"All the Things You Could Be by Now, If Sigmund Freud’s Wife Was Your Mother": Psychoanalysis and Race

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1

The view from here is old-fashioned. One might even call it lame, predicated as it is on the proposition that self-knowledge has its uses. From here, we might be invested in a reinvigorated social practice, whose aim is ethical and restorative. To say so, however, is to start at the end of this piece, where and when and if the writing has not only congealed but explained itself. We have now to do with beginnings.

A framework that would properly contextualize a confrontation between “psychoanalysis” and “race” is not imaginable without a handful of prior questions, usually left unarticulated, that set it in motion in the first place. The new social practices toward which I have gestured cannot proceed, however, unless we are willing to pose the not-quite thinkable, on which bases the converging issues have previously rested. In other words, culture theorists on either side of the question would rule out, as tradition

Unless otherwise stated, all translations are my own.

has it, any meeting ground between race matters, on the one hand, and psychoanalytic theories, on the other. But I want to shift ground, mindful of this caveat: little or nothing in the intellectual history of African Americans within the social and political context of the United States would suggest the effectiveness of a psychoanalytic discourse, revised or classical, in illuminating the problematic of “race” on an intersubjective field of play, nor do we yet know how to historicize the psychoanalytic object and objective, invade its heredity premises and insulations, and open its insights, subsequently, to cultural and social forms that are disjunctive to its originary imperatives. In short, how might psychoanalytic theories speak about “race” as a self-consciously assertive reflexivity, and how might “race” expose the gaps that psychoanalytic theories awaken? Neither from the point of view of African Americans’ relationship to the dominant culture nor, just as important, from that of the community’s intramural engagements have we been obliged in our analytical/critical writings to consider the place, for example, of fantasy, desire, and the “unconscious,” of conflict, envy, aggression, and ambivalence in the repertoire of elements that are perceived to fashion the lifeworld. Only a handful of writers of fiction, Ralph Ellison, Toni Cade Bambara, Alice Walker, David Bradley, and Toni Morrison, among them, have posed a staging of the mental theater as an articulate structure of critical inquiries into the “souls of black folk,” though my having recourse to W. E. B. Du Bois’s 1903 work indeed suggests that the black New Englander was on course nearly a century ago. Among Du Bois’s generation of thinkers, poet Jean Toomer comes as close as anyone within this repertory of writings to the coherent laying out of a paradigm of the imaginary (Cane, 1922), even though, in a very real sense, we could say that the artwork, in its intelligent “muteness,” is already a “translation” that requires a didactic rereading back into its eventuality from concatenations on the real object—in other words, the “message” of art is hardly transparent, or to be read like the palms of the hands. Paule Marshall’s fiction, as another example, plays a similar role in the contemporary period, especially The Chosen Place, the Timeless People and Praisesong for the Widow. I think it is safe to say, however, that the psychoanalytic object, subject, subjectivity now constitute the missing layer of hermeneutic/interpretive projects of an entire generation of black intellectuals now at work. The absence is not only glaring but perhaps most curious in its persistence. There are genuine costs as a result, whose upshot may be observed in what I would consider occasional lapses of ethical practice in social relations among black intellectuals themselves. Such lapses are most painfully obvious and dramatically demonstrable in cross-
gender exchanges within this social formation, although this outcome is not the only way to read the picture. Within genders, the black intellectual class is establishing few models of conduct and social responsibility, but perhaps change is in the making. Relatedly, we appear to be at a crossroads in trying to determine who “owns” African American cultural production as an “intellectual property,” who may “speak” for it, and whether or not “possession” itself is the always-exploitative end of kinds of access, even when the investigator looks like me.

While a sustained reading of this manifestation is beside the point of this essay, it hovers in the background as precisely the sort of problem that a revised and corrected social-political practice might field, if not solve, and might mobilize to pointed attention, if not drive out altogether. As a democratic idealist, even I need not be so naïve as to believe that nostrums are available to us and that there are, in fact, a cluster of “god-terms” waiting in the wings if only our collective genius could put them in the right order. We should be so lucky. I do want to contend, nevertheless, that psychoanalytic discourse might offer a supplementary protocol we might consider. And if one is going to posit such a thing, then those prior questions I have alluded to ought to be spelled out. This essay attempts to provide such an opening.

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By juxtaposing psychoanalysis and “race,” is one bringing them into alignment in the hope that these structures of attention will be mutually illuminating and interpenetrative? By contrast, does one mean to suggest the impossibility of the latter, which reinforces the impression that these punc-

1. Perhaps the long-awaited thaw in the recognition of a collective and cooperative interest among African American women in the academy is only now coming about. During the month of January 1994, several hundred black women and women of color converged on the campus of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology for four days of meetings devoted to inquiry concerning a range of issues. Organized by MIT Professors Robin Kilson (history) and Evelyn Hammond (the history of science), “Defending Our Name, 1984–1994,” its title taking its cue from the New York Times advertisement in support of Professor Anita Hill, was keynoted by three leading figures: Dr. Johnetta Cole, president of Spelman College; Professor Angela Davis, of the History of Consciousness Board, University of California, Santa Cruz; and law Professor Lani Guinier, of the University of Pennsylvania Law School. Prior to the MIT conference, however, black women graduate students in English and African American studies at the University of Pennsylvania convened a smaller conference of similar design at the Philadelphia campus during the spring of 1993. The MIT symposium was modeled on this idea.
ualities are so insistently disparate in the cultural and historical claims that they each invoke that the ground of their speaking together would dissolve in conceptual chaos? One pair of well-known critics even ventured that it is the “cure” from which we need curing? And if one is not going to speak, eventually, of a cure from whatever perceived ailment, then what exactly is the point? We could spend as much time interrogating both psychoanalysis and “race” as more or less fixed conceptual narratives and social praxes that occupy their own definitive moment in a semiotic chain. What those are might be as useful as any “fix.” This is what I mean: “race,” on the one hand, speaks through multiple discourses that inhabit intersecting axes of relations that banish once and for all the illusion of a split between “public” and “private.” The individual in the collective traversed by “race”—and there are no known exceptions, as far as I can tell—is covered by it before language and its differential laws take hold. It is the perfect affliction, if by that we mean an undeniable setup that not only shapes one’s view of things but demands an endless response from him. Unscientific in the eyes of “proofs,” governed by the inverted comma, unnatural and preponderant in its grotesque mandates on the socius, “race” is destiny in the world we have made. Is it not the unequable dinosaur of postmodernist sensibilities, enamored of instant addictions and handguns? Seemingly out of place alongside the hipness of DNA research, interplanetary probings, and televised repairs on the Hubble telescope, suspended “nowhere” we know, it is our firm and inexorable link to the logics and appeal of the irrational. From Bosnia-Herzegovina to Los Angeles, from Riyadh to Boston, and back across the spine of Europe and Africa, “race” asserts itself as the contagious magic in substitution for totemic collapse and the gods gone astray. What is this thing called “race”? Our deadliest abstraction? Our most nonmaterial actuality? Not fact, but our deadliest fiction that gives the lie to doubt about ghosts? In a word, “race” haunts the air where women and men in social organization are most reasonable.

2. Mark Seem, introduction to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane, preface by Michel Foucault (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983); originally published as L’Anti-Oedipe (Les Éditions de Minuit, 1972). Seem identifies the project in this way: “What it attempts to cure us of is the cure itself. Deleuze and Guattari term their approach ‘schizoanalysis,’ which they oppose on every count to psychoanalysis” (xvii).

“Race,” therefore, travels: while we are confronted, from time to time, with almost-evidence that the age of the postrace subject is upon us, we are just as certain that its efficacies can, and do, move from one position to another and back again. It is fair to say that “gays in the military” inscribed a social posture that was race-like in its dramatic concentration of negative semantic energy, in the surfeit of blind panic that underscored it, and in the terrifying certainty by which its target was marked. The generals who opposed the early Clinton administration’s wish to reverse the ban on gay and lesbian military personnel were both right and wrong in their objections to the analogizing of gay sexuality to the situation of black soldiers in the armed forces of the Truman era. They were right to observe that black people cannot conceal the color of their skin, while gay subjects, even when black, can keep “it” from sight. From this angle, to have been a black person in arms during World War II and the Korean War must have been analogous to nothing else. (The phenomenon of racial “passing” is roughly comparable, one might guess, to sexuality under concealment, but Africanity, by definition, describes the essence of visibility, which contains its own contradiction, insofar as it not only embodies a marked position but also specifies for the nervous beholder an overinvestment of anxiety because it is so marked. Trouble comes double when “race” determines a marker for the person who “has” it. This is not exactly tautological, or question begging, as the processes—phenotypic assignment/recognition, over and against a spurt of psychic energy—interconnect with the actual presence of the black person, who, gratefully, under “normal” circumstances, remains oblivious to the slight stir that her/his appearance has caused in places. Frantz Fanon spoke of the “Negro of the Antilles” [and by association, any “Negro”] as a “phobogenic object, a stimulus to anxiety.” 4 It would be useful to know, though, in general, how bodies respond to bodies not like their own, and what it is that “sees”—in other words, do we look with eyes, or with the psyche? The sight disturbance is activated on the streets of Accra, for example, when a white person erupts from the front door of a Barclay’s Bank, say, at high noon in the midst of Ghanaian market women at their work, though I think it would be an error to gauge the latter happening as a simple reversal of this: a black person, with nappy hair, come upon all of a sudden by a band of Russian children outside of Moscow.

is instantly aware that someone has blundered.) From the point of view of power relations, which remained unstated in their objections, the generals, in the controversy with the White House, knew well that racist practices, as a rule, habitually focus on “black,” as racism even sprints across the jazzy frontiers of sexual preference. Practically speaking, then, their nay-saying was accurate.

What the generals got wrong, however, was the following: (1) the arbitrariness of difference can occur along any lines of stress and for reasons that are, at once, elaborate and simpleminded; and (2) “race” is both concentrated and dispersed in its localities—in other words, “race” alone bears no inherent meaning, even though it reifies in personality, but gains its power from what it signifies by point, in what it allows to come to meaning (i.e., the synonymy struck between Africanness and enslavement by the close of the seventeenth century in the English colonies marked the boundary of freedom, which decided, in turn, a subject’s social and political status). In the context of the United States, “race” clings, primitively, to a Manichaean overttness—“black” and “white.” But it is evident that “race” by other names may operate within homogeneous social formations that lose their apparent “same” under hierarchical value: from an American point of view, Haitian and Somalian societies, as well as the complex ethnic groupings that constitute the former Yugoslavia, are less racially diverse than the United States, since here, skin color is the deciding factor. But in all three instances of community shattered by conflict and killing, “color” was—still is—displaced onto other features of the discriminatory. To that extent, “race” demarcates both an in-itselfness and a figurative economy that can take on any number of different faces at the drop of a hat. Understanding how this mechanism works is crucial: “race” is not simply a metaphor and nothing more; it is the outcome of a politics. For one to mistake it is to be politically stupid and endangered. It is also a complicated figure, or metaphoricity, that demonstrates the power and danger of difference, that signs and assigns difference as a way to situate social subjects. If we did not already have “race” and its quite impressive powers of proliferation, we would need to invent them. The social mechanism at work here is difference in, and as, hierarchy, although “race” remains one of its most venerable master signs.

Unhooked from land, custom, language, lineage, and clan/tribal arrangements, modern “race” joins the repertoire of fetish names bolstered by legislative strategy, public policy, and the entire apparatus of the courts and police force. It appears to best advantage under the regime of exile, estrangement, and struggle—in brief, where and when heterogeneous social
subjects invoke their humanness and its orders under the signs of enmity and alienation. With the new global arrangement portended by European incursions around the Atlantic-Gulf rim of the New World,\(^5\) conquest and warfare seem automatic to cross-racial exchange, and fortune, the crown of the colonizing spirit. Michel de Certeau speaks of the New World as “nuova terra,” an “unknown body” then covered over by discourses of power. This “writing that conquers . . . will use the New World as if it were a blank ‘savage’ page on which Western desire will be written.”\(^6\) Under this fairly novel scheme of orientations, “race” will malocclude culture, as the former becomes fatally wed to questions of value. The processes set in motion in de Certeau’s conceptual narrative, wherein the new land is allegorized as an unclothed female figure,\(^7\) will come to exact a cultural denuding, an emptying out of culture; this lesion on the world surface, this gap in its “brain,” will be filled up, and filled in, by “race.” In the long aftermath, however, where we are currently located, we already know that “race,” even then, “passed” for the Harvest but was, in fact, the great Big Empty.

Centuries down the line, the problem is how to explain the way by which “race” translates into cultural self-production, at the same time that it is evidently imposed by agencies (agentification) that come to rest in the public/administrative sphere, or what we understand as such. The provocation is to grasp its self-reflexivity, which is presumptively “private” and “mine.” The relay between self-fashioning and “out there” is only intricately revealed, however. The three dimensions of subjectivity offered by Lacanian psychoanalysis, the Symbolic, the imaginary, and the Real,\(^8\) broach an in-


\(^{6}\) Certeau, *The Writing of History*, preface, xxv.

\(^{7}\) This line of argument is fruitfully pursued in Patricia Parker’s *Literary Fat Ladies: Rhetoric, Gender, Property* (London: Methuen, 1987), 141ff. Parker’s “feminized New World” offers the ground for the convergence of diverse human interests: male gaze, real estate, and the operations of rhetoric. See also “Who Cuts the Border?” my introduction to *Comparative American Identities: Race, Sex, and Nationality in the Modern Text*, ed. Hortense J. Spillers, English Institute Essays (New York: Routledge, 1991).

\(^{8}\) Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977); selected from the original *Écrits* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1966). In the translator’s note to the English version, the three Lacanian dimensions are defined together: Sheridan points out that the “imaginary” was the first to appear, prior to the Rome Report of 1953, in which writing the notion of the “symbolic” surfaces. The “real” was initially “of
terpretation that could be articulated with racial economy, but in its muddle concerning the Real, which is not the real, according to certain theorists, we are left stunned in the breach. J. Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis’s Language of Psycho-analysis, for example, carries substantial entries on the Symbolic and the Imaginary, but nothing under the name of the “Real.” What one anticipates, then, is that a fourth register will be called for in establishing “reality” (of the dominated political position) as the psychic burden, acquired post-mirror stage, that reads back onto the Lacanian triangulation a distended organizational calculus. In short, the Lacanians do not give us a great deal of help, as far as I can tell, with the “reality” that breaks in on the person.

Before we could even attempt such revisionary reading, we should ask of psychoanalysis generally what objects in its field might come into play in the understanding of “race,” as well as what business we have here. As a literary critic/theorist might deploy it, psychoanalytic theory has little or nothing to do with psychoanalysis defined by an object, a field delimited by a practice, or the desire of the analyst, as Lacan elaborated the problematic of desire knows no more than that, since for it reality is entirely phantasmatic” (280).

only minor importance, acting as a kind of safety rail.” Gradually developing, its impact shifted over time, from a “function of constancy” as that “which always returns to the same place,” to that “before which the imaginary faltered, that over which the symbolic stumbles”—thus, the “impossible” (x).

9. Jacques Lacan, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton, 1981); originally published as “Les quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse,” in Le Seminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XI (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1973). In the translator’s note on this text, Sheridan points out that, though linked to the symbolic and the imaginary, the “real” stands for neither and “remains foreclosed from the analytic experience, which is an experience of speech.” In any case, the “real” comes about prior to the subject’s assumption of the symbolic and “is not to be confused with reality, which is perfectly knowable: the subject of desire knows no more than that, since for it reality is entirely phantasmatic” (280).


11. This fourth register would be nothing more or less than “reality,” constructed in relationship to the Lacanian Schema R. (see Anthony Wilden, trans., and commentary, Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis: Jacques Lacan [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1968], 294–98). If we think of this encodation as a psychic totality of “one,” it might be analogized in accordance with genetic structure as the “socinom.”
in *The Four Fundamental Concepts.* Clearly, we are making use of the psychoanalytic echo toward an end that practitioners would neither recognize nor endorse, though aberrant performances to which psychoanalytic theory is occasionally subjected are nothing new or especially daring these days: psychoanalytic insights, transported into the fields of feminist and critical inquiries, for example, are already a well-known quantity. (Perhaps the problem of poaching could be disposed of if we called such forays as this one an exercise in *psychoanalytics*, a project that would think through aspects of a psychoanalytic culture criticism and how one might go about determining its shape and style.) We are thrown here onto some vaguely defined territory between well-established republics. The point, I believe, is to put down tracks for some future investigation/investigator, whose “citizenship” might remain as generously undefined as the space I would claim. Putting the best light we can on such a state of things, we could call this investigator of the future a “cosmopolite.” In a very real sense, our corrected relationship to the realities of “race” might induce a “negative capability” in the place of guilt and an openness to a world that now appears final and closed. Stretching the metaphor, we might say that one goes in search of a “homeland” that is as sufficient to the needs of strangers as of kin.

Negotiating the ground between forms of exile and belonging captures precisely the historic vocation of communities of individuals on the periphery of the dominant order, but it is difficult now to focus on and to keep in view a distinct margin and center. So much of the work of domination appears to be aided by an erstwhile “outsider,” reproduced within the very precincts of the dominated, that a rigid demarcation of the social order into cultural dominant, and dominated, positions seems ever more parodic. There is, in fact, an element of antagonistic cooperation involved in sociocultural work, from whatever vantage one is situated. The degree to which cooperation can be distinguished from complicity, or consensus from compromise, calls for discernment of the nicest sort, but the prior problem, as I have observed, is that the inquiry itself has been put only sporadically, if at all. A psychoanalytic culture criticism not only would attempt to name such contradictions but would establish the name of inquiry itself as the goal of an *interior intersubjectivity*. As it seems clear to me at the moment, the African American collective denotes the quintessential object of the discourses of social science, insofar as the overwhelming number of commentaries concerning it have to do with the “findings” of the sociological

and the collective situation within economy. The limitation of this view, if not of particular projects, is that it achieves little perspective with a “general science of the economy of practices.” What is more, naming here becomes destiny, to the extent that the social formation, or individual communities within it, more accurately, comprehend themselves, almost entirely, as an innocence or a passivity worked upon, worked over, by others. While it would be much too simplistic and erroneous to say, “all we have to do . . . ,” we can guess without apology that there is an aspect of human agency that cannot be bestowed or restored by others, even though the philosopher’s “recognition,” or lack of it, will, in fact, support it, and it is this aspect of the historical and cultural apprenticeship—strategies for gaining agency—that we wish to describe in a systematic way.

I have chosen to call this strategy the interior intersubjectivity, which I would, in turn, designate as the locus at which self-interrogation takes place. It is not an arrival but a departure, not a goal but a process, and it conduces toward neither an answer nor a “cure,” because it is not engendered in formulae and prescriptions. More precisely, its operations are torque-like to the extent that they throw certainty and dogma (the static, passive, monumental aim) into doubt. This process situates a content to work on as a discipline, as an askesis, and I would specify it on the interior because it is found in economy but is not exhausted by it. Persistently motivated in inwardness, in-flux, it is the “mine” of social production that

13. Pierre Bourdieu, Outline of a Theory of Practice, trans. Richard Nice, Cambridge Studies in Social Anthropology, gen. ed. Jack Goody (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); originally published as Esquisse d’une théorie de la pratique, précédé de trois études d’ethnologie kabyle (Paris: Librarie Droz, 1972). See especially “Structures, Habitus, Power: Basis for a Theory of Symbolic Power,” 159–97, which makes a case for the “perfect interconvertibility of economic capital . . . and symbolic capital” in his study of Kabyle anthropological structures, and in which Bourdieu argues an explicit link between forms of capital and modes of circulation (177). I am borrowing his notion toward different ends, however, by contending that a revised African American culture critique would seek to place the subject in the “totality” of his/her surround, including the interior. Bourdieu’s context is specifically this: “Thus, homologies established between the circulation of land sold and bought, the circulation of ‘threats’ ‘lent’ and ‘returned’ (murder and vengeance), and the circulation of women given and received, that is, between the different forms of capital and the corresponding modes of circulation, oblige us to abandon the dichotomy of the economic and the non-economic which stands in the way of seeing the science of economic practices as a particular case of a general science of the economy of practices, capable of treating all practices, including those purporting to be disinterested or gratuitous, and hence non-economic, as economic practices directed towards the maximizing of material or symbolic profit” (183).
arises, in part, from interacting with others, yet it bears the imprint of a particularity. In the rotations of certainty, this “mine” gets away with very little, scot-free, and that, I believe, rebounds back upon the ethical wish that commences this writing. (Questions pertaining to the ethical—to the relational dimension of the lifeworld—have become urgent over the last thirty years for reasons too complicated to explain quickly here, but we could say, in brief, that the postmodern economy, both in real and symbolic terms, has been devastating for both the concept and practice of “community.” My deep worry and surprise is that the African American community no longer appears to grasp what I am at pains to describe as an intelligent response to a myriad of crises, as it seems that we were able to marshal considerable resources over the long and terrific century after Emancipation. We would have to account for powerful and systemic changes in national life following the period of the Vietnam War [1964–1973], but apart from that, one feels something quite private and unofficial about the post–Civil Rights era that no amount of analysis can sufficiently explain: it would appear that certain social capabilities have been dissipated—a certain lightness of being, if we could say so, observable in the community’s superior music and in some of its best writings, in its commitment to taste, to style, to the masks of self-humor—just as we note, ironically, unprecedented upward mobility for black Americans at the same time. In the wake of loss, we have left only the inexorable grimness of “competition,” of “getting over,” of “role-modeling,” of “success” for the well-credentialled, and a thorough commodification of black culture. My nostalgia for the lost love-object cannot be entirely laid down, I suspect, to the affects of anxiety’s displacements alone, but relates as well to the dispersal of community across so wide a social terrain that Robert Stepto’s “symbolic geography” takes on added explanatory power. The outcome of the national flight of labor, the demise of older modes of pro-

14. Robert Stepto, From Behind the Veil: A Study of Afro-American Narrative (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1979). Readdressing Victor Turner’s “ritual topography” to specific, other narrative matters at hand, Stepto seeks a paradigmatic concept that would be capable of identifying “the requisite features or tropes of any ritualized journeys or pilgrimages in Afro-American narratives, whether they be of ascent [the journey North, actually and symbolically, toward freedom in the historical outline] or of immersion [the reversal of direction, back toward the matrix or cradle of the South]” (67). Stepto’s “symbolic geography” focuses on the idea that a landscape becomes symbolic in literature when it is a region in time and space offering spatial expressions of social structures and ritual grounds on the one hand, and of communitas and genius loci on the other” (67). Stepto’s “moments in and out of time” that would also entail the imaginary and the phantasmal, as I see it, provide a basis for a more generous application of the principle of communitas.
duction and industry, and the radical reorganization of global capital, which fundamentally archaizes the sovereign nation-state, with certain features held over from the nineteenth century, engender a "community" that is to be understood, desired, reproduced, and consumed in a different way. An apparently homogeneous social form with strictly determined borderlines, within and without, is no longer located in the same place, or, perhaps more accurately, no longer configured in the same way, if by that we mean zones of safety in the familiar. The old community, which presented its aspects to the eyes of the child as the first and monumental stability, is no longer a space I would swear I know.)

I would say, then, that from my limited acquaintance with classical psychoanalytic theory, the missing pieces that would help us to articulate a protocol of healing in reference to the African American lifeworld have to do with the dimensions of the socio-ethical. Even though the Freudian archive offers a rich itinerary of narratives and their context, beginning with Fräulein Anna O's family situation, we cannot trace from there, for example, a systematic trajectory of wider social engagement and implication: we cannot tell where a household is located in political economy or the stresses generated by the positioning, although it is clear from the discourse on the early psychoanalytic movement that its initial subjects were, to a degree, quite comfortably situated in the environment and were even "at home" in it. (But was that the problem? That what might have been a rebellion, or the site of an "uncanny," or a "not home," reappeared as a symptom instead?) The relationship, then, between the "nuclear family" and the intervening sociometries of the bourgeois household of Viennese society of that era generated the neurosis and its science out of a social fabric that feminist investigation has been keen to rethread. It seems that Freud wrote as if his


16. A number of important works—both monographs and essay collections—in feminist interventions on the psychoanalytic object have emerged within the last decade and a half, including, among others: Charles Bernheimer and Claire Kahane, eds., *In Dora's Case—Freud-Hysteria-Feminism*, Gender and Culture Series (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985); Mary Jacobus, *Reading Woman: Essays in Feminist Criticism*, Gender and Culture Series (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986); Teresa Brennan,
man/woman were Everybody's, were constitutive of the social order, and that coeval particularities carried little or no weight. The universal sound of psychoanalysis, in giving short shrift to cultural uniqueness (which it had to circumvent, we suppose, in order to win the day for itself and, furthermore, in order to undermine, to throw off the track, the anti-Semitic impulses of Freud's era), must be invigilated as its limit: in other words, precisely because its theories seduce us to want to concede, to "give in" to its seeming naturalness, to its apparent rightness to the way we live, we must be on guard all the more against assimilating other cultural regimes to its modes of analyses too quickly and without question, if at all.

But for all that, I have no evidence that what are for me, at least, the major topics of its field are not in fact stringently operative in the African American community: (1) self-division; (2) the mimetic and transitive character of desire; (3) the economies of displacement—associative and disjunctive; (4) the paradox of the life-death pull; (5) the tragic elements couched in the transfer of social powers from one generation of historical actors to another; (6) the preeminent distinctions that attach to the "Twin Towers" of human/social being—"Mama" and "Papa" (this item does invite sustained attention, because parenting in black communities is historically fraught with laws that at one time overdetermined the legal status of the child as property; but the question is, to what extent the legal relations—of a child who neither "belonged" to the mother nor to an African father—might have been translated into an affective one); (7) the "paradox of the negative,"17 or the sign's power to delegate by negation; and (8) the special


17. Delineating the four realms or regions of linguistic reference, Kenneth Burke speaks of the "paradox of the negative" in that context: [it] "is simply this: Quite as the word 'tree' is verbal and the thing tree is nonverbal, so all words for the non-verbal must, by the very nature of the case, discuss the realm of the non-verbal in terms of what it is not. Hence, to use words properly, we must spontaneously have a feeling for the principle of the negative" (The Rhetoric of Religion: Studies in Logology [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970], 18, Burke's emphasis). For all intents and purposes, the classic distinction between sign and thing gained primacy via the field of modern linguistics and one of its most influential teachers of the early twentieth century, Ferdinand de Saussure (Course in General Linguistics, ed. Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye in collaboration with Albert Riedlinger, trans. Wade Baskin [New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966]). Overlapping Freud's era, Saussure's researches were posthumously introduced to a wider audience of readers by some of his former students.

On this side of the Atlantic, however, philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce carried
relationship that adheres between exile and writing (which may be retroactively viewed here through the lens of de Certeau). It seems, then, that the lifeworld offers a quintessential occasion for a psychoanalytic reading, given the losses that converge on its naming, and given the historic cuts that have star-crossed its journey. The situation of the African American community is more precisely ambivalent than any American case we can concoct, in light of its incomplete “Americanization” even at this late date. The way it is situated in American culture precisely defines the human-social element trapped between divergent cultural mappings, as well as an oppositional and collusive circuit of desire itself. The question, then, for this project is not so much why and how “race” makes the difference—the police will see to it—but how it carries over its message onto an interior, how “race,” as a poisonous idea, insinuates itself not only across and between ethnicities but within. What I am positing here is the blankness of “race” where something else ought to be, that emptying out of which I spoke earlier, the evacuation to be restituted and recalled as the discipline of a self-critical inquiry. In calling this process an interior intersubjectivity, I would position it as a sort of power that countervails another by an ethical decision, but would this countervalence belong, by definition, to what Freud called the “secondary processes” of consciousness, and would a radical shift of consciousness adequately effect the kind of root change I mean?

In my view, classical psychoanalytic theory offers some interesting suggestions along this route by way of (1) the fetish object (if we read Freud with Marx on the fetish); and (2) certain Lacanian schemes, corrected for what I would call the “sociom,” or the speaking subject’s involvements with ideological apparatuses, which would embrace, in turn, a theory of domination


18. Juliet Mitchell offers what appears to be an unobjectionable, perhaps even inevitable, response to notorious penis envy, for example, one of the reportorial items that renders feminist theories and indeed some feminists edgy about the entire Freudian protocol: “. . . but I think the main problem arises because the suggestion is taken outside the context of the mechanisms of unconscious mental life—the laws of the primary process (the laws that govern the workings of the unconscious) are replaced by these critics by those of the secondary process (conscious decisions and perceptions), and as a result the whole point is missed” (“Freud: The Making of a Lady I: Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious,” in *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, 8).
(to that extent, Lacanian psychoanalytic theory is simply heavenly, insofar as it has no eyes for the grammar and politics of power). The insights of psychoanalysis might be carefully scrutinized for what they might teach, but any investigator must attempt to illuminate the ground as the premier statement of a theory rather than its “blindness,” to state systematically why it is important to do so. Concerning the latter point, Freud could not “see” his own connection to the “race”/culture orbit, or could not theorize it, because the place of their elision marked the vantage point from which he spoke. Because it constituted his enabling postulate, it went “without saying.” Perhaps we could argue that the “race” matrix was the fundamental interdiction within the enabling discourse of founding psychoanalytic theory and practice itself. But it is the missing element here that helps to define Freud’s significance as one of the preeminent punctualities of Western time in modernity. But how to deal with the resistances—both those necessary caveats and those rather revealing fears?

3

“Man got everything else. Can’t have my soul, too,” goes the wisdom. Once, in a gathering of colleagues, I even heard a heart-wrenchingly disdainful “F——a Freud!” A friend of a friend, upon hearing that some people were going out to Santa Cruz for a symposium entitled “Psychoanalysis in an African American Context,” replied, “That sounds just like that place!” Not real promising for those who might want to have a “tetch” of conversation? It need not be idol worship that we engage in but a genuine desire to improve on black intramural relations in the here and now. Doing so seems to me fairly imperative to our taking the next step. But how to go?

The way here is basically unmapped, except for a handful of venturers, Frantz Fanon the most eminent among them. Because we have inserted this proper name into the pantheon of revolutionary figures, sixties style, we tend to forget that Fanon converted to political activism by degree and, somewhat unusually, from the field of medicine and psychiatric practice. Not a natural actor on the political stage, Fanon might be considered a man disillusioned with the science and arts of healing, turning ever more forcefully toward polemical address and lyrical emphasis in order to make his points. While Fanon offers our clearest link to psychoanalysis in the African/third world field, there is sufficient enough doubt concerning the efficacy of psychoanalysis, implied in some of his writings, that he appears to withdraw with the left hand what he has proffered with the right.
If, as Irene Gendzier suggests, Fanon did not evolve thorough contempt for Western psychoanalytic practice, then his ironic stance toward it increasingly marked his career, most notably, she urges, in the shift of tone from *Black Skin, White Masks* to *Wretched of the Earth*, written as he approached the premature close of his life in his thirty-sixth year. If we can be certain of anything, though, it is that our reading of the Fanon canon will most likely be inadequate, because the writing is shot through with contradiction. Knowing that, a reader tries to isolate the broadest themes in his work and should hope to reach a few tentative conclusions. Even though the translation of *Les Damnés de la terre*, with its introduction provided by Jean-Paul Sartre, became, alongside the sayings of Mao Tse-Tung and Ho Chi Minh and *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, a sacred work for American students in revolt a quarter century ago, it is in *Black Skin, White Masks* that Fanon draws and quarters a fictive composite called the “Negro of the Antilles” and the complexes that come to infect his mental life in proximity to

19. Irene Gendzier, *Frantz Fanon: A Critical Study* (New York: Vintage, 1974). Fanon’s early adulthood and medical training in Lyon, France, instead of Paris—“to avoid too many blacks”—provide the background for the opening chapter of this study, “Biographical Notes to 1952,” (3–21, passage cited from 16). Gendzier claims that Fanon maintained some reluctance to engaging himself in the process of psychoanalysis (19). In fact, he appears to have held psychoanalysis “in disdain.” Working as a resident during the summer of 1952, under the direction of one Professor François Tosquelles, at the Saint Alban hospital, Fanon performed “with enthusiasm and... learned his lessons well.” According to Gendzier, French psychoanalytic training did not require at the time “that potential psychiatrists be analyzed” (19). It is not clear to me that this mode of bypass still operates in the French psychoanalytic community, but given Lacan’s persistent concern for the training of the analyst and the apparently retorical entanglements embroidered through his troubled relationship with the French establishment and, furthermore, his attentiveness to Freud’s ethical dimension, we should be surprised if at least Lacan himself had not urged the protégé to an analytic course.

20. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, preface by Jean-Paul Sartre, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1968); originally published as *Les Damnés de la terre* (Paris: François Maspero, 1961); also published in *Presence Africaine*, 1963. Sartre appears to have been, singlehandedly, the stellar one-(white)man imprimatur of Francophone intellectuals—those students from “France Overseas”—in “introduction” to proper French culture. He had also “fronted” for an earlier generation of black intellectuals, including Aimé Césaire, by way of his introduction to the anthology of poets of Negritude, “Black Orpheus.” Are we correct to see in such a move an analogy on Frederick Douglass’s *Narrative* (1845) and the role wielded there by a couple of famous New England intellectual-abolitionists, William Lloyd Garrison and Wendell Phillips? (See *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass an American Slave Written by Himself* [New York: Signet, 1968].)
Western white society. In other words, the very text by which the signature of Fanon is most vividly inscribed in “minority” memory not only deals with Maghrebian societies, specifically Algeria, but with cultures whose language—Arabic—he never really mastered, according to one of his biographers, and whose religion—Islam—he cannot really be said to have denied, since the latter stance would have required sufficient knowledge of what exactly one was repudiating in the first place. Further, “Concerning Violence” (the opening chapter of Wretched), twisted out of perspective with what surrounds it, apparently tempts one to boil Fanon’s activist career down to a Manichaean emphasis that is belied by “The Pitfalls of National Consciousness” and “On National Culture” of the same work and by ironical, even comic, turns that crosshatch the fabric of Black Skin. In brief, the Frantz Fanon we believe we know brings on a kind of astigmatism, a kind of superimposition of contradictory messages that might have been provocative to a forthright self-analysis. A full decade before Wretched, the “apostle” of violence, forced to an extreme view of things by the intransigence of the empowered, we take it, and by the heightened revolutionary tensions that marked the North African field, wrote: “I, the man of color, want only this: That the tool never possess the man. That the enslavement of man by man cease forever. That is, one by another. That it be possible for me to discover and love man, wherever he may be” (BS, 231).

Because Black Skin and some of the essays that comprise Toward the African Revolution fix their laser on the self-deceived “Negro of the Antilles,” these writings strike closer home to the desired target, even though the population I am alluding to was never strictly colonized (the phenomenon of the absentee landlord and its related parasitic economies, as, for example, one of Ousmane Sembene’s early films, Emitai, demonstrates)

but shares the narratives and emplotment strategies of enslavement and
domination with groups across the geopolitical-ethnic spread of the New
World. For that reason, Fanon instructs us in the general notion that psycho-
analytic discourse, with its originating purposes pointed toward European
community, might be understood as the bracketed portions of a sociopoliti-
cal analysis in reference to new-world Africanity, but to parenthesize is to
complicate, to make potholes in the way of an otherwise smooth ride. It an-
nuls nothing, figuring its traces on the dynamic play of signifiers. Precisely
because social engagement might be accurately portrayed as a scene of
massive contagion (sensibilisation), we are all the more compelled to in-
quire not only into the psychic character of those cultural and social forms
that experience “no disproportion between the life of the family and the life
of the nation” (BS, 142) but also into those demographic elements cut on
the bias of a theoretical symmetry. (It must be said that the clinical case,
at least insofar as the lay person might perceive it, already suggests that
the synonymity that Fanon posits between European society and European
family is as mythic in its texture of reality as its opposite. In other words,
it seems to me that “individual,” “family,” and “society” are, by definition,
particles in constant bombardment—across the “race” spectacle, between
and within the races, and according to a modern cultural synthesis, brought
on by industrialized capital in its precise historic formation and its aftermath
that divide and specify “persons” from “land,” “family,” and “other” in the
competitive machineries of living. The individual, in his/her peculiar nervous
temperament, emerges not so much as the solution of a willful struggle
against the mass but as the name of new relations of labor and sociality.
The psychoanalytic subject, then, along related lines of stress, and whether
it is Freud/Lacan’s or Fanon’s, is already incipient in the very forces of the
historical labor that will bring the modern world to stand.) How does Fanon
see the picture?

In “The Negro and Psychopathology,” the sixth chapter of Black Skin,
Fanon proceeds on the basis of a couple of key assumptions:

1. The “Negro of the Antilles” is, for all intents and purposes, a Euro-
   pean, having been placed under the burden of an “unreflected imposition
   of . . . culture” (BS, 191). Denouncing Carl Jung’s cerebrally inherited “col-
   lective unconscious,” Fanon proposes that it is “normal for the Antillean
to be anti-Negro,” inasmuch as he “partakes of the same collective uncon-
scious as the European.” How could it be otherwise, he conjectures, since,
for example, “the works of ‘our’ novelists—Balzac, Bazin, Anatole France,
among them—utter never a word about an ethereal yet ever present black woman or about a dark Apollo with sparkling eyes”? Having “breathed and eaten the myths and prejudices of racist Europe, and assimilated the collective unconscious of that Europe, [the Antillean] will be able, if he stands outside himself, to express only his hatred of the Negro” (BS, 188).

2. The corollary of this disheartening conclusion—even though one would be led to concede that the Antillean is likely a cultural persona in the intersection of divergently pointing vectors—bursts upon a twinned contradiction:

(a) there is a “normal” psychic economy that flows from the homogeneous circumstance—“as long as he remains among his own people, the little black follows very nearly the same course as the little white” (BS, 149). In Fanon’s apparently closed society, which Martinican society, for instance, most certainly was not, as a “departement” of France, the child emerges from the parental cocoon to find “himself once more among the same laws, the same principles, the same values. A normal child that has grown up in a normal family will be a normal man” (BS, 142). (And begging the question to beat the band, we might point out!) Even though Fanon sideswipes “normal” by not saying what he intends by it, he does suggest, in a footnote, that in the “psychological sphere,” the “abnormal man is he who demands, who appeals, who begs” (BS, 142; my emphasis). Taking him where he leaves it, we have already anticipated the obverse of the Manichaean allegory he seems to be building.

(b) “a normal Negro child, having grown up within a normal family, will become abnormal on the slightest contact with the white world” (BS, 143; my emphasis). If colonized societies embed “contact,” even in the absence of “The Man,” then it is puzzling to me where a “normal” would come from, or even how it is possible to conceive it. Under such circumstances, “same laws, same principles, same values” are the mirage of the homogeneous social forms, insofar as their foundation is already riddled with difference from jump. At the least, we can say that in Fanon’s fiction, it is altogether possible to start well. A very curious thing happens, however, if “the little black follows very nearly the same course as the little white” is read in exactly the opposite way from my own interpretation. It was recently pointed out to me that Fanon meant that the “little black” imagines that he is “white,” not “black” as I had assumed, and that Fanon is deploying the elements of an abnormal scene—that of the colonized. If my colleagues are right, then the following paragraph turns somersault, except that I still
want to trouble the "same," and the apparently unruffled, surface of affects that the "little black" is believed to traverse.23

In either case, the problem with this picture is that it is perfect as far as it goes, but it might not take us the distance. Conceded, African American/U.S. culture offers a rather different case, although Fanon believes that the black is "black" wherever he might be in the world, whatever the particularities of his condition. In the U.S. field of social relations, African American culture is open, by definition, if by that we mean a constant commerce in real and symbolic capital among struggling intersubjectivities. Even though the "neighborhood" that we spoke of earlier comes close, on the mythic level, to the cocoon of kin and relatedness that Fanon imagines for the black-before-going-to-Europe, it was always quite literally crossed by something else—

23. I wish to thank here Ms. Yolanda Pierce, a member of my Cornell graduate seminar "On Minority Discourse" (fall 1995), and Professor E. Ann Kaplan, Director of the Humanities Center, SUNY—Stony Brook, for taking issue with my reading of this chapter. The opportunity to give a version of "Psychoanalysis and Race" at the SUNY campus (fall 1995) and to follow it up with a seminar the next day, suggested a reading strategy to me that I had simply not considered: that Fanon's "Negro of the Antilles" imagines that he is French, which I am prepared to accept, steps off the deep end when it modulates into his thinking that he is "white." This was also Ms. Pierce's observation. In fact, the reading accords with the fine print of a footnote that Fanon works out in the course of the chapter, but, in a way, by no means as transparently as I have stated it just now: the twenty-fifth footnote of the chapter in question runs about four pages, and in it, Fanon explains how the imaginary appears to work in the European subject (on the basis of Lacan's "mirror stage") and how the imaginary of the Antillean complicates the picture. For the white man, "the Other is perceived on the level of the body image, absolutely as the not-self—that is, the unidentifiable, the unassimilable." For him, there can be no further doubt, Fanon offers, "that the real Other . . . is and will continue to be the black man" (BS, 161). The black as a "phobogenic object, a stimulus to anxiety" (BS, 151 n. 4), may be read against this elaboration, as the black person begins the biological cycle in the white imaginary as the "destruction" of the body of the latter. But he appears to draw a distinction at this point between "visual perception" as the "elaboration of the imago" and "the level of the imaginary" (BS, 163). He contends that "... in the Antillean perception always occurs" on that level, as "it is in white terms that one perceives one's fellow"—people will say, for instance, that "thus and so" is "very black." In other words, the Antillean is seeing his fellows as a white man would see him. When he adds "that every Antillean expects all the others to perceive him in terms of the essence of the white man," is he saying that every Antillean expects to be seen as a white man, or as a white man might see him (BS, 163)? The confusion lies here—the extent to which the activity of seeing/being seen, or "visual perception," as Fanon would have it, is already a product of the imaginary and what the black person sees when he/she stands before the mirror. Taking this problematic on its crudest terms, I should think that it would be difficult for the black person not to see himself as he is, but Fanon must be asking, What is he?
the General Motors car, for example, the old assembly-line technologies replaced by automation and the service economy, the ubiquitous television and media blitz—those metropolitan/urban byways and by-the-ways along the borders of particular cultural enclosure. If we translate these technological means into a figural and semiotic use, then clearly African American personality is situated in the crossroads of conflicting motivations so entangled that it is not always easy to designate what is “black” and “white” here. In contradistinction, then, to Fanon, I actually doubt that the black person is, at bottom, the empty vessel that “slightest contact”/“abnormal” would lead us to believe. Does he wither in “white” air? If Fanon is right about this, then the colonized person has every reason to fall into abnormality when he crosses the Atlantic, because it is on the other side that he becomes the “phobogenic object” that we met with earlier. In that event, the crisis of collapse passes over the black and is “answered” in the white, whose imaginary is insulted and assaulted by this radically different bodily manifestation. This identifies the terrain of racism and the racist, which remained, for Fanon, the white problem. But inasmuch as the white problem rebounds on black personality, its burden is generously shared. For Fanon, the activist, a commitment to revolutionary struggle would change the entire relation between black and white, colonized and colonizer, the European and the Negro.

Fanon seems caught, however, in a wholly binary disposition, which pins him everywhere: not only does he deeply engage the ideology of “black”/“white” but also of “man”/“woman” in the classic heterosexual arrangement. He readily acknowledges, for instance, that so far as the “woman of color” is concerned, he “know[s] nothing about her” (BS, 180). This familiar repudiation (and in Fanon, it seems rather playful), with its riff on Freud and “female sexuality,” 24 not only limits his view of the “woman of color,” all tricked out in the melodrama of one Mayotte Capécia, but also, for that very reason, the conclusions that he draws about the “man of color,” for it is against the sexualized bodies of “male”/“female,” installed in the local effects of political economy and the life of the culture, that the black and human child—our charming “little” fellow—will realize his ethical vocation.

24. I am referring to the following passage from Freud’s “Question of Lay Analysis”: “We know less about the sexual life of little girls than of boys. But we need not feel ashamed of this distinction; after all, the sexual life of adult women is a ‘dark continent’ for psychology” (The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, trans. James Strachey [London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1959], 20:212).
It seems to me that the Fanonian approach to the psychoanalytic object spins its wheels because it cannot discover a practice of "disalienation" (Fanon's word for it) within the resources of black culture, or an ethical position that is worth delineating according to the future of those cultures—how, for example, the "Negro of the Antilles," and I should like to add, for all that, the "Negro of Memphis" (Tennessee, where I grew up), sustained human and social activity, despite the awful press of racist sickness not her own that bore down on her. If colonized society, as the colonized experienced it, is entirely predicated on negativity, or I would dare say, on negativity at all, then we should not be surprised that the way out of its quite terrible aftermath is shot through with unbearable travail, that the way out appears to be entirely impossible. I would go so far as to contend that the limitations of a nationalist or ethnic analysis will not be surmounted unless and until the culture worker breaks through the "perceptual cramp" that focuses his/her eyeball on "The Man" rather than the dynamics of structure that would articulate psychic order and its massive displacements with the realm of social-political-administrative institutions. To that extent, the culture worker's object of investigation begins where the epistelist said charity started—at home." The Fanonian narrative of the Antillean supposes that this "he" spends every waking moment (and otherwise) in the "presence" of "whites," and while, to a certain extent, this must be so, insofar as the cultural apparatus is commandeered beyond his control, if not his sights, he nevertheless executes an entire human being whose nuanced particularities escape calculation beforehand.

Though such propositions fly in the face of accounts offered by historical materialism, as early as the *German Ideology*, my view does not so much oppose a materialist reading of "concrete oppression" as it seeks to gain perspective with it. (One contemporary theoretician attributes materialist objection "to a certain type of Marxism," which, in his view, misreads portions of *Capital*.) In the place of the Fanonian narrative, I should like to intrude a slightly different one: if psychic economy "grows," as it were, with the historical subject, doesn't she have one long before she "knows"

25. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, "Beyond the Possibility of the Social: Antagonisms and Hegemony," in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 1985), 146 n. 19. Laclau points out here that capitalist accumulation in Marx's protocol "is presented as a strictly social logic which only imposes itself through establishing a relation of equivalence among materially distinct objects" (my emphasis). The writers not only insist on the discursive relations between materialism and discursive positionality but argue the priority of the latter.
that there is a “white man” and certainly well in advance of her caring about him at all? If black is “normal,” so long as . . . . , then mustn’t this normalcy persist in an economized relationship to the shock/trauma of white encounter? In other words, this “I,” it seems, operates as the embodiment of a dialectical field, or sufficiency, in the midst of normal/abnormal oscillations. In this case, being will stutter—yes—but this can be helped, and the aid, we can very well imagine, will not come from any of the sources of friction, even though the latter specifies the moment of “cure,” to the extent that the stutterer is embroiled in it. In the brilliantly moving closure of Black Skin, beginning with “The body of history does not determine a single one of my actions” through the disarmingly simple “The Negro is not. Any more than the white man” (BS, 231), Fanon appeals to our higher sense of moral and imaginative daring that locates the point at which an enlightened (small e) political witness commences its work, from Ghandi to King to Mandela, in the second half of our century. But I must say that in order for the address to insinuate itself into our deepest determinations, the addressee must effect a cold, calculated wager against the official odds: that enough of the consciousness of agency still resides within colonized and enslaved personalities that liberational movement remains a distinct possibility. This “enough” may be good enough, but for sure, it is nearly all we have, wherever we may be situated along the spectrum of practice.

We must assume that the pressures of Fanon’s rhetorical choices hustled him on toward teleological closure with his subject, on the one hand, in which case an allegory of black/white confrontational hostility offered the sole alternative to wretched conditions, while, on the other, his sense of poetic intensity, everywhere evident in the declamatory thrusts of his argument and the constancy of reference to Aimé Césaire’s lyric voice, running like flame stitch through the texture of his own semantics, urged him toward suspicion of a programmatic appeal. There is, however, a rather sharp contradistinction to that refusal, a dogmatic peevishness that occasionally erupts across the discourse, sometimes in humor: “It is too often forgotten that neurosis is not a basic element of human reality. Like it or not, the Oedipus complex is far from coming into being among Negroes,” for example (BS, 151–52). The question, in that case, might well be, What is a “Negro”?—insofar as at least one itinerary of psychoanalytic researches

26. Marie-Cécile and Edmond Ortigues, Oedipe africain (Paris: Éditions L’Harmattan, 1984), 9. The translations from this work are my own and come from this edition, which hereafter is cited parenthetically as OA.
would suggest that Fanon’s sentiment here might mark a leap of faith more than a good guess. Marie-Cécile and Edmond Ortigues’s *Oedipe africain* argues, on the basis of their clinical observations in Dakar, Senegal, West Africa, that the question of the father presented itself in the African milieu with the same constancy as in Europe, and according to varied familial configurations—with the matrilineal Serer as well as the patrilineal Wolof [“Les observations cliniques à Dakar nous ont montré que la question du père se présentait en milieu africain avec la même constance qu’en Europe, et chez les Serer matrilinéaires aussi bien que chez les Wolof patrilinéaires. La référence constante au père était un test décisif, un fait indéniable” (*OA*, 9)]. Whether or not, then, Fanon’s conclusions on this point are tenable is less the issue than the absence in *Black Skin* of a systematic inquiry of differences of the psychoanalytic object that would specify the location of the “Negro of the Antilles,” as much a *fictive* invention as an anthropological toponym, or a signifier in a hat. While I can agree that an application of classical psychoanalytic theory or its modifications, as “black psychoanalysis” or “black psychology,” or even an “African-Caribbean-American imaginary,” would need to examine very carefully the conditions of its discursivity and its relations to the entire repertoire of social productions and reproductions in question, I would still look askance at an unmediated dismissal: “I have preferred to call this chapter ‘The Negro and Psychopathology,’ well aware that Freud and Adler and even the cosmic Jung did not think of the Negro in all their investigations. And they were right not to have” (*BS*, 151). The dogmatizers of classical psychoanalytic theory and practice “did not think of the Negro” because “the Negro,” quite literally, did not come before them, even though Freud himself had absorbed, interestingly enough, a heady figurative concoction called the “dark continent” in his approach to his “querelle de femme.”

Actually, though he tells us quite a lot about “the Negro,” Fanon’s “Negro” does not have a name, and as worrisome as it is to behave as if he did, the investigator, from now on, ought to inquire what it is; it seems that everybody wants to tell the black person what he should think—at least the “races” agree on that—while wanting too quickly to dismiss his words as unofficial, untraditional, inappropriate, or some such thing as that. As a result, we know “the Negro” rather as an ambulatory instance of what

we have assumed, and it is not at all clear to me that Fanon has escaped this general charge of reductive interpretation, despite his riveting commitment to the notion of human freedom. In the play between the discourse of racial orthodoxy and its ironic subversion across the rhetorical surface of Fanon’s work, a central problematic emerges, to my mind, and we would call it the *dissolution* of the psychoanalytic object in the hiatus that yawns between his “great black mirage” and “great white error.”28 It seems that the status of the interrogation, indeed its very form, has little altered between his time, over three decades ago, and our own.

In trying, then, to specify the breaks (not to fill them) in a conceptual crux that attempted to site a different psychoanalytic subject, we have recourse to Fanon in a post-Fanonian juncture. (How his theoretical views might have shifted over the intervening decades is anybody’s guess, but certainly we tend to conclude that he would have remained a dynamic thinker.) Having recourse is also to inquire: what follows inaugurates nothing more than a sketch of a gambit.

4

It seems to me that any investigation that would make track on this issue must—ironically enough—“forget” “race,” or more precisely, “racism,” although such a venture is firmly installed in its awful powers, just long enough to open the question. I would start there. If we could eventually explicate the “interior intersubjectivity” as a useful concept, or one we could improve on, we must, in effect, start from scratch and try to rethink “race” as a piece of political reality, inculcated soon enough, but as something that belongs to an entire ensemble of givens to be managed. Part of the problem is to grasp the whole issue as a feature of the human ecosystem that arises in the historical rather than in nature and divine force. What I mean is clear enough, but it would do no harm to repeat it—“race” is not ordained by orders from Providence, even though the politics of race might as well be. Related to the aims of human and historical agency, the following remarks might be read in light of some of the closing articulations of Jürgen Habermas’s *Knowledge and Human Interests*. Addressing the project of psychoanalysis related to the critique of ideology, Habermas contends that both take

28. “It thus seems that the West Indian, after the great white error, is now living in the great black mirage” (Fanon, *Toward the African Revolution*, 27).
would not be enough, Marx thought, but trying to see with greater clarity think this are, by the way, the intellectuals who, in practice, not only insist on to be individualistic. I must admit that most of the black people I know who what the problem is might be no mean thing.

Consistently revealed as bogus social form. Stopping at such a revelation consists of the “one.” Though there is a hidden allegiance to the idea of the “super-star”/“hero”—the emplotments of both the autobiography and the form of the slave narrative are firmly grounded in old-fashioned notions of bourgeois “individualism”—it is widely believed that black people cannot afford to be individualistic. I must admit that most of the black people I know who think this are, by the way, the intellectuals who, in practice, not only insist on their own particularity but in some cases even posit a uniqueness. But if we can, we must maintain a distinction between the “one” and the “individual,” even though the positions overlap. The individual of black culture exists strictly by virtue of the “masses,” which is the only image of social formation that traditional analysis recognizes. Practically speaking, the “masses” were all there were against the other great totalizing narratives—“white” and “Indian”—in the historical period stretching from colonization to nationhood. The individual of the lifeworld does not stand in opposition to the mass but at any given moment along the continuum might be taken as a supreme instance of its synecdochic representation.

If such applicability is thinkable, then racism and its conceptual minions are consistently revealed as bogus social form. Stopping at such a revelation would not be enough, Marx thought, but trying to see with greater clarity what the problem is might be no mean thing.

What is missing in African American cultural analysis is a concept of the “one.” Though there is a hidden allegiance to the idea of the “super-star”/“hero”—the emplotments of both the autobiography and the form of the slave narrative are firmly grounded in old-fashioned notions of bourgeois “individualism”—it is widely believed that black people cannot afford to be individualistic. I must admit that most of the black people I know who think this are, by the way, the intellectuals who, in practice, not only insist on their own particularity but in some cases even posit a uniqueness. But if we can, we must maintain a distinction between the “one” and the “individual,” even though the positions overlap. The individual of black culture exists strictly by virtue of the “masses,” which is the only image of social formation that traditional analysis recognizes. Practically speaking, the “masses” were all there were against the other great totalizing narratives—“white” and “Indian”—in the historical period stretching from colonization to nationhood. The individual of the lifeworld does not stand in opposition to the mass but at any given moment along the continuum might be taken as a supreme instance of its synecdochic representation.

In other words, Every Black Man/Woman is the “race”—as the logic of slave narratives amply demon-

29. Jürgen Habermas, Knowledge and Human Interests, trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968); appendix, 310; originally published as Erkenntnis und Interesse (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1965); reprinted as Technik und Wissenschaft als “Ideologie” (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1968).

30. The value of the synecdochic figure rests in its commutability—Kenneth Burke speaks of the “noblest synecdoche” entailed in the identity of “microcosm” and “macrocosm.” In this “noblest instance . . . the individual is treated as a replica of the universe, and vice-versa . . . since microcosm is related to macrocosm as part to whole, and either the whole can represent the part, or the part can represent the whole” (A Grammar of Motives [New York: Prentice Hall, 1952], appendix D, “The Four Master Tropes,” 508).
strates—and the elements of the formula are reversible and commensurate. Imagining, then, that African American culture, under extreme historical conditions, was not simply at odds with the cultural dominant but opposed to it, the intellectual/activist has concluded that his culture inscribes an inherent and coherent difference. African American culture, then, on the supposed African model, is advanced as a collective enterprise in strict antinomy to the individualistic synthesis of the dominant culture, as well as the summation and reification of the indigenous mass. The individual-in-the-mass and the mass-in-the-individual mark an iconic thickness: a concerted function whose abiding centrality is embodied in the flesh. But before the “individual,” properly speaking, with its overtones of property ownership and access, more or less complete, stands the “one,” who is both a position in discourse—the spoken subject of énoncé that figures a grammatical instance and a consciousness of positionality—the speaking subject of the énonciation, the one in the act of speaking as consciousness of position. As the former is mapped onto his/her world by social discursive practices, the latter comes into the realization that he/she is the “one” who “counts.” This one is not only a psychic model of layered histories of a multiform past; he/she is the only riskable certainty or grant of a social fiction, insofar as the point mimics the place where the speaker/speaking is constituted. In other words, “I” grants its validity in assuming the social for itself, and not unlike the other, whose gaze floods what it grasps and summons the attention at

31. The speaking subject of enunciation marks two distinctions: The “I” of the enunciation is not the same thing as the “I” of the statement (Lacan, “Analysis and Truth,” in The Four Fundamental Concepts, 138–39). Alan Sheridan translates énoncé as the statement, or the “actual words uttered,” whereas énonciation refers to “the act of uttering them” (Écrits, translator’s note, ix). The “I” who makes “the statement is the subject of the enunciation (sujet de l’énonciation), or what I am calling here the “speaking subject of the enunciation,” whereas the “I” that constitutes “the grammatical subject of the statement itself is the subject of the statement (sujet de l’énoncé)” (Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen, Lacan: The Absolute Master, trans. Douglas Brick [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991], 260 n. 20. Hereafter, this work is cited parenthetically as LAM.) Now, the consciousness who “counts” is the one who speaks his position, whereas the statement does not uniquely define him by virtue of the shifter “I” that establishes his relation in grammatical context—a position in discourse.

32. Jean-Paul Sartre’s “bodies” exist in three-dimensional space—the “body-for-me,” or one’s relations with objects of the world; the “body-for-the-other”; and the “body-as-seen-by-the-other” (Being and Nothingness: An Essay on the Phenomenological Ontology, trans. with intro. Hazel E. Barnes [New York: Philosophical Library, 1956], xli). Lacan and Sartre might have shared a teacher in Alexandre Kojève, whose lectures on Hegel’s Phenomenology were delivered at the École des Hautes Études between 1933 and 1939.
the same time, the “one” is both conceded and not-oneself; it is not to be doubted, as its sureness is tentative. To that degree, the mass is the posited belief that empirical data insist on, but where is it? Could we say the “one,” by contrast, is always “here,” not “there”? That it is concrete and specific, even if anonymous? This is not to choose “one” over the “mass” but to ask a different question, for we know no other gauge of the intersubjective than the one who would assure the more. On this view, the mass is not only putative and abstract but never emerges otherwise. It would be absurd to say that there is no mass but, rather, that its historical and social materiality can be brought to stand, stage by stage, and bit by bit, in a way that begins unimpressively on the smaller scale of something local and at hand. For openers, it is exactly too massive and disappears under the weight of report. The picture will change right away when mass movement is required, but that is something else again, and demands several, shouting.

In the meantime, who is this one? I am referring to a structure in this instance: the small integrity of the now that accumulates the tense of the presents as proofs of the past, and as experience that would warrant, might earn, the future. In the classical model, the mental apparatus, Freud argued, can be analogized to a compound microscope or photographic apparatus. Instantly defensive about the “unscientific” status of assertion by analogy, Freud claims that his procedure is permissible so long as the “scaffolding” is not mistaken for the “building.” The single lesson that we take away from Freud, in this case, is the split function of subjectivity at the heart of subject formation. The crux of the matter is concentrated in The Interpretation of Dreams, which assigns to consciousness itself a relatively minor role in the drama of mind-life. Consequently, Freud apportions a far greater share of mental activity to the functions of the unconscious and the primary processes that suggest their import, he holds, in dreams and

(Wilden, Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis, 192–93); these lectures became the influential Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit, assembled by Raymond Queneau, trans. James H. Nichols Jr., ed. Allan Bloom (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980). This passage of the essay is much indebted to the Sartrean body and “look”: “What I constantly aim at across my experiences are the Other’s feelings, the Other’s ideas, the Other’s volitions, the Other’s character. This is because the Other is not only the one whom I see but the one who sees me . . . finally in my essential being I depend on the essential being of the Other, and instead of holding that my being-for-myself is opposed to my being for others, I find that being-for-others appears as a necessary condition for my being for myself” (228, 238).

the neurosis. Related to the dynamic play of mental forces, Freud contends that “psychotherapy can pursue no other course than to bring the [unconscious] under the domination of the [preconscious].”34 As Lacan will have it decades later, the particular aim of psychoanalysis is “historically defined by the elaboration of the notion of the subject. It poses this question in a new way, by leading the subject back to his signifying dependence.”35

The Freudian and Lacanian fields of discourse are not only separated from each other by considerable disparity in time, conditions of material culture, and the narrative/conceptual modalities that would situate and explain them; but both, because they reach subject formation by an act of poetic faith that imagines subjectivity hermetically sealed off from other informing discourses and practices, are foreign, if not inimical, to subject formations defined by the suppression of discourse. In other words, the social subject of “race” is not only gaining access to her own garbled, private language, as psychoanalysis would have it, but to language as an aspect of the public trust. (That the language of our contemporaneity is beating a hasty retreat from the tasks of consensus and public address does not alter my thesis here, because we have no difficulty imagining a public sphere, or a beyond-ego position, as a desirable goal for several reasons. For one thing, we would not be able to explain “politics” and “culture” as the ground of contention without acknowledging a public sphere, even though American politics and culture today, dishearteningly, attract often enough the most cynical and unattractive of players.) The one that I am after, then, must be built up from the ground, so to speak, inasmuch as classical psychoanalytic theory and its aftermath contradictorily point toward it—a subject in its “signifying dependence,” which means that the subject’s profound engagement with, and involvement in, symbolicity is everywhere social—yet such theories cannot demarcate it. As far as I can tell, African American cultural analysis, as black intellectuals carry it out, has not explained either a subject in discourse crossed by stigmata or the nonfantastical markings of a history whose shorthand is “race.” From that angle, the most promising of trails may be false, since it does not necessarily lead to a destination but circles back to the same place. The problem here, which fractures somewhat chaotically in many directions at once, is how to break the circle, how to pursue a theoretical model that might pose the pacing along to the next step, even if such pacing effects a halting progression. The interior intersubjectivity

34. Freud, The Interpretation of Dreams, 578.
would substitute an agent for a spoken-for, a “see-er,” as well as a “seen.” Habermas’s self-reflection, in which case the laws are operative but do not apply, appears to be predicated on the agency of self-knowing, but Du Bois’s figure of the “double consciousness” suggests the complications through which such agency must pass.

When Du Bois spoke earlier in the century about the protocol of “double consciousness,” he was gesturing toward a duality of cultural fields metaphorized by “African” and “American.” Though the former term had been used in self-reference to the American Negro long before Du Bois’s era and would be again in our own, Du Bois was working under the assumption that “Africa” more than vaguely signaled the origins of black culture. It is also noteworthy that his provocative claims, barely elaborated beyond that short paragraph that the student knows virtually by heart, cross their wires with the specular and the spectacular—the sensation of looking at oneself and of imagining oneself being seen through the eyes of the other/another is precisely performative in what it demands of a participant on the other end of the gaze. To that extent, the Fanonian “phobogenic” object meets up with the Du Boisian “double consciousness,” but it seems that Du Bois was trying to discover—indeed, to posit—an ontological meaning in the dilemma of blackness, working out its human vocation in the midst of overwhelming social and political power. It was not enough to be seen; one was called upon to decide what it meant. To that degree, Du Bois’s idea posed an instance of self-reflexivity. Addressing the aims and objectives of consciousness, then, as it negotiated the terrain of a given reality, Du Bois, writing contemporaneously with Freud, was interested in providing a new mythography, or a new way of seeing the black problem, for the “souls of black folk,” as he called it.

The subject of double consciousness is divided across cultural valences, but Du Bois did not exhaust the formulation. For him, nothing was hidden from the sight of the man in the mirror, who not only recognized the falseness of his countenance, as in a kind of theatrical mask, but how he had come to wear it. From that angle, the subject already “knows” as

37. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 2–3: “After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world,—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others.”
much as he knew, for all intents and purposes, on the day he was born. But Du Bois’s economy of doubleness was adequate insofar as it proffered a name for cultural ambivalence, while seeking a reconciliation of putative opposites; it is clear that the Du Boisian knot cannot be healed or resolved on the level where Du Bois was posing the question, because: (1) the act of seeing oneself rests, rests in the subject’s head and is only partially shaped and motivated by the official deed; and (2) the change of seeing mostly depends on a change of mind coming from the direction of a power imagined to be entirely other, but an entirely other from outside. While Du Bois understood quite correctly that an effective political solution did remain in the hands of black community—the Niagara Movement, and the NAACP springing from it, constituted his practical response—the latter was conflated in his scheme with an ontology. He was not so much wrong in making this move as too quick to reach a conclusion; but, despite that, the dilemma that Du Bois justly posed is the psychocultural situation of minorities in the West, even though he specifically targeted the “problem of the color line” as it traversed the body of the seventh son, born with a caul over the face, the American Negro. In working with the Du Boisian double, we recover the sociopolitical dimensions that classical psychoanalysis and its aftermath sutured in a homogeneity of class interests, just as Du Bois’s scheme must be pressured toward a reopened closure: the subject in the borrowed mirror is essentially mute. Du Bois is speaking for him. It is time now, if it were not in 1903, for him to speak for himself, if he dares. That this speaking will not be simple is all the more reason why it must be done.

The interior intersubjectivity is predicated, then, on speaking. If we cannot identify a “first” step here in any systematic way, we can put our finger on the point: to overcome the officially imposed silence engendered by exclusive traditions of power—state- and corporate-sponsored—that, in turn, go on to be taken over by “personality,” under the influence of those powers that properly belong to the repertoires of learning and naming that both “piggyback” on the self-evidentiary wisdom of “received opinion” (i.e., IQ testing, bell curves, the criminality of the poor, etc.) and help to create it; in brief, the weight of the discursive debris that comes to rest on subjects a priori the local and specific fields of cultural play that they are called upon to negotiate. The unavoidable contradiction in what I am proposing, which would historically resemble the Freudian “talking cure,” 38 but which would

38. The locution talking cure was attributed to one of Freud’s colleague’s patients—“Fräulein Anna O”—whose case history is sketched out by Dr. Joseph Breuer in Studies in
also share in the dialectics of Toni Morrison’s character called Sethe, is that my solution specifically relates to a social positioning vis-à-vis discourse. Perhaps the speaking of intersubjectivity effects a kind of mimicry of the professional wordsmith’s relationship to symbolic capital, but how is the speaking I mean here to be differentiated from professional discourse?

There is much insistence, at least in our customary way of viewing things, that the professional has little in common with the majority of the population. True enough as far as it goes, this truism is tinged with animus toward activity perceived to be esoteric, elitist, uncommon. But this simplified reading of the social map, sealing off entire regions and territories of

Hysteria, in Standard Edition, vol. 2. Freud opened his Clark University lectures, on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the founding of the Worcester campus (September 1909), with an examination of the progression toward psychoanalytic procedure from hypnosis and the “talking cure”: The hypnotized patient “relives,” in the presence of the doctor, the occasion, the connection, and the accompanying affect of the first appearance of the symptom of disorder (12-13). The patient is also said to have jokingly referred to the treatment as “chimney sweeping.” In any case, the point was to get the patient to talk along the mnemonic traces of the traumatizing event in a reverse-chronological order, starting with the latest manifestation of the symptom and working back in time. Because Freud came to think of hypnosis as a “mystical” and an “arbitrary” ally, he ditched it in favor of the technique of “free association,” combined with the interpretation of dreams. He called this method of treatment “psychoanalysis” (28).

When I refer here to “talking,” or more exactly “speaking,” I am far closer to meaning the plain speech of everyday encounter than the particularized discourse of the psychoanalytic hermeneutic. For example, during the long televised ordeal of the O. J. Simpson murder trial, CNN reported on events surrounding the news phenomenon with unrelieved regularity; one of the stories that the cable outlet carried for the customary twenty-four-hour cycle of coverage was that of a black doctor (M.D.) in Los Angeles, who had turned the site of his practice, for a few hours a day, into a sort of neighborhood den, open to members of the community, where talk about the trial occurred. In the footage I saw, the scene was arranged like a classroom, as the doctor himself both talked and listened to what his interlocutors had to say. That is exactly the sort of protocol I would mean for the “talking cure” as a metaphor for exchange that occurs quite a lot less often in black communities than we might imagine. I see no reason, again, why black church congregations cannot convert pulpit and altar into a public forum at least once a week for the exercise of discourse related to events that touch the lives of the congregants. It seems to me that a few valuable lessons might be conveyed this way, in the undramatic informal analysis of the Event. As the last standing independent organ in black communities, black churches, in my opinion, have the stellar occasion to teach attention (as a function of determining how one is situated), criticism (as a function of seeing), and articulation (as a function of saying what is on the mind and the heart). We do not need psychoanalytic training for these tasks, but the simpler will to communicate.

experience from the reciprocal contagion proper to them, offers us a slim opportunity to understand how the social fabric, like an intricate tweed, is sewn across fibers and textures of meaning. There is the discourse in which the professional, as de Certeau observes, dares and labors,\textsuperscript{40} the discourse of *travail*; but there is also the mark of the professional’s human striving in terms of the everyday world of the citizen-person—coming to grips with the pain of loss and loneliness; getting from point a to b; the inexorable passing of time, change, and money; the agonies of friendship and love, and so on. *This* speaking, and the one I refer to, is nothing less than the whole measure of the tirelessly mundane element on which ground, we recall, Freud placed the key to the mental theater, the unconscious and the dream life, the apparent junk tossed off by the deepest impulses. In that regard, the professional’s relationship to discourse is tiered, but it is also imbricated by forms of dialects through which she lives her human and professional calling, as work is rent through with the trace of the uncommon and the more common. On this level, speaking is democratically impoverished for a range of subjects, insofar as it is not sufficient to the greedy urge to revelation of motives that the social both impedes and permits, nor is it adequate to the gaps in kinetic and emotional continuity that the subject experiences as discomfort. Psychoanalytic literature might suggest the word desire here to designate the slit through which consciousness falls according to the laws of unpredictability. In that sense, the subject lives with desire as intrusive, as the estranged, irrational, burdensome illfit that alights between where she “is at” and would/wanna be. On this level of the everyday, the professional discourser, if we could say so, and the women commandeering the butcher’s stand at the A&P have in common a mutually scandalous secret about which they feel they must remain silent, but which speaking, more emphatically, *talking*, about appeases, compensates, deflects, disguises, and translates into usable, recognizable social energy. I mean, then, this speaking as it turns us off the track of isolation into which the preciousness and lowness of desire, persistent in solid juxtaposition in the same person, might tend to lead. I believe that this arena of the emotionally charged and discharged is not only where the subject lives but is the position through which she speaks a particular syntax.

Is it not, then, the task of a psychoanalytic protocol to effect a trans-

\textsuperscript{40} In *La Culture au pluriel* (Paris: Christian Bourgois Éditeur, 1980), Michel de Certeau makes a distinction between discourse as work and discourse as the mark of activity in getting at the problematic of “culture” (225).
ation from the muteness of desire/wish—that which shames and baffles the subject, even if its origins are dim, not especially known—into an articulated syntactic particularity? This seems to me a passable psychoanalytic goal, but perhaps there is more to it than simply a nice thing to happen. At the very least, I am suggesting that an aspect of the emancipatory hinges on what would appear to be simple self-attention, except that reaching the articulation requires a process, that of making one's subjectness the object of a disciplined and potentially displaceable attentiveness. To the extent that the psychoanalytic provides, at least in theory, a protocol for the “care of the self” on several planes of intersecting concern, it seems vital to the political interests of the black community, even as we argue (endlessly) about its generative schools of thought. I should think that the process of self-reflection, of the pressing urgency to make articulate what is left in the shadows of the unreflected, participates in a sociopolitical engagement of the utmost importance. If we think of speaking along this line of stress, then we cut right through the elitist connotations of “discourse” to the basic uses of literacy, whose attainment is currently regarded by the postmodernists as something of an embarrassment. But if we imagine such achievement as an emancipatory aim, then the perceived advantages of it lose their sting of privilege. Relatedly, both speaking and literacy, in the ways I am stipulating, might be understood as the right to use, which certain theoreticians regard as one of the premier destinies of property.41 This entire discussion is caught up in questions of power in the last instance, but we are concerned with only a single one of its multiple and interpenetrative phases, and that is the power and position of a specific speaking.

To speak is to occupy a place in social economy, and, in the case of the racialized subject, his history has dictated that this linguistic right to use is never easily granted with his human and social legacy but must be earned, over and over again, on the level of a personal and collective struggle that requires in some way a confrontation with the principle of language as prohibition, as the withheld. An irony here ensues that the researcher/subject must both surmount and ride: the historic prohibition can only be spoken within language, yes, but also within discourse (the particular dialects of criticism, resistance, testimonial and witness, etc.). What must be emphasized here is the symbolic value of the subject's exchanges

with others, and it is within the intersubjective nexus that the inequalities of linguistic use and value are made manifest—what one can do with signs in the presence and perspective of others—and it is only within those circuits that a solution can be worked out. The unalterable difficulty is that such an operation cannot escape the Western context, and this is crucial. As we observed before, the traditional subject of psychoanalytic process was deceptively “at home” in the culture; he seemed to believe that he “belonged,” whereas the minority subject does not start there. Du Bois clearly understood both the Western context and the cut from it that African personality inscribed. But can we derive a formal coherence, related to the psychoanalytic, from these general ideas, springing up from the historic, whose pitch and thrust are, by definition, public, definitive, consensus-driven?

Though a psychoanalytics related to the lifeworld would implicitly maintain contact with its predecessor texts, with the conceptual horizon that situates it, it is equally true that such a protocol would be guided by a new aim, insofar as the analysis must make a place for it—the speaking that self-reflection begins to demand. The scarcity, the deficit, is located in the occasion for this private discourse that is not satisfied by the public forms and proprieties of narrative, autobiographical and otherwise, that remain substantially malleable to market forces and fickle public opinion. A cultural analysis revised and corrected for this most difficult of tasks is called upon to: (1) substitute the problematics of culture for that of “race,” or a determinate group interest whose outcome is always already known; and (2) articulate its investigations along three lines of stress: (a) the diurnal, or the everyday; (b) the dimension of the practical/pragmatic; and (c) the dimension of the contemplative. Of these three registers of analysis, the third is the least developed in the field. Currently, the cultural analysis offers no theory of the “everyday” and appears to have no firm grasp of social subjects in relationship to it. Such an understanding would conduce to a systematic materialist reading, which would establish “race,” in turn, in perspective with other strategies of marking and stigmata. Because of its allegiance to ideologies of empiricism, material success, and the transparency of reading, the analysis provides no clue to the contemplative register of the lifeworld. I am not talking about the recognition of the significance of rumor, gossip, and jaw-wagging, nor about armchair reading and

42. I am borrowing this notion from Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar, Reading Capital, trans. Ben Brewster (London: Verso, 1979), see especially part 1, “From Capital to Marx’s Philosophy.”
philosophizing, but rather about a name for the sense of time that we could call *distancing*, standing apart momentarily from the roll and moil of Event and ways to introduce it to the repertoire of human and social relations that traverse communities of interest. Because our analysis of the fields of the everyday and the contemplative are tangled up in the confusions of crisis-response (the threat to “affirmative action” policies, for example), we flounder, therefore, on the pragmatic point, or the realm of direct political action and engagement. But it seems clear that the dimension of the contemplative practice, contextualized in relationship to the “science of a general economy of practices,”43 must be quite literally pronounced as an aspect of cultural continuity and struggle.

Contrary to the position taken by certain black leadership, we would say that “analysis” is not “paralysis,” as it certainly seems that the absence of it is a living social death. Practically speaking, the leadership, wherever it arranges itself along the axes of responses, must update its “message,”44 send a different one, and, in my view, link its own destiny more fully to the work of scholarship and reading. (Du Bois remains our exemplary figure in this.) Exactly how today’s leadership—and I do not exempt the intellectuals as a social formation from the general charge—is itself an elaboration of the problem it would solve should be thought about with a careful and, where possible, generous attitude, though such an investigation is not my aim here. If the psychoanalytic hermeneutic has any bearing at all on the lifeworld, and I believe that it does, then it will enter the picture at the third level of stress, even though, dynamically speaking, these layers of human

43. See note 13 above.
44. During the winter 1995 convocation of the Rainbow Coalition, Reverend Jesse Jackson emphatically addressed the question of “personal responsibility”: “We cannot give up any more ground on that word.” His remarks were contextualized, indeed necessitated, by what the pundits have called a political “tsunami”—an earthquake at sea—that stunned the nation in November 1994, when less than 43 percent of the national electorate reporting brought us a Republican majority in Congress and the so-called revolutionary leader of the new majority in more than four decades, Newton Gingrich of Georgia, newly ascendant Speaker of the House of Representatives. The winter meeting had been called as a signal to the American (to borrow a term from Britain’s Paddy Ashdown) “Lib/Lab/Left” coalition to mark this moment as a crucial realignment of the sociopolitical landscape and to think again, as a result, the uses to which the idea of alliance might be put. Jackson’s remarks also signaled that he was alert to the question of agency and the imperative to refashion a notion of it (“Defending the Family: Strategies for Economic Justice and Hope,” 5–7 Jan. 1995, Washington, D.C., Friday, 6 Jan. 1995, C-SPAN).
time are interpenetrative. Their articulation, however, very much depends on the extent to which we differentiate pieces of the social content and demand.

The formal coherence that we seek for an apposite psychoanalytic practice, then, does not commence in the psychoanalytic at all but is firmly rooted in habits and levels of communication, reading, and interpretation—in short, how communities are apprenticed in culture and the ways in which lessons are transmitted. Even though we customarily attribute reading and interpretive activity to an advantageous class position, the conclusion is inaccurate—the wide dissemination of literacies, visual and cybernetic, as well as literary, necessitates the negotiation of signs at whatever level, to whatever degree of competence. Sign reading, or the field of the semiotic, is democratically executed, as the culture worker can do nothing more or less than point this out as a strategy for opening the way to the third dimension of social engagement. (To nail down the point, I will run the risk of redundancy: the Rodney King “event,” for example, say nothing of the reaction to the jury’s verdict in the O. J. Simpson trial, the end of which was oddly linked by an accident of timing to the Farrakhan-convoked “Million Man March,” all occurred on two levels of stress. In the Rodney King case, the event itself and what it told us yet once more about the potential for the abuse of police power and its impact on black communities across the United States were a terrible shock that even exceeded, perhaps, the strange, chilling, nightmarish experience of listening to the Fuhrman tapes, introduced by the Simpson defense toward the end of this interminable trial for double murder. I personally gauged my own shock reaction to the King occurrence and the “revelation” of former L.A.P.D. detective Mark Fuhrman [the man who spoke out of his unconscious] by a penetrating sensitivity to exactly what my location was during those days—in the latter case, in an apartment complex in a university town with the nearest black person I knew at all a car-ride away. With no immediate or visible signs of threat on the horizon, I remained, nevertheless, all ears and eyes to the least alteration of nuance in the surround. This response was dictated by my cultural apprenticeship as a black American woman of a certain generation in U.S. history “talkin’” to me with the acuteness of the Richter scale measure. It was also, quite specifically, the immediate reaction to shock that brings one to her feet in nearly unspeakable anxiety. At some point, however, one steps back from the horror that recedes as a blow and consumes it in a different way. I am suggesting that all eventuality comes vested with a timing
mechanism that releases one from the shock, that grants us time to *think* the event; if that were not so, then memory would be neither possible nor thinkable.)

If we cut through this human section in order to retrieve schematically the contemplative practice as a point of entry to the entire ensemble, then we mean no less than the capacity to detach oneself from the requirements of self-attention long enough to concentrate on something else; transformative labor marks a distinctive activity, then, from that of the everyday and that of the practical/pragmatic, but such labor is contextualized and shaped by both, and translates its living in both by other means. In other words, there is a dimension of activity in the lifeworld that lays claim not only to the materiality and immediacy of labor but also to its *difference* of perspective. Distancing here might be regarded as the mark of self-displacement in the social given: if the aim of a radical democratization is to free up more and more subjects to their transformative potential—is this not the point of a “pedagogy of the oppressed”?

—wresting their time farther and farther away from the necessity to concentrate on the needs of the biological creature and whether or not it is safe and secure, then such an aim will be carried out in the sphere of political practice and engagement. This is not to suggest that the range of cultural expression is apolitical, or above the ground, nor is it to contend that access to work is unrelated to the economy and public policy, but it *is* to insist that each of these temporal emphases of the speaking/historical subject bears significance in relation to the human project. Such an insistence will operate as if we mean, in fact, a social division of labor, and so be it, but I mean division as the scissiparous effect *within* subjects rather than *between* them. Just as the culture worker maintains for himself/herself, so he/she must ever more forcefully hold out for others the subject’s right of access to his double in the place where it is created.

The double resonates here through intentionalities: it means at once the “add on” that comes to the subject in her access to work and by way of that other scene evoked in the psychoanalytic reading. We must acknowledge what the classical psychoanalytic writers could take for granted, and

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45. This powerful text, to which the title of the quoted passage refers, has become a classic tool of thought about the insurgent aims of education. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970). Specifically grounded in the Brazilian situation, Freire’s work, in applying the thinking of Fanon and Marx, might be suggestive for other localities.
that is the extent to which information about the other scene was predicated on access to literacy and economic resources; in short, we mean a more or less exact correspondence between the body freed from the harshest, most oppressive labor regime and emancipated to labor abstracted in an intellectual or imaginative/creative quantum. In other words, African American cultural analysis must actually knot the relations between work—increasingly rationalized in a service economy that counts the turning of alphabets on a television game show as a “career”—and self-reflection/self-knowledge, or end up being choked by it. But it would seem odd, if not downright perverse, to insist that only bourgeois subjects operate in the way of the double, although, for sure, the explanatory discourses and enabling postulates of differentiated speaking and practice are brought about by the same power differential that disperses subjects along the paths of political economy in unequal ways. In that sense, symbolic economies, of which psychoanalytic practice and theories are one, are directly tied to the sociopolitical sphere. The culture worker, because he understands this connection, or will soon, is called upon, therefore, to behave as though his work carried the ultimately political meaning that it does.

I believe that the problem here, then, has more to do with evolving a language appropriate to the subjects differently constructed from the classical moment of psychoanalytic theory and its postmodern aftermath than deciding “for” or “against” the psychoanalytic aim. This task will eventually require a lengthy and patient revisiting of the key questions of those theories with a result that I certainly could not predict, except that the main thing appears to be, for the culture critic, the articulation of a position in discourse and practice along the lines of a more carefully modulated reading of human and social performances in the lifeworld than an actual psychoanalytic model for it. Pronouncements, ex cathedra, are, in any event, flat wrong. (I am suggesting that such a model can occur only as psychoanalytic practice and in it. The only sources with which I am familiar that offer the reader outlines of practice based on case histories of African subjects and peoples of color are Frantz Fanon’s Wretched of the Earth and the Ortigueses’ Oedipe africain.46 Dr. Ibrâhîm Sow’s Les Structures anthropologiques de la folie en afrique noire,47 as if in response to Oedipe africain, ar-

46. Anthony Wilden’s Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis addresses the 1964 edition of Oedipe africain as an instance of the anthropological uses of psychoanalysis (303–6). See also note 11 above.
47. Ibrâhîm Sow, Les Structures anthropologiques de la folie en afrique noire (Paris:
gues that an efficacious psychoanalytic instrument can be fabricated solely in relation to a global cultural harmony: in his monograph, West African structures of belief are traced back to African systems of cosmology, which irradiate, in turn, the grids of sociology and religious practice.48 But Sow and the Ortigueses agree that the age group, the horizontal relation among confreres of the same biological age, proposes a crucial thematic of African social and psychic organization.) I am suggesting that such a model for diasporic communities might initiate its protocols: (1) with a practice “on the ground”—the case histories of subjects who speak their word to the analyst, not unlike John Gwaltney’s quite different venture in Drylongso;49 and (2) on the other side, as it were, of the “white man.” It seems to me that such a model cannot be based in, does not commence with, “race” but rather in the intimate spaces where his almighty form is, in fact, “forgotten” and misbegotten in the funny and satirical. It would be neither accurate nor useful to propose an irreparable split between the intimate and the public, for doing so would simply reverse and compound the error that I am contending traditional analysis has made all along. Rather, a subtler modulation of the flows from one to the other must be sought. As the critics have correctly maintained, much of the activity of self-defining, which describes

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48. Professor Valentin Mudimbe’s work on the African problematic has been rich and steady; among other titles, his Surreptitious Speech: Presence Africaine and the Politics of Otherness 1947–1987 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992) is not to be missed.

49. One of the most exciting works in African American culture studies over the last fifteen years has been John Gwaltney’s Drylongso: A Self-Portrait of Black America (New York: Vintage, 1981), a veritable mine of black talk on every conceivable subject, from sex to the economy. Drylongso foregrounds ordinary “members of the tribe,” as Ralph Ellison might have put it. I am uncertain of the origins of the locution, but it was well-known in my household and neighborhood in Memphis: when some character had not shown particular flair or aplomb in carrying out some task, my mother, for example, would describe his/her behavior as “just drylongso.” This was not simply an explanation but was accompanied by kinetic gestures and a trill of the voice whose register a musician could identify with accuracy. My mother, whose every gesture exudes more or less passion of one sort or another, could “collapse” her voice and posture with great skill in telling what a “drylongso” looked like. In Gwaltney’s book, however, the characters are anything but uninteresting, as they make no pretense, as far as we can tell, to any particular competence or “expertise.” I believe that Gwaltney was driving home this point.
the goal of self-reflection, or what I am calling here the “interior intersubjectivity,” has occurred in the transgressive unpredictable play of language. For that reason, a psychoanalytic model appropriate to the lifeworld and courageous enough to forego the refuges of delusion that wrap around this world like a shroud would risk its occasions in language, not only the locus of the subject’s practice of culture—both the natal and the broader one that traverses it—but the single feature of cultural apprenticeship that has been the most denied. Above all, we must admit the scandalous: African subjects and subjectivity are infinitely more unknown “at home” than anywhere else.

5

When I was young and free and used to wear silks50 (and sat in the front pew, left of center, I might add), I used to think that my childhood minister occasionally made the oddest announcement. Whenever any one of our three church choirs was invited to perform at another congregation, our minister, suspecting that several of his members would stay home or do something else that afternoon, having already spent some hours at worship, skillfully anticipated them. Those who were not going with the choir were importuned to “send go.” The injunction always tickled me, as I took considerable pleasure in conjuring up the image of a snaggle-toothed replica of my seven-year-old self going off in my place. But the minister meant “send money” (i.e., pass the collection plate). Decades later, I decided that the “send go” of my childhood had an equivalent in the semiotic/philosophical discourse as the mark of substitution, the translated inflections of selves beyond the threshold of the fleshed, natural girl. It was not only a delightful but useful idea to me that one herself need not always turn up. One and one did not always make two but might well yield some indeterminate sum, according to the context in which the arithmetic was carried out, indeed which arithmetic was performed. I have been suggesting that we need to work the double in this discussion.

Perhaps this is as factual as I know: in any investigatory procedure concerning African American culture, a given episteme fractures into negative and positive stresses that could be designated the crisis of inquiry that reveals where a kind of abandonment—we could also call it a gap—

50. This sentence alludes to a wonderful collection of short stories by the Barbadian Canadian writer, Austin Clarke, *When He Was Free and Young and He Used to Wear Silks* (Toronto: House of Anancy Press, 1971).
has occurred. Rather than running straight ahead toward a goal, the posi-
tivity (a given theoretical instrument) loops back and forward at once. For
example, the notion of substitutive identity, not named as such in the litera-
ture of sociocultural critique, is analogous to the more familiar concept of
negation. On the one hand, negation is a time-honored concept of philo-
sophical discourse and is already nuanced and absorbed, if not left behind,
by linked discursive moves, from Hegel to Marx, from Kojève to Sartre and
Lacan. On the other hand, it is a useful concept to “introduce,” alongside
the psychoanalytic hermeneutic, to a particular historical order located in
the postmodern time frame as a move toward self-empowerment, but in
an era of discourse that needn’t spell out the efficacy of either. (The same
might be said for the concept of the subject.) We are confronted, then, by
divergent temporal frames, or beats, that pose the problem of adequacy—
how to reclaim an abandoned site of inquiry in the critical discourse when
the very question that it articulates is carried along as a part of the method-
ological structure, as a feature of the paradigm that is itself under suspicion,
while the question itself foregrounds a thematic that cannot be approached
in any other way. If one needs a subject here, with its repertoire of shifts
and transformations, and negation, with its successive generational clo-
sures and displacements, though both might be regarded as a disappeared
quest-object at best, or a past tense for theory at worst, then we have come
to the crisis that I have told, the instrument trapped in a looping move-
ment or behind-time momentousness that need jump ahead. One tries, in
this fog of claims, to keep her eyes on the prize; if by substitutive iden-
tities—the “send go”—we mean the capacity to represent a self through
masks of self-negation, then the dialectics of self-reflection and the strate-
gies of a psychoanalytic hermeneutic come together at the site of a “new
woman”/“man.” That, I believe, is the aim of the cultural analysis.

A break toward the potentiality of becoming, or the formation of sub-
itutive identities, consists in going beyond what is given; it is also the
exceeding of necessity. While this gesture toward a theory of the transcen-
dent is deeply implicated in the passage and itinerary of modern philosophy
and the Cartesian subject, it is not so alien to the narratives and teachings
of overcoming long associated not only with native traditions of philosophy
in the lifeworld (via the teachings of the Christian church) but is entirely
consonant with the democratic principles on which the United States was

51. For a lucid reading of Jacques Lacan’s indebtedness to Hegelian philosophy by way
of Alexandre Kojève, see Borch-Jacobsen, Lacan: The Absolute Master.
founded (though immensely simplified in the discourses of liberal democracy). But the resonance that I would rely on here is less dependent on a narrative genealogy, whose plotline culminates in an epiphany of triumph, than on a different relation to the “Real,” where I would situate the politics and the reality of “race.” Even though it is fairly clear that “race” can be inflected (and should be) through the Lacanian dimensions, its face, as an aspect of the “Real,” brings to light its most persistent perversity. In Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen’s reading of Lacan’s “linguisteries,” the “Real” is said to be “‘pure and simple,’ ‘undifferentiated,’ . . . ‘without fissure,’ ” and “‘always in the same place’” (LAM, 192). As these Lacanian assertions seem to match precisely the mythical behavior of “race,” or of any “myth today,” they pointedly refer to the situation of the subject of enunciation—his or her own most “Real,” or the status quo. In the classical narratives of psychoanalytic theory, the status quo, the standing pat, does not by error open onto death’s corridor inasmuch as it freezes and fixes subjectivity in a status permanently achieved. The outcome breezes by us in the very notion of status, with its play on statue, sto, stant, and so on. In this sense, “overcoming” is the cancellation of what is given. Borch-Jacobsen offers this explanation: “Thus language, the manifestation of the negativity of the subject who posits himself by negating (himself as) the Real, works the miracle of manifesting what is not; the tearing apart, the ek-sistence, and the perpetual self-overtaking that ‘is’ the subject who speaks himself in everything by negating everything” (LAM, 193). “Speaking” here is both process and paradigm, to the extent that signifying enables the presence of an absence and registers the absence of a presence, but it is also a superior mark of the transformative, insofar as it makes something by cutting through the “pure and simple” of the “undifferentiated” in the gaps and spacings of signifiers. If potentiality, then, can be said to be the site of the human, rather than the nonhuman fixedness—more precisely, if it is the “place” of the subjectivity, the condition of being/becoming subject—then its mission is to unfold, through “words, words, words” (LAM, 193), yes, but “words, words, words” as they lead us out to the re-presentational where the subject commences its journey in the looking glass of the symbolic.

Thus, to represent a self through masks of self-negation is to take on the work of discovering where one “is at”—the subject led back to his signifying dependence. Freud had thought a different idea—bringing un-

consciousness under the domination of the preconscious—while Lacan, Freud's post-Saussurian poet, revised the idea as the “mapped” “network of signifiers” brought into existence at the place where the subject was, has always been: “Wo es war, soll ich werden.” 53 We could speak of this process as the subject making its mark through the transitivity of reobjectivations, the silent traces of desire on which the object of the subject hinges. This movement across an interior space demarcates the discipline of self-reflection, or the content of a self-interrogation that “race” always covers over as an already-answered. But for oneself, another question is posed: What might I become, insofar as . . . ? To the extent that “I” “signs” itself “elsewhere,” represents itself beyond the given, the onus of becoming boomerangs 54—Ralph Ellison’s word—as it rebounds on the one putting the question. But what impedes the function of the question?

Once posed, the interrogative gesture, the interior intersubjectivity, would fill up the Fanonian abîme, “the great white error . . . the great black mirage.” Might we suggest, however, that a different question could come about with the acquisition of a supplemental literacy, one that could be regarded as alien and, for that very reason, to be learned and pressed into service? Frantz Fanon assumed that his great positivities (conceptual narratives) were always and constantly equal to themselves, and he was exactly right. But he went further by saying that both of them were “not” in the sense that they were borne on the wings of an illusion and to the extent that they were both unsatisfactory as self-sufficient points of the stationary, and this seems right, too. He did not, however, ask of himself and his formulation, So what? Such a question could not have been posed by him, because his allegory had not only responded to the “so what?” but had preempted, indeed, any other impudent intervention. But if we move back in the direction of a “prior” moment, the seven year old in the front pew, for instance, we can then go forward with another set of competencies that originate, we might say, in the bone ignorance of curiosity, the child’s gift for strange dreams of flying and bizarre, yet correct, notions about the adult bodies around her—how, for example, her father and brothers bent forward in a grimace when mischievously struck in a certain place above the knees by a little girl, propelling herself off a rollaway bed into their arms. The foreignness had already begun in the instant grasp of sexual and em-

54. For the “boomerang” effect and an inquiry into it, see Ralph Ellison, Invisible Man (New York: Modern Library, 1992), in particular, the “Prologue,” 3–14.
bodied division. But from that moment on, the imposition of homogeneity and sameness would also be understood as the great text of the "tradition" of "race." The Fanonian abyss requires this urtext as the "answer" that fosters a two-way immobility. But before "race," something else has happened, both within the context of "race" and alongside it.

Does tradition, then—depositories of discourse and ways of speaking, kinds of social practice and relations—enable some questions and not others? It seems so, but tradition, which hides its own crevices and interstices, is offered as the suture that takes on all the features of smoothness; in order to present itself as transparent, unruffled surface, it absorbs the rejects according to its most prominent configurations. But it seems that the move toward self-reflexivity demands a test of inherited portions of cultural content in order to discover not only what tradition conceals but, as a result, what one, under its auspices, is forced to blindside. What difference did it make that Fanon was a native speaker of French? That he had earned a significant place in French intellectual circles? His response seems appropriate—the sideways glance, the superbly ironical look, which marked the effect of scission at the heart of the diasporic utterance. What he could not do, however, was read its outcome in reference to the "Negro of the Antilles," as well as "Frantz Fanon." To have admitted that the diasporic African is cut on the bias to the West, and not sharply at odds with it, would have involved him in a contradiction that his polemic against the West could not abide. Nevertheless, the problematic that he carved out remains intact, and that is the extent to which the psychoanalytic hermeneutic has the least relevance to African diasporic lifeworlds.

We already know what Fanon might have thought of this question and the limited usefulness of raising it in reference to psychoanalytic theory as "we know it," at least from the point of view of those portions of Black Skin, White Masks that we’ve examined. With the neurosis and the oedipal complex out the window, the black man does not have time to make racist practice "unconscious." But turning now to another protocol, we have the

55. Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks. See note 4.
56. Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks, 150: "Then there is the unconscious. Since the racial drama is played out in the open, the black man has no time to 'make it unconscious.'" Yes, but one wonders along a repertoire of unanswered, inchoately posed questions—how to explain intramural "colorism," as Alice Walker nominated it, which embarrassing trend did not die out, I recently discovered, with the black nationalist sixties? Exactly how does one think about, though it is not particularly her business, the mind-boggling tendency of black men of a certain generation and a certain profile of "success" to include any and all
chance to pose the question again in an altered context. I want to look briefly at aspects of Marie-Cécile and Edmond Ortigues's *Oedipe africain* as an instance of psychoanalytic reference to a non-European community of subjects and as a systematic examination of symbolic currency (*symbolization*) as a response to the riddle that Fanon advances concerning the “Negro of the Antilles.” Again, it is important, to my mind, to insist that even though diasporic African and continental African communities share “race,” they pointedly differ in cultural ways and means; the contrary view, which flattens out black into the same thing despite time, weather, geography, and the entire range of complicating factors that go into the fashioning of persons, is difficult to put to rest, given, especially, what seems to be the unchanging face of racism. But unless we introduce cultural specificity to the picture, we run the risk of reinforcing the very myth that we would subvert. In that regard, the emphasis that *Oedipe africain* places on the processes of symbolization, not only in the workings of psychoanalytic practice but in the making of human culture, more broadly speaking, offers a powerful antidote to reductive formulations. I have also examined aspects of Sow’s *Les Structures anthropologiques de la folie en afrique noire* as a francophone reading from “inside” African culture. I try to bring the texts here into dialogue.

*Oedipe africain* is not available in English translation and was originally published in 1964 by French psychoanalysts who carried out clinical practice and observation in Dakar, Senegal, from 1962–1966; a redacted version, which text I use for this essay, came out in 1984. While the authors acknowledge that the analyst must attempt to understand the patient in the entire context of his or her lifeworld and that no point of comparison can be sustained between one culture and another along a particular line of stress without an examination of the whole, they do contend that the oedipal complex pertains to all human societies. Its nuances will differ, however, according to one’s standing in the social order and the strategies of acculturation that are available to subjects within a given natal community.

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women, if he is heterosexually defined, as potential love objects, *except* black women? It is not so much that “the black man” ought to love “the black woman” as he might love anyone *but...* At the moment, this question is posed as the “black man/black woman thang,” which the African American popular press covers with notable frequency. Why do we pose it over and over again? Perhaps we might say that if “the black man” does “not have time” for the unconscious penetration of the “race” question, then he ought to *make* time and the “black woman” right along with him, inasmuch as “she” has some work to do as well.
The authors suggest here that “a practitioner at work in a society foreign to his own definitively illustrates an essential characteristic of the analytic attitude; that is to say, no proposition can be understood without reference to a familial, social, and cultural context.”

If the knowledge that the analyst has about the total context is not exhaustive, “then what counts above all else is the analytical attitude that seeks to understand the place of the subject in what he says.” It seems to me that all dogmatic pronouncement, before and despite “what the subject says,” is precisely the way in which traditional analyses, of various schools of thought, have failed, including all brands of nationalist thinking, as well as more informed opinions that have evolved a template of values to which “the black man” is supposed to conform, and, moreover, “the black man” as a formulation itself. This whole vital soul, imagined to be snoring beneath the wisdom of the ages, conveniently poised for the exact liberatory moment, or “leader,” is actually an unknown quantity in this very “soul” we thought we knew. Because the analyst, from the Ortigues’ point of view, awaits a content, he has, in effect, no program to “sell.” But the analyst here does not even do that much; he or she responds to a seeker.

Attempting to understand the subject in his or her discourse, the Ortigues address the specificity of illness by way of a number of case studies (references to aggression, the persecution complex and its intricate functions, and so on). But in each instance, the doctors, in touch with patients who have sought them out or have been referred to them by parents or school administrators, are not treating a single individual alone but an ensemble. Even the latter is not limited to the familial nucleus but may include ancestral and religious figures; in some cases, these might be the rab—an otherworldly figure—and the marabout, both of whom are active cultural agents in the Wolof, Lebou, and Serer communities of Senegal. The unseen seen, the “evidence” of things not seen, the rab, who may be either perverse of conduct, “or possessively loving regarding a subject,” is often felt to be responsible for certain facets of the subject’s behavior. In

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57. En décrivant dans ce chapitre la situation d’un psychanalyste travaillant dans une civilisation étrangère la sienne, nous n’avons fait en définitive qu’illustrer un caractère essentiel de l’attitude analytique puisqu’aucun propos ne peut se comprendre sans référence au contexte familial, social, culturel (OA, 57).

58. Faudrait-il en conclure qu’une information sociologique poussée doit précéder le travail clinique? Nous répondrons que, si un minimum d’informations est nécessaire, ce qui importe avant tout c’est l’attitude analytique qui cherche à comprendre la place du sujet dans ce qu’il dit (OA, 57; my emphasis).
this cultural setting, “illness is not a clinical entity at all,” and certainly not foremost, but is “attributed by subjects to magical causality or the intervention of the divine.”59 The cultures in question are not only not of the West but are situated on the cultural map of Islam. The Western doctors, then, are attempting to work within the limitations posed by linguistic difference as well as differences of religious and ethnic reference.

If “the element of coherence,” or consistency, by which illness is represented is embodied in the rab, then this intervention would pose one more reason, among a variety of others, why “the doctors and their consultants might have been derailed in their interrogation.”60 In any case, however, this complicating factor in the relationship between a speaking subject and the grammar of his speaking brings to focus one of the key differences between tools of Western practice and the African context, as Sow will spell out: who is the subject of treatment? In the African context, there are no lone subjects of mental illness. A profoundly anthropological reading of subject disorder and its essentially communal and familiar character in traditional (and this distinction is crucial for Sow) African societies defines the project of Les Structures anthropologiques de la folie en afrique noire.

While the Ortigueses are aware that their project comes freighted with its own peculiar cultural baggage and bias, they nevertheless take their chances within the framework of certain psychoanalytic assumptions, as we have seen. Sow, on the other hand, locates the subject at last within a global scheme of reading that examines the basic tenets of West African culture. As informative as this method may be, it is in its own way as general and generalist as he claims that the classical descriptions of mental illnesses are to the African field. Too “superficial and artificial” to account for “psychological, social, human, and clinical realities” encountered in traditional African communities, the nosographical and nosological categories and tables, Sow argues, are themselves less objectionable to him than the inadequate supplement of their means with culture-specific strategies (SA, 48; AS, 53).61 In Les Structures anthropologiques, he attempts to

59. Et, en effet, ici, la maladie n’est pas une entité clinique. Pour les maladies mentales, il n’y a de classification que par la causalité magique ou le destin voulu par Dieu. . . . On se réfère soit à une action contrariante des rab, soit à “l’amour” possessif de rab liés à une famille, etc. (OA, 40).
60. L’élément de cohérence dans la représentation de la maladie c’est le rab. . . . C’est pourquoi nos consultants sont déroutés par nos interrogatoires (OA, 40).
61. At the time of the work’s publication, the author was apparently a researcher and lecturer at the Laboratoire de Psychopathologie at the Sorbonne, Université René Descartes (Paris V), after having practiced psychiatric medicine in his native Senegal.
go beneath the manifestations of Western practice to penetrate its leading
premises, to address and correct the problem, except that, in doing so, his
chief actors are the macroelements of narrative and belief—the thematics
of myth, of ancient tale and report. In that regard, he paints with a broader
brush, as it were, and covers a canvas of wider scope, but, ironically, it
seems that we lose the import of the psychoanalytic in the process pre-
cisely because, to Sow, it is unimpressively grounded in the messiness of
the everyday world, in the utter evasion of the neat and rational category.

For example, madness in Sow’s critique is similarly configured to
the way it is sketched in Oedipe africain—as a mishap in an ensemble of
sociocultural relations. Sow calls it a “‘sign’” that indicates straightaway
that the subject is expressing conflict between himself and the constitutive
authorities of his personality that are external to him (SA, 42; AS, 44). Sow
consistently distinguishes between personnalité and personne.62 It is the
role of traditional therapy, then, alongside the interactive participation of
family and community, to read and interpret the sign, to determine at what
point in the constitutive network of the intimate structure of personality there
has been breakdown or rupture in an otherwise highly articulated social
function (see SA, 42; AS, 44). While it is fairly clear that Sow’s “extérieures”
look and behave suspiciously like the Lacanian “supports” through which
the subject of enunciation is “spoken,” Sow appears to so disjoint particular
acts of enunciation from the culturally permissible that the neurosis itself
erupts in “oneness.” The double dose of narcissistic desire, therefore, fol-
lows from “individuality,” when the neurotic personne behaves as if he were
an end within himself:

In effect, what is signified for the neurotic is buried in his individu-
ality and, in the final analysis, “doubles” or duplicates his narcissistic
desire, which functions as if he were his own end in himself. For
man confronting the sacred, however, what is signified is the Word,
Law, Tradition—in short, man’s Origin, in the sacrifice of the founding
Ancestor, creator of the Law, guarantor of peace and coexistence
among present-day human beings. (AS, 207)63

62. The French text reads: “En sa lecture la plus profonde, la folie est ‘signe’; elle indique
d’emblée que le sujet affecté exprime un conflit: conflit entre lui et les instances con-
stitutives de sa personnalité qui lui sont extérieures, selon la conception traditionnelle”
(SA, 42).
63. En effet, on pourrait dire que le signifié du névrosé est enfoui dans son individualité
et, au bout du compte, “double” son désir narcissique qui fonctionne comme s’il était, en
lui-même, sa propre finalité; alors que le signifié de l’homme face au sacré, c’est le Verbe,
But the real question for me, in light of this formulation, is, What is the relationship between the Word and the word in which personne, neurotic and otherwise, is orchestrated? It appears that we pass here rather too quickly—dropping the ball is more like it—from a social dysfunction to a coerced repair in the formidable evocation of overwhelming devices, the great *di ex machina* that silence all before them—the Law, the Origin, the Tradition. "Man confronting the sacred" is a mighty idea, but who can stand before it? And isn't it quite possible that such standing would be unique? would represent an inimitable moment or an originary and irrecoverable act?

Nevertheless, Sow's insistence on a *constitutive network* restores the psychoanalytic hermeneutic to its social coherence, to its intersubjective function. As traditional therapy in his account seeks to transform mental illness into an articulated language, it would repair the broken link in which the individual is not alone located: "Reestablishing order in the subject reconstitutes the loose connection and reinserts the subject into the place from which he has been expelled, cut off from his source of nourishment by an 'aggressor' " (AS, 44).

An "affliction" in the structure of communication implies an aversive meeting of paroles, and, to that extent, the anthropological elements of madness in African society do not deny, at the very least, conflict at the heart of human relations. Sow's "answer," however, by deferring or displacing the source of illness onto a global abstracted Outer, envisages an absolute otherness, whereas the struggle for meaning appears to "reduce" the absolute by dispersing its centrality. In other words, the subject, in a different order of things, must discover the degree to which he has engendered his own alienation. Consequently, the Western subject, it seems, sprouts guilt and big shoulders in taking on responsibility for an outcome, whereas his African counterpart, at least if Sow is right, does not acquire a discourse for the *guilty conscience* insasmuch as his ultimate ground of social and moral reference is situated "outside" himself.

In a sense, the universe projected in *Les Structures anthropologiques* is vestibular to both the historical and posthistorical insofar as it is finished and elegantly arranged according to an immemorial Law and Order that Sow elaborates at length. We can do no more than sketch some

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of its prominent features here. In West African cosmography, human and social order is based on an imbricated, yet hierarchical, grid of functions marked according to three levels of stress: (1) the sensible, given world of the microcosmos—the world that is immediate and given, the world of the social; (2) "the intermediary world of the genies, the spirits, and a repertoire of malevolent and beneficent forces of the mesocosmos"; and (3) "the suprasensible world of the Spirits elect, the Ancestors, the Godhead" (SA, 45; AS, 48). But there are ancestors and the Ancestor(s), as it seems apparent that the capitalized Ancêtre is the equivalent of the Godhead, if not exactly synonymous to it. Given this elaborate schematization, there is, in effect, "no one"—in a rather different sense from the "nothing" and "no one" of Western philosophical/psychoanalytic discourse—with its eye trained, finally, on an eclipsed God, or the One about whom silence is in order. In African discursive and social practice, as Sow narrates the scene, "one" is nothing more or less than a link through which the three great valences of order reverberate. Therapy thus consists in bringing one back to harmonious relations with a cosmogonic principle whose intent can be teased out in various mythic narratives. There, "the prescriptions, rules, interdictions, and models of conduct" aim toward a definitive suggestion: that "cultural order and coherence repose on a delicate, subtle balance of the differentiated identity of each and all" (SA, 154; AS, 159), primarily the continuity of the generations in the passage of the biological age group, wave on wave of horizontal confraternities in progression toward the status of ancestry. In such a system, the strategies of rapprochement between God and human appear in language—"in speech, prayer, and dream, as the dialogue between distant interlocutors must pass through the privileged intercessory office of the Ancestors" (AS, 210 n. 9).

From this perspective, mental illness is read as the interrupted circuitry between carefully delineated parts (see SA, 10–11; AS, 6). But the texts of role and agency are not discoverable, inasmuch as they are already known from a transmitted structure of articulated cause and effect. Moreover, this symbolic economy, which rests in a transcendent signifier, generates a Story, unlike the discourse that breaks up into the atomized particles of evasive meaning, or a meaning delayed in the "effects" of the signifier. We would regard the latter as a symptom of modern social analysis that fol-

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65. Parmi les moyens du rapprochement, il y a la parole, la prière et le rêve... mais, comme toujours en Afrique, le dialogue entre Dieu et les hommes passe par l'intercesseur privilégié qu'est l'Ancêtre (SA, 164 n. 27).
follows the trails of fragmented social objects—in short, a world defined by the loss of hierarchy, privileged moments, and ineluctably declarative—ambiguity expelled—utterances. We know this world as our own—the scene of scission and displacement.

But where would this buzz of the harmonious leave the culturally “illiterate,” the one who misreads the traffic signals? In the opening chapter of *Les Structures anthropologiques*, Sow treats at length the occurrence and frequency of mental illness in West African communities. As he adopts nosographical categories of description familiar to Western psychiatric practice, he is convinced that the categories themselves are ill-equipped to treat key questions, such as “the problem of the stain, of the pure and impure, that dominates Swedish psychopathology, for instance” (SA, 31 n. 36; AS, 32 n. 10), or the phenomenon of “la bouffée psychotique”: the most characteristic formal aspect of African psychiatry (AS, 31; SA, 31). If the “bouffée psychotique” is a characteristic form in African medicine, then *persecution* is the most frequently and meaningfully recurrent thematic of Continental practice (see SA, 34; AS, 35). He claims that it not only colors the entire field of practice but that it also occupies a privileged place in the anthropological system of representations across Black Africa. The ensemble of premises against which Sow leads up to his reading of the African conception of cosmos and its signifying role in the mental theater might be summarized according to two binarily opposed tables of value: traditional African institutions, in their preventive or prophylactic capacity, effectively maintain personal, interpersonal, and communal equilibrium. The psychological defenses are cultural and collective and may be compared with what we spoke of earlier as the Western implantation or interiorization of guilt.66

In other words, the persecutor in African culture embodies the externalization of guilt, whereas in Western culture, the guilt function is assumed by the person. Sow evaluates the internalizing of guilt as (1) “the origin of the morbid structure” and (2) “the sociocultural context of sin and blame” (SA, 25 n. 20; AS, 24 n. 7). But is it possible that the binary disposition is less than dispositive, even in a traditional African setting? Is it possible that traditional structures, precisely because they are time-honored, do not always respond to a particular demand?

66. “Factors that are often cited are . . . effective psychological—in effect, cultural—defenses, such as the externalization of conflict, with precise group identification with a persecutor” (AS, 38). [On souligne souvent, en effet . . . des défenses psychologiques—en fait, culturelles—efficaces telles que extériorité du conflit avec nomination collective précise d’un persécuteur (SA, 36).]
Among the case studies presented in *Oedipe africain*, the Ortigueses’ Samba C., a fourteen-year-old Wolof Muslim, might raise interesting problems for Sow’s scheme. “According to the psychotherapeutic material presented to them,” the authors believe that Samba did reach the internalization of conflict, which process Sow identifies as the origin of morbidity in Western disorders, and that a dream reported to them by the analysand not only signaled such internalization but announced it as the onset of a series of psychotic episodes. The dream, which occurrence led him to the Western doctors, is described this way: “The baobab tree” (the renowned tree of African lore and legend) “of Samba’s initial vision, at the time of this dream . . . , cried out that the dead must be buried at his feet and not in the cemetery; the terrifying persona of Samba’s hallucinations was transformed into a man who declared these words: ‘It is the father of fathers.’”67 Samba’s confrontation with representative instances of the paternal image—in the baobab tree and the transformations that it induced—suggested to the doctors that Samba’s troubles were related to the ancestors. In attempting to retrace the trajectory of the Ortigueses’ conclusions, which follow below, we hope to see at least the divergence of interpretation between two styles of analytic practice and assumption. We can only guess how Sow might have read Samba’s case.

Samba C. first encountered trouble, when, passing under a baobab tree on returning to school one day, he heard a voice that called out to him by his family name three times. Samba does not answer, for responding would have been incorrect, but he does not continue on his way, and quite frightened, turns back toward home. He takes to his bed, trembling, vomiting during the night. For the rest of the following day and for some months afterward, Samba keeps his eyes closed, as if he feared a terrifying vision, “like children, something big, a devil.” He suffered from migraine headaches in the course of things, refused to eat, and in any case only imbibed small amounts of food and drink. He remained inert, prostrate, arms bent in moaning. His groans would intensify for hours at a time, in extended and monotonous plaint. The words that escaped from him came torn,

67. Le matériel de la psychothérapie montre qu’arrive au seuil d’un affrontement assumé personnellement, Samba . . . situe l’image paternelle et la castration dans la rapport aux ancêtres: le baobab de la vision initiale, lors d’un rêve (il figure dans le nombreux rêves), réclame que l’on enterrer “le mort” à son pied et non au cimetière; le personnage terrifiant des hallucinations s’est mué en un homme au regard bon qui prononce ces seuls mots: “C’est le père des pères” (OA, 101).
babbled, barely audible, and were accompanied by an involuntary shaking of the head.

Samba’s parents reported that the outbreak persisted for several months, and he was eventually led to neurological consultation and hospitalized. All the tests administered to him proved negative. During hospitalization, Samba’s state was unchanged three weeks later; he left the hospital after insisting upon it, having attempted escapes daily. Shortly thereafter, he was hospitalized in the psychiatric unit. In the course of a year, he was hospitalized three times and during interim periods was treated as an outpatient, subjected, during each term of hospitalization, to a series of electroshocks at the same time as psychotherapy. A neuroleptic treatment was pursued as well.

In Samba’s case, it is legitimate to speak of psychoanalytic psychotherapy in the most classic sense of the term. Samba’s demand was clear: He came “to talk in order to get well.” A rich transferential relation was quickly established, as his treatment lasted a year and included some fifty-one sessions with the doctors. Samba was regarded as intelligent and sought to verbalize everything that he lived.68

68. Les troubles de Samba ont commencé le jour où, passant sous un grand baobab en revenant de l’école, il entendit une voix qui l’appela trois fois par son nom de famille. Heureusement, il ne répondit pas car “quand on répond c’est mauvais, on devient fou, ou on est sale et seul dans la brousse” (comme un homme que Samba a vu jadis); il ne s’est pas retourné non plus. Il a eu très peur et est rentré chez lui en courant, s’est couché tremblant et a vomi dans la nuit. Depuis ce jour et de mois durant, Samba tient ses paupières closes comme s’il redoutait un vision terrifiante: “comme des enfants, quelque chose de gros, un diable.” Il souffre de céphalées intenses, refuse de s’alimenter et en aucun cas ne porte lui-même à ses lèvres le peu de nourriture ou de boisson qu’il absorbe. Il rester, inerte, prostré, le dos voûté, en géignant. Ses gémissements peuvent, des heures durant, s’amplifier en de longues plaintes monotones. Les quelques mots que l’on parvient à lui arracher sont murmurs, à peine audibles et accompagnés d’un mouvement de négation de la tête.

Ce tableau persistant plusieurs mois, au dire des parents, Samba est conduit à la consultation de neurologie et hospitalisé. Tous les examens pratiqués sont négatifs. Son état étant inchangé trois semaines plus tard, Samba sort sur sa demande insistant, après de quotidiennes tentatives de fugues. Il est hospitalisé peu après en psychiatrie. En un an il y sera hospitalisé à trois reprises et suivi entre-temps à titre externe. A chaque hospitalisation une série d’électro-chocs est pratiquée parallèlement à la psychothérapie. Un traitement par neuroleptiques est poursuivi également.

Dans le cas de Samba, il est légitime de parler de psychothérapie psychanalytique au sens le plus classique du terme. La demande de l’enfant est claire: il vient “parler pour...
Summarizing, we would make the following observations:

1. After two months and nine sessions of treatment, Samba barely got beyond the hallucinations that haunted his nights. "The visual representations ranged from children, to snakes, to a very large black man, who frightened him." Samba reported auditory and visual hallucinations that included "snakes invading his body, drinking his blood, and the attacks made him feel that he would die soon." The doctors were caught by the binary equation in Samba's description — "fear"/"bliss-happiness" ("peur"/"bonheur") — as they came to discover "that the voice of the baobab, which was the voice of the devil, was actually the projected persona of an older companion of Samba's, one Malik, who, in Samba's eyes, incorporated at once the manhood virtues of boldness, physical force, and endurance, as well as the temptations to fall that led to Samba's madness" (OA, 98).

2. "La folie" was understood by the doctors to have conformed to "désocialisation," into which Malik had led his younger companion over a few years — disobeying and deceiving parents, insolence toward authority, thievery, and the violation of a fundamental prohibition, "going out at night." The latter activity was strictly forbidden children, especially treks into the bush or the countryside, those reputedly dangerous places thought to be inhabited by evil figures. This crossing the bar, we might say, manifested in various antisocial behaviors that challenged authority, was accompanied by gross misconduct toward Malik's and Samba's female peers. The doctors observed that "Malik's 'leadership' was exercised in a decidedly sadistic tonality" and that none of the authority figures, including parents and teachers, were ever able to bring him in line. "Above all, Malik embodied for Samba an element of undeniable fascination" (OA, 98).

3. Samba, then, "was frightened by his desire to look like Malik, to be Malik [d'être un Malik]. The temptation was projected as the 'devil'" — the "saytané." The attending marabouts, preceding consultation with the Western doctors, believed that the problem was the "devil," who wanted to harm Samba. But as it turned out, Samba's family, "his entourage," had themselves had similar experiences, "since childhood, with the evidentiary

"... Des enfants ou un serpent ou un homme noir très, très grand, viennent lui faire peur, comme un diable. . . . " Il me faisait peur. Il m'a montré le bonheur. . . . " Des serpents sont dans son corps, sur son corps ils vont le mordre, ils boivent son sang, il va mourir dans l'instant (OA, 97–98)."
presence of djinns and devils" ("Pour le père et la mère de Samba, pour tout l'entourage, l'existence des djiné et saytané est une évidence quotidienne depuis l'enfance; chacun a une ou plusieurs expériences personnelles les concernant") (OA, 98).

4. "Samba finally arrived on the threshold of an interiorization" of guilt. The "devil" was Malik, wanting him to do ill, yet "he realized that he admired the older boy and that the latter was a thug" ("celui-ci était un voyou ignorant") (OA, 99). Over time, "his fantasies concerning the personae of the devil . . . terrifying and attractive at once, were doubled and divided among three or four persons, as this game of doubling, coupling, and dividing allowed Samba ever greater suppleness in projecting himself into variable positions regarding his desire and its related anxiety."70

Even though Samba's condition was ameliorated by treatment, the authors maintain that his state, for all that, proved irreversibly psychotic. To the question, what if the prognosis were inept, or unrelated to the strategies of cure available in Wolof society, the Ortizuées respond with what is, for all intents and purposes, a question of their own: "Did not Samba's culture impose on him, or propose to him in a privileged way the solution to his hallucinatory psychosis, vis-à-vis the theme of persecution?"71 The doctors believed that Samba had "jumped"—my word—his circumstance by internalizing his dilemma, by seeking to resolve it at the level of personality. In a sense, cutting loose from certain communal beliefs, feeling himself driven to the wall, he had sought other means of address and "become a stranger to himself while doing so, acceding to the level of personal conscience that had situated him 'well ahead of the fathers.'" 72 In the culture in question, one did not reach for advancement beyond or away from the group, as they

70. Dans ses fantasmes le personnage du diable, monolithique au départ, terrorisant et fascinant, s'est progressivement dédoublé puis scindé en un groupe de 3 ou 4 personnes, ce qui permettait à Samba un jeu de plus en plus souple où il se projetait dans des positions variées à l'égard de son désir et de son anxiété (OA, 99).
71. Mais cela ne peut empêcher de se demander si la culture qui est celle de Samba ne lui impose pas ou ne lui propose pas de manière privilégiée la solution de la psychose hallucinatoire à thème de persécution (OA, 99–100).
72. Il est en effet bien difficile d'imaginer Samba guéri grâce à un traitement psychanalytique, après avoir intérieisé ses tensions, les avoir résolues "personnellement." Cela supposerait que, seul de son milieu, de sa famille, il se désolidarise des croyances communes, qu'il se singularise d'une manière telle qu'il deviendrait comme étranger chez lui, qu'il aurait accédé à un niveau de conscience personnelle qui le situerait bien "en avant de ses pères" (il se trouve que l'on ne peut attendre aucune évolution du groupe familial). Est-ce possible? Est-ce souhaitable? (OA, 100).
read the picture. At best, Samba’s condition in the end “appeared fragile, as the ‘devil’ remained discretely present” (OA, 100).

What I have interpreted in the foregoing paragraphs as declarative assertions are advanced as inquiries in the text, and this fact is important to note, inasmuch as the doctors are themselves aware that their speculative instruments are adopted from a very different cultural framework. For instance, they question whether or not it is thinkable that Samba had arrived at the interiorization of the conflict that he clearly expressed and whose implications he could explain—“Est-il pensable qu’il parvienne à intérioriser sa culpabilité?” (OA, 99). Furthermore, they handle certain conclusions that they have tentatively reached in a subjunctive appeal: In effect, Samba’s assumption of guilt would suppose that he had disconnected himself from certain communal values, and is such delinking not only possible but even desirable? The Ortigueses go on to say that everything during the course of initial treatment happened “as if” Samba, feeling no way out, had placed all his hope, had articulated all his demand in the opening dialogue of the first interviews and as if “he assumed the risk of an unknown outcome” [“il assumait le risque de l’issue inconnue”] (OA, 100). His parents, “feeling anxious, powerless, and overwhelmed by Samba’s auto-aggressive conduct,” following the failure of traditional treatment, “sought to turn him over to ‘the doctors’ and also accepted the risks.” During the course of the doctors’ treatment, Samba’s family consulted “un marabout ‘plus fort’ que les précédents,” as the doctors were in accord with the decision. “This procedure, no more than prior consultations with the marabout, did not interrupt the psychoanalytic course,” as the differing strategies were simultaneously pursued (OA, 100).

As a reader goes back and forth on this, grappling in another language, about a vastly different culture, not Western, French, English, or diasporic, for that matter, trying to see through other eyes to the truth of the matter or even gain some clarity concerning it, we are confronted with mutually exclusive questions. Perhaps all the doctors and theorists are right, or more precisely, know how to be, within the particular parameters of insight and blindness that frame their discourse. But the affecting line, “tous son espoir, toute sa demande” (OA, 100), sketches a face before us whose details are unreadable, except that we hear in its trace of the paraphrase the stunning bafflement of one at pains to know why he suffers, and it seems that we are captivated there—in the inscription of particular address. There is the society, doubtlessly so, but what about Samba? Another way to ask this question is the impossible, What does he say he wants? Unless I have
misunderstood the matter, the “hermeneutic demand” of the psychoanalytic itinerary unfolds from each of the Sambas’ articulated wannas-be, but in what world? Is it thinkable that a Samba was raising, in the depths of his being, a question that his culture could not answer, even though the latter had opened the place of the question by giving it its props, its materiality? Is the quest conditioned by the epistemic choices available to the want-to-be of the subject? And if the subject “overreaches” the given discursive conditions, does madness attend, no one quite knowing what he is saying, as indeed it was reported to have happened at the onset of Samba’s psychotic course? For the Ortigueses, Samba’s dilemma raises the question of recognition by the brothers, which they contend is routed through “Oedipe africain.” It is at heart an inquiry concerning status and the variable positions through which it is expressed.

In Samba’s society, “the search for status recognition by the ‘brothers’ is a dominant mode of manhood affirmation” [La recherche d’une reconnaissance de mon statut par les ‘frères’ est un mode dominant de l’affirmation virile] (OA, 135). As we observed before, the brothers are the progressive, or processual confraternity of age-mates precisely linked by the time of birth. “The wish to be a man expresses itself here in a form and content different from the ones that we know in European societies,” say the Ortigueses. “In Europe, young Oedipus wishes to be a rival in tasks, actions, and realizations; it is a rivalry that is manifest by objective sanction,” or we could say that the objectifiable nature of goals acts to mediate the rivalry—making a better boat, for instance, or hurling a discus farther than another. In brief, it seems that the socius of the objectifiable aim may be called competitive. In the Senegalese field, rivalry is accentuated by a stress on status, on prestige. It has to do with demonstrating or showing a certain image of the self to the “brothers,” or of doing what they believe conforms with the image in the eyes of the brothers.

For the young Dakarois whom we saw, plans for the future. . . were hardly based on performance or personalized activity, as it was in small measure a question of inventing something, or exceeding some achievement, but was tied up with the theme of giving oneself to be looked at. [Il est peu question d’inventer quoi que ce soit, ou de dépasser qui ce soit, sinon en se donnant à regarder.] A subject might have said, for instance, that he wanted to wear beautiful clothes, or have a good position, but the precise activity, the métier, the vocation that supported the good position or the beautiful clothes
was not considered in and for itself. The wish, then, had less to do with a more interesting or efficacious performance of some task, but more to do with achieving higher visibility for socially prominent reasons. . . . To improve one’s status, one might say “I did this or that,” or “Such and such admires me,” or “such and such said that I was intelligent” [or] . . . “great.” . . . If a subject reported: “I have more success with the females than my buddies,” he was appealing less to his relationship with the girls in question than reflecting on the admiration or the jealousy of his comrades.73

It is difficult to decide from what the authors report about such assertions whether or not bragging among the young is common across cultures. I actually think that it might well be, but one is nevertheless struck by the importance of the specular and the spectacular here, which is precisely where Du Bois placed the significance of the look regarding the “seventh son,” albeit for radically different historical reasons.74 Yet, I believe that this stunning thematic running through a milieu of West African society is well worth keeping in mind. Though far too quick, as it were, to be given more than passing thought, the concern about “how’s it hanging”—which would mark an especially male anxiety—may actually “translate” into diasporic communities as the analogous stress on looks, prestige, success, and the entire repertoire of tensions that have to do with the outer trapping, that is, one’s appearance. The Ortigueses suggest that with all their subjects, “ref-

73. Ici l’accent est davantage mis sur l’affirmation d’un statut, d’un prestige. Il s’agit plutôt de montrer aux autres, aux “frères,” une certaine image de soi-même, de faire qu’ils y croient pour pouvoir soi-même coincider avec cette image. . . .

Pour les jeunes Dakarais que nous avons vus, les projets d’avenir, le “quand je serai grand,” ne portent guère sur des performances ou des activités personnalisées: il est peu question d’inventer quoi que ce soit, ou de dépasser quoi que ce soit, sinon en se donnant à regarder. On dira que l’on veut porter de beaux vêtements, que l’on veut veux avoir une bonne situation, mais l’activité précise, disons le métier, que suppose la bonne situation ou l’acquisition des beaux vêtements, est peu considérée pour elle-même. Le vœu est moins celui d’une activité plus intéressante ou plus efficace que d’une place plus en vue, d’une raison sociale plus éminente. Le fantasme sous-jacent est d’imaginer ce que les autres pensent en vous regardant. Pour se valoriser on dira autant: “J’ai fait ceci ou cela,” que: “Un tel m’admirait . . . Un tel a dit que j’étais intelligent . . . Un tel a dit que j’étais un grand” (ce sont là paroles d’étudiants). Si l’on dit: “J’avais plus de succès féminins que mes camarades,” ce sera moins pour évoquer ses relations avec les filles que pour renvoyer à l’admiration ou à la jalousie des camarades (OA, 101–2).

74. See note 37.
ferences to fathers and uncles bore the character of spectacle, witness, and display offered to the look of others. The child felt empowered by the father, loved by the father, when he was well-dressed by him, when he imagined others looking at him well-dressed.” 75 Among Europeans, they contend, “a boy of a certain age might think: ‘My father is stronger than a lion . . . my father has the biggest car . . . my father is rich and commanding,’ ” whereas among the young Dakarois, “the boy thinks: ‘My father is going to buy me a beautiful shirt, a beautiful suit.’ ” 76 The instances could be multiplied, they tell us, but they sum up the point: “The desire for better clothes, for more beautiful clothes, was the first desire expressed by the young men, the desire to show their father, and for those who suffered his indifference or estrangement, it was not rare to encounter an obsessive concern about appearance to the extent of seeking homosexual engagement in the search for ostentation.” 77

By “the look . . . the subject decides if he is mocked, held in contempt, thought to be disagreeable,” and so on. “The frequency with which distressful sensations were triggered by the look of another, or perceived at the level of the skin or the superficial musculature” because of another’s “regard,” was considerable in their estimation. Relatedly, the Ortigues evoked from the cases a veritable “grammar” of the look: “formidable,” “contemptuous,” “masked,” “averted,” “eyes turned sideways,” “looks and laughs,” “looks down (or lowers head)” (“formidable,” “méprisant,” “est masqué,” “détourné,” “les yeux de côté,” “regard et il rit,” “garde la tête baisée”). 78 Prominently placed in the discourse of “the first interviews was

75. Chez tous nos sujets la référence au père ou à l’oncle a le caractère d’un spectacle, d’un témoignage offert au regard des autres. . . . L’enfant se sent en puissance de père, aimé du père, quand il est bien habillé, quand il imagine les autres le regardent bien habillé (OA, 102–3).
76. Chez nous, selon son âge, un garçon pensera: “Mon père est plus fort qu’un lion . . . mon père a la plus grosse voiture . . . mon père est riche et commande . . .” Ici, l’enfant pense: “Mon père va m’acheter une belle chemise, un beau costume” (OA, 102–3).
77. Le désir d’habits meilleurs, plus beaux, est le premier désir exprimé par les jeunes garçons, désir de montrer leur père. Et chez ceux qui souffrent de son indifférence ou de son éloignement, il n’est pas rare de rencontrer un souci obsédant de leur apparence jusqu’à évoquer l’homosexualité dans la recherche apportée aux colifichets (OA, 104).
78. La fréquence avec laquelle le déclenchement de sensations douloureuses, perçues au niveau de la peau ou de la musculature superficielle, est attribué au regard des autres. Dans bien des cas, l’angoisse paraît être secondaire à la douleur perçue, à la crampe, comme si l’éprouvé corporel était directement modelé par le regard d’autrui. . . .

L’attention portée au regard dans les descriptions de comportement qui nous sont faites: il a un regard formidable; il a un regard méprisant; il est masqué; il a un regard
the subject's concern about the troubling look; from instances of hysteria, having to do with a transient evil eye \( [d'un\ mal\ aux\ yeux\ passager] \) . . . to fantasies surging up in the here and now, we were always told: 'Je ne me donne pas le droit de voir,' " Because one's own look is disabled, or because one cannot seize the right to look, as I understand this, which frequently occurs in one's own bad dreams, perhaps we bear this rubric away from the scene: "The sight appears as a privileged place of castration" here (OA, 105).

By a detour off the customary path, the oedipal problematic travels in this instance through the peer group, snared in the coils of looking and being seen. The Ortigueses do not pause to elaborate on what is, to my mind, a point of saturation in their itinerary that could possibly bridge across Old and New World African cultures in a consideration of unconscious material, but I am not, for all that, claiming that there would be good reason on that basis to pose or even anticipate moments of a transhistorical (black) collective psyche. Nevertheless it seems to me that any sustained investigation along these lines might usefully isolate the gaze in its discrete cultural property as a route of organization for a comparative reading of intersubjective signals in divergent lifeworlds. But I should try to be clear about this. The inquiry that I am describing would occur under some other auspices than that of the psychoanalytic, even though it might be informed by its protocols. In any case, the look and its dynamics would bring to focus several topics that come together in the name of subjectivity, that is, the extent to which self-formation is authored elsewhere, in the split between the wanna-be and its objectivations in the place of another. The eyes in this case are nothing more or less than the crucial relay of a "message" that either proffers or denies, though denial, as we know, is also a most powerful offer. The tales of the young Dakarois reinforce the unthinkable—it is all too often up to someone else—and for my money, we have little idea what this particular exchange of subtextual motives, "choreographed" in the rise and fall of the eyelid, actually "sounds" like in cultural theory concerning black communities. Relatedly, is there not this conundrum: If the young male consultants of the Ortigueses' "récits" are bound to the "look" of others—as feminist film theorists have suggested that the female "star" is\(^{79}\)—then what revision-

ary notions might be introduced to the conceptualization of the gaze as *heterosexual* currency? At least to the extent that it induces more questions than it disposes of, the “récit” of the consultation expands the genre of narrative art.

The coil of the looks for the Ortigueses, however, is entirely related to the psychoanalytic aims of *Oedipe africain*, and that is to explore how the oedipal crisis—finding one’s place in the social order—is resolved in a cultural context where the symbolic function of the father remains tied to the ancestors. We can only sketch out a few more details of this running narrative:

1. In the case where the father mediates between the dead ancestors and the living sons, the sons cannot think of themselves as the equal of the ancestor (and therefore not the father either) and certainly not his superior. What one must confront instead is the right to claim his place within the group, as castration here is based on the collective register of obedience to the law of the dead, the law of the ancestors. To be excluded from the group or abandoned by it is the equivalent of castration (see OA, 75). When Samba, in the case that we have examined, was confronted by the baobab tree in his disturbing dream, he was essentially coming face-to-face, as it were, with a representative ancestral figure, as the baobab holds a privileged place in the culture as the site of the wisdom of the dead and of the living fathers. It is, therefore, collectively possessed. The appearance of the tree in the young man’s dream apparently signaled his arrival on the threshold of manhood.

In contrasting European Oedipus with its African equivalent, the Ortigueses suggest that the youth in the latter setting does not imagine killing the father but must be referred to the ancestors through him.

2. Because the ancestor is “déjà mort” and “inattaquable” the sons constitute their brothers in rivalry, the group that they must enter. This horizontal social arrangement yields two crucial representations—“the collective phallus and the unbeatable ancestor,” which conduces to “the game of rivalry-solidarity between the brothers.” In this setup, everything that the brothers do regarding one another acquires profound weight, inasmuch as one’s successful achievement of status is predicated on it. “Rivalry, then, appears to be systematically displaced onto the ‘brothers’ who polarize the aggressive drives,” as “aggression itself is primarily expressed under the form of persecutive reaction-formations.” “The network of intersubjective relations would be strongly colored here by the fact that everyone is easily perceived as both vulnerable to persecution” and capable of serving its
ends through the medium of a superior force or talisman. "Under all circumstances, it is appropriate to protect oneself against harmful intentions," against apparently aggressive moves in the other, which energy, the authors observe, is deflected away from self-affirmation through action toward self-defense. "Blame, then, is barely internalized or constituted as such," since the material cause of the harm "lies outside oneself," where the "badness" reigns: "Everything happens as if the individual cannot bear to be perceived as internally divided and driven by contradictory desires." Les Structures anthropologiques and Oedipe africain seem to strike a common chord on this point. We would also read Samba's predicament in this light.80

"To the extent that the aggressive drives are not projected onto another, the subject remains conscious of them, but represses them, tries to control them. Aggressive fantasies and emotions might then take the route of the secretive, muted, destructive, unacknowledgeable material about which silence is deemed appropriate," because mouthing it might "'discourage my parents,'" or "‘they would count against me,’" or expressing it would expose one's vulnerability, his "location," as it were. "Often, somatizations appeared as a means of inhibiting the instantaneous expression of fantasies and aggressive impulses." What might occur in the event of a repression is the dissimulation of mistrust and suspicion under the guise of an "imperturbable gentilesse" that is aimed at warding off a blow. But such a "separate peace" might not yield the expected "detente," but could well result in "immediate depression" or the "emergence of aggressive fantasies."

80. Dans le modèle européen du complexe d'Oedipe, le fils s'imagine tuant le père. Ici la pente typique serait plutôt: le fils se référant par l'intermédiaire du père à l'ancêtre déjà mort donc inattaquable et constituant ses "frères" en rivaux. C'est pourquoi les représentations que nous avons utilisées, phallos collectif, ancêtre inégalable, ne peuvent se comprendre qu'en fonction du terme où elles conduisent, le jeu de la rivalité-solidarité entre les frères. . . .

La rivalité nous paraît tout d'abord être systématiquement déplacée sur les "frères" qui polarisent les pulsions agressives. . . . L'agressivité s'exprime principalement sous la forme de réactions persécutives. . . . L'ensemble des rapports interpersonnels est fortement coloré par le fait que chacun se perçoit facilement comme persécuté. On pourrait dire qu'une partie de l'énergie qui, dans un autre contexte, serait employée à s'affirmer en agissant, est ici consommée à se défendre. En toutes circonstances, il convient de se protéger des intentions menaçantes. . . .

La culpabilité est peu intériorisée ou constituée comme telle. Tout se passe comme si l'individu ne pouvait pas supporter de se percevoir divisé intérieurement, mobilisé par des désirs contradictoires. Le "mauvais" est toujours situé à l'extérieur de moi, il est du domaine de la fatalité, du sort, de la volonté de Dieu (OA, 79, 92, 93, 94).
Unless a subject sought solitude in order to protect himself against anxiety reactions that had become overwhelming, the young consultants described to us the high degree to which they felt compelled to be with their friends . . . , to be part of the group, of the crowd. Even if nothing of particular importance accrued from a sporting event, a dance outing, an interminable round of talk . . . , the real thing was the presence of others—necessary and reassuring—in keeping the latent aggressive fantasies in the background.81

Could it be that male bonding or confraternity is based on keeping the latent aggressive fantasies at bay? In that sense, perhaps, the solidarity piece of the rivalrous relations would sheathe, at all times, a decidedly violent possibility, all the more so for what it covers over. The “gang” in diasporic communities may well replicate this pattern of repression and closure.

We recall that the social formation of the brothers, banished in the Freudian myth for the crime of patricide and other impressive infamies, is the triggering mechanism of the incest taboo and the cut into human community. But Freud’s exiled issue have the opportunity to “return” with the boon of guilt. As we think about the African Oedipus, according to the Ortigueses’ sketch of it, several half-formed, obscure questions crowd in: Did African Oedipus show a break in the fabric of narrative, in the incontestable roll and continuity of generation after generation, reaching the shores of death and the “full fatherhood” (“père à part entière” [OA, 110]), by way of the Atlantic slave trade? The question springs to mind from a suggestive passage in Claude Meillassoux’s Maidens, Meal, and Money, wherein Meillassoux, in elaborating the role of elders and juniors in the African “domestic com-

81... dans la mesure où les pulsions agressives ne sont pas projetées, on peut constater qu’elles sont conscientes mais réprimées, contrôlées, non exprimées. Les fantasmes ou émots agressifs sont présents comme une longue souffrance, sourde et secrète, écrasante, inavouable qu’il convient de taire “pour ne pas décourager mes parents” . . . “parce qu’ils comptent sur moi” et aussi pour ne pas se montrer vulnérable. Bien souvent des somatisations apparaissent comme le moyen d’inhiber dans l’instant l’expression des fantasmes ou impulsions agressives. Le comportement de ces sujets est de méfiance dissimulée sous une imperturbable gentillesse visant à ne pas donner prise aux attaques. . . . A moins qu’ils ne recherchent la solitude pour se protéger des contacts devenus trop anxiogènes, les jeunes gens décrivent tous comment ils sont poussés irrésistiblement à aller avec les amis, comment pour eux être “bien” (heureux, dynamique) c’est être partie d’un groupe, d’une foule. Peu importe souvent qu’il s’agisse d’une réunion sportive, dansante, de palabres interminables (“faire la nuit blanche”) . . . . La présence des autres est rassurante, nécessaire; elle désamorce ou repousse à l’arrière-plan les fantasmes agressifs latents (OA, 95–96).
munity," cites other historical research on the matter: populations that had been “brutally subjected to the effects of the European slave trade" often used the juniors not only as producers, “but ultimately commodities as well.” Their severity toward them exaggerated by greed, the elders banished the juniors “for real or imagined crimes,” as the young “were transformed into goods for the slave trade.” The latter, of course, bears none of the advantages of myth but shows some of its earmarks, as the Atlantic trade might be thought of as one of the founding events of modern history and economy. But for our purposes here, the execrable trade, in radically altering the social system in Old and New World “domestic community,” is as violent and disruptive as the never-did-happenstance of mythic and oneiric inevitability. In other words, this historical event, like a myth, marks so rigorous a transition in the order of things that it launches a new way of gauging time and human origin: it underwrites, in short, a new genealogy defined by a break with Tradition—with the Law of the Ancestors and the paternal intermediary.

From my perspective, then, African Oedipus is the term that mediates a new symbolic order. It allows us to see that “father” designates a function rather than, as Meillassoux points out, a “genitor”: the father is “he who nourishes and protects you, and who claims your produce and labor in return.” In that regard, the African Oedipus removes the element of sentimentality from the myth and exposes it as a structure of relations instead. The riddle of origin that the Oedipus is supposed to constitute, first, as a crisis, then as a resolution of order and degree, was essentially canceled by the Atlantic trade, as the “crisis,” for all intents and purposes, has continued on the other side, the vantage from which I am writing. I spoke earlier about a subject in discourse, crossed by stigmata, as the psychoanalytic difference that has yet to be articulated. I am defining the stigmatized subject as he or she whose access to discourse must be established as a human right and cannot be assumed. I am specifically referring here to the history of slavery in the Americas and not only its traditions and practices of “chattel property” but, related to it, the strictures against literacy imposed on the bonded. Inasmuch as classical psychoanalytic practice works to transform symptomaticity into a narrative, I take it that discourse constitutes its primary value. The raced subject in an American context must, therefore, work his way through a layered imperative and impediment, which deeply impli-

83. Meillassoux, Maidens, Meal, and Money, 47.
icates History in any autobiographical itinerary. I think that I am prepared to say that those markings on the social body of New World Africanity are the stripes of an oedipal crisis (for male and female children) that can only be cleared away now by a “confrontation” with the “scene” of its occurrence, but as if in myth. In other words, the discontinuity that the abandoned son demarcates here must be carried out as a kind of new article of faith in the non-Traditional, in the discovery of the Law of the living, not the dead, and in the circulation of a new social energy that confronts the future, not the past.

Carrying out that line of thinking, we might be able to see in an apposite psychoanalytic protocol for the subjects of “race,” broken away from the point of origin, which rupture has left a hole that speech can only point to and circle around, an entirely new repertoire of inquiry into human relations. Perhaps I come out here where I least expected: Fanon, to that extent—my history must not imprison me, once I recognize it for what it is—might well have been right.

6

Among all the things you could be by now, if Sigmund Freud’s wife were your mother, is someone who understands the dozens, the intricate verboseness of America’s inner city. The big-mouth brag, as much a sort of art form as a strategy of insult, the dozens takes the assaulted home to the backbone by “talking about” his mama and daddy. It is a choice weapon of defense and always changes the topic; bloodless, because it is all winding words and outrageous combinations of imagery, and democratic, because anyone can play and be played, it outsmarts the Uzi—not that it is pleasant for all that—by re-siting (and “reciting”? ) the stress. The game of living, after all, is played between the ears, up in the head. Instead of dispatching a body, one straightens its posture; instead of offering up a body, one sends his word. It is the realm of the ludic and the ludicrous that the late jazz bassist Charlie Mingus was playing around in when he concocted, as if on the spot, the title of the melody from which the title of this essay is borrowed. Responding to his own question—“What does it mean?”—that he poses to himself on the recording, he follows along the lines of his own cryptic signature, “Nothing. It means nothing.” And what he proceeds to perform on the cut is certainly no thing we know. But that really is the point—to extend the realm of possibility for what might be known, and, not unlike the dozens, we will not easily decide if it is fun.
We traditionally understand the psychoanalytic in a pathological register, and there must be a very real question as to whether or not it remains psychoanalysis without its principal features—a “third ear,” something like the “fourth wall,” or the speech that unfolds in the pristinely silent arena of two star witnesses—a patient and he or she “who is supposed to know.” The scene of assumptions is completed in the privileged relations of client and doctor in the atmosphere of the confessional. But my interest in this ethical self-knowing wants to unhook the psychoanalytic hermeneutic from its rigorous curative framework and try to recover it in a free-floating realm of self-didactic possibility that might decentralize and disperse the knowing one. We might need help here, for sure, but the uncertainty of where we’d be headed virtually makes no guarantee of that. Out here, the only music they are playing is Mingus’s, or much like it, and I should think that it would take a good long time to learn to hear it well.