

Ellison's Resistance: The Place for Underground Praxis in the Black Radical

Constellation

by

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Ellison has been "type casted" in the cultural political considerations of the day. When looking for insight into the political concerns of our moment (not excluding stop & frisk policies, broken windows policies, the prison industrial complex, the school to prison pipeline, gentrification, diminishing social services, and police brutality) interlopers will mention a number of figures, King, Baldwin, Malcolm X, even Du Bois. Yet the insight offered by Ralph Ellison is often sorely overlooked. A significant reason behind this is that Ellison is clearly not a part of any formulation of a "black avant-garde." Houston Baker addresses this quite specifically in his essay "Failed Prophet and Failing Stock: Why Ellison Was Never Avant-Garde," positioning Ellison against particular political movements of the time.<sup>1</sup> Indeed Ellison had many conflicts with various activists and other political affiliates. His response to the Black Power movement's rise and the publication of Toure's book, *Black Power* at a gathering at Haverford College, along with a famous account of his response to activists who criticized him for his absence at various protests: "I'm sorry for those of who you who just discovered your beauty yesterday," serve as warrants for his critics' contention that he was politically a milquetoast moderate. This reading of Ellison's politics is complemented by his references to the value of the Constitution, the Declaration of Independence and Bill of Rights. The image that many carry of Ellison is one of an apolitical aesthete, and institutional sympathizer happy to receive praise from a mainstream establishment.

An immediate comparison of Ellison to his contemporaries-Wright, Baldwin, and Baraka-does little to unsettle this impression. Each of these counterparts advance clear political commitments and exhibit stages of change or evolution in their political thinking and affiliations.

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<sup>1</sup> Baker's prior work often made a case that Richard Wright's work was denied the same praise and reception as that of Ellison. It is likely that his essay continues that thinking, while observing the way that various curricular emphasis often glosses over Wright in favor of Ellison

It is difficult to challenge these readings when one considers the various movements from Wright's faith/ambivalence about Communism in *Black Boy* and *Native Son* to his Pan-African articulations in *The Color Curtain*, *White Man Listen*, and *Black Power*; Baldwin's Civil Rights faith in *The Fire Next Time* with his depressing accounts in *No Name in the Street* and his embrace of black power in his open letter to Angela Davis; and the various movements in Baraka from black nationalism to third world socialism. In the case of Ellison, we primarily look to *Invisible Man* and his essays to discern his political commitments. These selections leave a scant amount of work to track any form of movement in Ellison's politics.

All of this is compounded by the appropriation of Ellison's work by conservative interlopers. Carl Eric Scott, a writer for the *National Review*, describes Ellison as a champion of both individualism and assimilation to American identity. In a reading of Ellison's "The Little Man at Chehaw Station," Carl Eric Scott argues that Ellison rejects the proliferation of group identities within America, and that Ellison is an example of the proper mode of conforming to American life. With growing attention in conservative circles, and waning consideration in radical ones, Ellison's image as "mainstream sell-out" becomes a tacit assumption across the political spectrum.

In this intervention, I want to evaluate Ellison with respect to other black writers of his time to explore the precise-rather than perceived-differences and similarities between his aesthetic and political perspective and others that have been accepted into a loosely defined canon of the black radical tradition. By comparing Ellison's thought against that of James Baldwin and Frantz Fanon, I hope to demonstrate the tactical insight of Ellison's thought, as well as the convergences between Fanon (as an accepted black radical thinker) and Ellison. It is important to remember that *Black Skin, White Masks* and *Invisible Man* were both published in

the same year, 1952. While Fanon and Ellison do not explicitly acknowledge each other, it is likely that both are responding to similar pressures on black politics, aesthetics, and culture, and that a comparison of the two thinkers, Fanon and Ellison, might reveal a hidden dimension of black radical praxis that has been dismissed as non-avant-garde.

### **Baldwin And Ellison-A Comparison**

Ellison differs from his contemporaries through a subtle complexity, a nuanced ambivalence in terms of his relationship to race, culture, and America. If we place him next to Baldwin-looking at a place where both writers excel, in nonfiction essays, this difference gains a particularly vivid basis. Baldwin and Ellison meet, fortuitously, in two essays on the same topic, education of African American children. Baldwin states in the speech turned essay "A Talk to Teachers":

Let's begin by saying that we are living through a very dangerous time. Everyone in this room is in one way or another aware of that. We are in a revolutionary situation, no matter how unpopular that word has become in this country. The society in which we live is desperately menaced, not by Khrushchev, but from within. To any citizen of this country who figures himself as responsible – and particularly those of you who deal with the minds and hearts of young people – must be prepared to “go for broke.” Or to put it another way, you must understand that in the attempt to correct so many generations of bad faith and cruelty, when it is operating not only in the classroom but in society, you will meet the most fantastic, the most brutal, and the most determined resistance. There is no point in pretending that this won't happen.

Since I am talking to schoolteachers and I am not a teacher myself, and in some ways am fairly easily intimidated, I beg you to let me leave that and go back to what I think to be the entire purpose of education in the first place. It would seem to me that when a child is born, if I'm the child's parent, it is my obligation and my high duty to civilize that child. Man is a social animal. He cannot exist without a society. A society, in turn, depends on certain things which everyone within that society takes for granted. Now the crucial paradox which confronts us here is that the whole process of education occurs within a social framework and is designed to perpetuate the aims of society. Thus, for example, the boys and girls who were born during the era of the Third Reich, when educated to the purposes of the Third Reich, became barbarians. The paradox of education is

precisely this - that as one begins to become conscious one begins to examine the society in which he is being educated. The purpose of education, finally, is to create in a person the ability to look at the world for himself, to make his own decisions, to say to himself this is black or this is white, to decide for himself whether there is a God in heaven or not. To ask questions of the universe, and then learn to live with those questions, is the way he achieves his own identity. But no society is really anxious to have that kind of person around. What societies really, ideally, want is a citizenry which will simply obey the rules of society. If a society succeeds in this, that society is about to perish. The obligation of anyone who thinks of himself as responsible is to examine society and try to change it and to fight it – at no matter what risk. This is the only hope society has. This is the only way societies change. (325-326)<sup>2</sup>

From the beginning, Baldwin's comminatory rhetoric-perhaps a residual artifact from his days as a preacher-is fierce and alive. The opening words "Let's begin by saying that we are living through a very dangerous time" initiates a sense of urgency-paradoxically, one might add, for it also calls attention to the need to declare the presence of danger, implying that it is not apparent to everyone in the situation. There is a very clear sense that Baldwin needs to wake the audience from the dogmas of passivity- as the menace from within requires that educators, "those of you who deal with the minds and hearts of young people" must be ready to commit all they have, to "go for broke" in combating "the most fantastic, the most brutal, and the most determined resistance." In the second paragraph, Baldwin shifts for a moment to establish his presence as a speaker, to acknowledge that he is not a teacher himself, but is nonetheless qualified to comment upon "the purpose of education in the first place." From here, Baldwin wastes no time in getting to the central dilemma, the paradox that troubles the endeavor of social change through education, "that the whole process of education occurs within a social framework and is designed to perpetuate the aims of society." While education's "proper" goal may be "to create in a person the ability to look at the world for himself, to make his own decisions," society

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<sup>2</sup> Baldwin, James. "A Talk to Teachers." *The Price of the Ticket: Collected Nonfiction, 1948-1985*. Macmillain, 1985.

is not kind to prophetic rabble-rousers of this sort, and would much rather foster a "a citizenry which will simply obey the rules of society." Consistent with the jeremiad tradition, we get the prophecy of society's undoing, and the call-the demand-for citizens to engage in the criticism of that society for the sake of its own continued existence. Baldwin describes a world, drawing on terms that carry force-revolutionary, responsibility, menace, obligation-where those who are on the side of authentic education are positioned within a larger battle of good versus evil not with some outside opponent, "not by Khrushchev," but from internal dynamics, as they must "correct so many generations of bad faith and cruelty." In many ways, Baldwin uses the context of the Cold War, the imagery of good and evil and the necessity of action in the context of education as a concern for structural inequality. Baldwin serves as a kind of emotional or persuasive recruiter to the cause, to enlist his audience on the level of hearts and minds if nothing beyond that.

Baldwin delivered this talk in October of 1963, a month after Ralph Ellison had given his own address on the same topic. In the speech titled "What These Children Are Like," Ellison opens:

I assume you all know that I really have no business attending this sort of conference. I have no technical terminology and no knowledge of an academic discipline. This isn't boasting, nor is it an apology; it is just a means of reminding myself of what my reality has been and of what I am. At this point it might be useful for us to ask ourselves a few questions: what is this act, what is this scene in which the action is taking place, what is this agency and what is its purpose? The act is to discuss "these children," the difficult thirty percent. We know this very well; it has been hammered out again and again. But the matter of scene seems to get us into trouble.

The American scene is a diversified one, and the society which gives it its character is a pluralistic society-or at least it is supposed to be. Ideally it is, but we seem to insist, on the other hand, that this society is not pluralistic. We have been speaking as though it were not made up of diversified cultures but was in fact one monolithic culture. And one which is perfect, the best of all possible cultures, with the best of all people affirming its perfection.

Well, if this were true there would be no point in our being here. But we are here, and since we are, let us try to see American society in all of its diversity. One of the things that has been left out in our discussion is imagination. But imagination exists even in the back-woods of Alabama, and here too is to be found a forthright attitude toward what it is possible to achieve and to become in this country.

The education which goes on outside the classroom, which goes on as they walk within the mixed environment of Alabama, teaches children that they should not reach out for certain things. Much of the education that I received at Tuskegee (this isn't quite true of Oklahoma City) was an education away from the uses of the imagination, away from the attitudes of aggression and courage. This is not an attack. This is descriptive, this is autobiographic. You did not do certain things because you might be destroyed. You didn't do certain things because you were going to be frustrated. There were things you didn't do because the world outside was not about to accommodate you. (546-547)<sup>3</sup>

Ellison's rhetoric here is of a noticeably different mode than Baldwin's rhetoric. Rather than beginning with the stakes, as Baldwin does, he takes a moment to address who he is, and why he is there to speak. The humility entailed in claiming to "have no business attending this sort of conference" as he lacks "technical terminology" and "knowledge of an academic discipline," reflects the context of the moment. The speaker is aware, in a way that the audience cannot deny, that there is a level of privilege and honor in the ability to speak at a gathering of this sort, among people who are trained to address particular questions. Ellison situates his speech in a place where anyone in the audience can meet him, regardless of their predispositions politically or otherwise. From that opening, Ellison spends substantial time describing the American scene as "a diversified one," and contrasting that notion of diversity with the sense that America is not only "one monolithic culture" but is in fact "perfect, the best of all possible cultures, with the best of all people" to affirm its perfection. The word paradox is not used; it is demonstrated

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<sup>3</sup> Ellison, Ralph. "What These Children Are Like." *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison*. New York, NY: The Modern Library, 2003. 546-545.

through description, on the way to Ellison's deduction that "if this were true there would be no point in our being here." The subtlety of this move forces those who accept the former premise to grapple with the contradiction. A clever rhetorician, Ellison gives the audience enough to put their own emotions and imaginations to work. The last paragraph initiates what will become the major focus of Ellison's talk, the cultivation of imagination as a critical part of education both inside the classroom, and outside the classroom. Rather than present a call to action, Ellison establishes a thematic, a place for his own poetic and contemplative intervention.

One difference between Baldwin and Ellison- in addressing a public and adjusting their craft to the needs of spoken, instead of written, communication-might best fit a distinction between metonymic invocation and metaphorical embodiment. Baldwin uses a rhetoric of urgency and necessity-invokes a battle between harmony and destruction-through terms that resonate with an American audience as they've seen those terms used elsewhere. His comminatory speech points out a type of hypocrisy in the American public, as this public believes that Krushchev is a more dire threat than the ongoing instability at home. His call to educators to "go for broke" is a charge to join the battle. Ellison highlights similar contradictions, but does so through deductions and allusions to the facts which he and his audience must face. The tension between the idea of America as perfect and the need for the conference at hand is undeniable, but rather than posing that tension with a desperate urgency, Ellison uses it to continue his own intervention. While Baldwin argues that society is hypocritical-as it at once encourages individuals to become independent thinkers while punishing those who disagree with the status quo-Ellison-through his presence and capacity to question society without the proper terminology or knowledge-locates the source of this hypocrisy in the multitude of conflicts with



the holistic self-conception of America. The contradiction is felt through his performance, rather than stated as his premise.

We can liken Baldwin's fierce declaratory rhetoric to a boxer, as he emerges clear and forceful as he challenges a popular position or its advocate to a rhetorical sparring match, dodging blows and returning swift and eviscerating uppercuts. Through immediate statement, Baldwin's prose leaves no question as to the victor of the encounter. His adversaries walk away with tempered egos and bruised reputations (among other injuries).

Ellison, on the other hand, is more subtle. Rather than immediately calling educators to a certain direction, he contextualizes the space they mutually occupy, laying out the terrain of difference, not simply through statement, but through the embodiment of his presence, which is a testament to diversity. As he moves from common premises to unstable contradiction-much like the figure many posit as the origin of the prophetic tradition, the philosopher Socrates-He guides his listener from simplicity to complexity, from rigid distinction to mutual interaction. While Baldwin describes society as hypocritical, Ellison-through his presence and capacity to question society even without the proper terminology or knowledge-locates the source of this hypocrisy in the multitude of conflicts with the holistic self-conception of America as they operate in the assumptions within the gathering at hand. The contradiction is felt through his performance, rather than stated as his premise. Baldwin may call you and challenge you to a duel, but in the length of Ellison's reflection of imagination, he discusses the unique development of imagination in black children as an unacknowledged, but critical, gift to American society. He sneaks into the mansion of western cultural capital and into the basement of our sturdy assumptions, offering new and often discrepant curation to our most treasured artworks and icons-all while in the open and yet unseen, such that we hardly grasp that the order of our own cultural archive has been

almost entirely overhauled. Compared to the prizefighter, Ellison, here is the yokel from the prologue of his novel *Invisible Man*- he has “stepped inside of his opponent’s sense of time” to strike an imperceptible, and therefore critical blow (8). Ellison's rhetoric meets the reader and moves them, and proceeds from an internal transformation. This is a striking contrast from Baldwin's call to address a real threat outside the bounds of the context of the speech, speaker, and audience.

The work that Ellison does in this essay is done from underground. In addressing the audience's position and beliefs, Ellison embodies Gordon Park's photograph titled "Emerging Man," with a black man peering up at the lens from a man hole, half of his face concealed. This emerging man, much like the protagonist in *Invisible Man*, Wright's "The Man Who Lived Underground", and Ellison himself, is outnumbered and overpowered. One response to this imbalance is a call to arms from sympathetic parties. This is Baldwin's strategy in 1963, as he marshals educators to action in "A Talk to Teachers" and announces the need for "relatively conscious whites and the relatively conscious blacks" to create the consciousness of others in *The Fire Next Time* (105).<sup>4</sup> Ellison's strategy is not to fight fire with fire, but to examine the political and cultural terrain, waiting for opportunities to exploit the crevices of what appear to be stable foundations for culture and politics.

### **The Underground**

In the essay "Ellison's Vision of Communitas," Nathan Scott addresses the critique that *Invisible Man* is a novel that moves "by way of coming to an end and then having once more to start itself up again," forming a cycle where the protagonist goes from finding a position and a

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<sup>4</sup> It is important to locate this thinking historically. This was where Baldwin stood in 1963. By 1972, with *No Name in the Street*, the prospects of his hope were radically different

place of meaning with some organization of some person's sense of the world only to fall out of that grace and pursue a new place to be (314). Scott argues that this rhythm within the novel's plot illustrates a core theme of instability in American life and race relations:

wherever he turns, he finds himself dealing with those-whether it be Bledsoe or Mr. Norton or the Reverend Homer A. Barbee or the owner of the Long Island paint factory or Brother Jack-who are eager to map out a design for his life and to convert him into a kind of automaton of their own schemes: they may be agents of religion or education or industry or radical politics, but, at bottom, they are (as Tony Tanner says) "mechanizers of consciousness"-and each is prepared to say something like what Bledsoe says in reference to his college: "This is a power set-up, son, and I'm at the controls." (314)

Scott describes the novel as a process by which the narrator "does at last himself realize that all his various proctors and patrons have been 'very much the same, each attempting to force his picture of reality upon me and neither giving a hoot in hell for how things looked to me'" (314). Scott's reading of the novel's cyclical features demonstrates the necessity of the underground as a space of cultural and political practice. The narrator's various points of disillusion illustrate that for every grand narrative at the heart of an institution, his black body becomes a prop for that institution's understanding of itself. Blackness, in each of these moments, is rendered static, and black people are accepted insofar as they confirm the details of blackness already established in advance. Existing as a black person in this schema is a double bind. One can confirm the vision within the "inner eye" of the institution, enduring the psychic and emotional trauma of repression of individual expression, or one can deviate from these prescriptions and become a victim of exclusion or punishment. The separation in the aspects of this bind distinguish the dominant creative themes between the works of Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison. Wright's hard-boiled naturalism-his brutal depictions of violence and depravity within *Native Son* and "The Man Who Lived Underground," for example-emphasizes the violent character of society's treatment of

deviant blackness, where a black being's refusal of the racial script marks a moment of crisis. Ellison, through *Invisible Man* and in some of his earlier short stories-focuses less upon the extreme instances of anti-black violence and more on the subtle quotidian repressions of black subjectivity that do not occur in response to crisis, but function as the normal operations of anti-black society. One might describe this difference in focus through the lens of "macro" vs "micro" aggressive racism.

Ellison elaborates upon the psychological dynamic of this more subtle dimension of violence through a discussion of "darkness" in the prologue of *Invisible Man*. In a longer reflection upon the value of light (to which I shall return in a later section), the narrator reflects upon the experience of a beautiful woman:

A beautiful girl once told me of a recurring nightmare in which she lay in the center of a large dark room and felt her face expand until it filled the whole room, becoming a formless mass while her eyes ran in bilious jelly up the chimney. And so it is with me. Without light I am not only invisible, but formless as well; and to be unaware of one's form is to live a death. I myself, after existing some twenty years, did not become alive until I discovered my invisibility. (6-7)

This fear of formlessness refers to the fungible nature of blackness. Saidiya Hartman defines fungibility as the ability for white subjects to use and possess black bodies for their own desires. The logic of slavery-that persists even after its legal abolition- applies to both the physical body of the slave and it's discursive representation and existence (21). In the various appropriations of blackness throughout the novel, it is difficult to identify any defining characteristic that is not dependent upon the motives and investment of the specific dominant institution of the phase of the novel. Black beings, made subservient to varying articulations of blackness, resemble malleable clay in their subjective architecture. "To be unaware of one's form is to live a death" because one's agency is always delimited by the desires and investments of another. One can

only act through the form of blackness demanded by the (white) other, in ways that reflect the motivations and insecurities that crafted that form.

Nathan Scott highlights the precarity of amorphous black form in his analysis of the character of Rinehart. The narrator encounters several people with vastly different conceptions of Rinehart, from those who see him a trendy hipster, a prostitute who considers him a lover, to a group of people who claim him to be a reverend (315). Scott describes the narrator's impression of this figure as ambivalent. "He is at once fascinated by the virtuosity of this remarkable changeling-and, in a way, unhinged by the abyss of infinite possibility opened up by his glimpse of the "multiple personalities" worn by this black Proteus" (315). Rinehart's mere outline, the trace of the various moves from one role to another, one context to the next-while certainly a strategy that demonstrates a degree of formidable strength-invokes an ominous lack of substance for the narrator. This is perhaps in part because the threat of complete dissolution through the desires of another is a threat all too real to his own existence.

Nathan Scott's reflections have two important implications for the political dimensions of Ellison's work and thought. First, it is clear that Ellison does not simply champion a "trickster" aesthetic turned political. The threat of formlessness both through Rinehart's countless masks and death through darkness suggest that Ellison is not willing to sacrifice definite form for complete fluidity.<sup>5</sup> Second, the cyclical form of the novel-the movement from institution to institution, with phases of embrace, disillusion, and retreat- serves as an implicit criticism of assimilation to any dominant order. For Ellison, any stable promise of security or triumph always entails the sacrifice of the most precious parts of the self. These two insights find a unique resonance for

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<sup>5</sup> Ellison might have created Rinehart as an analog for his impression of Charlie Parker. In the essay, "On Bird, Bird-Watching and Jazz," he describes how Parker's embrace of bebop rendered him "fungible" to disaffected white audiences of his day.

another major Africana thinker/theorist writing in 1952. The chapter "The Lived Experience of the Black" of Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* poses these concerns through Fanon's own idiom in ways that manifest a moment of co-recognition or co-realization in a transatlantic context.

### **Fanon's thought and convergence with Ellison**

Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* was published in 1952, the same year as *Invisible Man*. There is little explicitly given in either text to suggest that Fanon and Ellison were in contact or even belonged to the same intellectual circles. Both texts reference black political developments outside of their own national contexts, but these instances are generally meant to distinguish the particular circumstances of race relations in their respective contexts. Given that there are much clearer thematic parallels between the work of Richard Wright and Fanon, as well as Ellison's stylistic and thematic differences with Wright, it is easy to see why the emergence of two highly influential black cultural artifacts within the same year has prompted little attention as to what the dual emergence suggests about a larger movement in black cultural politics, or what larger conversations might contain these two texts as moments of exchange.

A dialogue between the full range of themes in *Invisible Man* and *Black Skin, White Masks* is a sorely needed intervention. Such an intervention could begin with a comparison of the particular features of both texts, but might also include an exploration of the common historical, literary, and philosophical influences for both the authors and the works in question. Such a thorough elaboration is beyond the scope of this essay. This section aims to elaborate a particular thematic between Fanon and Ellison toward the end of demonstrating that both writers have

contributed to a particular development in what might be called a black radical tradition.<sup>6</sup> Specifically, Ellison and Fanon embrace a degree of ambivalence in the face of racial subjugation. This ambivalence is clear in Fanon's chapter "The Lived Experience of the Black," as it clarifies the nature of psychic violence experienced by the black subject as well as the possible strategies and tactics of response available to the black subject.<sup>7</sup> Fanon posits a mode of existence similar to that of the underground as a basis for understanding the nature of racial violence, and a position from which to evaluate possible responses.

"The Lived Experience of the Black" is a deceptively complex chapter. Although one can very easily miss it, Fanon stages a criticism of the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty in the opening pages of the chapter. Fanon's criticism addresses the facile notion of a "universal" orientation to the world within Merleau-Ponty's thought. Jeremy Weate traces Fanon's criticism in his essay "Fanon, Merleau-Ponty and the Difference of Phenomenology," and elaborates Merleau-Ponty's concept of the corporeal schema. Weate elaborates that the corporeal schema serves as a site of "reproductive synergy between body and world" (170). This schema serves a set of bodily orientations and compartments that facilitate human belonging and participation within the world. Weate uses the example of a guitar to illustrate this concept. To meaningfully

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<sup>6</sup> David Scott, in the essay "On The Very Idea of a Black Radical Tradition," explains that the black radical tradition contains its own ambivalences and disagreements among those positioned within it. This intervention is less concerned with a definition of the specific vectors of the tradition, rather than demonstrating the arbitrary exclusion of certain canonical black radical thinkers that share powerful resonances with some accepted figures, and comparative advantages to other accepted figures.

<sup>7</sup> The relevance of the particular translation in question is certainly important in terms of methodology. The various debates concerning the most "faithful" or "accurate" translation is a debate which is beyond the scope of this paper. My rationale for choosing the specific translation-"The Lived Experience of the Black"-is to take advantage of its use in Jeremy Weate's analysis of the phenomenological dimensions of Fanon's thought. The translation (included along with Weate's essay in Robert Bernasconi's Blackwell published collection of essays entitled *Race*) has its own merits and flaws that deserve attention in further investigations.

play a guitar, one has to follow gestures, habits, and practices of the history of guitar players. Following these rules transforms the bodily composition of the guitar player, such that-through physically interacting with guitars- they develop intuitive orientations that are unknown, illegible, and invisible to those who have not participated in these experiences. At the same time, through playing the guitar and embodying the prior forms of guitar practice, players contribute to the history of guitar both through continuation of and deviation from "standard" guitar practices. As the culture of guitar playing informs their own bodily composition, they in turn inform the culture of guitar playing in the gradual historical evolution of generational guitar players and the radical and rapid change brought about by true innovators of the art of the guitar. Weate mobilizes this metaphor to demonstrate the interactions between individual bodies and a larger cultural world. The result is a communicative relationship between the culture of any given practice, location, or group and the bodies of the people who belong to that community (171). This process creates a "relation between agency and historical freedom as a condition of *habitation*," where habit (practices ingrained through repetition) and inhabitation (the act of dwelling in particular space in a permanent sense) are the means by which humans interact with the cultural-historical world (171).

Even as Fanon references this initial philosophy from Merleau-Ponty, he is incredibly critical, noting that "In the white world, the man of color faces difficulties in the elaboration of his bodily schema. Knowledge of the body is a merely negating activity. It is knowledge in the third-person mode" (185). Fanon elaborates that the intuitive aspect of the bodily schema is missing for the black body in a white world, recounting that even the act of smoking a cigarette requires a careful consideration of his muscular movements; he must perform "a slow



construction of [himself] as a body in the midst of a spatial and temporal world" (185).<sup>8</sup> The slow construction is necessary because, just as the protagonist of *Invisible Man*, Fanon can only find respite when his presence reaffirms the world of a white person. This painstaking process of anguished comportment illustrates the historico-racial schema that exists beneath the corporeal schema for black bodies. Weate elaborates that the historico-racial schema consists of "a white *mythos* that inserts itself between the black body and its self-image" and becomes the symbolic register for producing a subjectivity and body legible to white subjects (172). Fanon describes the historico-racial schema as something he created through the elements provided "by the other, the White, who has woven [him] out of a thousand details, anecdotes and stories" (185). Since "the Black does not have any ontological resistance in the eyes of the White," black people can only meaningfully participate in a white world by acquiescing the racial ideology that delimits their character, potential, and being (184). The condition for black social visibility-as Ellison might formulate-is a discursive subservience not simply to the expressed intention of another, but the implicit desires and drives that constitute the life world of the other.

As Fanon elucidates the culminating movement in the phenomenological account of racial violence, it becomes clear that he-like Ellison-is concerned with the quotidian subtle formulations of violence as opposed to the gratuitous spectacular forms of violence. The historico-racial schema eventually becomes a racial-epidermal schema. Whereas the historico-racial consists of ideas, histories, and anecdotes that become the countless details for the formation of legible black subjectivity and presence, the racial-epidermal schema is the intensity felt when a black body realizes that its possibilities for freedom and agency are determined in

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<sup>8</sup> This trope of distance between the black body and the white world occurs several times in the twentieth century, from Du Bois, to Wright, and here with Fanon. This is an important feature of black thought that deserves attention beyond its presence in the recent work of Ta-Nehisi Coates.

advance by the saturation of values, assumptions, fears, desires, and investments within the white mythos. Fanon recalls being "all at once responsible for [his] body, responsible for [his] race, for [his] ancestors" feeling [deafened by cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetishism, racial defects, slave ships," etc. (185-186). Weate describes this position through Sartre's concept of nausea, which he describes as a tragic resolution to the dilemma of double consciousness, where the final realization is that the gap between the two forms of consciousness-white and black-is policed by the very terms of the corporeal schema that mediates participation in the world. As the black subject moves toward the other, strives for recognition from white others, the white subject in turn rejects the possibility of being with (black) others, leaving the black to internalize the implications of the encounter-that the black subject is indeed not a part of the human community of white people (173-174). Weate further explains that this shift from discourse to feeling (perhaps affect) is a naturalizing one. Whereas the various tropes of racial ideology within the historico-racial schema can be understood as "useful fictions," the rejection from white others is understood as an immediate sensation of denial, a confirmation of the fact of blackness-the fact that blackness is outside of the realm of the human(174). In this way, Fanon elaborates the interactions between the discursive and the material, ideology as statement and hegemony as structured feeling and orientation.<sup>9</sup> The historico-racial schema becomes central to the corporeal schema and invokes the racial-epidermal schema in the interactions between white and black bodies.

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<sup>9</sup> Raymond Williams, in his book *Marxism & Literature*, describes the difference between ideology and hegemony as the difference between a dominant order's self-articulation through language or law, and the unconscious structures that shape subjects, culture, and practice according to that order, regardless of its explicit articulation or the awareness of the subjects beholden to it.

Fanon's formulation of racial violence through the vocabulary of phenomenological schemas illustrates a level of awareness and psychological labor required by black subjects. The theoretical description of the transition from corporeal to historico-racial to racial-epidermal schemas traces an unconscious movement in black subjectivity. This is an elaboration of the phases of *Invisible Man's* cycle—from acceptance to disillusion and finally flight—as the narrator crafts various racial-historical schemas only to find them fail throughout various points of the novel. In a different vocabulary, one might say that both *Invisible Man* and *Black Skin, White Masks* account for the psychic difficulty entailed in what Houston Baker in his book *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance* called the mastery of form. Through the mastery of form, black subjects meld themselves to the contours of the readymade cultural forms of minstrelsy to appease (or sometimes manipulate) white subjects (20-21). Though it is indisputable that developing a racial-historical schema to master the racial forms of the white imaginary yields various material benefits, Fanon and Ellison both elaborate the risks entailed in the expected outcomes of the mastery of form. The material benefits of conforming to racial ideology do not include participation in the world established by white subjects; it cannot overcome the distance and resistance to black participation in the corporeal schema. Ellison's novel reflects upon the absurdity of the various societal messages that conscript black participation in the world at large to particular forms, just as Fanon accounts for the experiential intensity and labor of such endeavors. Both are accounting for the unattended layer of experience that informs black life, rendered invisible as it remains embedded under the visible messages and accounts of the white created world of meaning and value.

In this regard, Ellison and Fanon both theorize the underground as both a position outside of the endless cycle of conforming to racial-historical schemas and as a condition for the

participation within those schemas. To craft a bodily comportment to meet the demands of the white world, black subjects must pay attention to the inexplicit values of the dominant order; they must read the world to discover their allotted place within it. To the extent that this process is a conscious one—that is, to the extent that the black subject in question grasps that she is performing according to the world-view of another—the rhetoric of masks and form, of concealment, account for a kind of underground practice whereby double consciousness is managed by utilizing the white (or American) consciousness to preserve the black (or Negro) consciousness. The mastery of form can be understood in this way as a form of the underground.

However, Ellison and Fanon both configure the underground in a different formulation as well. In response to the trauma of the racial-epidermal schema, Fanon remarks that he "took [himself] far away, very far away from [his] being-there," and having "resigned to no longer aspire to [his] own emergence," he began to "creep his way though" and "slip into corners...[staying] silent...[striving] for anonymity and oblivion" (186-187). This hidden movement describes a refusal of the world above ground, where he must conform to the demands of white subjects, and is analogous to the prologue and epilogue of *Invisible Man*, where the narrator retreats underground, ceasing the cycle of relation to the historical-racial schema. This underground position carries a negative value in "The Lived Experience of the Black," and later I shall contend that it gains greater potential in Fanon's introduction and conclusion to *Black Skin, White Masks*. Even with its negative connotation, the entire chapter is written from that "very far away" perspective, as it serves as a vantage point from which to evaluate the processes of racial subjection and its various responses.

Fanon considers one of these alternative responses, the cultural practices of Negritude, in the latter half of the chapter. Negritude becomes an invocation of rhythm, the capacity to grasp

that which is least material but nonetheless a vital element of human life(190-191). In this way, Fanon investigates the active refusal of the white world through the embrace of its antithesis. From this point, Fanon (and black people writ large) are able to embrace the world through a passionate sensitivity of the body rather than the calculative reduction of the mind. This in turn allows a recovery of meaning and feeling lost to the machinations of western civilization (192-193). Here again, we see where Baker and Fanon meet, as this description of Negritude matches Baker's deformation of mastery. If the mastery of form is meant to conceal through blending in with the given-or the supposed facts prompting the response of "I know, that's right, that's true!"-deformation of mastery is an announcement. Rather than adopting forms that confirm what is implicitly held as true, the deformation of mastery entails an announced disruption of that mode of being (49-52). Negritude similarly serves as an announcement of the weakness and decay of western cultural forms and rejects them in favor of those that serve the flourishing of life through embrace of the body, emotion, irrationality, and poetry.

This sanguine tone does not last, however. Fanon explains "I then had the sense that I was repeating a cycle. My originality was being wrung from me...I was haunted by a series of destructive cliches" (194). Within *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon's frustration with Negritude rests in its concealed regressive posture. Rather than truly rupturing the historico-racial schema, Negritude represents an extreme fidelity to the White mythos, which further sediments the objective "natural" quality of its ideology. While Negritude may champion the expansive flourishing of human life, it pursues that flourishing by limiting itself to a narrow degree of the totality of human life. Further, in committing itself to the premises of a white racial ideology, Negritude suffers from the same pitfalls as the commitment to the historico-racial schema and the mastery of form. They all submit themselves to the discursive terrain established by white

subjects. Fanon notes that he finds the premises of Negritude poetics in treatises on negro inferiority and deficiency. He is also particularly bothered by Sartre's remarks on Negritude in terms of its capacity to fulfill its revolutionary destiny. In collapsing down to the details contained within the historico-racial schema, Negritude not only limits the possibilities for self-creation, but renders those possibilities ever more fungible to white appropriative gestures.

Fanon's focus upon the discursive and symbolic implications of racial experience demonstrate a quality in common with Ellison, yet distinct from Baldwin. Baldwin's mode of prophetic rhetoric requires frequent reminder that we are under constant threat from an insidious force within our own communities. The description of the fire that will replace the water of Noah's flood in *The Fire Next Time*, as well as the insistence that we live in a "dangerous time" in the "Talk to Teachers" are clear examples of this particular mode of prophetic discourse. Fanon and Ellison are concerned less about an impending apocalypse but are more attentive to a subtle sense of decay in human life. Fanon's description of nausea and Ellison's fear of dissolution through invisibility represent degrees of affective and symbolic violence that finds its target in the marginalized psyche. The repression of human capacity, for Fanon and Ellison, is a regrettable situation in its own right. They both would likely agree that this violence is a condition for other forms of violence; that forms of quotidian violence can accumulate into instances of gratuitous violence. This is a common tenet of social justice discourse, that the intangible forms of injustice will inevitably lead to catastrophes-riots in the case of racial injustice, for example. Perhaps both Ellison and Fanon might caution against this rhetorical strategy. Once a tangible value has been placed on something like racial justice, the worth of racial justice can solely be measured through that value as a metric. The result is that the suffering of black subjects only matter insofar as it represents the possibility for spectacular

violence. This would in turn continue to render black subjects invisible and further render their experiences fungible.

Fanon and Ellison forgo the apocalyptic prophetic mode of Baldwin for a different value entirely. What is clear in both Ellison and Fanon, in their respective 1952 texts, is that they want to sustain possibilities for freedom and diverse expression of black life. This theme of possibility and potentiality is not necessarily unique to blackness, however, and is precisely why both thinkers appropriate terms that have played powerful roles within western civilization. While Fanon invokes a new humanism as the necessary outcome of postcolonial struggle, Ellison remains committed to the value of democracy as a mode of relating to and being with others. To the degree that either thinker adopts Du Bois' understanding of black people as a sort of "seventh son," it is not in a unique distinction from other peoples, but in the capacity to fulfill and renew a promise long forgotten in the history of white supremacy and colonialism. The embrace of humanism and democracy through the lens of mystery thus suggests that even through their underground operations, both Fanon and Ellison are ambivalent toward the west—neither refusing or unconditionally accepting western institutions, but maintaining an ongoing, mutable interaction with these institutions through rigorous yet improvisational form.

### **Workings of Mysterious Force**

Ellison's concept of mystery is true to its own name. While there is an analytic quality to the genre of the essay, Ellison's literary quality is distinct from that of academic writing in that mystery is itself a quality of generative work rather than a distraction from precision. Ellison's essay, "The Little Man at Chehaw Station," puts mystery into a particular level of clarity, as he evokes in his discussion of the role of art in identity politics. Ellison champions an embrace of

mystery as opposed to the rigid, boundary demarcation processes he associates with "blood thinking."

Ellison gives the following summary of the little man behind the stove toward the beginning of the essay:

...the man behind Chehaw's stove also serves as a metaphor for those individual we sometimes meet whose refinement of sensibility is inadequately explained by family background, formal education or social status. These individuals seem to have been sensitized by some obscure force that issues undetected from the chromatic scale of American social hierarchy: a force that throws off strange, ultrasonic ultrasemi-semitones that create within those attuned to its vibration a mysterious enrichment of personality. In this, heredity doubtless plays an important role, but whatever that role may be, it would appear that culturally and environmentally such individuals are products of errant but sympathetic vibrations set up by the tension between America's social mobility, its universal education, and its relative freedom of cultural information. (497)

The language of "force," "tones," and "vibration" draw upon two frequent tropes in Ellison's work. All three concepts apply both to the sound produced by stereo equipment as well as the radio waves that may provide the signal for the equipment. This reference suggests that there is something ethereal about the operations that inform the little man. We may witness the effects of these tones as music or radio waves, but the medium itself is intangible. The little man behind the stove is peculiar precisely because he is attuned to these invisible workings. The reference to heredity may refer to the diversity in the dispersal of multiple intelligences throughout all demographics and populations. Just the same, while the little man behind the stove may be inclined towards auditory learning and expression, his cultivation as a critic of classical music is also informed by the cultural and environmental factors that would have placed him in proximity to the music. The sensibility that informs the music is transmitted to the little man, through processes that are at once material and invisible.



It would be an attractive intellectual move to make a clear conceptual analog for the mysterious force at work in the production of the little man behind the stove. It could at once represent the spiritual, philosophical, ideological, religious, and aesthetic dimension of a particular culture. This, I think, is precisely what the value of mystery would want to warn against, because in different contexts, the valence of mystery can be any one of these examples. In fact, mystery is the force that suggests that neither of these modes exists in a vacuum, and the each participate within one another in "our fractured, vernacular-weighted culture as an intrinsic whole" (498). What is important about this mysterious force is that it cannot be controlled, despite the efforts of society to maintain a rigid class order. As such, mystery is what haunts the stable symbolic order that structures society. It is the element of randomness demonstrated with the little man's "unaccountable knowingness" (498). An important implication about this mysterious force and the little man is that while society makes an attempt to produce order through delineation, establishing a proper relationship and place for all content, these attempts ignore the elusive connections that form across divisions and classes, the tendency of the respective facets of a culture to exist as many, but transmit amongst one another as a unified whole.

Unfortunately, this mysterious force presents a threat to any stable identity because it serves as a constant reminder of the infinite interactions between divisions in taste and class. The response to this idea is what Ellison calls blood thinking and blood magic, Ellison elaborates

So we seek psychic security from within our inherited divisions of the corporate American culture while gazing out upon our fellows with a mixed attitude of fear, suspicion and yearning. We repress an underlying anxiety aroused by the awareness that we are representative not only of one but of several overlapping and constantly shifting social categories, and we stress our affiliation with that segment of the corporate culture which has emerged out of some of our parents' past-racial, cultural, religious-and which we assume, on the basis of such magical

talismans as our mother's milk or father's beard, that we "know." Grounding our sense of identity in such primary and affect-charged symbols, we seek to avoid the mysteries and pathologies of the democratic process. (507)

The mystery of the one and the many, the individual and the collective, presents a problem of identity. This ambivalence To guard against this threat, people-Americans in this specific context-adopt particular symbols or artifacts as representations of the "essence" of their affiliations. For Ellison, this is precisely what drives the investment in ethnicity, the "heady evocations of European, African and Asian backgrounds accompanied by chants proclaiming the inviolability of ancestral blood" as well as the "brutal racial assaults in areas where these seldom occurred before" (509). This investment in purity is an attempt to preserve stability in what would otherwise be a profound state of psychic uncertainty.

The brilliance of Ellison's description of ethnic blood thinking is at once poignant and tragic. In many ways, this essay serves as a response to the Black Power movement's assertion that people of African descent can only find solace in African cultural forms-that they will only find alienation and depravity in societies dominated by white people. Ellison was certainly critical of Black Power's emergence, and this reading of his remarks on blood thinking is not unfair. But at the same time, Ellison's critique of ethnic blood thinking flows with the grain of black studies as blood thinking is a particularly staunch feature of whiteness as an identity. The promise of whiteness is purity. It associates the phenotype marked white with notions of virtue and propriety to ward off the possibility that human existence always involves a range of experiences that do not meet the standards of "virtuous" and "proper." Ellison's carefully crafted articulations within the essay are easily reduced to one side of binary, but such misreadings demonstrate the fear of mystery behind blood thinking in the first instance.

It is also important to avoid confusing Ellison's embrace of mystery with a relativist, multicultural leveling of difference. Ellison's discussion of the melting pot provides an interpretive pivot for such a reading. The melting pot is disavowed because it implies a "melting down" of different identities, a process of assimilation through which difference is made to conform to the dominant order. This understanding of the melting pot has been aided by a tacit alliance between nineties discourses on multiculturalism and neoliberal expansion, and it is worth separating that understanding of the melting pot from that which Ellison offers in his essay. Just as the vernacular-weighted whole of society is "always in cacophonous motion...a vortex of discordant ways of living and tastes, values, and traditions, a whirlpool of odds and ends," the melting pot is also a dynamic concept in the essay (508). In describing his surprise at finding intense deliberation of the merits of various opera singers among coal heavers in the basement of a building Ellison remarks:

The men were products of both past *and* present; were both coal heavers and Met extras; were both workingmen and opera buffs. Seen in the clear, pluralistic, melting-pot light of American cultural possibility, there was no contradiction. The joke, the apparent contradiction, sprang from my attempting to see them by the light of social concepts that cast less illumination than an inert lump of coal. I was delighted because during a moment when I least expected to encounter the little man behind the stove (Miss Harrison's vernacular music critic, as it were), I had stumbled upon four such men. Not behind the stove, it is true, but even more wondrously, they had materialized at an even more unexpected location: at the depth of the American social hierarchy and, of all possible hiding places, behind a coal pile. Where there's a melting pot there's smoke, and where there's smoke it is not simply optimistic to expect fire, it's imperative to watch for the phoenix's vernacular, but transcendent, rising. (523)

There are two important features of this passage. First, the melting pot occupies a role that is inconsistent with "melting down" assimilation. The melting pot in the final sentence is not "the" melting pot, but "a" melting pot. There could be others, but what Ellison witnessed in the basement was one way of bridging differences in American culture, and in a different

circumstance, he would encounter a different mode of the melting pot. The melting pot in this instance does not break down, but illuminate differences, as the men were both past and present, workingmen and opera buffs. It is important to note that the violence occurs not through the melting pot, but through the social concepts that poorly illuminate the differences as they exist. The product of the melting pot, finally, is not the security of the dominant order-the replication of the same-but the vernacular, the local and marginalized instead of the hegemonic. Its transcendent quality is not in molding itself in the likeness of the dominant, but moving through the dominant in order to exist beyond its limitations of meaning and value.

Second, the melting pot is a source of light, a motif that holds a particularly important role in the prologue of *Invisible Man*. Light suggests the production of knowledge, the capacity for things to be observed and known. The use of the melting pot as mode of cultural practice is not solely the enriched personality of the little man behind the stove, but also the enhanced awareness of that which is present throughout any society-forms of life outside the accepted models of the dominant order. The light of the melting pot further demonstrates its capacity as a mode of subterfuge. This is particularly clear in Ellison's invocation of light from the basement apartment in the prologue of *Invisible Man*, as the metaphor of light demonstrates the epistemological faults of dealing exclusively in the terms of the dominant order, and the possibilities of new understanding through underground praxis.

### **Light and Praxis**

In the prologue of *Invisible Man*, the narrator remarks that whereas Broadway or the Empire State Building at night are "among the darkest of our whole...culture," his own hole is

"warm and full of light" (6).<sup>10</sup> This relative darkness of Broadway and the Empire State Building suggests that as monuments of American culture, they represent the social concepts that in fact obscure meaning rather than clarify it, casting "less illumination than an inert lump of coal. In the context of the novel's circular structure, this implies that all of the various orders to which the narrator subscribes—the college, the Brotherhood, Bledsoe, or Norton—obscure reality in an attempt to salvage meaning from chaos.

In accounting for the light within his own abode, the narrator explains:

That is why I fight my battle with Monopolated Light & Power. The deeper reason, I mean: It allows me to feel my vital aliveness. I also fight them for taking so much of my money before I learned to protect myself. In my hole in the basement there are exactly 1,369 lights. I've wired the entire ceiling, every inch of it. And not with fluorescent bulbs, but with the older, more-expensive-to-operate kind, the filament type. An act of sabotage, you know. I've already begun to wire the wall. A junk man I know, a man of vision, has supplied me with wire and sockets. Nothing, storm or flood, must get in the way of our need for light and ever more and brighter light. The truth is the light and light is the truth. When I finish all four walls, then I'll start on the floor. Just how that will go, I don't know. Yet when you have lived invisible as long as I have you develop a certain ingenuity. I'll solve the problem. And maybe I'll invent a gadget to place my coffeepot on the fire while I lie in bed, and even invent a gadget to warm my bed - - like the fellow I saw in one of the picture magazines who made himself a gadget to warm his shoes! Though invisible, I am in the great American tradition of tinkers. That makes me kin to Ford, Edison and Franklin. Call me, since I have a theory and a concept, a "thinker-tinker." Yes, I'll warm my shoes; they need it, they're usually full of holes. I'll do that and more. (7)

The protagonist stages his form of practice as at once "sabotage" and "invention" en route to his own "vital aliveness."<sup>11</sup> Light here gains a dual dimension in the context of the 1,369 "older,

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<sup>10</sup> The narrator makes a point to differentiate between "culture" and "civilization." There are many implications to this distinction. One possibility is that while civilization may refer to the material existence of buildings and institutions, culture refers to the ethereal symbolic and discursive workings that render such institutions legible, and allow bodies to both shape them and be shaped by them.

<sup>11</sup> This language of life and death might find fruitful interaction alongside the Lauren Berlant's concept of "dead citizenship"

more-expensive-to-operate." In the basic sense, the protagonist is stealing a necessary utility and enacting a monetary price on Monopolated Light & Power for their refusal to see him. The absurdly specific and large number of lights, as well as their inefficiency suggest a type of spite and pettiness on behalf of the narrator (one can almost hear, in a humor inflected African American vernacular, "teach yo' blind behind tuh see me!" in the narrator's internal dialogue). At a separate level considering the metaphor of light in an epistemic sense, light would seem to be the ability to produce meaning and sense that orient oneself to the world. Monopolated Light & Power is not simply an electric corporation, but a representation of the cultural, social, aesthetic, and intellectual configurations of hegemony that impose a static distribution of light and dark, what Ranciere might call the "distribution of the sensible." In stealing light, the protagonist steals the capacity to make meaning. The fact that these light bulbs are of an older variety suggests that these forms of making meaning might consist of older artifacts- not the films and radio broadcasts of the day but the novel and other literary forms that have fallen into obscurity in the modern context. The number of light bulbs represents a grand number of sources of inspiration for the production of a life world outside of the hegemony of Monopolated Light & Power. This generates the need for invention, ways of wiring and bringing in more light stolen from the dominance of an exclusionary order.

This need for invention, for innovation, is a dynamic thematic in Ellison's writings. It requires experimentation and analysis as well as creativity, a balance between the reliability of order and the randomness of chaos. Invention is crucial for the "American tradition of tinkers." Through inventing gadgets, the protagonist develops both "a theory and a concept" as "thinker-tinker," and his view of democracy is expressed through the practice of Jazz. Robert Bone describes Ellison's position on Jazz as an aesthetic of freedom that allows for a harmony of the

whole as well as particular breaks for the expression of individual members of the band. Bone also remarks, however, that this freedom must be tempered through discipline, a balance of experimentation and tradition-since improvisation requires nuance as well as understanding of the original context (23-24). This theme informed Ellison's literary practice as well, as his craft draws from his own readings of various literary traditions and it also informs his own political concern with bringing the "Negro" and the "American" in harmony with each other.

By understanding the interconnections between the various divisions in society-including but not limited to race-the narrator is able to break the static imposition of "social concepts" and through the investigation of the mysterious forces of society, craft his own intelligible mode of existence. This process is not without its hazards, nor does it carry with it any guarantees. Indeed, embracing mystery also requires that one forgo the promise and security of destination ahead of the process. Mystery dabbles with the unknown and restores "invention into existence" as Fanon remarks in the conclusion to *Black Skin, White Masks*. In a provocative closure to his ground breaking text, Fanon reminds readers that there is no fulfillment to be found in recovering a past Negro civilization, and that the role of the black man cannot and should not be limited to this in advance. To do so would be to fall prey to the trap of Negritude, of committing oneself to the dull light of those social concepts as well as appropriation by those served by those concepts, the members of white society.

In the middle of the century, with the shift into postmodernity, the political landscape for black radicalism was particularly fraught with complication. The proliferation of narratives for liberation, progress, or freedom left individual black persons with various possibilities for the cultivation of self, but with very little means by which to evaluate or consider these perspectives. The underground, for both Ellison and Fanon, became the zero-point from which the happenings

and inner dynamics of black social life and white social life could be respectively witnessed, and mystery becomes the mode through which the either/or binaries are broken down. In this respect, Ellison provides a mechanism for achieving Fanon's lysis of the morbid body trapped within the antinomies of human existence. The various dimensions of black radicalism at this point in history include both those of action, as well as those of reflection, in both theoretical and poetic modes.



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