

Chapter 5: The Difference of Phenomenology

CHAPTER 5: THE DIFFERENCE OF PHENOMENOLOGY

I do not want to exalt the past at the expense of my present
and of my future

Frantz Fanon “Black Skin, White Masks” p227

The concluding paragraphs of the last chapter began to suggest that Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology is not prior to politics. By concentrating on a few pages in the “Phenomenology of Perception” I argued that Merleau-Ponty remains ambiguous concerning the phenomenological and therefore ontological status of ‘the other’. At one point at the beginning of Part One, as was shown, the other is reduced to a quasi-simple locationality. The other is the lamp over there, the chimney in front of me; in fact the other is essentially any other position from which I might deepen the facet of the percept currently available to me. The logical conclusion of this process of ‘profundification’ is the translucency of the object ‘seen from everywhere’. The object thereby takes its place in the totality of the ‘universe’. Merleau-Ponty is however always mindful of the finite limitations

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embodiment places upon this phenomenological monadology. The subject inhabits space, and only on the basis of this inhabitation can it perceive. This inhabitation entails that the co-implication of the other produces a depth that is *indefinite*, not infinite. The embodied subject can only be aware of a finite number of other possible locations for perception across space and time. The difference between an infinite co-implication and an indefinite one is the difference between logic and perception. As a perceiving subject, my inhabitation within the world entails occlusions in the perceptual field. The perceptual field is populated by other bodies which block and obscure a panoptic mastery. A translucent objectivity is the asymptote, at the limit of the world's horizon.

So where does this leave the place of the other in the world? The only other reference to the other in this section comes where Merleau-Ponty is describing the limits of depth. He refers, as was stated in the previous chapter, to the facets of the object given to the other, 'through the intermediary of time and language.'(Merleau-Ponty,1962:69). The question therefore would be, "what is the force of inflection of the 'intermediary?'" Does the intermediary involve difference? Do the time and language of the other belong to the world, *contributing*, through mediation, to its depth? Or does the other *resist* contribution? Furthermore, given the resistance of the

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other, are we not lead back into something like Benjamin's 'conflict naming', as discussed in chapter 3?

In order to proceed further, it is necessary to focus on the relation between the other and the world in the "Phenomenology of Perception". To do this, I will briefly examine in more detail Merleau-Ponty's notion of world.

The notion of the universe, for Merleau-Ponty, is an ideality, an hypothesisation of a totality of translucent beings, each mirroring all the rest through a hypothetical locationality. In contrast, the notion of world refers to the limit context of bodily being in the world. The world is the ultimate ground of all corporeal intentionality. Embodied actions are always already situated on a contextual horizon, a signification matrix without which those actions would be senseless. As such, its boundaries are indefinite or horzonal. The world horizon is the

horizon of all horizons, the style of all possible styles, which guarantees for my experiences a given, not a willed, unity underlying all the disruptions in which we have discovered the definition of the body. (Merleau-Ponty, 1962:330)

For Merleau-Ponty, this ultimate horizon is not merely a spatial limit to

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existence. The world- horizon is at the same time grounded in temporality. Each incarnate act of motile behaviour signifies on the basis of a contextuality that is always unfolding. As Dillon writes, “The world horizon as the context of all contexts is a temporal horizon, and its historical unfolding influences all themes, perceptual or linguistic, emerging within it.”(Dillon, 1988:78) Therefore, ‘the world’ refers to the limit of all horizons to any embodied action, according to the possibilities of the present. So, given a particular action of a particular subject, the action’s significance occurs on the basis of at least a two-fold layer of contextuality. First, there is the immediate context of the action, the football pitch, the law chambers, the rules of the game being played. But this figure-ground relation itself only ‘makes sense’ in relation to the horizon of the temporal present within which this enactment is being played out. Beyond the immediate horizon, which itself is often open to multiple readings (for instance in football is it the physical feature of the pitch, the skills and characters of the players, or the current styles of playing the game?) there are many sheaves of contextual richness before the ‘world’ is reached. But then, as the context of all contexts, it is illegitimate to think of the world as a horizon that can be ‘reached’. As Dillon explains,

As the “horizon of all horizons,” it [the world] is ultimate and

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all-inclusive because it does not permit thematization. It is characteristic of other horizons that they can be thematized, placed within the context of a more encompassing horizon. But, since every thematization is contextualisation within a more encompassing horizon, it follows that there is always a horizon that eludes thematization. It may be that a horizon that functioned as the world horizon at some stage in history subsequently becomes thematized, bounded conceptually, and objectified. Thus, for example, one can speak more or less determinately about the eighteenth-century world or the world of Christian civilisation, and one might even claim to be able to speak this way about the twentieth century. (Ibid,78-79)

A monadology which is suggested through the logic of depth in one moment of Merleau-Ponty's thought is therefore resisted, by way of its connection to the notion of 'world'. The resistance the world offers is that of the unthematisable and unrepresentable. The world is the boundary or limit for all existence, 'boundary' being taken in the positive sense of that which allows for existence. ¹However, the temporality of the world is not

¹Casey writes in "Getting Back to Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World", "Boundary" (*horos*) or "limit" (*peras*) is not the negatory notion of mere cutting off; nor is it the geometric concept of perimeter ..Boundary or limit, construed cosmologically, is a quite positive

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both determinative and yet somewhat mysterious, as one possible extrapolation of this passage might claim. The world-horizon must, to whatever degree, according to the findings of chapter 4, be in 'communication' with the embodied subject. The temporality of the world horizon is grounded in part by the motivations and motivations of the subject, transforming the historical given in the present². It is impossible however to posit any simple *causality* from one to the other. The relation between the *figure* of the embodied agent and the *ground* of the historical world of the 'now' is an *indeterminate* relation. Both are acting upon and transforming the other. Neither world nor embodied agent are either entirely passive or entirely active in relation to each other. An important consequence of this is that the locus of historical transformation, the present of the embodied moment, cannot be transparently articulated. The present presents itself as a rupture within any constructed linearity which works to establish it as lying in a non-transformative continuum with the past (and thereby entailing a predictable future). The present therefore is the site of openness, the horizon for multi-directional change. The temporal sense of the horizontality of the present referred to by Dillon therefore

presence.'(Casey,1993:15)

²Of course, the world-horizon is also grounded in the changes in materiality and virtuality afforded by technology.

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emerges: the horizon of the present itself cannot be thematized. The historical given and the project of the future are open to the differentiation of the present. As open, the horizon of the present cannot be re-presented. Or rather, each representation of the present is worked through difference, the difference of the new 'present' and the ruptures it enacts through new sheaves of embodied signification. The boundaries of the present body-world relation remain ultimate in the sense that they cannot be rendered explicit to representation. As Dillon says above, representation of a 'world-horizon' can only take place retrospectively. But beyond this, one can say that this retrospection only works through the intermediary difference of time and place, and itself can be retrospectively anew and differently in the future.

The world-horizon of any possible action is therefore all-encompassing of that action. In Merleau-Ponty's words, 'the world is not a sum of things which might always be called into question, but the inexhaustible reservoir from which things are drawn.'(Merleau-Ponty,1962:342) For both Merleau-Ponty and Dillon, although always already *temporal*, and as such is what we might call a 'horizon of becoming', there is only *one* world. The world is the grandest of Merleau-Ponty's terms, his approximation for the Absolute, an approximation always maintained because of its temporality. As such, the

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distinction between world and universe is reduced, at least for Dillon,

There is one world, one universe, because 'world' and
'universe' name the horizon of all horizons.(Dillon,1988:79)

The present is therefore both the locus for the transformation of the traditions and sets of cultural horizons to which the embodied subject belongs, as well as the all-encompassing horizon for all possible action. Again we move here from the immediate context of the present to its unrepresentable ultimate context. In the latter sense, the present of the world provides a theorisation of that notion of popular *currency*: the "Zeitgeist". The present is both the immediate context for embodied 'agency' and its ultimate context. In Dillon's words, the immediate context is 'nested' within the world. But the conditions of possibility at work here are not uni-directional. The world alone does not provide the axioms of agency for the subject. Temporality and historicity are generated out of the reversibilities between ultimate and immediate context. That is, the ultimate context of the grand 'now' of history is the finite horizon for all comprehension of agency, yet at the same time, this finite horizon is openly determined through the signification ramifications of transformations of the immediate context. And transformations of the immediate context are enacted by way of communications with the embodied subject. Therefore,

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the subject's dialogue with the world of immediate context can lead to new precedents of behaviour and disrupt the meaning-grid of the world. The anachronistic figure of the 'hero' would be one form of this 'bottom-up' disruption. By way of example, we can say that football 'signifies' according to the present historical context. To embellish this, a cultural commentator could start by pointing to the increasing commercialisation of the game, in the West at least. However, the historical position of this particular branch of the leisure industry in the present is articulated by the immediate context of particular teams, particular players and so on. It is possible that a particular player could transform the way in which the game is played. The position of football in the historical 'now' of the West is therefore a function of the interplay between its immediate and ultimate contexts.

So, to return to the question of the situation of the other: where does the other 'fit' into the world construed by Merleau-Ponty as the all-encompassing, 'universal' *inexhaustible reservoir of all beings*? It would seem that the answer is obvious: the other must belong to the world. As the context of all contexts, the indefinite, open and productive boundary for all existence, the over-arching nature of the world horizon entails that the mediation of time and language referred to above must therefore occupy a space *within* the world. Confirmation of this position being Merleau-Ponty's

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comes in the late chapter of the “Phenomenology of Perception” entitled ‘Other Selves and the Human World’.

Merleau-Ponty’s aim in this chapter is principally to resolve the paradox of interpersonal relations generated by Sartre’s extrapolation of cartesian ontology in “Being and Nothingness”. That is, Merleau-Ponty wants to argue that the subject does not encounter the other as first of all an object, thereby avoiding the polarities of being constructed, through this encounter, as either subject or object. Merleau-Ponty’s alternative account begins with the ontological ambiguity of the embodied subject. It is not necessary to go into details here, for enough was said in the previous chapter about the primordial third space of the body being both subject and object for it to be clear that the transparency of the subject’s gaze in Sartre is at its inception undermined by Merleau-Ponty’s idea of the reversibility of the subject’s corporeality. The impossibility of the subject constituting the other as another subject through first of all encountering the other as object is rejected, precisely because an object-ality, or rather a corporeality, is already grounding the subject itself. Interpersonal relations therefore are not construed by Merleau-Ponty on the basis of two centres of consciousness perilously bridged via the ‘objectifications’ of two bodies. Rather, interpersonal relations emerge through the *intercorporeity* of bodies open to

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the flesh of the world. Interpersonal relations are not given as 'subject to subject' through the intermediary of the body. The body's openness to the world, its pre-personal communication with it, is what enables an openness to the other. Merleau-Ponty can therefore write,

..we must learn to find the communication between one consciousness and another in one and the same world. In reality, the other is not shut up inside my perspective of the world, because this perspective itself has no definite limits, because it slips spontaneously into the other's, and because both are brought together in the one single world in which we all participate as anonymous subjects of perception.(Merleau-Ponty,1962:353)

For Merleau-Ponty, the world is always already given to the embodied subject. The subject's freedom lies in inhabiting the present of this given through the agency of the body. Freedom is the freedom of a historical being, situated within the openness of the present. This present is, as has just been shown, an enfolding unfolding of layers of contextuality, from the immediate to the ultimate. Freedom is therefore the freedom for an embodied subject to refuse the mere repetition of embodied patternings, according to an incorporating linearity. The subject encounters the other

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across time and language, and yet always within the world. The embodiment of difference therefore does not solicit the monism of the world's horizon of becoming.

The politics of difference made available through Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology would thereby seem extremely limited. Any embodied difference works within the community of the world, that context of all contexts. The time and difference of the other is always reduced, at the last instant, into the same of the world. The 'intermediary' of time and language would therefore always be vulnerable to collapse, given the ultimacy of the worldly 'now', from difference to forms of equivalency. All leavetakings of phenomenology are therefore justifiable on political grounds alone: it would seem that questions of community and difference cannot be asked on the basis of an already assumed community.

Were this the conclusion of my research thus far, phenomenology would have been exposed as the ultimate form of conservatism, despite any transformativity drawn out from the 'communication more ancient than thought.' Phenomenology would allow for the presentation of embodied difference only on the basis of a reduction to the ultimacy of the One world. This however is not the conclusion of the thesis. I shall now attempt to transform the way in which Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology can be

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read. This reading has already begun: the communication more ancient than thought developed in the previous chapter already lies in tension with a universal world-horizon. The tension arises because the differential repetition of the present of the corporeal schema does not need to assume an ultimate context. Indeed it would seem more plausible to assume that contexts of cultural patternings do not fold outwards *ad ultimum*. Rather, the incarnating ground of a cultural given is such precisely on the basis of its irreducible *specificity*. The world is on the cusp of breaking up, of no longer being harmonised through its function of contextualising contexts to the limit.

I shall argue that the ‘inexhaustible reservoir’ of the world is not given, certainly not as a *universal*. Such a reduction is the reduction of politics to nationalism, to the polity of the One. *The universal can only be given as the ideal.*³ If phenomenology can think this, then phenomenology can think a phenomenology of difference that is at the same time a phenomenology of worldly difference. A politics of embodied difference that thinks the

³David Michael Levin reminds us that Merleau-Ponty did think, in one place at least, of the flesh as ideal. In the “Themes from the Lectures” Merleau-Ponty describes reversibility as ‘the correlate of an ideal community of embodied subjects, of an intercorporeality.’ (Merleau-Ponty, 1970:82). However, in Levin’s paper (‘Visions of Narcissism’), the form of this ideality is not clarified. Levin later writes ‘Although of course only in a rudimentary and preliminary way that needs to be appropriately cultivated, intercorporeality already schematizes the embodiment of a self deeply rooted in an ethics of caring and open to the kind of communication necessary for the building of a society truly organized by principles of justice.’ in Dillon, 1991:77. I would argue that it is precisely the vagueness of the

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universal as that which is deferred precisely on account of difference. A politics of the Kantian/Derridean ‘yet-to-come’: the ideal of a universal community that many have taken phenomenology to have assumed as already given. In order to move further in the direction of this project, I shall turn to one of Merleau-Ponty most productive critics, Frantz Fanon.

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Frantz Fanon’s most significant philosophical influence is often taken to be the existential phenomenology of Sartre. Whilst Sartre’s shadow is undoubtedly cast across many of the pages of Fanon’s “Black Skin, White Masks”, it is important to register that Fanon was also engaged in a dialogue with Merleau-Ponty.⁴I will argue that Merleau-Ponty’s inclusive notion of world is both the point of criticism for Fanon and the source of the construction of his ideal of ‘disalienation’. Only by looking at the implicit dialogue between Sartre and Merleau-Ponty that Fanon constructs will we be able to comprehend Fanon’s politics of difference. As Fanon’s method in “Black Skin, White Masks” is phenomenological, an excursus into the well known essay of chapter 5, “The Fact of Blackness”, and an

‘rudimentary and preliminary’ nature of the ideal that needs to be both clarified and challenged.

⁴In his book, “Fanon and the Crisis of European Man”, Lewis R.Gordon acknowledges the influence of Merleau-Ponty on Fanon, without developing the nature of the dialogue in depth. See p14.

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examination of the final chapter, “By Way of Conclusion”, will, in the light of the political critique of Merleau-Ponty’s ontology already undertaken, lead to a radical phenomenology of difference. It will also lead to a novel construction of political ideals, grounded in a phenomenology of the body.

It is not difficult to show how “The Fact of Blackness” involves a dialogue with Merleau-Ponty. What is essential beyond this however is to bring to light the force of the critique at work, a force that is matched by the vigour of the ideals that emerge within the frame of the analysis. That is to say, Fanon’s critique of Merleau-Ponty is undertaken only for the sake of exposing a redemptive politics which is latent in the latter. Fanon allows for a reading of Merleau-Ponty that cuts out the conservatism of the function of the ‘world’ and emphasises the transformativity of embodied communication. In this way, Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology is developed into the arena of difference. This is the task I am attempting here.

In “The Fact of Blackness,” Fanon’s opening argument is that a phenomenology of blackness cannot be understood in the context of the ‘black man among his own.’(Fanon,1986:110). It is only in the encounter with whiteness that an analysis of the experience of skin difference, of being

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the black other, can be undertaken. In the Antillean setting of Martinique, the coercion and internalisation of racial inferiority cannot be understood at the level of experience. Before entering the 'white world', Fanon was 'satisfied with an intellectual understanding of these differences.'(Fanon,1986:Ibid) Everything changes in the cross-racial encounter however. Fanon writes,

In the white world the man of color encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema.(Fanon,1986:Ibid)

Fanon proceeds to explicate Merleau-Ponty's notion of corporeal schema in the following paragraph. He ends the paragraph with the summative statement,

A slow composition of my *self* as a body in the middle of a spatial and temporal world- such seems to be the schema. It does not impose itself on me; it is, rather, a definitive structuring of the self and of the world- definitive because it creates a real dialectic between my body and the world.
(Fanon,1986:111)

Fanon therefore agrees with Merleau-Ponty's insight that the self and the world are constructed through the work of the body. As we have seen, he

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has also made the initial suggestion that the black construction of self is inhibited in the West. Concomitant with this initial suggestion therefore is the idea that the world itself is inhibited, or at least encountered as a difficulty. Fanon then articulates the character of this inhibition,

Below the corporeal schema I had sketched a historico-racial schema. (Fanon,1986:Ibid)

The move announced here against the primacy of the world in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology is dramatic. Fanon is suggesting, in one sentence, that the corporeal schema, the locus of the co-eval emergence of self and world, is undercut or undermined in the case of the black subject in the West. Fanon therefore challenges the universal 'one-world' thesis that I have shown is the outcome of Merleau-Ponty's monadological tendencies. Fanon is suggesting that not all subjects *belong*. The non-belonging of the black subject is the work of the 'historico-racial schema', the *de-composition* of self and world. Fanon therefore introduces an account of the *mediation* of difference which shakes the security of belonging to the world that Merleau-Ponty held to be unquestionable. As Nick Crossley writes, without any further expansion,

Merleau-Ponty is clear that one's experience of one's body is

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mediated but he does not identify the social devices whereby differences are introduced. Race and more particularly skin colour provide a useful example here. They demonstrate that bodies are categorised differently and invested with different meanings, with the consequence, in many cases (in the context of European societies), that persons are treated differently- which, in the context of a world of interdependencies, amounts to a differential in agency capacity.⁵

Hence the illocutionary force of the ‘Fact’ of blackness. The Merleau-Pontyan ambiguity over the status of the body, as either subject or object, is reduced to the painful clarity of being designated solely as the latter, for the black subject. Blackness is an unambiguous fact of being which is encountered as an external reality, and the reality of its embeddedness within certain signification structures cannot be disavowed.

The fact of blackness therefore raises the issue of *visibility*, in a sense beyond those stipulated by Merleau-Ponty in either “Eye and Mind” or “The Visible and the Invisible”. Beyond the ambiguity of the phenomenological reflexivity of always ‘being seen’ in each act of seeing, the fleshy birth of

⁵ Nick Crossley, “The Politics of Subjectivity”, p39

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subject and object in each act of perception, the fact of blackness overdetermines the 'being seen'. Given the fact of blackness, the black subject's being seen in seeing cannot perform according to the ambiguity of reversibility. Rather, each act of perception confronts the possibility of being marked out as 'other', as a stranger to the world, or rather somehow beyond the world. In this sense, it becomes clear that the ambiguity and reversibility of the world requires a form of invisibility which Merleau-Ponty did not take account of. The visibility of skin difference becomes an *irreversible* facticity.⁶

Fanon sets up the historico-racial schema by way of a simple narrative which recurs in fragments throughout the rest of the essay. It is the experience of a white child saying to his mother on a train, "Look, a Negro!" This is the moment of alienation for the black subject. Fanon's fragmented style in this piece invites a reconstruction of the historico-racial schema in a more systematic manner. The two aspects of this undercutting schema I want to highlight are its effects on freedom and the way in which

⁶ At this point it is meet to mention the important distinction between *race* and *ethnicity*. Although it is not my concern in this chapter or in the thesis to address the complexities at work in this distinction, I will offer the following brief comments. One way in which the distinction can be introduced is in terms of visibility and invisibility. Race difference tends to involve inalienable forms of visible markers of difference, whereas ethnic difference tends to involve invisibility. I say 'tend to' because it would be easy to think of specific examples where there is more ambiguity. In general one can say that each form of embodied visibility (in terms of being seen and 'marked out') involves at the same time modes of invisibility, and vice versa. This point will be developed in future work.

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another form of objectivity is constructed which contrasts with the objectivity of science that Merleau-Ponty discusses.

Firstly then, the opening pages of the essay mark the difference between the freedom of the subject receiving and transforming the gift of cultural patternings discussed in the previous chapter of this thesis and the unfreedom of the alienated black subject. To begin, in Fanon's experience, the encounter with the white other who subjects the black male subject to his gaze is taken lightly. "Look, a Negro!" It was true. It amused me" (Fanon, 1986:Ibid) This amusement is annulled as the child continues badgering his mother, this time adding to the expression of the gaze a component of fear. The fear of the child is read as the outcome of all that Fanon's skin represents. The child is no longer merely pointing to the skin difference as a form of naive rejoicing in the novel – the surprise of seeing (perhaps for the first time close up) a black human being. The child, this figure allegedly prior to coding, has in actual fact already imbibed various presuppositions beyond the simple physicality of skin difference. That is, the black skin is already operating as a kind of metonym for the child, representing a specific construction of otherness. The child gazes upon the Fanon's black male presence as a representation of the primitive.

I could no longer laugh, because I already knew that there

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were legends, stories, history, and above all *historicity*, which I had learned about from Jaspers. Then, assailed at various points, the corporeal schema crumbled, its place taken by a racial epidermal schema. (Fanon,1986:112)

The violation of the train episode is therefore given a more dramatic context because of the gaze being expressed by a child. The power of the gaze resides in its exemplification of the permeations of racist attitudes in the West to even the ‘innocent’. Fanon’s brilliance lies in the way in which he subjects his own experience to phenomenological analysis. The collapse of the corporeal schema is the moment whereby alienation becomes *embodied*.

I existed triply: I occupied space. I moved toward the other... and the evanescent other, hostile but not opaque, transparent, not there, disappeared. Nausea...(Fanon,1986:Ibid)

Here Fanon reproduces Sartre’s threefold model of the subject in relation to others. The subject is first of all an outlook upon the world, the locus of perception. In encountering the other, the subject is forced however to accept secondly a view of itself from the outside, as a location or entity in the world, as an ‘other’. This tension between a subjective and an objective

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account of the subject's embodiment must be resolved, for as it stands the two views are opposed. As is well known, for Sartre this resolution, the dream of a *for itself in-itself* is a futile one.⁷ Double consciousness always involves non-coincidence – and this remains faithful to the logic of the excluded middle. The tension between being experienced as an object in relation to one's own interior experience can only lead to the unresolved modality of nausea. In a moment, this state of sickness will be named as 'abjection'. Fanon is therefore naming the collapse of the corporeal schema by the epidermalisation of the subject in Sartrean terms. Beyond Sartre however, Fanon is critiquing Merleau-Ponty's thesis of freedom taken as the freedom of the historical agent. The nausea Fanon felt on the train is therefore only the first stage of the experience of alienation and unfreedom. This unfreedom develops in terms of the weight of a past constructed by the other in caricatural fashion.

I was responsible at the same time for my body, for my race,
for my ancestors. I subjected myself to an objective
examination, I discovered my blackness, my ethnic

⁷In "Being and Nothingness", Sartre writes, 'Everything happens therefore as if the in-itself and the for-itself were presented in a state of disintegration in relation to an ideal synthesis. Not that the integration has ever *taken place* but on the contrary precisely because it is always indicated and always impossible.' (Sartre, 1958:623)

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characteristics; and I was battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetichism, racial defects, slave-ships, and above all else, above all: “Sho’ good eatin’.”(Fanon,1986:Ibid)

Beyond the experience of nausea, of the paralysis of bodily being, the gaze of the child effects an unfreedom. Instead of the body being located in the present of a ‘communication more ancient than thought’, of being the site of a possible transformation of the cultural givens of bodily patternings, the black ‘subject’ experiences his own skin as the metonym for a parodic primitivism. Black skin is indissolubly connected to a history constructed by a white imaginary. The black subject finds himself no longer in the present of possible transformation, but thrown back into a past that was never his own. Fanon writes, “The Negro, however sincere, is the slave of the past.”(Fanon,1986:225) Fanon therefore is showing that he is in strong agreement with Merleau-Ponty’s insight that freedom is the freedom to change the world, and to change the meaning of one’s history. But the way in which this agreement is expressed is in the form of a critique from the point of view of those *excluded* from freedom. Merleau-Ponty only ever explored the outside of history in the sense of those outside of the bodily *norm*, in the “Phenomenology of Perception” the figure in point being

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Schneider. Schneider's disabilities permit Merleau-Ponty to construct an account of a bodily norm.⁸ But Merleau-Ponty does not ever think the difference of bodies in terms of the differences of race, class and gender. As Fanon's analysis of his own experience shows, the politics of exclusion embodied in the child's gaze impose another form of disability: the disabling of the corporeal schema. This disabling is at the same time an alienation of the subject from the embodiment of freedom in the present.

Later in the essay, this unfreedom is expressed succinctly in two words, "Too late." (Fanon, 1968:121) From this mournful shibboleth everything that pertains to Fanon's analysis unfolds. The black subject enters the arena of interpersonal encounters in the West with his or her history already constructed and given. The already given history, the parodic primitivism most powerfully represented by cannibalism, is the form of the denial of giving the black subject historical agency. Once on the scene of the present, the black subject encounters his historical agency as already decided. Any possible uniqueness or singularity to the subject is undermined by the imposition of a representational framework. The black subject represents

⁸As Krell says, the production of an embodied normativity from out of an exploration of abnormality is not performed by Merleau-Ponty for the sake of reifying or privileging the normal. He writes, 'Merleau-Ponty advances along the *via negativa* of a pathology of the human body. He does so, not to deduce the normal from the abnormal, but to show that the geometric space of modern science, metaphysics and mathematics is fundamentally pathological' (Krell, 1997:140-1)

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black subjectivity. 'Everything is anticipated, thought out, demonstrated, made the most of. My trembling hands take hold of nothing; the vein has been mined out. Too late!'(Ibid) Fanon cannot even grasp something anymore- the schemas that permit the hands and arms to draw things close to the body according to the cultururations of habit are attenuated into insignificance. The fact of blackness (in the West) annuls the Heideggerian distinction between *vorhanden* and *zu-handen* by annulling the agency of the hands completely. Without the agency of the body occupying the free space of the present, the subject lies absolutely exposed to the gaze of the other. The black subject at this point loses his sense of interiority. At the brink of the decomposition of self and world, all Fanon's hands can do is tremble.

At this point we arrive at the second aspect of the undermining of the corporeal schema by the racial schema: *objectification*. As was shown briefly in the previous chapter, the 'object' in Merleau-Ponty refers to the asymptote of translucency of the percept. The object is that hypothesis of the limited perspective of my perception being deepened by an infinity of other perspectives. The object is, in Merleau-Ponty's example, the house 'viewed from everywhere'. In contrast, the object in Fanon's sense is that of the subject viewed from *elsewhere*. Not just any neutral elsewhere however. The

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gaze of the other denies the perspective of the subject and the capacity of the subject to perform embodied transformations of a specific cultural trajectory. The limit point of this denial of freedom comes when the subject acquiesces to the onslaught of the alienating gaze and *internalises it*. At two points in his essay Fanon describes this moment with acute force,

On that day, completely dislocated, unable to be abroad with the other, the white man, who unmercifully imprisoned me, I took myself far off from my own presence, far indeed, and made myself an object. (Fanon,1986:112)

I sit down at the fire and I become aware of my uniform.
(Fanon,1986:114)

In sum, the white other fixes the black subject as different because of their skin colour. The fixity of this difference resides in it operating as an inextricable and unquestionable metonym for a parodic construction of black history. Objectification therefore is the objectification of history, not science, for Fanon. The subsequent *internalisation* of the other's fixing point of view results in a self-inflicted inferiorisation. As Fanon writes, 'I have ceaselessly striven to show the Negro man that in a sense he makes himself abnormal.'"(Fanon,1986:225) The black subject repeats the other's gaze,

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and in a panopticon-like manner, the other no longer needs to be there.

In this state of exteriorised being, the subject has become *abject*.⁹ Not quite object, and yet no longer secure within an assuring framework of interiority, the subject is decentered by a paralysing double-consciousness. Not completely reducible to the names the other would ascribe, but then no longer able to legitimate the names the subject would give himself, abjection expels the subject from the community of citizens and rational beings.

But there is still a further moment of alienation, according to Fanon's text. Beyond the objectification alienating the black subject from the freedom of an embodied historical being, it excludes the externally constructed black historical narrative from being part of worldly history itself. That is, instead of being seen as historical beings in the world, with their own specific

⁹ Kristeva's term, most fully explored in her book "Powers of Horror", has been subsequently read by others beyond the confines of its original psychoanalytic context. For instance, Iris Marion Young in "Justice, Politics and Community" explores the concept from the point of view of the embodiment of difference outside of the 'universalisms' of modern reason. In chapter 6 of Cataldi's book "Emotion, Depth and Flesh", the author takes up Young's reading and carefully distinguishes between the abject subject and the object in terms of the threatening proximity of the former to a stable sense of selfhood,

Today the Other is not so different from me as to be an object; discursive consciousness asserts that Blacks, women, homosexuals, and disabled people are like me. But..they are affectively marked as different...The face-to-face presence of these others..threatens aspects of my basic security system, my basic sense of identity, and I must turn away with disgust and revulsion. (Cataldi:143)

It must be noted that the stated equivalences between different modalities of the abject here does not account for differences in visibility, for instance the 'fact' of blackness. I will discuss this in more

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cultural inflection of worldliness, at the limit subsumable within the context of all contexts of the 'world', the caricature of black history is kept separate from this universal world.

I shouted a greeting to the world and the world slashed away
my joy. I was told to stay within bounds, to go back where I
belonged. (Fanon,1986:114-5)

This extract powerfully reminds the reader of the essential relation between voice and community. To be part of a community is to have a voice. Belonging has a vocal imperative that the voice is heard and recognised and accepted. In any place where the voice is either not heard, not recognised or not accepted, an implicit disavowal of community is at work. In the field of race difference, this disavowal can become one of the most subterranean forms of constant racial abuse. Fanon strives to combat the incessant subtlety of this dynamic in the above quote by personifying the amorphous pressure of 'the world.'

Let us take stock of Fanon's critique of Merleau-Ponty. The racial-epidermal schema denies the universal freedom Merleau-Ponty ascribes to all 'normal' bodied beings. In this sense the 'ontology' of the same collapses under the

detail in my reading of Baldwin's "Another Country" below.

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pressure of difference. This denial of the universal acts as one form of a wave of difference according to race, class and gender that combine to resist the notion of the context of all contexts, the 'world' to which all embodied subjects belong. The world to which Fanon shouted a greeting is refused by the (white) other in the refrain of "The Fact of Blackness". A phenomenology which recognises the embodiment of difference therefore must confront the difference of worlds which differently positioned subjects experience. Fanon argues implicitly that phenomenology cannot legitimate its purported discovery of universal commonalities between embodied subjects such that every subject belongs ultimately to the same world-horizon of the 'now'. Not all embodied subjects are capable of becoming historical beings, due to this capacity being refused by the objectifying and abjectifying positioning of the other. Not everyone can experience their own embodiment of history. Therefore, some are denied the potentiality to transform the history of the world (or the history of *their* world). The internalisation of inferiorities based on the embodiment of difference works to deny a first-personal take on the 'now' of this present historical moment. Fanon himself is forced to live according to the weight of a fake past instead of a present open to possible change. Through internalisation, the now of the black subject is lived through the caricatured constructions of the white other. The excluded subject is alienated from

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their body, their history, and that history's relation to the 'history of the world'. Far from beginning with an always already given sense of commonality within a world-horizon, the nauseous objectified subject begins with an exclusion, a denial of a relation to the universal, and a denial of his belonging to the present.

With this in mind, we can understand more fully Fanon's initial antipathy towards 'ontology'. He writes

Ontology-once it is finally admitted as leaving existence by the wayside- does not permit us to understand the being of the black man. For not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man. (Fanon,1986:110)

For Fanon, the collapsing of ontology into difference enacts the collapsing of ontology itself. Fanon repeats the Levinasian move here of construing ontology as the field of the same. He is in effect arguing that ontology, by way of a phenomenological methodology, refers to a 'world' whose community of being discounts phenomenological visibilities such as the fact of blackness. To be black is to be seen as black, an *irreversible* facticity which Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology cannot articulate within its own terms. However, although an explanation for Fanon's rejection of ontology has

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been established, I would argue that the act of rejection is too strong. In thinking the embodied character of difference, an ontology of difference must be developed in order to demarcate the form of the boundaries between immanence and transcendence, between sameness and difference. The Fanonian critique of Merleau-Ponty is an attempt to highlight the omissions of embodied difference in the latter. But to reassert difference in phenomenology, as Fanon does, cannot be undertaken without recourse to the terms of ontology. This is explicitly recognised in the conclusion to “Black Skin, White Masks”, where Fanon writes, ‘I am a part of Being to the degree that I go beyond it.’ (Fanon,1986:229) Far from ontology demarcating the community of being that excludes difference, ontology itself is rethought as differential. Ontology therefore marks the limits of the same, and allows for a spacing between it and the other, such that a univocal ‘world’ is deferred and reconstituted as the ideal. Ontology is always an ontology of difference. If ontology was delegitimated by difference, difference itself would be rendered impossible to thinking.

*

In order to embellish the implications for phenomenology of a world that is not universally given across the embodiment of differences, I will now examine some key passages from James Baldwin’s novel “Another

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Country”.¹⁰ Written in Istanbul and set in New York in the late fifties, this novel can be read as an extended critique of the universalist normativity between the body and space that a text such as the “Phenomenology of Perception” represents. However, as with Fanon’s “Fact of Blackness”, the poetics of the text lead us back to phenomenology, through the sparks of difference. In this sense, Baldwin’s novel, like the text of Fanon’s, can be read in the light of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology in order to open it to difference. Although dense and turbulent with many other themes, for instance a portrayal of homosexual love thematised as non-deviant, and an account of pretension in the face of artistic failure, the novel is most disturbing and powerful in highlighting the blindspots of embodied difference.

By ‘blindspots of embodied difference’ I refer to the way in which the bodily schema is coded with difference to the extent that vision itself can no longer be seen as opening on to the neutrality of a ‘perceptual field’. Using Fanon, I have argued that the embodiment of difference suspends the possibility of a universal world being available to all subjects. Baldwin’s

¹⁰ I am aware that the bulk of the work of this chapter faces the potential criticism that in order to construct a phenomenology of race difference I have narrowed my reading down to just two thinkers, viz Fanon and Baldwin. This narrowing was necessary in order to speak with sufficient depth within the limits of a chapter length text. In future work I hope to expand upon the scope of thinkers involved in this direction.

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novel shows that this leads, in the case of densely coded zones like 'downtown' New York and 'uptown' Harlem, to the same spaces themselves being read differently. In Baldwin's New York, issues of visibility and invisibility are raised to the forefront of what it is to perceive the world, across difference. It is the 'privilege' of the white subjects in the novel to see the places they occupy as neutral zones. In contrast, those whose bodily capacities are challenged, principally in the novel the two central black characters, brother and sister Rufus and Ida, do not have this prerogative. As such, Baldwin is able to uncover a racism beneath its most obvious forms; a racism in perception.

In order to develop this reading, I will examine a passage detailing Rufus' consciousness of the white other's blindspots, and then Ida's. Both examples turn on that most covertly coded of urban spaces, the park. In the first example, Rufus is walking with his new girlfriend, the 'white trash' Leona, and his best friend the Italian-American Vivaldo. They are in the apparently free space of Washington Square, the park at the centre of Greenwich Village. Vivaldo has just been stopped by a drunken woman, leaving Rufus alone with his partner,

Without Vivaldo, there was a difference in the eyes which watched them. Villagers, both bound and free, looked them

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over as though where they stood were an auction block or a stud farm. The pale spring sun seemed very hot on the back of his neck and on his forehead. Leona gleamed before him and seemed to be oblivious of everything and everyone but him. And if there had been any doubt concerning their relationship, her eyes were enough to dispel it. Then he thought, If she could take it so calmly, if she noticed nothing, what was the matter with him? Maybe he was making it all up, maybe nobody gave a damn. Then he raised his eyes and met the eyes of an Italian adolescent. The boy was splashed by the sun falling through the trees. The boy looked at him with hatred; his glance flickered over Leona as though she were a whore; he dropped his eyes slowly and swaggered on- having registered his protest, his backside seemed to snarl, having made his point.

‘Faggot,’ Rufus muttered.

Then Leona surprised him. ‘You talking about that boy? He’s just bored and lonely, don’t know no better. You could probably make friends with him real easy if you tried.’(Baldwin, 1990:38-9)

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Although the couple are both challenged by the general ambience of suspicion in the square and the particular confrontation with the youth, only Rufus reads this suspicion as a challenge to his being. This is not to say that Leona is not aware of the statement they make. 'He's probably bored and lonely' gives the game away, a reference to an act which Leona does not bring into the open. The most Leona can do is effect a silent relation to the challenge, without speaking it. Prior to this encounter, the difference in readings of the space of the park is startling. On the one hand, Leona is 'oblivious' to the atmosphere, whereas Rufus is painfully self-conscious. Leona gleams in the pale sunlight, as if the sun's rays carry the force of the eyes looking at them. In other words, the sun's rays on Leona are a metaphor for her *basking* in the attention of the park dwellers. The surface of Leona's skin is glorified and illuminated by a concealed transmission of ocular power (in a manner that corresponds to the self-illumination of Heidegger's temple in the third chapter). On the other hand, Rufus cannot reflect the sun's rays or the gaze of the others, he can only feel their eyes sink into his being. Rufus' skin is non-reflective - the sun burns his neck. And only Rufus is aware of this difference, to the point of insanity. The insanity emerges at the point where Rufus is brought to challenge his whole reading of the situation. If the park is not full of suspicious eyes, then Rufus is aware that he must obviously be projecting his own paranoia onto the

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others. This possibility becomes present in Rufus' mind, as the possibility that his own mind is distorting the situation in which he finds himself. As such, Rufus is led into considering that he is mad, that he can no longer access reality beyond the delusions of his being. Being brought face to face with Leona's blindspots, the silence of the places where the sun does not shine, Rufus is led to question his whole orientation within the world.¹¹

Leona, in contrast, is not provoked to question her sanity. For her, the gaze of the others in the park is an occasion for display, an inversion of suspicion into admiration which turns on the self flattery of vanity. The subsequent particularisation of the suspicion in the figure of the adolescent therefore does not trouble her as a question put to their being together. Rather, she reads the youth's behaviour as a local problem, put down to his boredom.

This first excerpt from "Another Country" demonstrates Fanon's point that racial coding leads from a difference in embodiment to a difference in worlds. Baldwin shows the consequence of this when those 'worlds' happen to be superimposed upon the same space. The white world of Leona plays the part of Merleau-Ponty's 'corporeal schema', a privilege and a freedom to

¹¹ Here we broach upon a development of the spatial phenomenology of insanity mentioned in the previous chapter. The unresolvable double-consciousness of an exteriorisation that threatens to reduce the doubling to a 'pure' (and of course impossible) exteriority is an attack on the *rationality* of the subject. The outside impends as that which threatens the very viability of an 'inner groundedness of being'.

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occupy space as unproblematic and uncontested. The strength of the privilege is manifested in Leona's power, even as mere 'white trash' to resist the gaze of the others, to not internalise it into her being. For Leona, all space is orientated with the possibilities for a postural schema, unlike a scientifically 'objective' space devoid of such latent or manifest value. However, these possibilities are assumed to be universally available to other subjects. The place of the other for Leona is therefore the possibility of another position for perception, and nothing more. On the other hand, the world as it opens up for Rufus is an incarnation of Fanon's 'racial-historical-epidermal' schema. The positioning of the 'bohemian' others in Washington Square fixes him into a decomposition of self which leads him to the brink of the paralysis of insanity. The world is not, and has never been, universally available to him, at least the white world south of Harlem. But then this distinction between uptown Harlem and downtown Manhattan for black subjects is enough to shatter the notion of a worldly 'nest' for all. Local aspects of the world cannot add up indefinitely towards the limit of the worldly 'now'. The embodiment of difference resists such extrapolation. Rufus therefore lives between the 'freedom' of Harlem and the prison of Manhattan; however, the presence of the police and whites venturing north mean that even Harlem cannot be considered a zone affording with undisturbed possibilities for him.

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In the novel, Cass, the white wife of the failed novelist Richard exemplifies the reverse of Rufus' experience. As she makes the trip north to Harlem to Rufus' funeral, she experiences herself with reduced bodily competence, a decomposition of subjectivity which is the result of being positioned as other in a predominantly black space,

One small, lone, white woman hurrying along 125th Street on a Saturday morning was apparently a very common sight, for no one looked at her at all. She did not see any stores with ladies' hats in the window. But she was hurrying too fast and looking too hard. If she did not pull herself together, she might very well spend the day wandering up and down this street.(Baldwin,1990:120)

The interesting difference between Cass and Rufus in terms of their being positioned by the racial other is temporal. Cass experiences a breakdown in the bodily competence of her corporeal schema on a trip to Harlem. She finds the simple task of going to buy a hat disturbingly difficult. Her imagined sense of being exteriorised as 'other' takes her out of a bodily competence she would blindly take for granted in the streets to the south. Although perhaps rattled, her return to the white safety of downtown New York encloses her again in the security of the illusion that the world is there

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for everyone. For Cass, the blindspots against difference are accommodated for by the normative power of the white space of downtown. Rufus on the other hand is some part on the way towards a Fanonian crumbling of his corporeal schema. The possibility of being positioned as an object denied freedom is an ever-present threat. The constancy of this threat is often represented by the anonymous figure of white authority, the police, that populate the novel, always suspicious of the black subject. 'The policeman passed him, giving him [Rufus] a look.' This appears on the first page of the novel. Rufus' decision to embroil himself in the white world below 100th street ends in his suicide.¹²

Ida's race-consciousness entails that she is always already aware of the ever-present threat of positioning of the white other. She lives most of the novel in Harlem, working downtown. Unlike her brother Rufus, she resists the decomposing and crumbling effects of the racial-epidermal schema by exploiting it to her advantage. She uses the power of being read as an 'exotic' source of sexual intrigue to her gain in controlling her relation with

¹²Although Rufus cannot help being aware of the epidermal schema, Baldwin portrays him as being in denial about it. This contrasts with the critical attitude his sister Ida has. Baldwin writes, 'he knew Ida would instantly hate Leona. She had always expected a great deal from Rufus, and she was very race-conscious. She would say, You'd never even have looked at that girl, Rufus, if she's been black. But you'll pick up any white trash just because she's white. What's the matter- you ashamed of being black? Then, for the first time in his life, he wondered about that- or, rather, the question bumped against his mind for an instant and then speedily, apologetically, withdrew.' (Baldwin, 1990:37)

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the wheeler-dealer Ellis. She allows herself to be read in Fanon's parodic fashion as a way of manipulating the other's gaze. Ida therefore testifies to a reversibility in the power of the gaze, a competency which has yet to be explored in theory up to date.

The following dialogue between Ida and Cass takes place as they are journeying uptown to Harlem, passing by Central Park.

They were in the park. Ida leaned forward and lit a cigarette with trembling hands, then gestured out the window. 'I bet you think we're in a goddam park. You don't know we're in one of the world's great jungles. You don't know that behind all them damn dainty trees and shit, people are screwing and fixing and dying. Dying, baby, right now while we move through this darkness in this man's taxicab. And you don't know it, even when you're told; you don't know it, even when you see it.'[...] And she, too, looked out at the park, trying to see what Ida say; but, of course, she saw only the trees and the lights and the grass and the twisting road and the shape of the buildings beyond the park.(Baldwin,1990:341)

In this short exchange, Ida shows that Cass's blindspot's are *embodied*, an

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essential aspect of her corporeal schema. Cass does not suffer merely from a lack of knowledge. It is not as if she can, in true liberal fashion, learn to know the problem and thereby transcend it. Knowledge here will never be enough to surmount the asymmetries between the two women. The blindspot refers to an aporia more profound than merely an epistemic limitation. The blindspot is part of her being-in-the-world. The depth of her blindspots on the coding of space are powerfully evinced in the above passage. Ida *tells* Cass that she won't notice the jungle that is Central Park even when she *sees* it. Cass is obviously listening to Ida at this point. And yet, even in the knowledge that she may have a blindspot to the difference of perspectives upon the same space, she still cannot eradicate the aporias of her embodied, positioned and privileged perspective on the world. Cass' positioning as a white subject entails that she cannot see the world except in universal terms. A space such as Central Park therefore offers itself as available to everyone. As such, the social codings of the space drop out, and Cass is left staring at the trees and the grass.

The contestation of urban spaces witnessed in "Another Country" therefore shows how this contestation is *asymmetric* across the racial divide. For white subjects such as Cass and Leona (representing the middle class liberal and the Southern white trash respectively), the fabric of the urban as contested

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is repressed by their positioned embodiment as subjects of skin privilege. For the two central black protagonists, Rufus and Ida, (representing the uncritical and the critical modes of race awareness respectively), their positioned embodiment leads them to an awareness of the contestation of every space. As was shown in the case of Rufus in Washington Square, the pivot between the reading of space as universally available and reading it in terms of opprobrium and exclusion is itself the space of insanity. Either the lived experience of space is one which is universally available to all, and therefore it is possible to say that ‘we live in the same world’, or it must be accepted that there are imbalances and privileges in having a white subjective positioning over and against other forms of positioning. The main form of this privilege lies in being able to claim that the world does not exclude the other. This leads to the privilege of reading public spaces such as Central Park and Washington Square as uncontested spaces. This privilege therefore results in privileges afforded to the body’s sense of freedom in space. In many cases, this positioning can be seen to reach its zenith of privilege in the white *male* subject. In “Another Country”, Cass’ journey uptown to Rufus’ funeral is fraught with fear as she senses her bodily difference. This contrasts with Vivaldo’s freedom of movement in both uptown and downtown New York. The difference between Cass and Vivaldo could be expressed in terms of the extra layers of privilege

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Vivaldo's masculinity gives him. The white male does not encounter the contestations the white female faces, for quite obviously, the contestation of space works not only on racial lines, but also in terms of gender. The white male therefore is supported by a two-fold privilege in his access to social space: firstly in terms of not encountering exclusion based on race, and secondly in terms of not facing contestation based on gender.

After reading "Another Country", it becomes ever more clear that there is no middle position between the thesis of a universal world and that of worldly difference, or rather those forced to occupy this middle position can be driven to experience the unbearable nausea that Fanon felt. Whereas those who do not encounter opposition and contestation in their movement through social space exist outside of nausea, and can therefore be blind to its possibility. The condition of black western subjectivity then becomes a sickness unto death.

Baldwin's novel therefore can be read as urging those interested in developing Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology to rethink it in the light of differences of race, class, and gender. The spatial codings of difference between uptown and downtown New York in the late fifties should not be read as a 'classy throwback' to the dramas of the jazz age and black and white American movies. For those films should not and cannot be read as

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purely historical documents. As Fanon writes, on the last page of “The Fact of Blackness”,

I cannot go to a film without seeing myself. I wait for me. In the interval, just before the film starts, I wait for me. The people in the theater are watching me, examining me, waiting for me. A Negro groom is going to appear. My heart makes my head swim. (Fanon, 1986:140)

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When difference is grounded in the body, not merely in concepts and discourses *about* the body, the universal world to which we all allegedly belong is put in crisis. The social spaces of our existence become *contested spaces*. The nature of the contestation involves assymetry. The reading of Fanon and Baldwin above has established that this assymetry works through visibility and invisibility. In terms of race, the visible occupies two levels. Firstly, the ‘fact’ of blackness refers to the unambiguous difference of skin colour, a difference which, as was argued above, interrupts a phenomenological reversibility. Secondly, the visible in terms of a phenomenology of race highlights what lies beyond the blindspots of white embodied perception. The two examples given in my reading of Baldwin’s

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text, of Rufus in Greenwich Village and Ida in Central Park, both show differences in ‘visibility’ in both these senses. Moreover, the contestation of space between white and black subjects in Baldwin’s novel involves a relation between invisibility and the architecture of urban form. The ‘uptown’ area of Harlem, which in actual fact is mostly low-rise buildings, has a sort of panoptic privilege over the skyscraper landscape of downtown Manhattan. In much the same way as Michel de Certeau’s descent from the World Trade Center quoted in chapter 3, Baldwin’s Manhattanites occupy spaces invisible to each other. This contrasts with the one character rooted in Harlem, Ida, who can see into the invisibility of downtown sociality. Ida therefore represents the site and sight of embodied *counter privilege*. The visibility of black skin therefore leads to an affirmation of its corollary, the insight and vision of being embodied differently. Beyond white embodied blindspots of perception, beyond the skin privilege that covers over the contestive nature of social space and makes it invisible, the black subject uncovers a potentiality of insight.

It would be possible to extrapolate here a conflict naming of space from my generalisation of Andrew Benjamin’s notion of ‘conflict naming’ in the third chapter. In the long footnote to Derek Walcott’s poem “Names”, precisely such a move was made. To remind the reader, in this poem, the naming of

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spaces and places by the coloniser are challenged and re-worked or re-named by those formerly colonised. At this point poetry becomes overtly political: questions of language and naming explicitly refer to issues of community and enforced community. Universality is revealed, through conflict naming, to be the ruse and strategy by which the forces of victory conceal themselves as such. In this case, it is possible to draw a parallel between Cass' blindspot in Central Park and the operations of the names of power. Cass can only see the obvious, she has a 'natural attitude' which reifies the obvious in her perceptual field. She cannot see how the undisturbed neutrality of her perception is constructed on the basis of privilege. In the same way, the names of power installs and continues a certain framework of references and privilege (in the Walcott poem, a European privilege), without revealing itself as a form of power as such. If in the field of difference one can maintain the legitimacy of Heidegger's statement that 'language is the house of being', one can only do so under the rubric of plurality; there are many different houses of being. This, as has been shown, is the motive behind Fanon's rejection of ontology. For Fanon, ontology cannot 'accommodate' the difference of conflict, the difference of the black subject. But as we have also argued, the difference of the black subject can in actual fact only be secured by returning to ontology, as ontological difference. As the third and fourth chapters have argued, only

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through an ontology of difference can transcendence be thought within immanence. A phenomenological ontology of embodiment leads, through Fanon and Baldwin, to the notion of social space as contested. There can therefore be no 'pure' space of immanence, of a community that assembles itself prior to the question; any such claim could only be made on the basis of the blindspots of embodied privilege.

Conflicts of space, place and names are therefore opened up by a phenomenology of difference grounded in the 'third space' of the body. The body, be it white, black, mixed race, female or male, old or young, occidental or oriental, makes available certain ways of seeing and being in the world. In this way, an ontology of difference becomes necessary, to which I believe Fanon would concur (given his remarks in the conclusion). Given that social space is always contested, the immanence of immersion within a world always opens out onto the transcendence of other ways of seeing and being. The specific positioning of the subject to an extent determines whether this opening is a matter of coercion or repression however. The awareness of a difference beyond one's bodily groundedness in a world depends therefore to an extent on a critical consciousness. Critical consciousness opens the subject therefore to two forms of transcendence. Firstly, one's communication with the world through the

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pre-personal body, as has been argued, announces a transcendence of what has been given. The present, as the site of corporeal reworking, is not necessarily part of a line of time and tradition, rather it is the site of a potential rupture of that time and that tradition. But beyond this intra-conflictuality of the name (again apparently the most significant form for Benjamin in his notion of conflict naming), an opening onto the traditions and ways of seeing of the other is also emergent. The second form of transcendence the body is opened to is the transcendence of the other, grounded differently in their body. This transcendence is not the alterity of Infinity, rather it is the alterity of conflict. Through an inevitable reciprocation, the recognition of the embodied difference of the other leads to one also marking one's own body out as different. Recognition of the markers that ground one's body in difference, a recognition grounded in a critical consciousness, therefore leads to the arena of conflict.¹³ No-one can be exempt from the direction of such a programme, for to claim exemption would be to capitulate to the strategies of power that wish to overrule and undermine a critical consciousness of difference. But then such a

¹³Fanon cites Merleau-Ponty in the conclusion to "Black Skin, White Masks" '...for a being who has acquired consciousness of himself and of his body, who has attained to the dialectic of subject and object, the body is no longer a cause of the structure of consciousness, it has become an object of consciousness.' (Fanon, 1986:225) In this sense, the other allows the subject to become aware of his or her *own* difference. As such, Merleau-Ponty allows community to be thought in terms of intrinsic embodied differences, what I am calling the 'arena of conflict'.

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capitulation itself can only lead to conflict in the face of the other, against one's will or inclination.

But is that the end of the story, for one who reads difference into and against Merleau-Ponty such as Frantz Fanon? Are we merely led to the arena of conflict, of the name, of place, and of the body, that is if we were not already forced to encounter it? Does a critical awareness of the implications of embodied difference lead to a fragmentation of the *socius*, and a splitting of history into a thousand minor histories? Does difference therefore preclude the ideal of justice and community for all? Is the only 'justice' available through critical consciousness a promotion of the awareness that if your bodily being in the world is different from mine, then we are by reciprocation different from each other? But what sort of justice would that entail?

The response from Fanon must be clear: a critical awareness, of the body no longer merely as the structure but as the *object* of consciousness, performs no splitting, and certainly no fragmentation. All it does is discover, against the grain of a beguiling rhetoric of universalism, that all is not equal. Embodied difference is the *starting point* for a critical awareness, and should not be confused, as the basis of a pessimistic critique, as its goal. In Fanon's

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case, the critical awareness on race he preaches¹⁴ is for wholly redemptive, or dare I say it, *spiritual* purposes.

In the 'Fact of Blackness', Fanon expresses his political desire as follows,

All I wanted was to be a man among other men. I wanted to come lithe and young into a world that was ours and to help to build it together. (Fanon, 1986: 112-3)

Fanon's desire is to belong in the manner a phenomenologist such as Merleau-Ponty decries is already possible to all 'normal' humans. Fanon's critique of the universalism in Merleau-Ponty is therefore a *suspension* or *deferral* of it. The world to which he shouted his greeting slashed away his joy. Merleau-Ponty's insights are yet of the blind. The world is not *given*, it must be fought for. The world therefore signifies a freedom that resembles the Kantian regulative ideal, or the Derridean '*a devenir*'. The thought of embodying difference necessitates the deferral of a universal world. The world therefore is transformed from being the always already given ground of being, the 'inexhaustible reservoir from which things are drawn'. Instead, the world becomes the token of justice and freedom. The world is a futural

¹⁴Here 'preaching' is not meant as pejorative or as connoting proselytization. I am referring to the vociferous and pithy style of Fanon's voice, particularly in the final chapter "By Way of Conclusion".

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destiny for those who dream of transcending the fixing of the other's gaze. The body is both subject and object, as Merleau-Ponty says. Freedom lies therefore when the objectification of the body is not the work of the other, but the 'object' of consciousness for the subject.

For Fanon, this redemption from the gaze is articulated in terms of a transformative historicity, outlined forcefully in the final chapter. Fanon begins with Merleau-Ponty's notion of the body becoming an object of consciousness for the subject, inscribed within the *present*. Freedom for Fanon is first of all freedom from the weight of the past,

The problem considered here is one of time. Those Negroes and white men will be disalienated who refuse to let themselves be sealed away in the materialized Tower of the Past. (Fanon,1986:226)

The present is therefore the site of possible transformation, the horizon for the possibility of justice and community. A *specific* construction of the past has therefore to be dismissed. 'I will not make myself the man of any past. I do not want to exalt the past at the expense of my present and of my future.'(Fanon,1986:226) The only past that is legitimate for the purposes of freedom is a *universal* past. 'I am a man, and what I have to recapture is the

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whole past of the world.’(Fanon,1986:226) However, this project of recapture is secondary to securing a freedom for the black subject through the present. Here I will merely list some quotes, for even a mere list of Fanon’s conclusion makes available the force of his polemic:

I am not a prisoner of history. I should not seek there for the meaning of my destiny.(229)

In the world through which I travel, I am endlessly creating myself.(229)

I am not the slave of the Slavery that dehumanized my ancestors.(230)

I am my own foundation.(231)

Here then, Fanon argues that the present is the site of a potential rupture of the historical, the unbearable *weight* of Being. Fanon’s redemption from the past involves not responding or *reacting* to it. Freedom for Fanon involves the active force of transformation of the ‘now’, rather than a reactive valorization of recrudescence. It is not possible to avoid the parallel with the account of historical transformation found in the “Phenomenology of Perception”- with the notion of a pre-personal communication between the body and its habitus. Fanon’s ‘endless recreation of himself’, his existence as

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his own foundation, are the equivalent of Merleau-Ponty's 'resumption at every moment' of the perpetual contribution of his bodily being.'(Merleau-Ponty, 1962:254) In both philosophers, freedom is a function of the present, as the site of a possible transformation of the given. In such a manner, the linearity of the past is broken, and the future is opened to difference, the difference of a transcendence of the same.

There is however an important, if subtle difference between the two. For Merleau-Ponty, the possibility of transformation in the present is given with the ease of a 'perpetual contribution.' It would seem that the present is the site of rupture of the given's linearity, and that this rupture is guaranteed merely by the motility of the agent. That is, it is not clear whether rupture is automatic or potential in Merleau-Ponty. The problem with a decision on this issue is that one would want to recognise two patternings which lie in tension with each other. On the one hand, one would want, as Merleau-Ponty surely does, to articulate the insight that bodily repetition involves differentiation and transformation as the norm. A repetition that circles within the Same would be the exception, which in cultural production is usually enforced through work and discipline.¹⁵ On the other hand, to the

¹⁵The discipline of 'classical' music is a good example. Only by codification in terms of score can approximation to a repetition without difference be achieved. The fact that music scores themselves cannot accommodate all nuances of musical expression is in part that which allows for new

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extent that one marks this tendency, the risk of automatising and naturalising transformativity arises. I would argue that Merleau-Ponty articulates the former and encounters the risk of the latter, without attending to formulating a relation between motility, transformation, and work. There is a sort of flattery of difference at work in Merleau-Ponty's idea of a 'communication more ancient than thought'. In contrast, Fanon's freedom from the past involves a great deal more effort and resolve. For Fanon, transformation of the present requires a 'critical consciousness'. Without that, the weight of the past disavows and disables the possibility of transforming the present. In this sense, Merleau-Ponty's insight into the body's relation to freedom therefore again is blind to the weight difference can make to the past. For Fanon's text ends with the most solemn of vows to a vigilancy of the corporeal,

My final prayer:

O my body, make of me always a man who questions!

(Fanon,1986:232)

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interpretations of classical works. This contrasts with the 'metaphysics' of jazz, or other improvised musics, where difference within repetition is the norm.

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In this chapter I have argued that Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the body privileges a construction of the 'other' as within the world. The world's circumscription of difference in effect reduces all difference to the same horizon of being. Merleau-Ponty is cautious enough to suggest that the other sees the object through the 'intermediary of time and language'. Using Fanon, I have argued however that this mediation cannot resist a collapse back into the Same. Although Merleau-Ponty's monadological tendencies are always restricted by the facticity of embodiment (unlike Husserl's)¹⁶, the other is nonetheless inscribed within the temporality and historicity of the worldly 'now'. No-one escapes the *Zeit-geist*, Merleau-Ponty's spirit of time. I have used Fanon and Baldwin to show how embodied difference denies the possibility of an already given community and commonality between human subjects. Any assertion of an always already given Same is blind to the difference between the world named by power and the worlds which contest it. But then Fanon and Baldwin's insights are not ways of damning Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology to an ontology of the Same. Rather, my readings of both have been undertaken to tease out the ontology of difference that lies implicit within Merleau-Ponty's text. The 'communication more ancient than thought' of the

¹⁶See for instance Husserl's "Cartesian Meditations", sections 55 and 56.

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“Phenomenology of Perception” in particular provides the most powerful and resourceful way of thinking embodied identity grounded in the difference of the present. Only on the basis of the richness of Merleau-Ponty’s work can Fanon’s critique result in a productive phenomenology of difference which repositions community as the Ideal, and not the given.

Fanon and Baldwin in their different ways attest to a spatialisation and placialisation of Benjamin’s notion of ‘conflict naming’. As such, difference is seen to be grounded in an *ontological* problematic, rather than being reduced to mere epistemology. Difference involves blindspots in being engendered by the limitations of embodiment. The invisibilities of privileged forms of embodiment in the socius are matched by the insights of the ‘unprivileged’, insights which I called ‘counter-privileges’. In this way, the social spaces of urban zones become seen as contested spaces, whose forms of contestation are assymmetrical, from the blindspots of privilege, to the insights of the differentiated. But this contestation is only uncovered to its very depth through a phenomenological ontology of embodiment. This methodology reveals that there are no ‘pure’ spaces, spaces of immanence. The transcendence within immanence discussed in the previous two chapters therefore in this chapter is articulated in terms of contested space.

However, as the last pages of this chapter have sought to point out, a critical

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awareness of embodied differences between the subject and the horizons of its being does not seek to denounce justice and community for the sake of irreducibility. Rather, the phenomenologists' dream of uncovering a pre-thetic community is shown to be the vigilant goal of those who seek to question their bodies in the present.