

The Ends of Critical Intimacy

Spivak, Fanon, and Appropriative Reading

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In spring 2020, I wrote a first draft of this chapter in “self-isolation” during the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. As I am editing its final version in January 2021, we are still in the middle of the pandemic, again in “lock-down” in the Netherlands and still unsure where all of this takes us. What is quite evident though is that so far the predominant method to “grasp” what is going on has been the count of infected bodies. What is less attended to, at least in media discourse, is how the policy responses to COVID-19 across the globe (will) affect sociality; how they already afflict different social groups very unevenly; in what particular ways the underlying biocentrism (Wynter) of allegedly “protecting all lives” (Hartman) is complemented by the necropolitics that makes “all” not pertain to everyone.¹ It seems to me that beyond statistics and numbers, we also need to ask critically, how pandemic policies tap into the necro/biopolitical, neocolonial, hypertechnologized, security-prone, finance-capitalistic grounds of the early twenty-first century. How is “social” reconfigured in “social distancing” (and is it?) when what we are doing is, as many noted, physical distancing? What are the “governing fictions” (Fanon) at work in this superposition of “bodily” and “social”?

The COVID-19 pandemic comes after decades in which neoconservative and neoliberal governance has tried to reconfigure the social as a collection of individual bodies—think of Thatcher’s dictum that society does not exist, that there are only “individual men and women and there are families” (1987). Decades which correspondingly have seen drastic defunding of public services such as health care (now exacerbating the pressure on IC-units and the menace of triage) and higher education. In the latter, especially the humanities were hit disproportionately hard and fields associated with critique such as “literature” and “theory” have come under increasing suspicion by university administrations of being useless (i.e., of not generating sufficient

external funding from “societal partners”). These intersecting governing fictions of the past decades will have to be read: How do they continue to inform COVID-19 policies? How are they altered by the pandemic? Counting death by disease does not replace understanding the ((un)changing) operations of sociopolitical life in 2021 and beyond. “We” (a grouping that needs to be continuously and critically examined) will have to get a read on the deep grammars of this situation; a reading that does not emerge from statistics. Even a nonhuman agent such as SARS-CoV-2 requires that one reads it: not just its DNA, but also its effects, the conflictual agendas, the conceptions of the social that operate in relation to it. In that light, what follows is a plea for reading as a critical method—always in view of the social.

But first, a word on critique. As someone inspired by twentieth-century cultural critique, I cannot but start from the assumption that an end of critique, if not *the* end, is not only to diagnose social ills but also to produce transformative effects “for the better.” Especially the critical impetus of feminist and postcolonial analyses of the power/knowledge nexus constituting capitalist-patriarchal-colonial culture (henceforth CPC)² have been influential for me in this regard. From that angle, an end of critique is pushing us/the world to move from oppression toward greater social justice. Or, as Sylvia Wynter (2015) argues, especially with Frantz Fanon, the end of critique (which is also its conundrum) is to extricate ourselves from the current colonial-patriarchal-bourgeois-biocentric regime of being/knowledge that constitutes us all, albeit unequally. “*Comment s’en sortir?*” (1952, 9), as Fanon asks in *Peau noire, masques blancs*.

Indeed, how to get out? Merely counting on intellectual insight to be implemented, in the tradition of the Enlightenment hope that understanding will lead to (good) action, has historically proven not very effective; insight into persistent structural racism or sexism does not cause them to disappear, even if discrimination is legally, constitutionally banned. For transformation to actually take hold, more than rational critique and legal certification is needed. With the backing of legal declarations of equality (because without them, not even a first step is taken), also affective-cognitive habits need retraining. “We” need to learn different dispositions.³ Keeping in mind as an *end* of critique Fanon’s interest in “break[ing] the cycle” (Fanon 2008, xiv), which is Philcox’s translation of the question cited above, what are the *critical practices* needed to work toward that end? How to affectively and cognitively forge the tools to “extricate ourselves” (Fanon 1986, 12; Markmann’s translation of Fanon’s question), if critique in its traditional modality has fallen short here? What modes of critique might target the hegemonic corporeal-intellectual dispositions, which have so persistently been

molded according to the CPC regime of power/being/knowledge, with recent neoliberal twists, so that we can begin to learn new habits and to revision the formations of the social?

With these questions in mind, this chapter engages, perhaps counterintuitively, with the practice of reading. For Gayatri Spivak, reading itself can become a critical practice that does not primarily increase insight, but that can work toward “the rearrangement of desires, your own, and theirs”—if it trains us “in reading the other(s) carefully enough” (2014b, 164–165). Through reading, Spivak suggests, we can train ourselves away from self-interest and toward a concern for greater social justice. Of course, one might wonder how reading—by definition an act that is tied to textual material usually enjoyed by oneself in silence—can become a site of relearning and especially a site where the social or even social justice come into play. What kind of act or movement is reading, if we conceive of it as invested in retraining affective-cognitive habits? With the help of Spivak—her reflections on aesthetic education, as well as her engagement with Fanon—I will explore these questions, taking reading as a critical practice that invites us to engage intimately with (textual) otherness and that can affectively educate us toward considering others first; that is, train desire toward the social. When engaged in reading (especially in reading *literature*, as the chapter’s first part discusses) we can begin to practice breaking the cycles of appropriation and narcissism operative in CPC. Learning to move in critical intimacy is key here, as we shall see. However, critical intimacy is not only at play when reading literature, it also (albeit in slightly different ways) pertains to reading theoretical texts. Taking Spivak’s reading of “Fanon Reading Hegel” as an example, the chapter’s second part argues that critical intimacy permits an engagement with the thoughts of others that bypasses the established protocols of critical distance and rational critique. Spivak reading Fanon offers a different style of critique and considering Fanon’s moves with-and-beyond Hegel, we will see operations of critique that work differently from the traditional notions of critique as opposition, or as the detection and correction of shortcomings in the texts of others. As we shall see, Fanon neither accuses nor attempts to correct Hegel, but instead appropriates Hegel—and thereby paradoxically undercuts a racialized, colonial-capitalist order that thrives on the very appropriation of otherness. The chapter makes, therefore, a plea for reading in the service of transformation.

REFRAIN FROM APPROPRIATION. READING AS AESTHETIC EDUCATION

When thinking about reading as a practice or an act, the debates around the ethics of reading literature come to mind. Inspired by Jacques Derrida’s

work on *différance* and the literary, Derek Attridge's engagement with J. M. Coetzee and Spivak's work on Mahasweta Devi, for example, have considered the ethical implications of reading literature. For both, reading is a practice that hinges on a reader's exposure to the singularity or incalculable otherness of a literary text, where one encounters realities that are experienced as different from oneself and which challenge us to make the effort of understanding this alterity, an effort that is difficult and never complete due to the text's composition. In *Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading*, Attridge argues that reading a literary text requires a specific type of responsiveness to what one encounters. For Attridge, reading designates something more specific than what we conventionally understand by it: the act of "scan[ning] or study[ing] writing silently [. . .] by oneself or for one's own benefit" (OED) in order to discern a message. Instead, reading here means engaging with a complex linguistic, narrative texture—riddled with ambiguity and polyvalence so that one clear message is persistently complicated—and designates the very practice or event of acknowledging and responding to these complexities. Therein lies the ethical injunction: "Reading a work of literature entails opening oneself to the unpredictable, the future, the other, and thereby accepting the responsibility laid upon one by the work's singularity and difference" (Attridge 2004a, 9). Each time anew, literary texts activate readers to wrestle with this otherness and if that engagement does not occur, the time spent with a text would not be reading in this strong sense. The ethics of reading consists in this challenge to enter "a process of constant reappraisal and self-redefinition" (Attridge 2004b, 111). Literature invites readers to struggle with their assumptions and challenges them to "understand how little you understand me, translate my untranslatability" (131). Reading is this specific epistemological and affective exercise and Attridge highlights its ethical dimensions.⁴ Akin to Attridge, Spivak makes a similar proposition for the ethical element in literary education and reading as a practice. She holds that reading literature demands (but also *in the act* trains) a particular "epistemological performance" (Spivak 2014b, 4), a specific "micrology of practice" (5). Putting before us idioms and fictive realities not easily commensurable with our own, the literary invites us to "suspend our own interest into the language that is happening in the text" (4). As for Attridge, reading consists for Spivak in an exposure to otherness (the text, its language and protocols) that, given the pleasure it evokes, invites us to get close to what is other, to pay attention to "otherwise ignored detail" (7) and to refrain, for a moment, from judgment. Reading literature appropriately consists in such a suspension, it requires us to refrain from appropriating the otherness before us and to become attuned to the complexities invoked.⁵

Hence, the *ethical* consists in the summons to suspend immediate self-interest and the desire to impose our (pre)conceptions onto the text/other,

to refrain from the appropriative drive that arrests a world of differences into “the Selfsame.”⁶ On these ethical grounds of suspended appropriation, Spivak’s investment in reading as *aesthetic* education—prominent throughout *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization* (2012) and *Readings* (2014)—stems from the additional conviction that literary reading also makes possible “a painstaking *learning* of the language of the other” (Spivak 2014b, 6; emphasis added). Literature here becomes one key site to train the imagination and evokes more than an experience of otherness as incommensurable or an experience of the limits of self. Beyond the ethical suspension of self that is central to Attridge’s ethics of reading, the turn toward the aesthetic explicates a layer that the ethical implies but does not exhaust. The experience of otherness inherent in the literary is turned here toward the senses or *aisthesis*; toward the possibility of a training that works through affect, an *aesthetic* education that cultivates us to bear (with) otherness and complexity. The collected essays in Spivak’s *Readings* express the hope that literary reading can be part of such a deeper training of the imagination (i.e., a tuning or turning that outstrips the experience of limitation) whereby we might “be given habits that deeply relate to others first, the very principle of social justice” (25). Thus, from the perspective of an aesthetic education, reading is not only a site where we (negatively) experience the self’s limits of understanding otherness, but a critically affirmative site, where—infinately slowly and incalculably—desire might be rearranged by *unlearning* appropriation and *learning* to approach the languages of others, by *redirecting* affects toward a desire for responsibility, by *moving* our epistemological disposition toward social justice. Even though Spivak acknowledges that this is “undoubtedly a utopian vision” (22), it is where transformation (can) occur(s): in the moves of un/learning and redirecting which entail a however minute recomposition of the one who undergoes them, of one no longer at the safe distance of judgment or (mere) empathy with others, but one moving and learning with and from others/otherness. This is a vision Spivak affirms not only as an educator and teacher of literature, but also as an organic intellectual thinking with Gramsci and Marx.

As a teacher of literature myself, I affirm this role for literature in an age of globalization, when learning to appropriately (i.e., not in an appropriative manner) encounter and read otherness is a pressing concern, on the affective-cognitive, not merely the conceptual, level. Literature and other (visual, filmic) textualities can help us common readers, in our encounters with (literary) works of art, to practice intimate exposure to what is experienced as foreign and to relearn what sociality—being with and among others *as other(s)*—might mean. Literature (in and outside the classroom) can foster learning *to read* in this sense. Slowly but surely, it might assist us in veering away from narcissistic self-involvement toward thinking with and in view of

others first. That at least is the wager for literature and the arts here; and in this veering, this setting in motion, lies its critical, transformative potential. Reading then becomes a little bit like acrobatics or dancing, engaged in teaching us to make different cognitive-affective moves than the knee-jerk concern for self. By attending to literary texts carefully, we can become more adept in negotiating the difficult intimacies that difference and otherness demand.

I suggested just now that Spivak is thinking through this with Gramsci and Marx. I want to briefly turn to her “What’s Left of Theory?” (2012 [2000]) to illustrate why. Thereby, this chapter will also move from considering reading as a critical micro-practice that is hypothetically enacted in reading *literature* as unlearning appropriation, to the appropriations effected by more specialized readers when reading what is commonly called *theory*. One of these specialized readers is Spivak herself, to whose reading of Fanon, another specialized reader, I will turn momentarily. But for the moment, in conclusion of my first part and with the help of “What’s Left of Theory?,” I want to highlight again how Spivak’s engagement with the micro-practices of reading *literature* as unlearning appropriation is invested in an affective training for social justice. In “What’s Left of Theory?,” Spivak engages with two key elements of Marx’s thinking: his stress on labor-power as abstraction (which Spivak affirms and works with); and his ultimately humanist, Enlightenment trust in reason. It is the latter that is relevant here, because it made Marx assume, Spivak suggests, that once the workers understand themselves as agents of production, their public (social) use of reason must lead to revolution (and the left, in its Engelsian empiricism, followed him in this). In that regard, Marx was a thinker of his time and its unchecked Enlightenment belief in the force of reason. However, writing at the beginning of the twenty-first century and after Gramsci, Spivak can see that what this “left uncalculated was the epistemological burden of training the socialist subject” (2012a, 185). Marx did not pose the question why—once the *Mehrwert* produced through labor-power was understood—“an epistemically unprepared population” (185) should opt for socialism, rather than for improving their capitalist skills or even fascism. Even if we cognitively (or rationally) realized the freedom that inheres in labor-power, namely that its surplus can also be put to use for social(ist) justice and not only for capitalist accumulation, it is unclear why the desire for social justice should follow. Or, if it followed, how it could be sustained and become habit. The enlightened belief in rational insight alone will not do, because we can just as well opt for getting “better and better at making money” (2012b, 198). Therefore, what is needed

in order to make change sustainable, if not possible in the first place, is not just (class-)consciousness, but—with-and-beyond Marx—“cognitive tuning” (201) toward a responsibility for the social. “What’s Left of Theory?” calls this tuning an “aesthetic education as training the imagination for epistemological performance” (197). Reading literature, which, as we saw, provides a generous exposure to otherness, can be one important element in such an epistemologico-affective training.

With this, we can return to the questions raised earlier: How can reading as an intimate act, tied to a textual material commonly enjoyed by oneself in silence, be a site where social justice comes into play? I hope one can now better see the intimate link between a will for social justice and the type of training that literary reading can foster. The movements one undergoes when reading—wrestling with the incalculable, bearing the incommensurability of a text’s idiom with “my” language, paying attention to detail—are crucial not only as a constant reevaluation of the self or a change in individual disposition, but they also tie the intimate activity of reading to the social. When engaging in the micro-practice of reading in the sense outlined, it moves us toward thinking of others first and thus places us within a horizon of the social. “Literary reading has to be learned” (Spivak 2019, 18), but it is *in the learning of reading* that learning to refrain from appropriation is made tangible. Such training of the imagination toward the social is needed to make “revolutions last” (Spivak 2014b, 5). In nano-moves, the practice of reading literature can epistemically prepare readers to bear the complexities of sociality: suspend judgment of characters whose reasons I do not (yet) understand or agree with; endure the indeterminacy or polyvalence of language and yet continue to find my bearing; realize the world’s heteroglossia and resist the urge of reducing what are complex idioms to only one story or voice. What such aesthetic, affective-cognitive moves can generate is an orientation toward a desire for social justice—so that, for example, an insight like Marx’s into the operations of labor-power might fall onto *those* grounds, rather than onto the will to accumulate or to merely turn the tables. Surely, to say it again: aesthetic education in view of the social is a utopian project because it would be dangerously naïve to think that reading literature will make the revolution. But the thwarting of appropriation that reading demands *as one learns to read* literature can make it more likely that one might keep narcissism in check, tuning readers toward the social and getting us ready for wanting and anticipating a different future. In the meantime, I learn how to learn reading from and with others.

The second half of this chapter now turns to the related, yet distinct practice that was already hinted at above as the (perhaps counterintuitively) *appropriative* mode of reading theory—a mode that Spivak’s own reading of Marx (too briefly touched on above) enacts. As we will see, just like *reading*

literature in the outlined sense, *reading theory* designates a particular type of operation that is different from interpretation or commentary. But as we will see, the operations of reading theory by what Spivak and Gramsci call “organic intellectuals” also differ from the ethico-aesthetic training highlighted so far. Whereas intimacy with otherness in reading literature is directed at *refraining from appropriation*, the “critical intimacy” (Spivak 2014b, 12) at work when reading theory is instead rather *appropriative*. Reading here means becoming critically intimate with other thinkers so that one can, as Spivak suggests, work with-and-beyond them, generously use their texts in order to turn them around and appropriate them for one’s own purposes.⁷ So, intimacy here is not the same as intimacy in literary reading. Whereas a literary-aesthetic education trains me to abstain from imposing myself on the text, guiding me to become intimate with an otherness that nevertheless remains different and inappropriable and thus (re)training affects that are critical of CPC’s appropriative drive, the critical intimacy when reading theory works quite differently. It thrives on the desire to get into the thoughts of others and, where necessary and appropriate, use them for one’s own project. In such an appropriative move lies *its* critical transformative potential. In that vein, Spivak does not discard Marx as a thinker indebted to an Enlightenment trust in reason or the teleology of History, but rather becomes critically intimate with his thought, works with-and-beyond him—as we will see Fanon work with-and-beyond Hegel. As I hope will become clear in what follows, appropriation here is also quite different from the very powerful and voracious appropriation of everything into the sameness of CPC. What I call the appropriative reading of theory instead implies a positionality within and contestation of power relations (of who appropriates what?), while at the same time it refuses to discard certain thinkers or texts even if they clearly have limitations and problems (such as Hegel’s racism or Marx’s eschatology). I will take Fanon as a case in point here, pursuing Spivak’s reading of Fanon in “Fanon Reading Hegel” (2014), interlaced with attention to Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* itself, where Fanon takes what he needs from (Freud, Adler and) Hegel. “Reading Hegel” comes down to refusing to refuse Hegel as much as refusing to adhere to Hegel; a readiness to get intimate with another thought that the chapter’s second half calls appropriative reading.

Appropriative Reading: Spivak Reading Fanon Reading Hegel

A disclaimer at the start here to avoid opening an unfortunate and entirely misleading opposition between literature and theory. Ultimately, reading is reading: careful attention to the protocols of a text. So, just as with reading literature, when reading theory “[w]e do not bulldoze over the linguistic

practice of the theorist's work, making argumentative gist [. . .] we read it as a primary text, not as something that we are going to apply, not instrumentalizing it, but for its own sake" (Spivak 2014b, 77). In distinguishing between the two directions of reading, as I am doing here, my intention is not to classify practices, disciplines, or genres; rather, it is to tease out the different yet related styles of critique inherent in both. If the end of critique is transformation in view of social justice, if we can no longer put our trust (only) in reason and if critique from a distance as correction or fault-finding is neither sufficient nor effective, then we need to ask as precisely as possible: What modes of intimacy are at play in different modalities of critique? And how is reading one such mode of critical intimacy? As this second part argues, much like reading literature, reading theory is also an act of intimacy. It is not an application as if from the outside, or a utilitarian extraction of points or concepts from a theoretical text. Rather, it means to work intimately with a theorist's thought and text, and from that position of critical intimacy to start moving (with) it. However, these two maneuvers of intimacy are slightly different from each other. While I call the intimacy when reading theory appropriative, critical intimacy with literature trains us for the reverse. That said, let us turn to the example of Spivak reading Fanon reading Hegel.⁸

All the chapters in Spivak's *Readings* are based on lectures given at a four-day seminar at the University of Pune in May 2012. In "Fanon Reading Hegel," Spivak closely pursues the relatively short seventh chapter of Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (hereafter *BSWM*), entitled "The Black Man and Recognition," which is divided into subchapters on "The Black Man and Adler" and "The Black Man and Hegel" (2008, 185–197). Spivak tells her audience that although the fifth chapter of *BSWM* ("The Lived Experience of the Black Man") is usually selected as core reading from Fanon's canonical text, chapter seven, where he "reads Hegel," is where Fanon makes a move from negritude (of which chapter five is critical) "into something else" (Spivak 2014a, 30). Hence her focus on this chapter, which she uses to expound what reading means in Fanon's case. How, then, does Fanon read Hegel, according to Spivak? And considering critique no longer as exercising rational judgment within the horizon of universality, the question is also: Where from and what for does Fanon read Hegel? *Cui bono*?

Spivak opens "Fanon Reading Hegel" by noting precisely this positionality, stating that "[t]he Antilles are still not postcolonial" (28). Indeed, the West Indies, or more precisely Martinique and Guadeloupe, are still to this day administrative regions of France. As Spivak's opening suggests, Fanon starts from a concern for the colonial condition; a condition tied to relating to alterity through appropriation, the very mode of relating that literary reading sets out to re(s)train. Spivak makes sure to explicitly tell us where *BSWM* was written from:

Frantz Fanon writes from Algeria, not his place of origin—Martinique—when he is talking to us about Africa. A gentleman, traumatized by not being recognized as a French gentleman in France, wanting to go to a French-speaking country—first choice: Senegal. But Léopold Sédar Senghor does not respond to him. Therefore, Fanon goes to his second choice: Algeria. (28)⁹

Thus, Fanon writes *BSWM* and reads Hegel in chapter seven from that situation—from within French education, not recognized as French, as a gentleman of a certain class from Martinique and later Algeria, in a (blocked) conversation with one of the founders of *négritude*. His engagement with Hegel comes at the end of the book's analysis of the Antillean "identification process" (Fanon 2008, 126) and immediately after chapter six on "The Black Man and Psychopathology" as well as Fanon's engagement with Adler at the start of chapter seven. Thus, on the one hand, Fanon comes to Hegel as an educated man from Martinique who was forced to undergo the lived experience of racism, its "suffocating reification" (89), upon arriving in France (discussed in chapter 5), and, on the other hand, he comes to Hegel as the psychiatrist who speaks back to the discipline of his clinical training. Hegel interests him in light of these perspectives and Spivak rightly notes that Fanon was therefore not trying to "produce a correct description of Hegel" (2014a, 55)—offer commentary or interpretation. Rather, he *reads* Hegel in a strong sense: starting from within a certain concern, Fanon gets—and this is Spivak's argument on reading theory *in nuce*—into the movement of Hegel's text, appropriates his *philosopheme* of the master/slave-relation for the question of Antillean subjectivity and blackness for which psychoanalysis and psychiatry have proven insufficient. He uses Hegel partly against himself, especially Hegel's *Philosophy of History*, and does so from the vantage point of his own interest in sociogeny, over and against Freud and Adler's focus on bourgeois individuality.

Reading Hegel here means, Spivak proposes, that Fanon inserts himself "inside the text of the other, not as her/himself. It is not 'Please, Hegel, be like me!' It is rather 'Hegel, here I come, to ventriloquize you'." (31) At the end of his analysis of Blackness, colonialism and the inability of psychoanalysis to account for the emergence of Antillean self-consciousness, Fanon "*appropriates* and claims the Hegelian text" (31; emphasis added) and thereby performs the only *appropriate* move with which to respond to colonial-patriarchal-bourgeois conceptions of the Subject. In order to "combat [. . . those] governing fictions" (45), Fanon's appropriat(iv)e reading opens conceptualizations of alterity and Man that "turn the [Hegelian] text around" (31). But let us unravel this slowly and keep in sight the question of critical intimacy.

"The analysis we are undertaking" in *BSWM*, Fanon writes, "is psychoanalytical. It remains, nevertheless, evident that for us the true disalienation

of the black man implies a brutal awareness of the social and economic realities” (xiv).¹⁰ What Fanon at the opening of *BSWM* calls the disalienation of the Black man informs the entire span of the argument and it is also from this angle that he comes to Hegel in chapter seven. The emergence of self-consciousness of “the black man”—given his [*sic*] psychological-cum-socio-economic alienation—poses itself as a problem to Fanon, from the vantage point of the Antilles; a problem for which the psychoanalytic tools at hand are inadequate. They are inadequate, because the psychic complexes they describe and are meant to treat have been developed (Fanon explains this in depth in the sixty pages leading up to his engagement with Hegel) with the White, bourgeois European institutions of individual and family in mind. However, as the “Introduction” to *BSWM* already postulates and as the entire text expounds until coming to Hegel, “the alienation of the black man is not an individual question” (xv). Fanon’s famous addition of sociogeny to Freud’s phylogeny and ontogeny is a response to that insufficiency.¹¹ We can see that Fanon here thinks *with-and-beyond* Freud, as he will think, for different reasons, *with-and-beyond* Hegel: while acknowledging Freud’s claim of the individual factor for psychiatry as innovative, namely a reaction against what Fanon calls the “constitutionalizing trend” (xv) of the nineteenth century, he also points out its inadequacy to Antillean and Black realities in the twentieth century. Although Freud’s claim may have given important impulses for the analysis of psychic ailments of late nineteenth-century bourgeois European society, the isomorphism of individual, family, and nation does not work in the same way for the Antillean, Black child: “Whether you like it or not the Oedipus complex is far from being a black complex” (130). Whereas bourgeois, European society projects the “characteristics of the family environment [. . .] onto the social environment” (121), so that social structures are replicated and can be practiced within the bourgeois-patriarchal family, the Black child, according to Fanon, is made to experience a profound rupture between the two.

As long as the black child remains on his home ground his life follows more or less the same course as that of the white child. But if he goes to Europe he will have to rethink his life, for in France, his country, he will feel different from the rest [. . .] he is made to feel inferior. (127)

Evidently, Fanon has especially the colonial relation of the Antilles and France in mind here. It is going to the metropole—an experience famously described in “The Lived Experience of the Black Man”—that causes a psychic break, realizing one is and is not part of one’s country. Exposure to a predominantly white social environment and its myths around Blackness/whiteness needs to be taken into account, in order to understand what Fanon

calls the dependency and inferiority complexes of the Black man; and hence, as we heard above, Fanon claims that “[a]longside phylogeny and ontogeny, there is also sociogeny” (xv).

One could think that herewith Fanon’s analysis of psychic life of the colonized Antilles—always in full view of the social and economic realities saturating it—has achieved its goal. Since the analysis is stated as psychoanalytical, once readers have followed *BSWM* through its exposure of the links between Black existence, language, and myths of racialization (in chapters one to three), its unraveling of the “massive psycho-existential complex” (xvi) that the apposition of white and black have caused (chapters two to five), and its demonstration that the underlying fictions governing phenomenology, existentialism, and psychoanalysis are inadequate not only to Black lived experience, but also complicit with the maintenance of racism (chapters 5 and 6), that *analysis* is indeed complete. And with it, the fact of supplementing psychoanalysis with sociogeny is established. One might, therefore, take the brief, twelve-page chapter on “The Black Man and Recognition,” and especially its six pages on Hegel, at first sight as a mere addendum. But, of course, those pages are more than that. It is, in fact, in this brief final chapter where Fanon *does* what he proclaims in the Introduction, namely that “[b]y *analyzing* it [the massive psycho-existential complex of black and white] we aim to *destroy* it” (xvi; emphases added). Appropriating Hegel for his own project, in this final chapter Fanon moves from analysis “into something else” (Spivak 2014a, 30). It is here that we can watch him turn things around. For sure, the six pages on Hegel only take effect in light of the 190 pages preceding and preparing them, so just a cautionary note to be clear: these pages are not the linear culmination of Fanon’s argument. The destruction of the bourgeois-colonial frame of the individual already happens in the claim to sociogeny at the very start and *BSWM* has a similar proleptic temporality as Hegel’s *Phenomenology* itself, where the introduction states the project *in nuce* and the text “merely” but indispensably unravels it.¹² *BSWM*’s opening line itself notes that such explosions always occur “too early . . . or too late” (xi). So, the point is not to say that chapter six is the core of *BSWM*’s argument, but that we here get to see very closely *how* Fanon moves in critical intimacy with Hegel and appropriates a philosophical tool that may not have been intended for him, but that Fanon puts to use for his own purposes. It is here that we can watch him not only analyze, but also begin to transform (destroy) what Wynter calls the regime of Man2.

Therefore, let me return once more to the questions of reading raised earlier. We already saw *where* Fanon *reads from*: how the fact of Blackness is a matter of concern to him and that to tackle this concern he reclaims psychoanalysis and philosophy from a situatedness “in Postcoloniality” (to invoke one of the subtitles of Spivak’s chapter; 2014a, 39). We also saw that

the ends of his critical analysis of the “complex of inferiority” (Césaire qtd as epigraph, Fanon 2008, xi) instilled in the colonized is to destroy the entire psycho-existential complex of colonial, racialized modernity. So, exactly how then does Fanon read Hegel with-and-beyond Hegel? How does he put Hegel to use in ways that neither dismiss or find fault, nor merely offer commentary or a right or wrong interpretation, but that rather appropriate Hegel for his own critical ends? Having considered closely *what* Fanon reads for, we can now focus on *how* he does what he does, thus investigating more directly the procedures of appropriative reading.

In a way, Fanon both does and does not take Hegel at his word. The subchapter “The Black Man and Hegel” starts by quoting the opening to Hegel’s famous subsection in *The Phenomenology of Mind* on “Independence and Dependence of Self-Consciousness. Lordship and Bondage”: “Self-consciousness exists in itself and for itself, in that and by the fact that it exists for another self-consciousness; that is to say, it is only by being acknowledged or recognized” (Hegel 229; qtd in Fanon 2008, 191). It is the *mutual* recognition of two men (*sic*; see note 12) that Fanon affirms with Hegel; he highlights as crucial to Hegel’s phenomenology of self-consciousness that a recognition has to occur in “absolute reciprocity” (2008, 191). Recognition is therefore something else than being acknowledged within structures where the terms and values are already set and remain unchanged. Recognition is something else, Fanon holds, than being granted freedom in the abolition of slavery, one day in history when the “white masters grudgingly decided to raise the animal-machine man to the supreme rank of *man*” (194); such granting of freedom is not recognition, as it fails to be mutual and thus to destroy the racialized, colonizing regime of power/knowledge that is built on the very exclusion of reciprocity. “The individual, who has not staked his life, may, no doubt, be recognized as a *person*,” that is a legal position, “but he has not attained the truth of this recognition as an independent self-consciousness” (194). Although Fanon is clearly conscious of the Haitian revolution (he refers to it in the conclusion) and its revolutionary seizure of freedom from the French, that did not yet destroy racialized, colonial modernity—a fact that is evident not least when thinking from the Antilles, which are to this day administratively French. And it is precisely as a man from the Antilles that Fanon takes Hegel at his word in order to claim the philosophical tool over the historical fact *and* that he turns that *philosopheme* around.

In the pages leading up to his engagement with Hegel, Fanon speaks about that Antillean position at length. He contests Jung’s notion of the collective unconscious as something ahistorically archetypal and rooted in “inherited cerebral matter” (165) and shows, taking the Antilles as his case, that quite to the contrary the collective unconscious is a “cultural imposition” (167). It is sociogenic, in that—as we saw above—the family structure is insufficient

as analytic frame and the governing fictions that rein the social must be taken into account. Crucially, the Antilles are in that regard in what Wynter calls a liminal position, submitted to French imperial narratives of universal “Frenchness” and the lived experience of Blackness. It is from this position of liminality that Fanon can be heretic, Wynter holds (cf. 2015, 58ff). And also for Spivak that position is crucial to Fanon’s reading of Hegel: helped by this contradictory situatedness of Frenchness and Blackness, Fanon assumes the right to reciprocity in Hegel’s dialectic and he reads Hegel’s model of self-consciousness and the emergence of the Subject as *for him*. “Helped by this conviction” (and enabled by his problematic patriarchal notions displayed in chapters two and three of *BSWM*), Spivak writes, “Fanon puts himself in the place of the Hegelian Subject, clear away from the well-placed diasporic” (31). By taking Hegel at his word, Fanon is reading him against himself in a double fashion. Hegel’s account of history as world spirit in his *Philosophy of History* (1822–1831, published 1837) infamously relegated African civilization to the early stages (“childhood”) or outside of human history. Its apologetic argument for the institution of slavery gave “expression and legitimacy to every conceivable European racist myth about Africa” (Ngũgĩ 1986, 30 note 15).¹³ Yet, although Hegel did not have Fanon in mind as one of his potential addressees, *BSWM* does not discard Hegel for his delusions about History and Western civilization. Instead, Fanon simply refuses that (non)address and uses what he needs from Hegel’s *philosopheme*, neither buying into his racist presuppositions, nor in any way neglecting the history of their onto-epistemological and material violence. However, not stopping at *analyzing* that violence and taking Hegel as one case in point, Fanon “is doing something more: he is combating governing fictions” (Spivak 2014a, 45), with Hegel (because insightful) and beyond Hegel (because necessary). Contesting the teleology and white supremacy of the Hegelian idea of History, from his double-edged male position Fanon puts himself in the place of the self-consciousness that Hegel’s *Phenomenology* unravels. He asserts the position of man that Hegel’s *Philosophy of History* would deny him. So, although *BSWM* analyses at length the excruciating onto-epistemological and corporeal violence of the “zone of non-being” (xii) reserved for Blackness in Hegel’s universe (and CPC), Fanon refuses its ascription and affirms himself as (new) man: as a being who “is not only the potential for self-consciousness or negation [but also] a ‘yes’ resonating from cosmic harmonies” (xii). A “[y]es and no” (197) that Fanon returns to on the last page of chapter six: “We said in our introduction that man was an *affirmation*. We shall never stop repeating it. Yes to life. Yes to love. Yes to generosity” (197). Thus, even if he was not the *Phenomenology*’s implied reader and the *Philosophy of History* tried to consolidate his place as non-addressee (to say the least), Fanon, a gentleman from Martinique, refuses to be “a prisoner of History”

(204) and claims reciprocity as a philosophical tool from Hegel in order to put it to use for decoloniality and disalienation. Rather than finding fault with Hegel from a critical distance, Fanon enters the protocols of Hegel's text to such an extent that he comes to be "in a position neither to excuse [. . .] nor to accuse [. . .], but to locate a place where you think the text will allow you to turn it round and use it—to use its best energies for the project at hand" (Spivak 2014b, 161–162). In *BSWM*, and in demonstrable fashion in chapter six, Fanon is a most engaged reader, "claiming the text as the other's text *for me*" (Spivak 2014a, 35; emphasis added). What he does is "affirmative sabotage" (49).

THWARTING GOVERNING FICTIONS

"Fanon is able to see, on both sides—the European mistake and the Antillean suggestion of invincible uniqueness. There *are* competing and governing fictions. This is what gives him his power" (Spivak 2014a, 45; emphasis added). The reciprocity on which Fanon insists, *using* Hegel, permits him to claim his right to be a man, *simpliciter*, not a black man. It is a reciprocity that must ultimately eliminate the dualities of black/white. "Superiority? Inferiority? Why not simply try to touch the other, feel the other, discover each other?" (Fanon 2008, 206). Fanon does not merely apply, reverse, or imitate Hegel here, rather he morphs what Hegel thinks he says into what Fanon can use to speak for decolonization, using Hegel's best energies (the insistence on reciprocity) and putting them to work for his own project. That is, he reads appropriately.

By refusing to work only with negation, as we saw, Fanon "deliberately makes a mistake" (Spivak 2014a, 44), but it is a "mistake" that helps him refuse to accept the *Phenomenology's* master-slave dialectic as a "description of what happens" (44). In his insistence on reciprocity as philosophical booty, Fanon contests the historically implicit epidermalization of the master/slave dialectic, with-and-beyond Hegel himself.¹⁴ Spivak warns that "[t]he specialists will stop you. Someone who really knows Hegel will say, 'Ah!' But in fact these mistakes tell us something about what to *do* with philosophy" (35; emphasis added). If appropriative reading is making mistakes, it makes them in critical intimacy: that is, as a result of a generous-critical engagement that becomes so intimate with the thinking of others that the latter becomes one's own "mental furniture" (Spivak 2014b, 77). It makes errors perhaps in view of a thinker's established reception. However, whether one gives a right or wrong interpretation might not be the appropriate measure or the most important point. Rather, appropriative reading intends to claim that "mental furniture"—affirmatively—for one's own project at hand. Thus, "mistakes"

are not a shortcoming, but the effect of training oneself carefully enough in the idiom of the other; they stem from having “learnt to make the reading movements dictated by the text,” however, crucially, “without the guarantee that we are correct” (Spivak 2014a, 57). Certainly, there is a very fine line between misunderstandings or misreadings and “mistakes” in an appropriate reading.

The mistake that was made with Marx’s philosophy was—thanks to Engels who did not understand Marx’s counter-intuitive genius—to use it as if it were a blueprint for unmediated imitation in statecraft. That is the exact opposite of “claiming the text” by entering its protocols. (35–36)

In line with Marx and Feuerbach, the point of appropriating appropriately might not be to interpret the work of others. Instead, it might be to use it well, that is to make of reading a practice which aims to transform one’s present, not an application of ready-made concepts from thinkers of the past.

Thus, when reading theory in critical intimacy, the move is to make the thought-figures of another part of our own intellectual habitat, helping us to negotiate their potentials and limits and to forge from them our own (theoretical) weapons. We might not have to discard texts *tout court* because they are limited or problematic in certain respects. It might rather be a question of first getting as close as possible to them, “reading as carefully as possible, without the desire to reclaim” (39, emphasis added). A desire to reclaim (or to dismiss) would only get in the way of reading as carefully and intimately as possible and of then using (or eventually discarding) them well. Inspired by Fanon and Spivak, one might then say that the point of reading as critical intimacy is not to judge theoretical texts as correct or false, but to work with them, even if they may not be intending to speak to *me*; even if they have problematic presuppositions that make it necessary to deconstruct them and turn a text around. If those moves can help detect and thwart some of our own governing fictions, including the categories of individuality, identity (politics) and sociality that dominate the early twenty-first century, then it seems worth “entering their protocols.”

When reading literature in critical intimacy, as I have suggested, a slightly different task is put to us, namely to refrain from appropriating the text’s idiom and thus move affective-cognitive habits away from the quick discarding or appropriating of otherness that CPC thrives on. By sitting with a literary text—its idiom, strange fictive universe, or challenging opacity—without making the move to appropriate one begins thwarting a governing fiction of CPC: appropriate what is other. If reading literature moves us to instead bear with otherness, it seems worth the effort of reading. In both cases—reading literary texts or reading theoretical texts—critique turns, as I have been

suggesting, into an affective-corporeal practice that is somewhat akin to dancing, sometimes dancing in view of a project at hand, sometimes dancing in view of letting the text be and bearing otherness. Both require us to practice new steps for the future, a new style of critique that works with critical intimacy, moving us/the world rather than aiming to describe, analyze, judge, or dismiss.

In my opening vignette I suggested that the intersecting governing fictions of the past decades will have to be read. Surely, a critical reading of COVID-19—the policies and changes the virus has effected—is not the same as reading texts. But a constellation such as the “corona-era” also operates on (shifting) grids of signification and presupposition. Detecting these grids requires careful attention and degrees of intimacy; thwarting the governing fictions that uphold them will be impossible to do as if from the outside, by judging and dismissing, not least because the complicities here are too messy. The virus, this nonhuman agent at the limit of life, does not permit easy side-taking. It simply makes no sense to be for or against SARS-CoV-2. So can we, I wonder, become intimate enough with the situation inflicted by COVID-19 so as to critique it from the inside? Read it, enter its protocols and turn it, with-and-beyond itself? Can we critically affirm it and learn to move it in other directions than the state-corporate surveillance, intensified immunization of renationalized collectives and prohibition of social intimacies? Can we make use of this blaze that threatens to sweep away the few democratic, civil rights achievements of the twentieth century and turn it around for social and planetary justice in the twenty-first? That surely would seem to be one of the ends of critique.

NOTES

1. For the disproportionate exposure of people of color, poor people or people living in the Global South to COVID-19, but also disease in general, see Andrews (2020); Hartman (2020); Preciado (2020).

2. In its series 2018/2019, the collective ReadingRoom (<http://terracritica.net/readingroom/>) dubbed the interlocking system of capitalism ~ patriarchy ~ colonialism CPC. I will use the acronym hereafter.

3. The use of “we” here is inspired by Derrida’s “we” as a perpetual question (Derrida 1972, 136), that is, a category in need of continuous reexamination, and by Wynter’s use of “we” to delineate the *systemic* quality of a hegemonic regime of being/knowledge: its epistemic fault lines affecting everyone though privileging only certain groups (who are especially called upon to unlearn privilege and learn different dispositions); for more on Wynter, see Thiele in this volume.

4. Clearly, such an approach to reading differs drastically from the type of activity to which, for example, proponents of “surface” or “distant” reading refer, where

reading is associated with discerning patterns from larger clusters of data or descriptive neutrality. I discuss the pitfalls of these latter in Kaiser 2021; see also Peeren in this volume.

5. To do justice to the argument, I would need to consider in detail how the literary operates in that regard. As that would leave no space for the *modi* of reading as critique that I am after here, I refer readers for now to Spivak 2019 (on Coetzee's *Disgrace* and how it summons readers to counterfocalize, that is, actively nudges readers to contest the narrative perspective); and Spivak (1995; 2012a, 60–72; 2012b, 209–214; 2014a, 67–76) (all examining how Devi spurs responses to otherness, especially the tribals of India, and moves readers toward suspending self-interest and attending to the idioms of others).

6. Cixous (1986, 79). Cixous offers a feminist reading of Hegel's dialectic. Where Fanon reclaims narcissism, feminist responses to Hegel's death-freedom opposition have turned to Echo as Narcissus's gendered other in order to critique narcissism's patriarchal patterns and think toward self-consciousness for a feminist postcoloniality. For Echo in that regard, see Cixous (2009); Kaiser (2019); Spivak (2012a, 218–240).

7. "With-and-beyond" is used to designate the intimate moves of reading as critique that work with a text or thinker, neither excusing nor accusing, and yet allowing one to move beyond their shortcomings.

8. Fanon is not used by Spivak (nor by me) as a model whose argument we must embrace entirely, but as an example teaching us something about what it means *to read*. In chapters two and three of *BSWM*, for example, Fanon struggles with patriarchal and homophobic presuppositions (I am grateful to Shannon Winnubst for this reminder). That he can affirm "reciprocity" as key tool from Hegel, as we shall see, is conditioned also upon this masculine position. Thus, "[w]hen we read the text of Fanon we have to say to ourselves: That story is not yet at an end." (63) "We cannot imitate him [Fanon] absolutely" (48); we must also *read* him (see note 10 on Spivak's intervention with-and-beyond Fanon on gender).

9. *BSWM* was intended as Fanon's dissertation but rejected by the Faculty of Medicine at Lyon University. It was published in the spring of 1952, after he had defended an alternative dissertation in 1951. Thus, Fanon was not literally in Algeria when writing *BSWM*, but he had been to North Africa as a soldier of the Free French Forces in 1944 and returned as trained psychiatrist to a post in Blida-Joinville in November 1953. For a detailed timeline of Fanon's work and migrations, see Khalifa and Young (2018, 779–783).

10. The question of gender is apparent in Fanon's terminology of the Black *man* and it is one of the problems Spivak has with Fanon: He is—like Freud, Hegel, Adler and everyone Fanon engages—"speaking of the male" (Spivak 2014a, 32). We must acknowledge that as a limitation and work with it. In her chapter on Fanon, Spivak dedicates a section to gender, ironically understated as "Postscript: Gender." Ironic, because the extensive section turns to gender as a "prime mover" (58) for abstraction and capital, even if miscognized as belatedly made possible by emancipatory history (gender presented as achievement of Enlightened modernity, the (sub)titular "postscript"). That section in Spivak's text would require its own, full reading,

but in shorthand and especially in view of its importance for appropriative reading let me state only this: Spivak here turns to Hegel with her own agenda, namely to get to gender as an “instrument of abstractability that is so old that to follow in its tracks is to develop ways of critical intimacy different from rational critique” (59). She takes the tour through Hegel’s story of *Bewusstsein*, demonstrating how in its positing of otherness “by bringing it to zero” (60) it hints at simultaneously emergent modes of abstraction in eighteenth-century capitalist, colonial and gendered structures, and social transformations. Beyond Fanon, Spivak points out how in view of gender “Fanon is part of the problem” (63); and yet, noting how Fanon prepared *her* for reading Hegel, she invites us to “[w]atch me” (60) reading Hegel and Fanon with-and-beyond themselves, that is, appropriating their philosophemes for her own project, even if their racist and sexist implications might tempt others to discard them. She turns to the section on life in Hegel’s *Phenomenology* preceding the chapter on “Lordship and Bondage.” Intimate with Fanon’s appropriative claims on Hegel and critical of Fanon’s gendered and classed bias (38), Spivak veers Hegel with Marx toward a reading of abstraction as the logic that animates life and makes theoretical analyses of the intersections of gender and capital possible in order to reach beyond the narratives of their *historical* emergence (claiming them instead as *conceptual* tools). She performs in a very condensed fashion an “affirmative sabotage” (63) of both Hegel and Fanon.

11. Sylvia Wynter has powerfully drawn critical attention to Fanon’s introduction of sociogeny in *BSWM*. Wynter taps into Fanon’s concept of sociogeny and develops from there her own project of unfolding being human as a hybrid (bios/mythoi) praxis (see Wynter/McKittrick 2015), as a way to get out of the current biocentric, bourgeois “overrepresentation of Man” (Wynter 2003, 317). For my focus on the intimacies of reading as critical method, I decided to stay with Spivak’s explicit dissecting of how Fanon reads. For Wynter’s operations of reading Fanon in view of extricating us from the regime of Man2, see Marriott (2011).

12. Much more work is required to think through this proleptic temporality, which is also at work in the process of learning to read literature. Fanon himself notes that “[t]he problem considered here is located in temporality” (2008, 201). For more on temporality and critique, see Thiele in this volume.

13. See also Buck-Morss (2009, 67); Kuykendall (1991); and Diagne (2018) for Adler and Hegel.

14. Hegel was well informed about the Haitian revolution when writing the *Phenomenology* (see Buck-Morss 2009, 40–56). Yet, even if the *philosopheme* is saturated with that historical context (and its onto-epistemological regime that continues as Man2’s anti-Blackness until today), Fanon insists on taking theoretical booty out from under the historical. The white masters of history are for Fanon not identical to Hegel’s *philosopheme* of the master/slave dialectic. He insists on using the latter against the “racial epidermal schema” (2008, 92) that “legends, stories, history” (92) have congealed, because in the *philosopheme* the “slave turns away from the master and toward the object” (Fanon 2008, 195, note 10). In a similar move, Fanon turns away from Hegel’s system of History toward his own question.

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