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Fanon, the body schema, and white solipsism

Komarine Romdenh-Romluc

Department of Philosophy, The University of Sheffield, Sheffield, UK

Correspondence
Komarine Romdenh-Romluc, Department of Philosophy, 45 Victoria Street, University of Sheffield, Sheffield, S3 7QB. UK.
Email: k.romdenh-romluc@sheffield.ac.uk

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Abstract

Fanon's conception of the body schema plays a central role in his philosophy. The body schema is the body's "grasp" or "sense" of itself. Fanon argues that in the encounter between the Black and white person the body schema "crumbles," so that the Black person experiences herself as object-like in various ways. Fanon's focus is the Black person's experience because his aim is to provide the Black person with tools for emancipation. Nevertheless, his account raises the question: What happens to white self-awareness within the colonial system? I argue that a proper understanding of Fanon's notion of the body schema provides an answer. The body schema underpins awareness of *other people*, not just one's bodily self. It is the self-other experiential system that crumbles in the colonial system. Thus, we can supplement Fanon's account of Black self-experience as object-like with a description of white experience as tending toward solipsism, where this is the other side of the Black self-awareness that Fanon describes. Both forms of awareness result from degraded reciprocity. Whilst they are not the same, they are nevertheless complementary parts of a defective relation between people.

1 | INTRODUCTION

The topic of this article is Fanon's conception of the body schema. The body schema is the body's "grasp" or "sense" of itself. This notion plays a central role in Fanon's philosophy.

An important insight from his work is that colonial ideology is not grasped on a merely intellectual level but becomes embedded in the bodies and lived world of people who exist within the colonial system. Colonial ideology is a conception of what sorts of people exist and how they are situated relative to each other in social space. It divides people according to a racial binary: white versus Black. Whiteness is superior; to be white is to be civilized, rational educated; it is the normative state for human beings. Blackness is inferior; to be Black is to

be uncivilized, less rational, uneducated; it is to deviate from the normative state for human beings; it is to be less than fully human. Fanon's conception of the body schema is key to his account of how these ideas become embodied reality: colonial ideology brings about a deformation of the body schema, which affects self-awareness in various ways.

Fanon's focus is the Black person's experience because the aim of his analysis is to provide the Black person with tools for emancipation. He tells us that in the moment of encounter between the Black and white person, when the Black comes under the white person's gaze, the body schema "crumbles" under the weight of colonial ideas (Fanon, 2008, p. 84). Beneath it is a "historico-racial schema" comprising a "thousand details, anecdotes, stories" told by the white about the Black person (p. 84). The body schema's place is taken by "a racial epidermal schema" (p. 84). These alterations to the body schema result in changes to the Black person's self-awareness so that she experiences herself as object-like in various ways.[1] Nevertheless, he also holds that both Black *and* white people are negatively affected by colonialism. The impacts on both are not the same, and there are obviously ways in which it is the Black person who suffers more than the white. But it does not follow that the white person's situation is unproblematic. Fanon's account of the ways that colonialism affects the body schema raises the question: What happens to *white* self-awareness within the colonial system? Answering this question is important as it can help us to better understand colonialism.

Recent interpretations of Fanon's account of the body schema variously put forward by Ataria and Tanaka (2020), Noland (2009), and Colman (2021), read him as claiming that it is the *Black* body schema that is deformed by colonialism, which causes some striking deficits in *Black* self-awareness. I will call this the "Black pathology reading." I will examine this approach in the first part of my article and argue that there are serious problems with it. Not least, this approach—and any that take colonialism to impact just the *Black* body schema—can offer no resources for understanding the ways that colonialism also deforms white self-awareness.

In the second part of my article, I will offer an alternative reading of Fanon. To better understand his work, we need to return, as other writers do, to an important source for him—the work of Merleau-Ponty (1964a, 1964b, 2012). There is a crucial feature of Merleau-Ponty's account that has been overlooked in discussions of Fanon: the body schema underpins awareness of *other people*, not just one's own bodily self. Moreover, experience of others is crucial for awareness of oneself and vice versa. By paying closer attention to this aspect of Merleau-Ponty's view, we can supplement Fanon's account of Black experience as object-like with a description of white experience as tending toward solipsism.

2 | THE BLACK PATHOLOGY READING OF FANON

The Black pathology reading of Fanon appeals to a distinction between body *image* and body *schema* that was first articulated by Gallagher (1986). The body image "consists of a system of perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs pertaining to one's own body," whilst the body schema "is a system of sensory-motor capacities that function without awareness or the necessity of perceptual monitoring" (Gallagher, 2005, p. 24). On his view, the body schema enables the subject to act without having to consciously look for, or constantly perceive, her body; it allows her to act unreflectively. In the "normal" case, image and schema are intertwined and interact in various ways.

Ataria and Tanaka (2020) accept this distinction and then argue that it is primarily the body *image* that is affected by colonial ideas, because for them it is primarily the body image that

[1]This has been extensively discussed in the literature. See, e.g., Gordon (2005).

is affected by other people and the social world. They write that "the body-as-object and the BI [body image] becomes a place of intersubjectivity between the self and other" (Ataria & Tanaka, 2020, p. 658). The colonized subject absorbs stories, myths, and cultural reactions to their dark-skinned body, which for Ataria and Tanaka are the sorts of things that can be incorporated into the body image. On their account, what Fanon calls the historico-racial schema is really a body image constituted by colonial ideas and attitudes toward the colonized body. In contrast, the body schema is not *directly* influenced by social phenomena and other people, so colonial ideology only affects it *in*directly via its interactions with the body image. On Ataria and Tanaka's account, the colonized subject's body schema is eventually *replaced* by the body image. "The BI [body image] begins to absorb the BS [body schema]. Indeed, Fanon depicts a process via which the BS is completely assimilated by the BI: '*Then, assailed at various points the corporeal schema crumbled, its place taken by a racial epidermal schema*' . . . [i.e.,] the body image forced onto him by white people's gazes" (pp. 659–60; their emphasis).

Ataria and Tanaka—as the quote above makes clear—take the replacement of the body schema by the body image to happen via the white gaze. According to Sartre's (2003) famous analysis of the gaze, to which Fanon refers in his text, the experience of being looked at by another is simultaneously awareness of another as subject (a being that can perceive, make judgments about the world, emotionally react to it, etc.) and awareness of oneself as an object. Sartre holds that the relation between the one looked at and the one looking can change. One person can look back at the other, thus turning them into the object looked at, and reclaiming the position of gazing subject for himself. However, Ataria and Tanaka take Fanon to claim that the gaze cannot be reversed in this way for the colonial subject—"the black man *has no ontological resistance* in the eyes of the white man" (Fanon, 2008, p. 83, quoted in Ataria & Tanaka, 2020, p. 659; their emphasis). The Black person is thus stuck in the mode of object, which for Ataria and Tanaka means that the historico-racial schema created by colonial ideas is forcefully imposed on the colonized person, replacing their body schema.

Since the body schema enables unreflective action, its replacement by the body image results in some pronounced deficits. In Gallagher's (2005) discussion of the distinction between image and schema, he takes Ian Waterman—a man who lost his sense of proprioception—to be someone whose body image is intact, but whose body schema is either nonexistent or not functioning properly. Consequently, Waterman depends on visual information to coordinate his body in action. He can no longer act unreflectively but must actively look for his body parts and consciously attend to them when acting. Atara and Tanaka hold that the crumbling of Fanon's body schema has much the same effect so that he, and other colonized subjects, can no longer act unreflectively. Instead, they need to consciously monitor and keep track of their bodies using vision. "Fanon acts somewhat similarly to IW [Ian Waterman], that is, on the level of the BI alone: *I know that if I want to smoke I shall have to reach out my right arm and take the pack of cigarettes lying at the other end of the table*. He must consider the detailed procedures of the movement, as IW does in his mind" (Ataria & Tanaka, 2020, p. 659; their emphasis).

Noland (2009) offers a similar reading. She does not explicitly consider Gallagher's work in her discussion of Fanon, but she draws a similar distinction between body image and body schema and makes parallel claims to Ataria and Tanaka (2020). She distinguishes between interoceptive sensations of the body and visual imagery of it. The former comprises things like kinesthetic sensations: the awareness the typical subject has of her body in motion "from the inside," that is, without seeing or hearing or touching the parts of one's body as one would to detect the motion of any other object. They also include proprioceptive experience: feelings of heat or cold, tickles in one's armpit, pains in one's leg, sensations of one's arms pressed together when they are folded, and so on. Noland holds that interoceptive experience is a first-personal form of bodily awareness that makes agency possible. Noland takes this to be the body schema. Like Ataria and Tanaka, she reads Fanon as holding that it is unaffected by colonialism: "Fanon seems to believe that a semiconscious, operative body awareness is

available to—and constitutive of—the subject beyond or before the grip of a colonial world" (Noland, 2009, p. 201). In contrast, the *visual imagery* associated with the body comprises the body image on Noland's account. It *is* impacted by culture. The myths, stories, and anecdotes told by colonialism about people with Black skin comprise an epidermal historico-racial body *image*.

Like Ataria and Tanaka, Noland reads Fanon as holding that cultural images of the body get attached to specific embodied persons through the gaze. Just as Ataria and Tanaka read the white gaze as effectively robbing the Black person of their body schema, which on their account, gets replaced by the body image, so too Noland claims that "the colonized subject, Fanon tells us, has been deprived of his 'body schema' by the infiltration of an insidious 'historico-racial schema' [i.e., body image]" (Noland, 2009, p. 199). Again, this is claimed to result in some quite pronounced deficits. The colonized subject loses interoceptive experience of her own body—"it is precisely an ability to feel the body poised or moving through space (a body *schema*) that the black subject lacks" (p. 201). Since this is crucial for situating one's embodied self in space, Noland also claims that the colonized subject no longer experiences herself as situated and offers the following quote from Fanon in support of this claim: "in truth I say, my shoulders slipped from the structure of the world, *my feet no longer felt the caress of the earth*" (Fanon, 2008, p. 106, quoted in Noland, 2009, p. 202; her modified translation and emphasis). Whilst Noland does not refer to Ian Waterman, her claim is reminiscent of his experience of lying in bed. In his study of Ian Waterman, Cole (1995) recounts that "[Waterman] seemed to be 'floating' on the mattress. Without sense of position or touch from his body or limbs, he appeared not to be resting on the bed. . . . He was in a limbless limbo, an artisan of a floating world" (p. 14).

Colman (2021) also draws a connection between the body schema, agency, and awareness of one's bodily spatiality. In contrast to Noland, she spells this out by appealing to Merleau-Ponty's distinction between being *situated* and being *located*. To be located is just to be in some place or other. Inanimate objects like tables and chairs have a location. Embodied subjects also exist in some place or other, but Merleau-Ponty argues they are not merely located. The body schema provides the subject with a "sense" of her own body as the potential to perform various different actions. To "grasp" one's body as a potential for action means that one does not have a "sense" of it as simply a collection of body parts arranged in space relative to one another. It is instead to "grasp" it as a unity, where one's limbs are coordinated as powers to act that contribute to an overall capacity for action. Consider, for example, a simple action like kicking a ball with one's left leg. One's whole body is involved in this action—I need to shift my weight to my right foot, reorganize my trunk to balance, perhaps hold out my arms to keep from tipping over, tighten the muscles in my core to provide some *oomph* to the kick, and so on. Typically, all of this happens unreflectively, but in performing this action, I have an implicit "grasp" of my body parts as coordinated in this dynamic unity. Correlatively, I do not experience the surrounding world as simply a collection of physical objects positioned in space around me, but as a setting for my actions. For example, as I sit at the table in my kitchen typing this manuscript, there are various objects around me—the table in front of me, my computer just underneath my outstretched hands, the chair beneath me, and so on. I experience these objects as an environment that is appropriate for writing. I experience myself and the surrounding world as "fitting into" each other as the capacity to perform certain actions and an environment in which those actions can be performed. This is what Merleau-Ponty calls *situation* in space. It is made possible by the body schema.

The body image, in contrast, is a representation of the body from the outside as a unified whole. Like Ataria and Tanaka (2020) and Noland (2009), Colman takes the body image to be the aspect of bodily awareness that is affected by other people. "There is an emergence of the body image through our relations to others . . . [it is] ever emergent in and as an ongoing and variously charged transcription of our relations with others" (Colman, 2021, p. 131). Under the white gaze,

the colonial images of Black people as less than fully human are impressed on the Black person, who identifies with the images like the child identifies the reflection in the mirror as hers. Colman then suggests that either the complex interrelations between body image and body schema mean that the body schema becomes affected by colonial oppression; or colonial body image(s)—what Fanon calls the historico-racial schema and the epidermal-racial schema—take over from the body schema in organizing Black bodily experience in the colonial world.

Colman argues that as a result "the only interpretation of the Black *corporeal schema* is that it is *spatially pathological*" (2021, p. 134). She takes it to exhibit disturbances described by Bonnier (1905) in his study of pathological bodily awareness, in which he identified four types of disorder: *hyperschematie*—overestimation of the space taken up by parts of the body or the whole body; *hyposchematie*—underestimation of the space taken up by one's body and/or body parts; *paraschematie*—experience of one's body parts being displaced; and *aschematie*—a global bodily disorientation. The colonized subject is aware of her own body as a fragmented collection of parts merely located in space. Ultimately, this becomes the global experience of bodily fragmentation.

3 | OBJECTIONS TO THE BLACK PATHOLOGY READING OF FANON

Here, I will offer three objections to the Black pathology reading of Fanon.

First, it is undoubtedly true that colonial ideology influences the embodied self-awareness of people living in the colonial system. Fanon himself tells us that there is a tendency for the Black person to experience herself as object-like (Fanon, 2008). We find similar claims in the work of Gordon (1995) and Yancy (2008), to give just two examples. Nevertheless, it is thoroughly implausible to think that it leads to the *specific deficits* proposed by the writers considered. Recall that Ataria and Tanaka (2020) *explicitly* read Fanon as claiming that the Black person encounters similar difficulties to Ian Waterman and his loss of proprioceptive awareness from the neck down. Unable to feel his body "from the inside" as it were, Waterman must rely on visual awareness of his body to guide his movements. He has to consciously look for and monitor his limbs in order to act. Noland (2009) does not mention Ian Waterman, but since she reads Fanon as describing a loss of interoceptive awareness of the body,[2] Waterman's case is also an apt comparison for her account. As I pointed out above, her claim that Fanon no longer feels the ground beneath his feet recalls Waterman's experience of lying in bed but experiencing himself as floating. It is, of course, a factual question as to whether colonized people's bodily experience is similar to Waterman's. But there are no records of enslaved people in the Caribbean, workers on rubber plantations in French Indochina, diamond miners in South Africa, or other colonial people regularly exhibiting the same problems as Waterman, for example, collapsing to the floor when they sneezed, being unable to wash themselves for fear of uncontrollably hitting themselves so hard as to cause injury, needing to see how hard they are holding an egg to avoid crushing it, or employing any of the motor tricks that Waterman eventually learned to enable action.

Colman (2021) also reads Fanon as describing profound disturbances in the bodily experience of the colonized. These include awareness of one's body as taking up more—but also less—space than its objective size, feeling oneself to be outside space, and the experience of the body as fragmented and disconnected. Again, it is a factual question whether her description of colonized bodily experience is accurate. But I strongly suspect it is not. Colman's description of these bodily experiences draws on cases of *disorders* documented in the literature, where they tend to be associated with physical damage to the

[2]Noland does suggest at one point that this description is allegorical, rather than literal (Noland, 2009, p. 202). But this is not particularly helpful, since at other points she seems to take this literally. Also, if it is merely allegorical, then we lack a description of the actual deficits in bodily experience supposedly suffered by the colonized on her reading of Fanon.

body. For example, Bonnier (1905) associated some of the disturbances to awareness of bodily spatiality he described with vestibular disorders. This has been confirmed by later work (Lopez, 2013). Other cases have been reported in persons with neurologically caused disorders (De Vignemont, 2010). I think it highly unlikely that colonial ideology and the white gaze alone are capable of bringing about brain lesions and disorders of the vestibular system. (This is possible if they are coupled with physical violence or deprivation of some sort, which could cause such injury, but this is not what is at stake here.) Furthermore, there are again no records of colonized people widely exhibiting such disturbances.

A second objection can be made to the claim that only the body *image* is directly affected by colonialism, with the body *schema* only being *in*directly affected through its relation to the body image. On this view, the body schema is not immediately influenced by other people and the socio-cultural world and forms a sort of "natural self." This claim should be rejected—it is problematic in itself, and there is no textual evidence that Fanon is committed to it (or indeed, anything like Gallagher's [2005] distinction between schema and image).[3] As we have seen, the body schema gives the subject a "sense" of her embodied self as a potential for action. It develops through interaction with the world. When the subject acquires a new motor skill or physical ability, this affects the constitution of her body schema, so that this new potential for action becomes part of her implicit "grasp" of her bodily powers. Clearly, a good many of our actions are sensitive in many different ways to the social world and other people. First, and perhaps most importantly, the world with which we interact, building up the patterns of action that constitute the body schema, is one that contains other people. Moreover, these others are not simply bystanders to our actions, but people with whom we engage. Many of our actions are responsive to other people, responding to *their* responses to us. In the typical case, this is so right from the beginnings of agency. Each of us develops her capacity for action through interacting with other people who show us toys, encourage us to sit up, hold our hands when we learn to walk, respond when we cry, pass us pieces of food to try, and so on. Thus the body schema from the outset is composed partly of skills—often culturally-specific—of interacting with other people. Second, even when we are not directly interacting with other people, many of our actions are still sensitive to social norms. For example, I largely adopt the bodily postures and movements that are socially appropriate for feminine bodies and sit with my legs crossed rather than sprawled out even when no one is watching me. Third, humans organize the physical world around them in ways that support culturally specific activities. For example, it is now customary in the UK to use self-service checkouts in supermarkets, where the buyer scans their own shopping and pays for it using a bank card or smartphone. Aside from those occasions when the check-out declares "unexpected item in the bagging area," one does not engage with another human being throughout this process. The physical objects with which one interacts in this case have been made by humans to support the actions one performs—it would not be possible to engage in this behavior without the environment that has been engineered for this purpose. Again, culturally specific skills of using self-service checkouts are included in the body schema.

Finally, as I have already indicated in the introduction to this article, the Black pathology interpretation reads Fanon as holding that it is only the *Black person* whose body schema and self-awareness is distorted. But Fanon holds that white people are also negatively affected by colonialism. Whilst the colonizers undoubtedly benefit in numerous ways from colonial ideas about whiteness, their situation is not unproblematic. Like Hegel's (Hegel & Friedrich., 2019) master, the colonizing subject is in a situation that is ultimately detrimental for him.

[3]It is also unclear that Gallagher is committed to the distinction as understood by the authors discussed. Indeed, in his earlier paper, he describes the body schema as "precisely the style that organizes the body as it functions in communion with its environment" (Gallagher, 1986, p. 549). I would like to thank an anonymous referee for pointing this out.

All three of the accounts considered above make the mistake of taking Black peoples' experience to be characterized by deficits. White experience is tacitly assumed to be a norm of optimal functioning, from which Black experience deviates. Colman (2021) comes closest to acknowledging this aspect of Fanon's account, arguing that Merleau-Ponty has described the *white* body, and that it is his privilege as a white man that means he experiences his own body as moving fluidly around an environment with which it is in harmony. However, she still equates whiteness with the optimal and smooth functioning of the body schema. I think this is an error. To fully understand Fanon's account, we must acknowledge something defective in both white and Black existence. An understanding of the former will also contribute to a fuller understanding of colonialism in general.[4] The upshot is that the Black pathology reading of Fanon should be rejected.

4 | MERLEAU-PONTY, THE BODY SCHEMA, AND AWARENESS OF OTHERS

To give an alternative reading of Fanon on the body schema, we need to turn again to an important source for him: the work of Merleau-Ponty (1964a, 1964b, 2012).

I began this article by offering a rough definition of the body schema as the body's "grasp" or "sense" of itself. However, this is only partially correct as a gloss on Merleau-Ponty's understanding of it. It misses out a crucial feature of his account that is essential for understanding Fanon's analysis. Namely, that the body schema allows for the awareness of *other people*—that is, other embodied subjects—not just one's own bodily self. Moreover, it enables awareness of self and other as forming a system; they are experienced as complementary parts of a single whole. The experience of others is crucial for awareness of myself and vice versa. To anticipate, I will argue that Fanon takes colonialism to disrupt the experience of self *and* other through its impact on the body schema. It is this experiential system of self and other that "crumbles."

Merleau-Ponty holds that the body schema is present from birth, although not in adult form since it develops as the child grows. He begins his account by considering the infant's ability to imitate. For example, a baby smiling in response to someone smiling at her (Merleau-Ponty, 1964a); or an infant making biting motions when an adult playfully bites the infant's fingers (Merleau-Ponty, 2012). For such imitation to occur, the infant—or some subpersonal system within her—must somehow connect the *visual* perception of the other's actions with her own *motor* activity and *proprioceptive* experience. But it is impossible to see how the two sensations could be associated if they were experienced as separate. Merleau-Ponty concludes, therefore, that the infant does *not* experience her own body as a mere collection of sensations delivered by sight, touch, hearing, proprioception, etc. that somehow need to be grouped together. Instead, her experience is always already organized. This is done by the body schema.

On Merleau-Ponty's account, the body "grasps" itself primarily (although not exclusively) in terms of its potential for action. The infant's rudimentary body schema already gives her a sense of her body in terms of its capacities for action (although this will greatly develop as she grows and engages with the world, building up her motor skills and habits). On this picture, the infant's experience of her mouth is not a disorganized mass of taste sensations, pressure sensations from her tongue, and so on; instead, she immediately experiences her own mouth as an instrument for biting. Merleau-Ponty then holds that the infant's tacit grasp of her *own body's*

[4]Bergner (1995) recognizes this point in her discussion of how Fanon takes racial difference to be determined by vision. She writes, "Fanon represents not only the violence done to him by white fears, desires, and hatred but also the lack that these emotions reveal in the white viewer" (p. 79). Bhabha (1989) also makes the same point when he writes, "The white man's eyes break up the black man's body and in that act of epistemic violence its own frame of reference is transgressed" (p. 135).

potential for biting gives her a *general* "grasp" of biting activity. The body schematic "grasp" of biting is analogous in this sense to a concept. Just as the latter has generality built into it so that the person who possesses it can apply it in a variety of cases, so too the infant's body schema provides her with a general "grasp" of the activity of biting that can be applied to different instances. This manifests in the infant immediately experiencing certain movements performed by other people as biting actions. It follows that there is no need to associate separate visual sensations of an adult biting with motor and proprioceptive sensations of the infant's own biting activity. Instead, they are simply presented in the infant's experience as grouped together as instances of biting. Merleau-Ponty's argument for the existence of a rudimentary infant body schema with the qualities outlined above is a transcendental one: its existence is a necessary condition for the possibility of infant imitation.[5]

Merleau-Ponty further argues that infants do not yet have the capacity to distinguish themselves from other people. The infant is not aware of one of the embodied beings she experiences as *herself*, and others *as* others or *not-self*. Instead, she is aware of the bodily being that is in fact herself as just one of many selves in the world. Her experience is of what Merleau-Ponty describes as "an anonymous collectivity" or "an undifferentiated group life" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964a).

The experience of being undifferentiated from others is heightened by a phenomenon noted by Merleau-Ponty. The immediate grouping in the infant's awareness of a seen behavior with her own (potential) activity means that she has a sort of echo in her body of the other's proprioceptive awareness of their body as they act. What Merleau-Ponty seems to be proposing here is the ubiquitous existence of a phenomenon that in its extreme form is known as "mirror touch synesthesia." People who experience this feel in their own bodies what they see others doing. For example, "Amanda," a woman with mirror touch synesthesia, recounts the following experience:

> I think I was about three at a Christmas party or something. They had this boy—he was older than me—and people were hugging him like they hadn't seen him in a while. . . . And I remember feeling like I was being hugged watching him. . . . It was like a warm rush up the spine and just constricted the shoulder area here, like this. And I followed him around, like, the whole entire evening because it was just so nice. (Brumfield, 2015)

"Amanda" is unable to eat around other people: "It feels like they're shoving food in my mouth. And I'm trying to eat and they're just shoving forks in my mouth. And it's like this thing piled on top of itself, and it's terrible" (Brumfield, 2015). Later, in the same interview, Michael Banissy, a neuroscientist at Goldsmiths, University of London, explains that everyone who watches someone doing something has a burst of activity in the corresponding motor area of the brain. This is what has become known as the "mirror system." But in people like "Amanda" this system is "over-excitable" (Brumfield, 2015). The standard view is that in the usual case, the activity in the mirror system is too slight to result in conscious experience of the other's actions in one's own body as happens in mirror touch synesthesia. Merleau-Ponty's account is a challenge to this claim—he holds that even those of us who do not formally have mirror touch synesthesia still experience, albeit to a lesser degree, these echoes of other people's actions in our bodies.

The upshot is that the child is aware of herself as spread out across all the bodies she sees. She is aware of being located at these different points in space all at once; she is both *here*, where she feels her body is, and *over there*, where she sees the other as being. "The child himself feels that he is in the other's body, just as he feels himself to be in his visual image" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964a, p. 134).

[5]Moreover, Merleau-Ponty's discussion of the body schema is basically an appropriation and development of Kant's schematism. See Matherne (2016) for a detailed account of the connections between the two.

Fully developed humans possess self-consciousness, where this is the ability to distinguish between oneself and others. It is not simply a matter of grasping that oneself and the other are numerically distinct, but also understanding that one of those entities is *me*. Merleau-Ponty argues that the child moves from the experience of anonymous collectivity to self-consciousness through a stage in the development of the body schema, which involves the acquisition of the "specular image."[6] This is a representation of one's body as a whole, viewed from a perspective "outside" oneself. One's mirror reflection is a paradigmatic instance of a specular image. But the latter notion encompasses more than just a visual experience of the self as seen in a reflective surface. What the child comes to understand with the acquisition of the specular image is that her body is bounded. There is a place where her bodily self ends and the rest of the world begins. Moreover, the boundaries of the body mark out an *inside*, with what lies beyond designated as *outside* or *external* to the self. The child simultaneously comes to grasp that since she has an outside, it is possible for others to have a perspective on *her*. This paves the way for understanding that she is not just whom she feels herself to be, but also what others make of her. "In this sense I am torn from myself, and the image in the mirror prepares me for another still more serious alienation, which will be the alienation by others" (p. 136).

The features of the body schema that Merleau-Ponty identifies in the child's development ground mature experiences of intersubjectivity. In the normal case, Merleau-Ponty holds that I experience myself as one of many similar selves who share a common world. Perhaps surprisingly however, and as I will show below, crucially for Fanon's picture, Merleau-Ponty also holds that there is a solipsistic element in normal adult experience. He writes of "a lived solipsism that cannot be transcended" (2012, p. 374), such that "consciousnesses present the absurdity of a solipsism-shared-by-many" (p. 376). Solipsism is, of course, the view that I am alone. There can be varying degrees of aloneness—I might be the only self that exists, or I might be the only one of a special sort of self (e.g., a God amongst men). *Experience* is solipsistic to the extent that it presents oneself as the only existing self in a world of inanimate objects, or as being the only one of a special type of self. The solipsistic element in adult experience that Merleau-Ponty identifies comes from the fact that each of us has a perspective on the world. Perceptual experience presents the world as laid out in space around its subject. For example, at this moment, I see the computer in front of me, the window to my left, the shelves to my right. I feel the chair underneath me; I am aware of the ceiling above me. I am aware of myself as the zero point around which the world revolves. Since it emanates from me, I experience the world as *for-me*. I am its center. Other people feature in my world. But they are presented to me as entities on which I have a perspective. In this way, to have a perspective is to experience oneself as special in relation to other selves. *I* am the center of a world for-me; they are simply parts of it. This is the sense in which adult experience is solipsistic.

Although adult experience contains this solipsistic *element*, it is not overall correctly described as solipsistic. Instead, as noted above, normal experience is of being one of many similar selves who share a common world. It follows that the solipsism that flows from having a point of view must be mitigated in normal adult awareness. Somehow, one's experience must de-center one's perspective so that even as one experiences the world as laid out around oneself, one must also be aware that one is not *the* zero point from which everything emanates. Moreover, this awareness cannot be a mere intellectual grasp that this is so. It must be a real part of experience, since in the normal case I do not just *know* (or believe or assume) that I am one of many selves in the world—I am also aware of myself in this way.

It is the capacity to "inhabit" the bodies of others, retained from infant experience, that mitigates the solipsism of perspective. Just as the infant experiences other people in the first instance

[6]Colman (2021) sees Merleau-Ponty as thus making a distinction between body schema and body image, although it is not fully formed in his work. Whether or not this is right does not affect our discussion here.

as behavior, so too, I experience other people as acting. This is bound up with a perception of the world surrounding the other person as *soliciting* her to act. On Merleau-Ponty's account, I perceive the world as "inviting" me to engage with it. I see chairs as for-sitting, food as for-eating, a dog that has wandered into the road in front of me as for-avoiding, and so on. When I see someone else, I see the world around as inviting *her* to act. "My gaze falls upon a living body performing an action and the objects that surround it immediately receive a new layer of signification: they are no longer merely what I could do with them, they are also what this behavior is about to do with them" (p. 369). In this way, I see the world as laid out around the other as a center of action. "A vortex forms around the perceived body into which my world is drawn and, so to speak, sucked in: to this extent, my world is no longer merely mine, it is no longer present only to me, it is present to X. . . . The other body is already no longer a simple fragment of the world, but rather the place of a certain elaboration and somehow a certain 'view' of the world" (p. 369).

In addition, I experience in my own body a proprioceptive echo of what I see the other doing. Just as for the infant this echo means that she feels herself to be in other people's bodies, so too the adult experiences a trace of being in the other. Merleau-Ponty illustrates this by considering the experience of seeing one's reflection in the mirror. There is an uncanniness to the mirror reflection. Rather than experiencing it as something inert, it appears as an almost-presence in a space that both is and isn't in front of me. It *appears* to be right *there*, but I cannot step forward into it. Its uncanniness is exploited to dramatic effect in a number of horror stories and films. It also features in myths about magic mirrors that contain trapped spirits.[7] Merleau-Ponty accounts for the pseudopresence of mirror reflections by appealing to the retention of the infant's capacity to *feel* in one's body what one *sees* another doing. He writes, "Schilder observes that, smoking a pipe before a mirror, I feel the sleek, burning surface of the wood not only where my fingers are but also in those ghostlike fingers, those merely visible fingers inside the mirror" (1964b, p. 168). The adult experiences herself as having an "outside," that is, that she is a perceptible being that can be experienced by others—something upon which others can have a perspective. She is also aware of others as conscious, perceiving beings. As such, her experience is characterized by *reciprocity*: she is aware of others as experiencing her in the same way that she experiences them. Just as she both has an external perspective on the other, but also experiences a trace of being in their body, so too she is aware of the other as having an external perspective on her whilst experiencing a trace of being in their body. Ultimately, Merleau-Ponty describes this as an experience of "the others who haunt me and whom I haunt" (p. 161).

Thus on Merleau-Ponty's account, the body schema is inextricably bound up with awareness of others. "This entire placement of the corporeal schema is at the same time a placing of the perception of others" (1964a, p. 123).

5 | FANON: INTERSUBJECTIVITY AND WHITE SOLIPSISM

Understood in this way, Merleau-Ponty's account opens up a new way to read Fanon's text. When Fanon says "the corporeal schema crumbled" to be replaced by "a racial epidermal schema" (2008, p. 84), he is *not* pointing to a pathological breakdown in Black bodily experience whilst white experience is left untouched. Instead, his claim is that colonial ideology disrupts normal intersubjective experience (as described by Merleau-Ponty) between the Black person and white person. Normal intersubjective awareness necessarily involves reciprocity. Crucially, this requires each party to see the other as a conscious human being just like herself. In other words, awareness of the other as Another Me is essential to the experience of the

[7]For example, the magic mirror in *Snow White*, which contains a spirit who answers the evil queen's questions; the mirror in Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass*, through which Alice steps to enter the looking glass world; the evil mirror in the 2013 film *Oculus*, which drives a family to kill each other.

other as aware of me in the same way that I am aware of her. But colonial ideology categorizes the white person as superior and the Black person as inferior. Ultimately, the Black person is considered less than human. Colonial ideology thus furnishes people living in the colonial situation with an alternative to the normal body schematic grasp of the other as Another Me. Its categorization of people into a racial hierarchy is "a historico-racial schema" that organizes people into types. The category of Black person is created by the white man "out of a thousand details, anecdotes, stories" (Fanon, 2008, p. 84). The historico-racial schema is constituted primarily by ideas. It is a conceptual framework grasped intellectually, although it also has an affective import. Through repeated application, it becomes embedded in experience—the white perception of the Black, the Black perception of the white, and both Black and white self-awareness. At which point, we can talk about an epidermal racial schema as "the details, stories, anecdotes" become attached to the visible marker of Black skin.

The epidermal racial schema is a modification of the body schema. Another way to put the same point is that it is a body schema that has incorporated colonial ideas. Although Fanon coins an alternative term for the phenomenon, the body schema is never devoid of the effects of the surrounding culture as I noted above. Since the body schema provides for both experience of one's own bodily self *and* the other, the epidermal racial schema is possessed by both the Black *and* white person. The epidermal racial schema brings about a breakdown in normal intersubjective experience between the Black and white person by damaging reciprocity.[8]

In the text, Fanon only considers the impact of this on the Black person. This makes sense, given his central aim of analyzing the Black colonial situation to provide the Black person with the tools for emancipation. But the account offered above allows us to fill in the impact on the white counterpart.

Recall that on Merleau-Ponty's analysis, adult experience contains a solipsistic element. Having a perspective on the world brings solipsism with it as I experience myself as the center of a world laid out around, and for, me. Others appear merely as elements of *my* world. Solipsistic experience admits of degrees. I might be aware of myself as the only self who exists. Or I might be aware of myself as a special sort of self, and the extent of this experienced "special-ness" can vary. In the normal case, the tendency toward solipsism is mitigated by reciprocity. I "inhabit" the bodies and perspectives of others, and this decenters my perspective, dispelling the sense that the world is *mine*. However, reciprocity requires me to be aware of the other as an equal, as Another Me. Otherwise, the "flip" into the other's bodily perspective does not happen. To the extent that the white person does not see the Black person as Another Me, an equal human self, the transfer of perspective does not take place, or is not fully reciprocal. The white person in the colonial world remains—to some extent—locked in her perspective. Her experience with respect to the Black other is solipsistic to some degree. The white person in the colonial world tends to experience Black others as merely for-her, elements of a world that revolves around her. In this sense, she does not experience them as *full subjects* like herself—"the black man has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the white man" (Fanon, 2008, p. 110). Whilst the white person does not experience the colonized as literally inanimate, her experience of them as less than full subjects means that they appear to her as object-like in various ways. Since we are affected by how others see us, the Black person becomes aware of *herself* as object-like under the white gaze. Whilst I have not examined Fanon's analysis of Black self-awareness here, it has been discussed extensively in the literature.[9] White solipsism is thus the other side of the Black self-awareness that Fanon describes. Whilst these forms of awareness both result from degraded reciprocity, they are not the same. They are complementary parts of a

[8]Thank you to an anonymous referee for pointing out that the argument here shares strong parallels with Ngo (2017), who also draws on Merleau-Ponty to argue that racism should be thought of as a failure of intersubjectivity.

[9]See Gordon (2005) for a particularly nice account. He discusses this phenomenon in other places in his work too.

defective relation between people. The differences between these modes of awareness can explain why there are asymmetries between Black and white experience, such as the morbid symptoms that Fanon identifies in Black people's relationships with whites (Fanon, 2008), despite both resulting from degraded reciprocity.[10]

Furthermore, it is possible to draw a connection between solipsistic experience and dehumanization. To *perceive* others as for-me seems to imply that they can be *treated* as for-me. To treat others as for-me is to use them, to make them into instruments to achieve my ends. Of course, each of us regularly makes use of other people in the service of our own aims in ways that are not problematic. For example, I use a shopkeeper to buy my groceries. However, in the normal case this "use" of the shopkeeper is not grounded in the solipsistic perception of the shopkeeper as for-me—an inferior being who is a mere denizen of *my* world. I still perceive the shopkeeper as another human being like me with his own ends, and I recognize he can only be used for my purpose of acquiring groceries in the narrow context of shopping. In contrast, the solipsistic perception of others as for-me implies a more thoroughgoing sense of them as tools for my use. There are many examples of this instrumental use of others in the colonial context, from enslavement to the use of child labor on sugar plantations both during Fanon's time and continuing today.[11]

Solipsistic perception of others can slide further into the brutalities of the colonial situation. If one experiences oneself as a special sort of subject, akin to a God amongst insects, then it is not so far to the view that those others are inconsequential and can be treated however one likes.[12] If one also adds to the mix affective attitudes of disgust, scorn, and so on, which are directed at Black persons in the colonial world, then poor treatment of them seems to almost inevitably follow. Thus a human tool that fails to satisfactorily fulfill its purpose can be savagely punished, for example, by being made to wear its own dismembered hand in the Belgian Congo.[13] Or a group that gets in the way of the colonizer's aims can be eradicated in a similar way to the destruction of an inconvenient wasps nest, for example, the widespread murder of Native Americans during the Californian gold rush (Trafzer & Hyer, 1999).

Solipsistic perception of the colonized other is clearly disastrous for colonized peoples. However, it is not without consequence for the colonizer. In short, by practicing solipsistic perception of the colonized other, this way of perceiving other human beings starts to become a habit; the colonizers then run the risk of turning this mode of perception—with its associated dehumanization and brutality—back on themselves. Here is Aimé Césaire, pulling no punches just after the Second World War:

> First we must study how colonization works to *decivilize* the coloniser, to *brutalize* him in the true sense of the word, to degrade him, to awaken him to buried instinct, to covetousness, violence, race hatred, and moral relativisim: and we must show that each time a head is cut off or an eye put out in Vietnam and in France they accept the fact, each time a little girl is raped and in France they accept the fact, each time a Madagascan is tortured and in France they accept the fact, civilization acquires another dead weight, a universal regression takes place, a gangrene sets in, a center of infection begins to spread. . . .

[10]Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for urging me to make this point clear.

[11]This is an important way in which another can be experienced as object-like.

[12]Someone I know who experienced delusions of solipsism used this phrase to characteriz his experience. I find it a striking illustration of this mode of experience, and Fanon's invocation of insect imagery in *Black Skin, White Masks* to describe the experience of being caught in the white gaze brought it to mind.

[13]George Washington Williams ([1890] Williams, 2009), an African-American historian, documented some of these abuses in an open letter to King Leopold after having visited the Belgian Congo and seen the atrocities committed there.

> And then one fine day the bourgeoisie is awakened by a terrific boomerang effect: the gestapos are busy, the prisons fill up, the torturers standing around the racks invent, refine, discuss.
>
> People are surprised, they become indignant. They say: "How strange! But never mind—it's Nazism, it will pass!" And they wait, and they hope; and they hide the truth from themselves . . . that it is Nazism, yes, but that before they were its victims, they were its accomplices; that they tolerated that Nazism before it was inflicted on them, that they absolved it, shut their eyes to it, legitimized it, because until then, it had been applied only to non-European peoples; that they have cultivated that Nazism. . . .
>
> . . . at bottom, what [they] cannot forgive Hitler for is not *the crime* in itself . . . it is the crime against the white man, the humiliation of the white man, and the fact that he applied to Europe colonialist procedures which until then had been reserved exclusively for the Arabs of Algeria the "coolies" of India, and the "niggers" of Africa. (Césaire, 2000, pp. 35–36).

Nazism is European colonialism turned back on Europe itself. Dehumanization is constituted by ways of perceiving and treating other persons. Like all ways of seeing and interacting with the world, the more one practices, the easier it gets. Césaire's contention is that through repeated dehumanization of Black and brown people, European colonizers improved their capacity for dehumanization until they ended up turning it back on themselves. We can add to this that solipsistic perception of some people as for-me becomes easier the more I do it, and that this form of perception facilitates brutality.[14]

6 | CONCLUSION

A central insight of Fanon's work is that colonial ideology—a set of ideas that classify the social world according to a racial hierarchy—becomes embedded in the bodies and lived world of people living in the colonial situation. This happens through the body schema, which is, roughly speaking, the body's "grasp" or "sense" of itself. Under the pressure of colonial thinking, the Black person's self-awareness becomes distorted, and the Black person experiences herself as object-like. Fanon does not tell us what happens to *white* self-awareness, but I have argued here that a proper understanding of Fanon's account of the body schema provides an answer to this question. Fanon draws on Merleau-Ponty's account of the body schema, according to which it underlies, not just one's own bodily awareness, but also awareness of other people. As such, the body schema makes normal intersubjective experience possible. It is the embodied relation between Black and white people that breaks down under the pressure of colonial ideology. The counterpart of Black self-awareness as object-like, is white self-awareness as tending toward solipsism. The white person has a tendency to experience Black others as mere denizens of a solipsistic world that is for-her—a form of perception that is linked to dehumanization.[15]

[14]I'd like to thank an anonymous reviewer for suggesting that the analysis I offer here provides a way to understand Fanon's claim that colonialism brings about a "dual narcissism," affecting both colonized and colonizer (Fanon, 2008, p. 3). Narcissism involves certain kinds of blurring of the boundaries between self and other. Solipsistic perception of the sort I describe here looks like it maps onto one type of narcissism. Developing this idea is beyond the scope of this article, but I intend to return to it in future work.

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Komarine Romdenh-Romluc is a senior lecturer in philosophy at the University of Sheffield. Her primary area of research is phenomenology. She is the author of the *Routledge Guidebook to Merleau-Ponty and the* Phenomenology of Perception (Routledge, 2011) and has also written various articles on issues arising in the phenomenological tradition.