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THE END OF HISTORY OR THE INVENTION OF EXISTENCE

Critical Thought and Thinking about the Human

The real leap consists in introducing invention into existence. —FRANTZ FANON

One cannot “unsettle” the coloniality of power without a redescription of the human outside of the terms of our own present descriptive statement of the human.

—SYLVIA WYNTER

Crim, you can take it from me. If I ever give you freedom, Crim, then all your future is mine, 'cause whatever you do in freedom name is what I make happen.

—GEORGE LAMMING

I BEGIN THIS final lecture by expressing my deep appreciation to all of you who have attended this lecture series. Your engaging comments and questions have been important, making it more like a conversation than a formal lecture series. You may recall that I began this lecture series, or conversation, by stating that I was trying to do three things. First, I was not working through any theory of power but rather was attempting to think about our current moment. Reformulating the meaning of the phrase *empire of liberty*, I posited a possible language in which we might think about the relationship between power, domination, and the questions of freedom and desire today. Second, I suggested that the current description of our present condition, particularly in regard to America, as a “state of exception” generated by the policies of the Bush Administration,

is ahistorical. Third, I was making an attempt to shift some of the categories we commonly deploy. With reference to the ahistorical character of the “state of exception” and American power, I suggested the following: if we use “state of exception” to describe the current moment of domestic American power, we miss the historical “sites of exception,” racial slavery and dependent Native American nations, which have always been constituted by American power. As a consequence, I have argued that within the United States the systems of racial slavery and the conquest of the indigenous population meant that laws in these communities were never about rights but were always about death, torture, and pain. This is not an original point, and it emerges from my understanding of the labors of the radical black intellectual tradition and its various writers and thinkers, particularly W. E. B. DuBois.

But I also find it interesting that Walter Benjamin, in his “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” makes a similar point when discussing the idea of “states of emergency.” In his discussion, Benjamin makes the compelling case that “the tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the ‘state of emergency’ in which we live is not the exception but the rule. We must attain to a conception of history that is in keeping with this insight.”¹ This is an important point to which I will return. I will suggest that one of the major problems of critical thought today is that it does not focus on the traditions of the oppressed as they relate to thought.

In my second lecture, I posited the idea that, when thinking about questions of race and democracy, it may be useful to rethink the idea that democracy is an incomplete project to be completed by a series of prefixes, whether radical, direct, or participatory. Rather, we should see democracy as an empty signifier and a horizon always described by its lack. I argued that democracy was formulated in Western thought in response to a series of questions about the construction of political rule and, to paraphrase Maurice Godelier, was born out of the basic political relations in Greece between “citizens

and noncitizens, free men and slaves.” In such a context, democracy could be theorized, but the conflict between freemen and slaves was invisible and thus not theorized.

Of course, while Solon’s reforms led to the abolition of debt bondage, they did not abolish slavery. After the reforms, slaves in Greek society were imported and as foreigners were called barbarians. These slaves were outside the polity, while democracy was within the polis, so that one dimension of Greek freedom was the freedom to enslave the barbarian. That freedom belonged to the freeborn Greek male, whether he was an aristocrat or commoner. Greek freedom allowed the enslavement of another. It was a freedom predicated upon enslavement. It was the kind of freedom that was practiced during the period of racial slavery in America. In Greek society the slave was reduced to the state of an animate tool. In Aristotle’s words, the slave was “a part of the master in the sense of being but a separate part of his body.”² In such a context, the slave was human chattel, listed as the “first and most indispensable kind of property.”³ Following the arguments of the Caribbean historian Elsa Goveia, I made the point that racial slavery was a system in which the slave was “property in the person.” From this perspective, I argued in the second lecture that human groups who experience racial slavery and colonialism in what I have been calling colonial modernity experience historical and social trauma. They experience historical trauma in which social wounds cannot simply be erased by democratic inclusion. Instead, these wounds produce cries, not laments. These cries force upon us another set of questions—about living, about what we are, and about the nature of freedom itself.

I also suggested that when we think of political modernity, we should rethink what we mean. When making this suggestion I posited that the encounter between what has been called the Old World and the New World, which was initiated by the voyages of Columbus beginning in 1492, should be seen as the inaugural event of modernity, indeed, as the *instituting event*.⁴ By this I mean that

Columbus's voyages opened a new epoch, changed the relationships between what was thought possible and what was thought impossible, and broke the bounds of then-accepted temporalities, ushering in different configurations and framing new questions for human societies. Acknowledging the Columbian voyages as an instituting event means opening up another set of pathways into the meanings of political modernity and politics, meanings that are central to this lecture series.

My third lecture concerned violence. I engaged with Hannah Arendt, quarreled with her view that the presence of violence evacuates power, and noted that she misses the complex character of power. Contrary to Arendt, I suggested that violence can be power and that in its performance as power violence seeks to trap bodies. As power, violence does not necessarily make death its primary objective, and sometimes death becomes a means to an end. Violence as power is about enforcing discipline and an order based upon frequent enactments of death. Because of violence's intimate relationship to pain and death, we tend to see it as existing outside the boundaries of power. I therefore wish to link violence and power once again. When discussing violence, I shifted from the registers of intellectual history and political theory and reported on an ethnographic study that I conducted on violence in Jamaica. The study focused on an inner city and a group of young men called Shottas. This study led to my own understanding of the ways in which death became a performance of a "negative self-fashioning freedom," a self-fashioning that operates in the direction of negating life.

It has been critical to review the main elements of my previous arguments, since they situate this final lecture. From my first lecture, I have been tracking the ways in which power is constructed, the ways in which we as human beings become subjects. I have also been arguing that we live at a historical juncture that cannot be described in the way that Arendt described parts of the twentieth century, as simply "dark times." I have been arguing that perhaps we live in a moment in which power organizes itself as *free-dom*

and in doing so both obscures and directs our intellectual energies so that it is difficult to think in new ways.⁵ One of the purposes of these lectures is to suggest possible directions for thinking anew, and it is to this that I now turn.

Habits of Thinking

Let me begin my reflections on thinking anew by first referring to our current habits. Our present habits of thinking linger in part because we have not examined how they were acquired and in part because we often think in historical analogies rather than historically. But there is another reason why many of us have not been able to break our habits of the mind. That reason has to do with what I call *epistemological location*. In the field of critical political theory and thought, a series of events (the American Revolution, the French Revolution, the Commune in Paris, the formation of the Soviets in 1905, the Spanish Civil War of 1936, May 1968, and the Portuguese Revolution of 1974) have become the primary sources and resources of critique. Some of these events continue to stimulate our radical political imagination. This is so much the case that Alan Badiou speaks of the “unconquerable nostalgia of May 1968” while proclaiming in 1988, before the collapse of apartheid in South Africa, that the “Age of Revolution is over.” The aforementioned events are important, but they are not the only ones that can be deployed as resources for critical thinking. But I am not talking simply about constructing a broader field of events or correcting epistemic blind spots through fuller representations. Rather, I am pointing to a *way of thinking*, a genealogy of how critical and radical theory runs along certain tracks already constructed for it.

I will make my point concretely. In a book that attempts to work through possible meanings of human emancipation for our times, Alex Callinicos notes that “Eurocentrism is deeply embedded in historical thought.”⁶ He then confronts the implications of this statement and calls for a decentering of European history and thought

as the singular model of human progress. Yet Callinicos is unable to think deeply about the implications of his own judgment. The question before us is not about fuller and more complete representation of human cultures in the domain of thought, specifically critical thought. If this were the primary matter at stake, then only the broadening and diversification of our intellectual resources would be required. So while I agree that there is both an ethical and intellectual necessity for decentering Western thought, something else is required. What is that something? It is this. When we decenter, from what gaze do we decenter? From what angle do we begin to ask questions?

Some time ago, Walter Benjamin observed that thinking “involves not only the flow of thoughts, but their arrest as well.”⁷ To confront the arrest of thought, we need to decenter and to engage in intellectual pluralism. But we need to ask new questions that emerge from this process of decentering, questions that shift the old ones that we have become acquainted with. To get to these questions, we may have to reorder the categories of thought in which we do social and critical theory. The operation that DuBois successfully achieved in *Black Reconstruction* makes that text relevant today. My argument about habits of thinking concerns how the categories of thought that frame our thinking have become so fixed that even when we decenter we examine with the same eyes. Thus we are not able to see the different questions raised either about freedom or political life, questions that reside, in the words of Sylvia Wynter, between the “interstices of history.”⁸ For the remainder of this lecture, I will attempt to operate from within those interstices as I see them, while thinking about critical thought. In the end I will point to one possible ground from which we may begin to elaborate a radical politics. In the development of my arguments for this lecture, two figures are important as sources. The first is Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, and the second is Frantz Fanon.

Hegel and the End of History

I begin with Hegel and the end of history. I do not wish to rehabilitate Hegel (he does not need my assistance for this to happen), but I find it intriguing that in the last decade or so, one of his central ideas has come to frame some currents of hegemonic Western thought. So in terms of some of the issues facing critical thought, we can productively begin by thinking about the end of history.

In his *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, Hegel notes that “every state is an end in itself, its internal development and evolution follow a necessary progression whereby the rational, i.e. justice and the consolidation of freedom gradually emerges.”⁹ For Hegel, “freedom is the one authentic property of the spirit,” which is self-consciousness. Thus, when he writes that the work of the spirit is “to produce itself, to make itself its own object, and to gain knowledge of itself in this way to exist for itself,” we know that Hegel is thinking about man existing in a search for his essence. For Hegel, such a search is both teleological and theological. In Hegel’s view the spirit is a product of itself, and it strives to fulfill its capacity and its desire. Once this striving has been achieved, “the end in the historical process is the freedom of the subject . . . and the end of the world spirit is realized through the freedom of each individual.” This is his teleological point. To make his theological point, since “God is omnipresent, he is present in everyone and appears in everyone’s consciousness; and this is the world spirit,”¹⁰ the spirit becomes God’s wish. Hopefully we do not need to be reminded that for Hegel the history of the world moves from East to West; in his view, Africa has no history. And it is interesting that the notion of the “end of history” emerges with the apparent triumph of Western liberalism at the end of the Cold War.

But before we proceed further, I draw your attention to one aspect of Nietzsche’s reading of Hegel. In his *Untimely Meditations*, Nietzsche is critical of the drive for completeness in German philosophy and of the ways in which this drive works by revealing itself to itself. Of course, this is not peculiar to Hegel but pertains to

a significant segment of Western thought, in spite of more recent attempts by a set of thinkers to critique totality in what we may call the post-structuralist moment. However, I am presently interested in how this drive in Western thought becomes part of the practices of contemporary power at the level of discourse, and in how, in doing this, it ties itself into a hard, tripartite knot of freedom, man, and God.

Obviously therefore, when I speak of the end of history, I am not referring to Francis Fukuyama's 1993 book *The End Of History and the Last Man*. Rather, I am pointing to the close fit in some strains of dominant contemporary Western thought between questions about the essence of man, history, and God. Let me recall for you President George W. Bush's third State of the Union address: "We go forward with confidence, because this call of history has come to the right country, the liberty we prize is not America's gift to the world, it is God's gift to humanity. . . . we do not claim to know all the ways of Providence, yet we can trust in them, placing our confidence in the loving God behind all of life, and all of history."¹¹ Some would argue that what we have in this statement is a return to the religious or the theological in dominant and hegemonic thought. But let me ask, when has Western thought been fully free of the theo-political? When have we ever lived in a fully post-religious world? And, by juxtaposition, do we live in a post-secular world? By post-secular I do not necessarily mean an increase in the meaningfulness of religion but rather a changed attitude toward the modern state's own secularist self-understanding. One current, dominant strain of thought holds that *free-dom* becomes the telos, becomes the matrix for the end of human history, and that within such a framework history becomes the working out of a fateful destiny. This is not the telos of a striving toward human perfectibility but rather one of arrival at a destination that unfolds through strife and in which the arrival now signals closure. Jacques Derrida once noted that striving toward perfectibility can be a source of perversion. It seems to me that perversion also happens when there is

closure, when the striving becomes absolute, when freedom becomes closed, not open.

How does the idea of the end of history relate to the current conjuncture of globalization, our current modernity, and what I call the empire of liberty? At the level of political economy, we know that globalization creates concentrations of wealth alongside vast exclusion and misery. Within this logic of unequal structures, globalization is *urbi et orbi*, everywhere and anywhere operating as a kind of hyperbolic accumulation that strives not just to homogenize the globe but to be a totality. When discussing globalization, Jean-Luc Nancy observes that “the West has come to encompass the world.”¹² Nancy also remarks that when this happens, the West disappears. I would disagree. In his essay “The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power,” Stuart Hall notes that the West is an idea, a concept that conjures verbal and visual languages, models of comparison, and criteria of evaluation.¹³ So within the framework of globalization, the West does not disappear but consolidates its power. Jean-Luc Nancy states that, as a civilization, the West represented the universal and reason. He then notes that up until now “one cannot say that any other configuration of the world or any other philosophy of the universal and of reason have challenged that course.”¹⁴ I do not wish to critique this statement other than to observe that this is an extreme case of epistemological location. Is it not possible that the critical thought of the West is exhausted? In other words, might there exist another possible meaning for the end of history, not the fulfillment of reason, nor that of freedom and self-consciousness, but rather the “end of the history” for the universalism of the West as the *only* generative concept and language for the project of human emancipation? Please note that I am not speaking here of the end of meta-narratives, nor the flexible network of language games that, in Lyotard’s view, requires “agonistics as a founding principle” in a so-called postmodern period. Rather, I am speaking about categories of thought embedded within language, categories that blind us so that we cannot see new questions.

In 1951 Hannah Arendt observed that, since the nineteenth century, Western political thought had remained “impenetrably silent and insular in confronting specifically modern questions.”¹⁵ I take this one step further to suggest that when colonialism, empire, and racial slavery, as instituting events of modernity, are excluded from the conceptual frameworks of political and critical thought, then that thought becomes what the late Clifford Geertz called “local knowledge.”¹⁶

Ethics and Critical Thought

One current attempt to grapple with this problem in critical political and social thought and criticism is a turn to ethics. In this ethical turn Emmanuel Levinas is an important figure. And rightly so, since his elaboration of *the ethics of the other* in part flows from his grappling with the character of Nazism as a totality and as a system of domination through death and pain. Part of Levinas’s critique stems from his understanding that freedom and, as a consequence, human creativity were made impossible by Fascism. Of course, critiques of Fascism remain a touchstone and have generated much critical thought in Western political theory.¹⁷ The point here is that historically catastrophic events generate their own questions. So if a particular set of questions emerged from one set of catastrophic events, what questions emerge from others? Here I am pointing to the relationships of catastrophic events to each other and the traces they leave in our contemporary world. So I am not arguing for a narrow conception of thought of this or that intellectual tradition, nor am I suggesting that traditions operate in isolated silos. Rather, I am positing that the questions posed to us by the inauguration of colonial modernity work to shape our contemporary questions and that we continue to ignore them or do not recognize their centrality. Let me take one example.

At the level of polity, the questions that emerged with Thomas Hobbes in the seventeenth century concerned rule and sovereign

power. Hobbes himself notes that he developed his ideas when England was “burning with the questions of the rights of rulers and the duties of subjects, forerunners of an approaching war.”¹⁸ In this context he writes, “I authorize and give up my right of governing myself, to this man or assembly of men on the condition, that thou give up thy right to him and authorize all his actions in like manner.”¹⁹ From this perspective Hobbes constructs a sovereign power and, in a moment of metaphorical thinking, compares sovereign power to the case of a child’s submission to a father. It is crucial to note that, when Hobbes discusses laying aside rights, he says it is done either by renunciation or by transfer. In other words, the individual willingly gives up his or her rights for a common purpose. This was not the situation with colonial conquest. By the seventeenth century, when European colonial empires already held sway, another series of questions was being posed about rule, subjects, and rights. These questions were of a different character than the ones Hobbes formulated and attempted to answer. One episode that illuminates these different questions was the debate between Bartolomé de Las Casas and Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda in 1550. The nub of the debate was the question posed by Sepúlveda: on what basis could the rights of the conquered native populations in the New World be abrogated? The debate between Las Casas and Sepúlveda concerned the basis for the denial of rights, not sovereign rule. The political logics of these two questions move in two different directions. Thus one question that faces us in critical thought is broached by the debate between Las Casas and Sepúlveda: how does the abrogation of rights relate to and shape the conception of rights itself? It is clear that when we ask this question, we are on different grounds of political thought and philosophy. In other words, the issues raised by colonial power about conquest, possession, and the intellectual basis for creating systems of servitude over groups of people are political logics that complicate not only rule and rights but also our responses to them. I am arguing that the discourses and practices that opposed various abrogations offer us insights that we may add

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to our repertoire of critical thought. Let me give you one final example of what I mean. The eighteenth-century English historian and planter Bryan Edwards, a figure sympathetic to colonial power, observes that for colonial government, “the leading principle on which the government is supported is fear; or a sense of that absolute coercive necessity which leaving no choice of action, *supercedes all questions of rights*”²⁰ (emphasis mine). The political logics of these sets of practices unfold another set of debates in a different direction.

Rights and Abrogation

At the core of the abrogation of rights, coercion, and wars of conquest was the central question of who and what is a human being. For Western thought this question of the human has been answered in different ways, ranging from man’s relationship to the divine, to Cartesian anxieties about the body, to Martin Heidegger’s notion of a being that is created out of a void but that is nevertheless connected. However, within the domain of conventional scholarship, we have not spent much time thinking about this question of who and what is a human being from the perspective of human beings who were considered to be non-human beings. This means that our answers about the human typically have a framing, normative perspective that draws from dominant discourse. This allows many of these answers to operate within a philosophical *anthropos* of white or European normativeness. Paul Ricoeur tells us that history is a flux of events and that within that flux the advent of “man” was mediated.²¹ Let me twist Ricoeur a bit: the flux of the event (colonial modernity) inaugurated both man and knowledge of man. This knowledge leaves deposits and traces that we have to wrestle with. Today we need to recognize the limits of these deposits and traces. So let me return to the end of history, and suggest that there needs to be another end of history.

It is a conceptual end of history. It is an end of history for reason, not as meta-narrative but as particular categories of thought about

the human that presently reside in dominant philosophical anthropology.²² Perhaps we are at a moment in the history of critical thought in which the labor of the negative is to create anew. For help in this labor, I turn to my second figure, Frantz Fanon.

Fanon and the New

Why Fanon? At the end of John Edgar Wideman's recent novel *Fanon*, the author creates an imaginary political meeting attended by Fanon. Before Fanon speaks to the meeting, Wideman uses the narrator's voice to meditate on maps. Invoking a certain mapping of the world, a mapping that erases others, Wideman as narrator writes, "Fanon understands it, the map that erases him by erasing itself by erasing him, can be flipped over to its unwritten side and then perhaps you could begin a fresh drawing of the world."²³ I think about critical thought from within the interstices of history by working through Fanon because he is, I believe, a twentieth-century figure who has posed some questions about our contemporary world.

A little over a decade ago, Stuart Hall raised a similar question: "Why Fanon?"²⁴ Making the point that every rereading is ultimately political, Hall suggests that part of the attraction of *Black Skin, White Masks* is its multivocality. He also argues that Fanon misconstrued Lacan, Freud, and Hegel and that these acts of misconstrual produced remarkable insights. On the other hand, Lewis Gordon in his 1995 text *Fanon and the Crisis of European Man* argued that Fanon continues to be relevant in broad terms. Gordon notes, "Fanon embodies a crisis in the very effort to study and forge a better world for human beings. The crisis itself has been articulated as a form of bad faith in which the ability to construct a *tomorrow* is concealed."²⁵ Both of these positions were part of a debate at the time about Fanon. So what is the politics by which I am offering a rereading of segments of *Black Skin, White Masks*? My preoccupation has been with representation and subjectivity and how they are profoundly shaped by power's drive for total domination. I would

argue that the theorist and activist Fanon was supremely concerned with these matters.

By working with Fanon in this way I am neither rehabilitating him as a Caribbean thinker, nor even as a postcolonial figure necessary to the field of postcolonial studies. Instead I want to work with and through some of the questions he posed, because from his location as a colonized, racialized subject he formulated a series of basic questions that continue to resonate in our present. My argument is not about whether we are beyond Fanon or not, rather it is about thinking through the questions he posed, not the answers he gave. I issue a caveat here. These questions are not perpetual ones existing for all time, but they were posed so sharply in a context of profound global changes at the time that perhaps we have yet to face their enormous implications. At another level, I wish to think with and through Fanon in this lecture because he confronts Hegel and overturns the idea of the other as a permanent fixture of human ways of living. In doing this, I am following the lead of Charles Long, who with reference to Hegel's master-slave dialectic notes that the "hardness of life was not the oppressor; the oppressor was the occasion, for the experience but not the datum of the experience itself."²⁶

As I think through Fanon, I offer a rereading of the last two chapters of *Black Skin, White Masks* and the last chapter of *The Wretched of the Earth*. But before we examine these texts, let me say something about Fanon's writing.

For Fanon, writing was about engagement and a form of criticism in which language could be used to shape new categories. Categories are never stable for Fanon; he forms them, deploys them, and then releases them, thereby creating a style of writing in which his own restlessness becomes the operating principle. In Fanon's writing there is improvisation as he confronts reality, shakes it, and then recasts the categories in which we think about a set of specific issues. In Fanon's thought, colonialism and racism are systems of power and linguistic events with different levels of insertion into the

world. Consequently his writing is constructed through different registers of the speech-act in which temporalities are often juxtaposed.

In perhaps one of the finest readings of Fanon, Ato Sekyí-Otu observes that “Fanon’s discourse was dramaturgical in form.”²⁷ He then adds that Fanon writes in a language of “political experience.” Fanon’s texts themselves are political acts; they form a narrative of the political while participating in and defining the political. I have spent a moment reflecting on Fanon’s writing because it is within the act of writing, which is similar to *the act of making*, that we begin to see another aspect of Fanon’s radical political praxis.

The last two chapters of *Black Skin, White Masks* are devoted to two issues, “The Negro and Recognition,” and a conclusion that invokes Karl Marx’s *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. Within the chapter “The Negro and Recognition,” I want to focus on the segment titled “The Negro and Hegel.” Fanon tells us that he turns to Hegel because the “Black man is a former slave,” and he wishes to confront this history of slavery and its meanings for the present by juxtaposing one of the core models of the Western master-slave dialectic with racial slavery. For Fanon, Hegel’s master-slave dialectic is one in which the drive of the dialectic is an “absolute reciprocity which must be emphasized.” He cites Hegel’s *Phenomenology of the Mind* and notes that for Hegel both the slave and the master had to recognize “themselves as mutually recognizing each other.”²⁸ In Fanon’s reading of Hegel, in order to be oneself, to be human, “the concept of recognition is essential.”²⁹ For the Hegelian master-slave dialectic to operate, both slave and master must desire reciprocal recognition. However, in Fanon’s thinking this master-slave dialectic is untenable with regard to racial slavery. As he notes in a remarkable footnote that rips the master-slave dialectic asunder, “I hope I have shown that here the master differs basically from the master described by Hegel. For Hegel there is reciprocity; here the master laughs at the consciousness of the slave. What he wants from the slave is not recognition but work.”³⁰

But what does the slave want? Here I would argue that Fanon is ambiguous and that he gets the historical record of slave revolts in the Caribbean wrong due to his narrow focus on French-speaking islands, which excludes Haiti. Fanon is very specific in addressing French abolitionism. He is not referring to abolitionism in general when he notes, “the black man contented himself with thanking the white man, and the most forceful proof of the fact is the impressive number of statues erected all over France and the colonies to show the white France stroking the kinky hair of this nice Negro whose chains had just been broken.”³¹ Fanon has French abolitionism in mind when he says, “The White man, in the capacity of master, said to the Negro, ‘From now on you are free.’”³² He continues, “But the Negro knows nothing of the cost of freedom for he has not fought for it. From time to time he has fought for liberty and justice, but these were always white liberty and white justice.”³³ For Fanon the slave desires “to be like the master. . . . in Hegel the slave turns away from the master and turns toward the object. Here the slave turns towards the master and abandons the object.”³⁴ This is a strange reading of slave emancipation by Fanon. He is very accurate to point to French and, I would argue, British and American abolitionism as very much about white liberty and white justice. But this was not the only strain of abolitionism. There was a black abolitionism that carried within itself a logic of liberation as the ground of freedom. The most important expression of this current of abolitionism occurred in the dual Haitian Revolution.³⁵ Any examination of this revolution illustrates that Fanon is accurate about the master’s only wishing work from the slave but that Fanon is wrong about what the slave wants. I would argue that the slave turns away from the object of work but does not turn toward the master. Instead the slave turns to a series of practices of freedom.³⁶ For the slave, the nature of slave labor that uses both the slave and labor as chattel means that one effective practice of freedom is the negation of plantation labor. Thus the slave in the Atlantic world neither functions, as Alexandre Kojève says, as a part of the master’s “existential impasse,”³⁷

nor does the slave want to be like the master. The slave primarily turns his face away from work toward the master in order to remove the master as the source of domination. The slave does this to break the bondage of enslavement and to find a new freedom.

In a path-breaking study of the slave dimension of the Haitian revolution, Carolyn Fick tells us about an observation by a French colonial official who was perturbed at the actions of ex-slaves. She writes that the official became preoccupied and noticed that the ex-slaves were, in his words, “unambitious and uncompetitive, the black values his liberty only to the extent that it affords him the possibility of living according to his own philosophy.”³⁸ The question before us, one that we have yet to fully grapple with, is, what was this philosophy of freedom? In my view, this is the question that is posed when we not only decenter Western thought but also change our gaze. But let us return to *Black Skin, White Masks*.

We are now in a position to pursue further Fanon’s reading of Hegel’s master-slave dialectic as buttressed by historical events: The master wants the slave to work and desires recognition only to the extent that it will make the slave work. The slave wants freedom and faces the master to destroy the system of slavery. This is a new dialectic, neither one of recognition nor one of unequal encounter, but one in which new forms of freedom are being imagined, plotted, and enacted wherever possible.

What does this have to do with critical thought? Everything. I would argue that this new dialectic can best be seen in the dual Haitian Revolution and the ways in which practices of freedom played themselves out during the process of that revolution.³⁹ I want therefore to suggest that in the end one vital resource for us in the development of critical thought is the character of the slave’s freedom, which emerged in distinct opposition to the liberties of those who ruled the Atlantic world in the eighteenth century. Space does not allow a full elaboration of this point, but one of the issues raised in the dual Haitian Revolution was the relationship of wage labor to freedom.⁴⁰ This was part of the ex-slave’s own philosophy. The ex-

slave's reluctance in becoming a wage laborer means that long before Marx discerned that wage labor was really "wage slavery," the Haitian ex-slave recognized this. Thus issues of freedom arising from the perspective of the ex-slave should not be separated into distinct spheres; they are closely tied into a knot about how to live. The ex-slaves may not have found the answer to this question, but it is the posing that we are concerned with.

I am not arguing here that slave freedom is in any way a model of freedom for our present moment. I also eschew thinking in models because I think it is a dangerous exercise, reducing the complexities of human action to narrow slots. What I am suggesting is that the practices of slave freedom pose the following questions for us today:

- What is the relationship between freedom and labor or work?
- What is the relationship between equality and freedom? Are these irrevocably separate ends?
- How do human societies construct ways of life in which human domination does not factor?

A reader may say that some of these questions have already been posed in various ways and in different traditions. And my response would be yes. But the dual Haitian Revolution posed all three simultaneously. So while other revolutions of the period marked partial ruptures, the dual Haitian Revolution exploded into new terrain. Such ruptures, though robust, also tend to be fragile, and we often lose sight of the questions posed by the practices of those who wish to turn liberation into freedom. Fanon recognizes this.

In the conclusion to *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon invokes Marx by paying attention to the character of a social revolution. Marx made the point that the "social revolution . . . cannot draw its poetry from the past but only from the future, thereby creating a situation where content exceeds its expression."⁴¹ This is the central idea upon which Fanon builds the concluding chapter of *Black Skin, White Masks*. Without making any explicit reference to Aimé

Césaire's classic poem *Notebook of a Return to My Native Land* and its assumptions about the burden of history, Fanon critiques Césaire's understanding of the function of history in the colonial context as a nightmare in which the colonized encounters a past haunted by deep pain. Césaire's poem rejects this pain and constructs in its place a desire that embraces history, but not the history manufactured by the colonial power. He writes in *Notebook*:

Eia for those who have never invented anything
 For those who have never explored anything
 For those who have never subdued anything.⁴²

However, for Fanon the nightmare of colonial history was a burden that trapped the struggle for freedom. As he forcefully proclaims, "Like it or not, the past cannot in no way guide me in the present moment."⁴³ Of course Fanon is writing polemically here because he has in mind a certain view of history that in his view seeks to represent Africa in terms that mask particular African historical realities. However, there is no doubt that Fanon is ambiguous about history, about its function and relationship to acts of emancipation, so that oftentimes he gestures and calls upon us to move beyond the historical. And here I both disagree and agree. If Fanon means that the past is superseded and dead, then I disagree. If he means that the past must not be a burden but a release, then I am in agreement. History in the present is not about burden or mourning; it is about accounting for the population of the dead. But this dead population is not dead, because their actions leave traces that work to configure the world. In this sense our present historical actions are dialogues between the living and the dead. This is why the questions of history are always about the present. To engage in this dialogue we remember wounds, but more importantly, we hear the cries produced by wounds. Those cries affirm a different kind of freedom; they point us to a different song of the future upon which we can draw. But we draw from these future songs with a sense of history. Of course this is not a "monumental-

istic conception of the past,” but rather a critical history, what I have called elsewhere a “dread history.”⁴⁴ Fanon recognizes this because he writes, just before he concludes the final chapter of *Black Skin, White Masks*:

The self takes its place by opposing itself; Yes and No. I said in my introduction that man is a yes, I will never stop reiterating that. *Yes* to life. *Yes* to Love. *Yes* to generosity. But man is also a *no*. *No* to the scorn of man. *No* to the degradation of man. *No* to the exploitation of man. *No* to the butchery of what is most human in man: freedom.⁴⁵

Fanon’s affirmations are key to my arguments here because he uses them to establish a possible trajectory for critical thought and praxis. So in the last four pages of his text, he returns to history and writes, “I am not a prisoner of history. I should not seek there the meaning of my destiny. I should constantly remind myself that the real *leap* consists in introducing invention into existence. In the world through which I travel, I am endlessly creating myself.”⁴⁶ These are remarkable sentences. What do they mean, and how can we think with them?

First there is the drama of life itself: it is about endlessly creating oneself. This drama suggests that one element of freedom might include establishing the conditions under which creation is possible. So if freedom is about creation (not self-realization), Fanon does not separate the *conditions for* and the *exercise of* freedom. Second, although ambiguous about history, Fanon wants us to consider that living is not simply about existence. For Fanon it is not enough to say that existence is ontologically prior to essence because of the facticity of being in the world. *To be is to live and to live is to invent, to create with others*. So the capacity to create is *the* active part of being. The conditions for this creativity simultaneously construct grounds for the leap of invention and create the grounds of and for the practice of freedom itself. These practices allow us to go beyond being. Fanon writes, “I am a part of Being to the degree that

I go beyond it.”⁴⁷ In going beyond being, Fanon states that we negate the hierarchies human societies have constructed and instead make attempts “to touch each other, to feel each other, to explain the other to myself.”⁴⁸ In Fanon’s call all hierarchies are flattened, the other is no longer an Other, and a common ground of being human is established by which we may live together and construct humane ways of life. Fanon then ends with a sentence that with one stroke reworks liberal theory. With a force rarely seen in political literature, he asks, “Was my freedom not given to me then in order to build the world of the *You*?”⁴⁹ There is no more Other or I, as a common humanity in all its pluralism and difference becomes the foundation for critical thought and radical political praxis.

Fanon then outlines a perspective that we in our old penchant for labels would call “radical humanism.”⁵⁰ So for the sake of this lecture let us call it that. This is a humanism in which the critical element of being human is the degree to which one is part of being and yet is able to go beyond it to build the world of the *You*. This is not a humanism in which the human, though central, is conceived of as a “whole series of subjected sovereignties [and] a theory of the subject,” as Michel Foucault tells us.⁵¹ In Western thought humanism is very much a discourse about the human and the possibilities of mastery of self. In Marxist theory, humanism is about ending estranged labor that alienates the worker from the human self.⁵² Fanon and other radical anticolonial thinkers do not present either of these conceptions of humanism. Rather, their affirmation of the human rejects conventional humanist discourse to develop a radical politics of the human in which human beings are neither ends nor means. To be human is to live, to engage in a set of practices of inventions that creates freedom. In such a form of life, reason is also deeply connected to the body as the force that enacts these practices and is their embodiment. No wonder Fanon ends the chapter and the book with the cry: “My final prayer: O my body, make of me always a man who questions.”⁵³

In Fanon's thought Europe's colonial project disqualifies it from leading a new radical enterprise. Thus he issues his call in the final sentences of *The Wretched of the Earth* in which he proclaims, "For Europe, for ourselves, and for humanity, comrades, we must turn over a new leaf, we must work out new concepts, and try and set afoot a new man."⁵⁴ The issues now emerge: Where are these concepts to come from? How may we think about them and their relationship to critical thought and critical theory?

In general, critical theory can loosely be described as "a whole range of theories which take a critical view of society and the human sciences or which seek to explain the emergence of their objects of knowledge."⁵⁵ Of course the work of the Frankfurt School has been central to this tradition.⁵⁶ I want to argue that an overarching purpose of both critical thought and critical theory has been to critique the workings of power, to mark the shifts of power and its new configurations, and to make clear its dominant apparatuses and capacities. This intellectual labor continues to be a necessary feature of critical thought, and to some degree these lectures have operated in this tradition. However, if we think about other possible meanings of Walter Benjamin's phrase "the traditions of the oppressed," we notice another productive element to critical thought that is often not paid attention to: the opening up of another archive in which power is contested. This is not about writing a new history of resistance, or even of revolution, but about developing a capacity to gaze on practices through which we may grasp how different acts of humanization occur.

I hope that by now you are beginning to see the outline of what I am working through. I am traversing a different terrain, not one that gets caught up with forms of democracy or theories of social change (important as these are), but rather a terrain that asks us to think about *what we are, what we have become, and how we might rupture the frames of our present selves*. How do we create a rupture in which the profound questions opened up by colonial and

racial power are both posed and, if possible, answered? How do we live together in difference? How do we construct ways of life that create a human world of a *You*, not of an *other*?

These questions appear before us in sharp focus because the empire of liberty seeks an end of history in which different possibilities of the human are closed off. The issues I have raised open a critical intellectual space both to imagine new possibilities and to gain a historical sense of various forms of life. In other words, I suggest that critical thought can become productive by focusing not just on power but on *ways and forms of life*. By this I mean practices in which thinking is both thought and doing. This is a form of activity that may move us beyond a consideration of being as only ontology and into a space where existence is about ways of life. I submit that power today understands this. In Arendt's words, power understands that politics is not only about the "co-existence and association of different men," but is about the ways of life constructed in this association. Politics is about ways of life constituting life forms, what the Jamaican Rastafari calls *livity*.

The current objective of power is to construct a "politics of being," to preserve life as it is, to stop action and foreclose possibility, since the human world is our own artifice. To reinvent action requires us to move beyond this "politics of being" to *a politics of the radical imagination*. Such a politics functions in two ways. First, it deciphers the codes of power, and second, it allows us to think outside the death-drive of power. It allows us to construct freedom not as an absolute but as an ever-changing contingency of our fragile imperfectibility. I wish to end this lecture with a series of statements:

- We live today at a peculiar moment in human history in which *free-dom* has become the sign of human domination.
- We live today at a moment when violence and torture are performed in various places with a kind of banality, while the dialogue we engage in concerns degrees of pain and what constitutes punishment and torture.

The End of History

- We live in a world in which the traces of the colonial modern are not just haunting shadows but are part of the everyday technologies of rule that are deployed.
- We live in a world in which the traces of racial domination continue to shape our human world.
- We live in a world in which we have yet to face the most complex questions posed by the event of the colonial encounter: How shall we live together in difference? What does freedom look like when we bring “invention into existence”?

I offer no immediate answers to these questions, not because there are none, but because answers for life and living can only be found in the practices of life itself and in our theorization of those practices. I hope that in this lecture series I have been able to open a conversation, to pose a few questions, and in the end to ask all of us to heed the cries of wounds that have emerged from various historical events, so that perhaps in our fragile lives we may construct freedom. A freedom in which we constitute our humanness.

