wretched of The Earth* sets out what these transformative practices involved in the context of national liberation. Europeans can turn to successor texts like Sven Lindqvist's thoughtful intervention *The Skull Measurer's Mistake* to explore what this commitment means for the division of labour in an anti-racist politics conducted from the imperial and colonizing countries.

Structuralist and post-structuralist thought converged around the idea that humanism was, at best, an anachronism. In different ways, Fanon's earnest and today, firmly unfashionable, commitment to these goals fell foul of their founding presuppositions. Following the viral circulation of the UN declaration of human rights and its various vernacular recodings, the Cold-War era politics of humanism became extremely complex. It developed in anti-nomic patterns that continue to haunt our own situation in which the need to reformulate the human in both human rights and humanitarian intervention has initiated a deeper conflict than Fanon was able to imagine. The Jamaican philosopher, Sylvia Wynter, has shown that the pursuit of these aims can be strengthened by being articulated with Fanon's view of racism's sociogenesis and his plan for the destruction of its psycho-existential complexes. In

the longer term, these battles contribute to what she describes as humanism's re-enchantment, a process that in Jamaica had been dominated by the creative, Ethiopianist reworkings of Unesco's poetics by roots artists like The Abyssinians, The Heptones and Burning Spear.

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The avowed antihumanists who voiced the positions that shape today's campus common-sense, have bolstered unsympathetic interpretations of Fanon masquerading as critiques from the left. His commitments appear to be founded on naïve or incompletely thought-through positions that spill over into empty, compromised humanism of the Liberal and Unesco varieties and remains far too fixated on the redemption rather than the provincialisation of Europe. So far, that absurd verdict has not been tested by any exposure to critiques of racial hierarchy, colonial conquest and imperial power.

During the era of decolonisation and independence, debate on the boundaries of the human was conditioned by the aftermath of the recent struggle against Hitlerism. However, then as now, it was neither respectable nor polite to focus on the constitutive potency of racism and to analyse Nazi statecraft as the governmental implementation of racial hygiene directly connected to the genocidal history of colonial domination inside and beyond Europe.

Old, mid-twentieth century rules still prevail in the abstracted world of scholastic, anti-humanism. The vestigial disciplinary forces mustered by fascism's philosophical apologists do not sanction any



Frantz Fanon  
Flickr: désinteret

uncomfortable, reflexive consideration of their own relationship to the political ontology of race celebrated and affirmed by the likes of Heidegger, Schmitt and the other colossi of contemporary, scholastic theory. However, the continuing influence of those figures helps to make Fanon's reparative, anti-racist humanism, like the politics of national liberation, appear facile. If Nazism was, after all, not radical evil but rather a trace of metaphysical humanism that reveals the problems with all humanisms, few

brave souls will be prepared to plead guilty to humanism's folly. Marxian philosophical anthropology has travelled in different directions and a whole variety of feminist pronouncements has raised questions about the relationship of gendered categories to humanity (and citizenship) as well as to the prospects of trans- and post-humanity after the end of our species' natural evolution.

Why then should we care about humanism? a term that has lately been hijacked and monopolised by militant secularism of the Richard Dawkins type, a dismal formation that is studiously indifferent to the postcolonial re-configuration of our world and significantly refuses to make any gesture that might compromise its view of Islam as what Dawkins on his website recently called "an unmitigated evil".

How debates over the human and its limits became linked to the struggle against racial hierarchy and to the political ontology of race are not issues of interest to civilisationist secularism or scientific caricatures of Enlightenment. To follow Fanon's lead, we must do what they refuse to do and use intimate familiarity with Europe's continuing colonial crimes and the raciology and xenology that sanction them to orient ourselves. Then, we may ask how a refiguration of humanism might contribute to Europe's ability to acknowledge its evolving postcolonial predicament. Its relationship with migrants, refugees, displaced people, denizens, racial and civilisational inferiors and others judged inhuman whose lives have no value even when they fall inside the elastic bounds of the law. This is an urgent matter. The problems associated with it have only been augmented by the

way that security now saturates our fading political institutions. Here in the city of Vico, we cannot deny that these debates have a long and important history. Edward Said mapped a good deal of it towards the end of his book *Beginnings* where, for a tantalizing moment, he placed the legacies of Vico and Fanon in counterpoint.

[we may ask how a refiguration of humanism might contribute to Europe's ability to acknowledge its evolving postcolonial predicament](#)

That difficult, challenging agenda supplied something like a spine to Fanon's projects. In developing it, the starting point I favour, requires that we locate the desire to reassemble humanism in relation to his analysis of the alienated modes of social interaction that derive from the racialisation of the world and the Manichaean requirements of the colonial order which underpins it.

We must then consider Fanon's demands for a new humanism as a key aspect of the non-immanent critique of merely racialised being-in-the-world that he gradually elaborates. His humanism should be understood as a vehicle for the reconstruction of that broken world and the undoing of its characteristic forms of alienation. In other words, his humanism is not a residue of, or throwback to, the nineteenth-century debates over philosophical anthropology that preceded the emergence of a scientific anatomisation of capitalist domination and its human cost. We depart from that agenda when we place racial hierarchy, racial epistemology and the political ontology of race at the centre of a self-consciously post-colonial and firmly cosmopolitan analysis. We may then begin to appreciate that humanism, as Fanon

defines it, introduces new problems. There is an opportunity or perhaps an obligation to re-engage/re-enchanted the human. It can be defined by the twentieth-century context in which the racial nomos that was established in the process of European imperial expansion was still, steadily being overthrown.

One duty alone: That of not renouncing my freedom through my choices.  
I have no wish to be the victim of the Fraud of a black world.  
My life should not be devoted to drawing up the balance sheet of Negro values.  
There is no white world, there is no white ethic, any more than there is a white intelligence.  
There are in every part of the world men who search.  
I am not a prisoner of history. I should not seek there for the meaning of my destiny.  
I should constantly remind myself that the real leap consists in introducing invention into existence.  
In the world through which I travel, I am endlessly creating myself.  
I am a part of Being to the degree that I go beyond it.

Franz Fanon: *Black Skin, White Masks*

This non-racial, anti-colonial, reparative humanism was licensed by the open antipathy to racism that framed it as well as by its detailed, critical grasp of the damage done to ethics, truth and democracy by the racial discourses that could not be undone even



Memories of Hope in the Age of Disposability  
Flickr: Truthout by Jared Rodriguez 

by the grotesqueries Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks* dismissed as “the fraud of a black world”.

The liberating decolonisation to which he contributed so much is still far from complete though the terms of its legitimation have been redefined on one side by the political rhetoric of humanitarianism and the articulation of human rights and on the other by a sequence of neo-imperial conflicts over scarce resources: energy, water, minerals etc. many of which have pronounced the tacit re-racialisation of the world in civilisationist terms: a monolithic, despotic Islam is now posed against a simplistic image of Europe as the West.

This old fantasy now comes in two flavours: post-secular Christian or secular Enlightened. The racialisation of the human circulates through the



Helicopters, Pentagons  
Flickr: Truthout by Jared Rodriguez 

conflicts it feeds, sometimes with unexpected consequences. Part of the explanation for its durability resides in the fact that postcolonial relations, struggles and wars are no longer narrowly confined to the post-imperial powers. NATO's expansive new role, like the ISAF's war in Afghanistan and the global counterinsurgency that accompanies it, make all the contributing military forces into postcolonial actors whether or not they see themselves as having been beneficiaries of earlier colonialism. More than that, there is a high degree of historical and geographical continuity between the wars of imperial decolonisation and today's global counterinsurgency campaign.

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The “smart power” supposedly being deployed has moved on from the airwaves. It includes what the head of the world bank once casually called “facebook diplomacy”. The infowar aspires to complete control of visual culture and through that mastery, to command of human imagination and dreamscape. We should therefore concede the growing inadequacy of older critical approaches based upon the too simple distinction between being seen and being invisible. Instead, we must appreciate the need to contest the terms of visibility and the political, legal and economic conditions within which particular regimes of seeing can be reproduced. The spectacular is only one of these.

Let us recall also that the US government became a *private* client of the satellite imaging corporation whose digital eyes covered Afghanistan. The war conducted remotely by means of drones has been outsourced to Xe corp. The “Human-Terrain System” now ensures that anthropologists are embedded alongside warriors and info-warriors in the latest sequence of doomed military adventures which are novel only in being warranted by the liberal goal of redeeming gender equality.

Europe's vulnerable gays and young women are to be protected with cluster bombs, depleted uranium shells and a new system of banking based on mobile phones that can double as cameras and screens for photographing yourself instead of circulating video clips of the latest war crimes and collateral damage. A May 2010 dispatch by Nathan Hodge

from the Afghan frontline posted on [www.wired.com](http://www.wired.com) captured this situation neatly:

Things reached a chaotic peak when soldiers spotted a young man with a neatly trimmed goatee, apparently snapping photos with a cell phone camera. They stopped him, made sure the pictures were deleted from his phone and digitally scanned his irises and fingerprints with a BATS (Biometric Automated Tool Set) scanner. The young man was not detained, but now he was in the system.

The proliferating digital products of what one of their architects calls “armed social work” cannot be consumed innocently. One more recent example of these convergences and continuities suffices here. It centres, unsurprisingly, on torture and its recurrent utility in fighting the new kinds of conflict that re-specify the human in some rather antique cultures of impunity. The torturer becomes *hostis humani generis* but torture is rebranded and routinised, spun and banalised in the networked patterns of a military diplomacy that we cannot escape.

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The “Arab Spring” highlighted how the old colonial double standards rooted in Victorian racial theory, are still operating. The UN resolution justified intervention to protect civilians while the same civilians were being bombed by their European champions. The unsustainable repression in Libya and Syria was sharply distinguished from the bloody events

underway in Bahrain where US and British strategic interests specified a different geopolitical ethics.

The securitocracy of that gulf state had been designed and implemented by a highly-decorated British security-policeman, Ian Henderson, who has been repeatedly and consistently accused of being a brutal torturer both during the Kenyan emergency and in subsequent litigation as well as in Bahrain where he earned the nickname “The Butcher of Bahrain” for the steel and energy with which he organised the government’s response to the 1990s revolt (see: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2002/jun/30/uk.world>).

The revolting crimes of which Henderson has been accused are played down, justified and garlanded with flowers in a self-serving memoir (*Man Hunt In Kenya*) he penned in 1958 with the assistance of the Conservative politician, Philip Goodhart. What Henderson’s career as a hammer of subversion and national liberation in Africa and the Gulf tells us now about the political geography of Europe’s postcolonial statecraft cannot be adjudicated here. However, his text has other uses, not least of which is its figuration of the ambiguities intrinsic to racial hierarchy. For example, he describes what he takes to be the characteristic features of his many encounters with MauMau prisoners captured during Kenya’s emergency while hunting for the Kikuyu leader Dedan Kimathi. Kimathi, like Fanon, had served in a European army fighting against the axis powers. Here is Henderson:

“I often saw terrorists a few moments after their capture. Some would stand there wide-eyed, completely speechless, and shivering violently from shock and cold. They would think of the

moment of death, and that moment seemed very near. Others would be past the stage of thinking at all. Mad with shock, they would shout and struggle or froth at the mouth and bite the earth. Under these circumstances it was not easy to remember that they were fanatics who had enjoyed killing children and slitting open the stomachs of pregnant women. They were savage, vicious, unpredictable as a rabid dog, but because they were now cornered, muzzled, powerless, and terrified, one felt like giving them a reassuring pat.”

There is much to say about this passage and the text from which it has been extracted. Of course, the deeper ambiguities in its presentation of the native as savage, primitive and effectively inhuman, belong to the moral prescriptions associated with systems of racial classification in general. I have addressed those issues before. (In *Between Camps* I argue: The distinct order of “racial” differentiation is marked by its unique label, by the peculiar slippage between “real relations” and “phenomenal forms” to which it always corresponds, and by a special (a) moral and (anti)political stance. It has involved not only reducing “nonwhite” people to the status of animals or things, but also reducing European people to the intermediate status of that lowly order of being somewhere between human and animal that can be abused without the intrusions of bad conscience.) Now, my attention is caught by Henderson’s hint that reducing the enemy to an animal creates a confusing range of different obligations and moral pressures in the mind of his capturer cum torturer. Similar material can be found in the record of Africans and Caribbeans captured on European

battlefields by the Nazis or shot down and incarcerated by them in POW camps where their fellow prisoners may also have sought the comforts of racial hierarchy and segregation as partial compensation for their loss of freedom.

For all the self-evident character of race as natural difference, the boundary lines between human and inhuman, human and animal, human subject and object are not in the least bit obvious. Even, or perhaps especially, those who monopolise violence have to specify and determine that boundary in a difficult psychological setting where torture, castration and other highly sexual acts of brutality had to compete with “a reassuring pat” as the most appropriate outcome.

Though Henderson’s impunity has been sanctioned repeatedly by several different sovereign powers, a complex and multi-sited sequence of litigation has arisen from this case as a result of applying the contemporary legal standards defined indirectly by the language of human rights and the concept of crimes against humanity. This intervention continues to move slowly through the upper reaches of postcolonial Britain’s judicial system.

I must note that, apart from the effects that these cases have on the litigants and governmental actors involved, it is clear that they also impact upon our nation’s understanding of its colonial history and deeper still upon the idea that British people have of themselves as a political body imbued with civilised values. David Anderson, an Oxford professor of African politics who specialises in the Kenyan “emergency” recently told the BBC that a new batch of previously secret files about to be released by the government as a result of the continuing court action would prove to be of “enormous significance”.

He continued:

“These are a set of selected documents withheld for their sensitivity. We will learn things the British government of the time didn’t want us to know. They are likely to change our view of some key places ... (their release) will clarify the last days of Empire in ways that will be shocking for some people in Britain.”

According to a damning internal review carried out by Anthony Cary for the Foreign Office, these documents were regarded as a “guilty secret” and simply hidden (<http://www.historyworkshop.org.uk/britains-secret-colonial-files/>). How they came to be secret and how they acquired the capacity to shock people to this rare extent, raises a number of questions that deserve detailed historical answers beyond those I offered in *After Empire*. Here too, part of what is really shocking, is the way that disturbing instances of inhuman brutality can generate a painful acknowledgement of where the boundaries of the human should fall – the same lesson that is not being learned in the Mediterranean at this very moment (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/may/08/nato-ship-libyan-migrants>)

[disturbing instances of inhuman brutality can generate a painful acknowledgement of where the boundaries of the human should fall](#)

Following the classic contours of debate with regard to the human, a second instance of how the human is being contested in post- and neocolonial kinds of political and juridical conflict can be helpful. It relates to the future rather than the past. I want to

suggest that Fanon’s sense of how colonial conflict marks out new definitions and boundaries for the human can be applied to the new technological, legal and moral environments involved in the deployment of robotic military systems.


The US-manufactured General Atomics Reaper is currently the RAF’s only armed unmanned aircraft. It can carry up to four Hellfire missiles, two 230kg (500lb) bombs, and 12 Paveway II guided bombs. It can fly for more than 18 hours, has a range of 3,600 miles, and can operate at up to 15,000 metres (50,000ft).

The Reaper is operated by RAF personnel based at Creech in Nevada. It is controlled via a satellite datalink. Earlier this year, David Cameron promised to increase the number of RAF Reapers in Afghanistan from four to nine, at an estimated cost of £135m. The MoD is also funding the development by BAE Systems of a long-range unmanned aircraft, called Taranis, designed to fly at “jet speeds” between continents while controlled from anywhere in the world using satellite communications.

Richard Norton-Taylor and Rob Evans, *Observer*, 17 April, 2011

Automated and autonomous weapons will operate without immediate human control in changing circumstances deemed too complex and rapid to be amenable to human decisions. Peter Singer’s book *Wired for War* provides an excellent introduction



Detainee/Oblivion  
Flickr: Truthout: by Jared Rodriguez;  
Adapted: electron, habaneros 

to this topic. Though Britain’s Ministry of Defence “currently has no intention to develop systems that operate without human intervention in the weapon command and control chain”, it chose to spell out relevant legal and ethical issues in a recent briefing note: *The UK Approach to Unmanned Aircraft Systems* which was prepared for senior officers in all branches of the military service by the MoD “think-tank”, the Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre (DCDC):

“There is ... an increasing body of discussion that suggests that the increasing speed, confusion and information overload of modern war may make human response inadequate and that the environment will be ‘*too complex for a human to direct*’ .... The role of the human in the loop has, before now, been a legal requirement which we now see being eroded, what is the role of the human from a moral and ethical standpoint in automatic systems? Most work on this area focuses on the unique (at the moment) ability that a human being has to bring empathy and morality to complex decision-making. To a robotic system, a school bus and a tank are the same – merely algorithms in a programme – and the engagement of a target is a singular action; the robot has no sense of ends, ways and means, no need to know *why* it is engaging a target. There is no recourse to human judgement in an engagement, no sense of a higher purpose on which to make decisions, and no ability to imagine (and therefore take responsibility for) repercussions of action taken. This raises a number of questions that will need to be addressed before fully autonomous armed systems are fielded .... The other side of the autonomy argument is more positive. Robots cannot be emotive, cannot hate. A target is a series of ones and zeros, and once the decision is made, by whatever means, that the target is legitimate, then prosecution of that target is made mechanically. The robot does not care that the target is human or inanimate, terrorist or freedom fighter, savage or barbarian. A robot cannot be driven by anger to carry out illegal actions such as those at My Lai.”

[Automated and autonomous weapons will operate without immediate human control in changing circumstances deemed too complex and rapid to be amenable to human decisions.](#)

In his recent work, Achille Mbembe has approached these and related dilemmas through a meditation on what appears to be their animating political theology. It has assembled new forms of theologico-political criticism and turned to the ethico-judicial in order to answer the unsettling effects of a “radical uncertainty” prompted less by civilisational conflict and technological transformation than the steady reordering of the world that has been consequent upon its decolonisation. He continues:

“... we no longer have ready-made answers to such fundamental questions as: Who is my neighbour? What to do with my enemy? How to treat the stranger or the prisoner? Can I forgive the unforgivable? What is the relationship between truth, justice, and freedom? Is there anything that can be considered to be so priceless as to be immune from sacrifice?”

It is difficult to see how the history of race as political ontology, aesthetics and *techné*; of racism and its racial orders, can be made to count as part of how this crisis is to be answered. However, once again Fanon can help us with that difficult work. Indeed, his approach to the human and, in particular his final alignment of self and humanity in the transcendence though not the redemption of Europe remains suggestive. Perhaps it is best to say that approaching the human outside of the alienated and alienating configurations demanded by Manichaeism delirium

and the racial-corporeal schema can contribute to Wynter’s re-enchantment and what we might call the healing or reparative element in Fanon’s thinking. That proposal, in one form or another, has been a goal common to every major political thinker of decolonisation and racial democracy. All of them turned in that direction seeking ways that art, culture, science, music, war or technological expertise could enforce a mode of human recognition that had been consistently denied and thwarted. Fanon’s is the loudest clearest voice in that unhappy congregation for precisely the reasons that irritate the unassailable conventions of “identity politics” and its sophist tribunes.

Fanon had begun his first book by warning his readers that its truths were not timeless. From the start, he emphasized that the racial order of the colony would bring out the very worst in anyone whose life was distorted by its founding mirage. All of the shadowy actors populating the “epidermalised” world stood to lose something precious because racial hierarchy delimited their humanity and depleted the psychological well-being of perpetrator and victim alike. Of course, those different parties (dominant and subordinate, coloniser and colonised) were not affected in exactly the same ways, but the damage done to both of them appeared in complementary, “relational” forms. It always involved significant losses at the human level where the decay of species life that had been prompted by imperialism, opened up a path towards authentic, human history.

I hope that the unfashionable, reparative humanity he affirmed might start to appear less facile in the context of global emergencies arising outside of the historic dualities of colonial power reconstituted as the foundation for contemporary securitocracy.