

# Revalorized Black Embodiment: Dancing with Fanon

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## Abstract

This article explores Fanon's thought on dance, beginning with his explicit treatment of it in *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth*. It then broadens to consider his theorization of Black embodiment in racist and colonized societies, considering how these analyses can be reformulated as a phenomenology of dance. This will suggest possibilities for fruitful encounters between the two domains in which (a) dance can be valorized while (b) opening up sites of resignification and resistance for Black persons and communities—including a revalorization of Black embodiment as a kind of empowering danced experience.

## Keywords

Fanon, dance, racism, embodiment

To whirl and to dance  
Till the white day is done.

Langston Hughes, 1994

The thesis of this essay is as follows: Although Fanon's explicit remarks on dance are brief and negative, the similarities between his account of Black embodiment (in anti-Black racist societies) and the present author's phenomenology

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of dancing embodiment suggest the possibility of affirmatively reunderstanding—or revalorizing—both Black embodiment and dance. My point is not that the experiences of (various forms of) dance are forms of oppression in the same way or to the same degree as experiences of racism. Rather, I argue that dance (especially in its various professional forms), although for the most part a voluntary and empowering activity, bears important phenomenological resemblances to Fanon's characterization of Black embodiment in racist and colonized cultures in *Black Skin, White Masks* (Fanon, 1967; hereafter *BSWM*) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (Fanon, 2004; hereafter *WE*). These resemblances seem important because they suggest the possibility for Black persons' attempting strategic resistances to political oppression by trying, in a sense, to close the gap between racist and dancing embodiment, that is, by seeking opportunities for performative resistance and acknowledging ways in which oppression conveys (especially epistemological) advantages.<sup>1</sup>

I now begin with a consideration of Fanon's treatment of dance, which consists of two uses of the word *dance* in *BSWM* (and in only one extended example) and one brief mention in *WE*. My primary reason for this preliminary analysis is that it seemed intellectually irresponsible to work through the implications for dance of Fanon's thinking in general without first offering a careful reading of his explicit remarks on the subject. But having done so, it becomes important as well to show that Fanon is not as hostile to dance in general as he might initially seem to be, in part to prevent a misunderstanding of Fanon's views on dance and in part to open up a space of possibility for linking Fanon's views on Black embodiment in anti-Black racist societies to dance embodiment in general.

In both of its appearances in *BSWM*, the connotations are negative. The first is in Chapter 5, "The Fact of Blackness," in the later part of the chapter where Fanon is describing the Negro man's rejection of White culture after its rejection of him, throwing himself instead into the cultures of Africa. "I had rationalized the world and the world had rejected me on the basis of color prejudice. Since no agreement was possible on the level of reason, I threw myself back toward unreason" (*BSWM*, p. 123). What follows is a lyrical, prose poetry-type section of the chapter full of Negritude quotations from Césaire's (1939) poetry and Senghor's (1939) prose.

It seems important to distinguish here between Fanon, the author of the book as a whole, and the "speaker" of this section, the autobiographical-sounding "I," because the literary, poetic quality of this part of the text suggests the possibility that Fanon could be using a fictional narrative voice to achieve his effects. Given that possibility, one should not assume that he is necessarily purveying his own views, although that cannot be hastily ruled out either. The

speaker, then, describes himself as going “overboard” in his immersion in the irrational and magical aspects of African culture, although it is not entirely clear to what degree this irrationality is a perception of Fanon, to what degree of the speaker, and to what degree of the White racist hegemony. At any rate, the speaker ultimately concludes that a person has to “distrust rhythm, earth-mother love, this mystic, carnal marriage of the group and the cosmos” (*BSWM*, p. 125). Nevertheless, the description of the schizophrenic immersion continues, including the speaker’s experience that “from every direction I am assaulted by *the obscenity of dances and of words*” (*BSWM*, p. 126; emphasis added). Why, one might ask, should dance be an obscenity?

It seems clear that dance in general is not always or merely an obscene practice, as illustrated by the following Oxford English Dictionary definitions of *obscene*: “offensively or grossly indecent, lewd,” “offending against moral principles,” or “ill-omened, inauspicious.” Dance could qualify as an obscene practice in these terms only relative to a person’s or group’s moral sensibilities. There are, of course, some communities for whom any kind of dance is immoral (including, for example, some Protestant denominations). And most communities affirm some kinds of dance (such as perhaps square dancing or waltzing) while rejecting others (such as perhaps pole dancing and hip-hop dancing). A better question, then, might be, Which of Fanon’s moral principles are violated by the dance of the colonized?

Fanon would likely respond that dance should be considered obscene for the same reasons that (as I will elaborate below) dance has ameliorative potential—more specifically, there are numerous isomorphic similarities between dancing embodiment in general and Black embodiment. In other words, one reason to condemn dance in general on behalf of persons and communities afflicted with anti-Black racism is that experiences of dance involve many of the same dimensions. If the positive potential were overlooked, as it seems Fanon may have done, avoiding dance altogether would likely seem appropriate and beneficial.

The second occurrence of the word *dance* in *BSWM* is found in Chapter 6, “The Negro and Psychopathology,” in Fanon’s discussion of the work of his contemporary psychoanalyst Desoille, whose therapeutic method consisted of having the patient enter a state of “waking dreams”—pseudohypnotic, therapist-guided daydreams. Adopting the voice of a hypothetical patient of Desoille experiencing a waking dream—another fictional narrative strategy—Fanon writes the following: “When I descend, I see caverns, grottoes where savages dance” (*BSWM*, p. 189). Although Fanon is here critiquing the cultural racist association of Blackness with lowliness and baseness, it is again unclear whether the savage-dance connection is made solely in the mind of

the speaker (the hypothetical patient) or also in the mind of Fanon, the author of the sentence. In other words, to what degree, for Fanon, does Black dance belong inextricably to the racialized stereotype of the “savage,” and to what degree is, or can it be, liberated for other potential significations?

To answer this question, I turn to *WE*. The first passage on dance in the book occurs in a discussion of the affectivity of colonized peoples, specifically concerning how this affectivity “is drained of energy by the ecstasy of dance” (*WE*, p. 19). Thus, dance enters the passage and the book as part of an economy of energies, as a negative force “draining” the energy of an oppressed people. This draining function is evidently considerably important, because Fanon claims that “any study of the colonial world therefore must include an understanding of the phenomena of dance and possession” (*WE*, p. 19). In its second mention, dance thus finds itself associated with another (generally) negatively connoted word, *possession*.

Fanon then expands on these claims, describing indigenous dance as the “colonized’s way of relaxing” that takes the form of a “muscular orgy during which the most brutal aggressiveness and impulsive violence are channeled, transformed, and spirited away” (*WE*, p. 19). In this way, dance is physiologically reduced to muscularity and associated with the, at best, problematic phenomenon of the orgy. As will be observed later, the site from which this dancing energy has been redirected is the struggle for liberation, a political fact that forms the basis for Fanon’s harsh critique of dance.

The passage continues with the following poetic description of the village’s dance event:

The dance circle is a permissive circle. It protects and empowers. At a fixed time and a fixed date, men and women assemble in a given place, and under the solemn gaze of the tribe launch themselves into a seemingly disarticulated, but in fact extremely ritualized, pantomime where the exorcism, liberation, and expression of a community are grandiosely and spontaneously played out through shaking of the head, and back and forward thrusts of the body. Everything is permitted in the dance circle. (*WE*, pp. 19-20)

Note that the passage both begins and ends with the permissiveness of the dance experience, a permissiveness whose axiological status is unclear. Is permissiveness a good thing in itself or only in certain contexts?

A careful response to this question would be that the value of the permissiveness depends on what is being permitted, for whom, by whom, and to what end. Along these lines, Fanon’s focus seems to be on the context in

which the permission is given. If one is permitted to be freer, more joyous, and more expressive in a relatively safe and affirming environment, then that seems like a positive thing; but if the environment is dangerous, degrading, and pathological—as was clearly the case in the colonies—then perhaps restraint is preferable.

Fanon then describes how dance is involved in a sacralization of the very land of the community, including the “hillock” and the “river bank,” which become, for the community, sacred spaces. But his stark summarizing judgment of the entire event is that “the sole purpose of the gathering is to let the supercharged libido and the stifled aggressiveness spew out volcanically” (*WE*, p. 20). The two basic Freudian drives, of life and of death, are discharged through the dance—and that is the dance’s “sole” purpose? Why is there no place for the aesthetic value of the performance, the beauty of the movements, or at least the complexity of its social dimension?

Fanon’s response would likely be that such concerns are appropriate only where a fundamentally life-sustaining environment is in place; and this was clearly not the case in the colonies. Although this discharge of the drives was presumably not the conscious intent of the colonized dancers themselves, one could argue that in their political situation, the dance itself was not fully theirs—in a sense, they were instead being “danced” by the will of the colonizers, for whom this discharge was probably the primary motivation. Put simply, the colonized dancers for Fanon were like the dancing puppets of the colonizers.

In sympathy with this image of puppetry, and its connotations of external control, Fanon then returns into the issue of possession. “One step further and we find ourselves in deep possession,” what he terms “organized séances” (*WE*, p. 21). The result of these experiences, he tells the reader, is “a disintegration, dissolution or splitting of the personality,” an erasure of individuality (*WE*, p. 20). But elsewhere, as I will show below, Fanon rejects at least a certain kind of individualism as a value of the colonizer, not the colonized; so the loss of individuality alone cannot suffice as a reason to impugn dance. Why could possession not be a kind of Dionysian possession by the community, a joyous unification, a celebration of the life of the people?

Fanon’s answer would seem to be that the problem is not dissolution *per se* but that in these contexts, it “plays a regulating role in ensuring the stability of the colonized world” (*WE*, p. 20). The dissolution of the colonized dancers was not a case of a community coming together in ecstatic union but, rather, of the colonizers pulling the strings of all of the colonized villagers at once. In other words, indigenous dance, including the rites of possession, is negative insofar as it allows colonialist oppression to continue. The villagers, instead of bottling up their aggression and libido in preparation to throw off

their imperialist chains, dance it all out; and then as they leave the dance, “the village returns to serenity, peace, and stillness,” instead of remaining inflamed until their political freedom is secured (*WE*, p. 20).

Fanon addresses the subject of dance explicitly only once more in *WE*, after an extensive discussion of combat literature, in a brief suggestion that dance can be transformed into a kind of combat dance in a similar way to that in which ordinary literature becomes combat literature, preparing the people for political liberation and contributing to “the new national rhythm” that “drives the nation” (*WE*, pp. 80, 84). This transformation into combat dance consists essentially of integrating contemporary political consciousness into the artworks, making dances whose rhythms inspire proud revolt. This brief moment of positivity for dance foreshadows Fanon’s much more complex analysis of Black embodiment.

Having considered Fanon’s explicit treatments of dance from *BSMW* and *WE*, I now turn to the core of my essay, namely, an extended analysis of his treatment of Black embodiment in these texts. Embodiment, a theme that has obvious connections to dance, is one of the central themes of *BSWM*. And interestingly for the purposes of my investigation, Fanon’s overall description of Black embodiment seems to line up extremely well with the experiences of (especially professional) dancers. Insofar as this is the case, what might it suggest about the practices of racism and dance training, about the experiences of Black persons in anti-Black racist societies and experiences of all kinds of dancers? Are there ways of understanding the convergence of dance experiences and Black experiences that do not support racist stereotypes of essential biological superiority or athletic predispositions in Black persons and that also do not condemn dance to the status of a mindless release of resentment from oppression and disenfranchisement?<sup>2</sup>

To begin to explore these possibilities, I will now consider Fanon’s account of Black embodiment in an anti-Black racist culture as a constellation of the following four related features or characteristics, in both his original signification and my resignification vis-à-vis dance experience, to highlight the internal resonances between the two domains: total objectification, impeded bodily schema, symbol of the race, and overdetermination from without.

## Total Objectification

“I found that I was an object in the midst of other objects” (*BSWM*, p. 109). As opposed to being a meaning-making subject, the Black person in an anti-Black racist society, according to Fanon, is delegated to being part of the furniture of the White world. The dancer, too, achieves art through objectification,

although in the latter case through *self*-objectification, in *making* himself or herself an object instead of being passively made into one, or at least voluntarily entering a space, a practice, and a discourse in which objectification will occur. It is arguably this acquiescence to the movement of objectification that distinguishes the craft of the dancer from the Black person's experience of racist objectification.

However, this contrast also provides an opportunity to wonder how a Black person in a racist society might improve his or her situation by attempting to find ways to self-objectify, or alter the mode of objectification, or alter the conditions under which he or she enters into a space of objectification, such as by producing objects or performing intentional objectifications for White consumption that parody or open to critical reflections the stereotypes that ordinarily objectify Black persons without consent. Dance: Aesthetic Self-Objectification. In this way, dance foregrounds the possibility that various ways in which Black persons and communities "objectify" themselves hold a potentially greater positive significance than we are accustomed to think.

### Impeded Bodily Schema

"In the white world the man of color encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema" (*BSWM*, p. 110). The bodily schema is the experienced procedure, "implicit knowledge," of making one's way in the world as an embodied being. Fanon defines the schemas as a "slow composition of my *self* as a body in the middle of a spatial and temporal world" (*BSWM*, p. 111). He also refers to it as a "real dialectic between my body and the world" (*BSWM*, p. 111). The Black person's consciousness, he claims, is a "third-person consciousness," feeling his or her body, as it were, from the outside, from the perspective of the imagined White spectator. One could argue that the dancer is nothing but bodily schema, nothing but the dialectic between body and world. The dancer's training consists largely in learning to see her or his body as it is literally seen from the outside; hence the solid wall of mirrors standard in most professional dance studios and the constant feedback from choreographers and teachers throughout a professional dancer's career. This acquisition of a double consciousness, recalling Du Bois' (1903) famous concept from *The Souls of Black Folk*, is essential to the dancer's performance.

And, as with Black people in an anti-Black racist society, the third-person schema often disrupts the first-person schema; witness the typical coexistence of on-stage grace and off-stage clumsiness in accomplished dancers. An overemphasis on moving in relation to being perceived seems to interfere

with the ability to move successfully when not being perceived. On the other hand, there are obvious advantages to incorporating this “outsider’s perspective” (in multiple senses of the expression), such as the additional beautification of the world that occurs with each person who learns to move with more aesthetic grace. And perhaps the impeding of the bodily schema need not be a resting place but instead a moment in the dialectic from un-self-conscious graceless naturalness to self-conscious graceful awkwardness to self-conscious natural gracefulness. Perhaps the consciousness gained by Black persons through White oppression has enhanced their ability to perceive human movements from various informative perspectives, thereby enabling them to acquire potentially socially valuable information largely invisible to the oppressing White persons. Dance: Pluralized-Enhanced Bodily Schemata. In other words, dance foregrounds the fact that attention to non-Black bodily schemata illuminates the social construction of such schemata, thereby making it more difficult to view aspects of Black embodiment as essential, internal, and exclusive to Black persons and communities.

## Symbol of the Race

“I was responsible at the same time for my body, for my race, for my ancestors” (*BSWM*, p. 112). The Black person for Fanon is perceived not as an individual but as a mere token of the type Negro, bearing in his or her very corporeality the writing of the entire past and present race. “A man was expected to behave like a man. I was expected to behave like a black man—or at least like a nigger” (*BSWM*, p. 114). To be an individual is to be a token of a type as well but of the type *human being*, a universal whose higher abstraction gives it a much more limited content, meaning it interferes less with another human being perception of one of its tokens. Another way of putting it is that the Black person, by being perceived as *above all* Black, is prevented from being seen as *above all* a human being, thereby making the human being a privileged category for non-Black persons.<sup>3</sup>

In a similarly symbolic move, dancers become aesthetic objects—indeed, dance first emerges as an art—by subsuming particular bodies under the universals of aesthetic surfaces, epitomes of muscular control, and symbols of human physical perfection. In other words, although it involves a privileging of the visual and physical, the dancer is perceived as a symbol of human being. Consequently, perhaps by engaging in dance as an art form, Black persons can take advantage of the dancer’s privileged role as symbol of the human to subvert and problematize the Black person’s role as symbol of the race. Dance: Symbol of the Species. Thus understood, dance foregrounds



the importance of race in general in human life, which could encourage choreographers and audiences to be more attentive to the subtle and complex ways in which dancers function as symbols of humanity.

## Overdetermination From Without

“I am overdetermined from without. I am the slave not to the ‘idea’ that others have of me but of my own appearance” (*BSWM*, p. 116). As opposed to oppressed groups with less visible markers of group membership, who can resist conformity to oppressive stereotypes as a strategy to resist oppression in general, the moment of visibility and the moment of oppression are simultaneous for anyone who is perceived as Black, according to Fanon. This means that all work to resist oppression must actively confront a horde of stereotypes always already in place and that even successful resistance can never do more than coexist with the visible marker. Dancers are also determined from without, not just in their movement but in their comportment, demeanor, attire, and so on, by dance partners, choreographers, instructors, the rituals handed down through cultural traditions, and the various aspects of the music to which they dance.<sup>4</sup>

The primary differences between these two types of experience seem to be that (a) it is more obvious, and widely acknowledged, that the status of “dancer” is the *result of a process* or is the *performance* of overdetermination from without, and (b) in many cases, although not all, this process and its result are primarily voluntary on the part of the dancer. On the other hand, in the case of racism, it is more popularly believed that the overdetermination is instead an immediate and accurate perception of inherent characteristics. This suggests the possibility that Black dance performances, by putting Black bodies into a discursive and artistic space that privileges the performative, could encourage—by showing—a performative (as opposed to essentialist) interpretation of Blackness, much as Judith Butler (1990) suggests onstage drag performances do for offstage performances of gender and femininity.<sup>5</sup> Dance: Overdetermination Made Visible. Put differently, dance foregrounds (via an emphasis on performativity in connection with the work of Butler) the benefits of applying insights from queer theory to theoretical work on race.

A related account in *WE*, of group embodiment, has a similar phenomenological relevance to dance in regard to dance’s social-communal aspect. It also offers similar opportunities for cross-fertilization and political resistance, and although its analyses were sparked by a specific set of historical circumstances, those circumstances were sustained by ideological structures

of racism that have survived colonialism into the present. My analysis of Fanon's analysis consists of the following four points: valorization of the spatial, nonindividualism, showing versus saying, and perpetual muscular tension.

## Valorization of the Spatial

"For a colonized people, the most essential value, because it is the most meaningful, is first and foremost the land" (*WE*, p. 9). The fight must first of all be for brute physical space, so unequally distributed prior to liberation. Fanon described the "colonist's sector" as one in which "trash cans constantly overflow with strange and wonderful garbage, undreamed-of leftovers" (*WE*, p. 4). Even the refuse, the abject of the White world, runneth over with bounty. The "colonized's sector," by stark contrast, Fanon paints as "a world with no space, people are piled on top of one another, the shacks squeezed tightly together" (*WE*, p. 4). The colonists have more space for, and a higher quality of, garbage than the colonized do housing.

Obviously, spatiality is central to dance, not only because the dancers must move through space but because this movement can gain the status of art only when there is space for display. Only against a relatively stable and uncluttered background can the dancer's movements be clearly seen and appreciated for their aesthetic qualities. And this space is one that must be set apart, etymologically made sacred by the community, foregoing the use of the space for more functional, practical ends. One could go farther and say that dance is what occurs when space is liberated from all subservient functions and can be seen and experienced qua spatiality; only in this way can the dancer's use of space be purely aesthetic.

Perhaps political goals for Black communities can be achieved by emphasizing the aesthetic contours of polymorphous spaces of Blackness—living spaces, psychic spaces, metaphorical spaces, contested spaces—by opening these spaces to greater representation. Writes choreographer Thomas DeFrantz (2005), "Beauty—in any definition—cannot flourish without representation. It has to be reflected, pursued, and circulated to be engaged it has to be assembled in its component parts to fulfill itself, it must be remembered to construct its effects" (p. 100). *Dance: Liberation of the Spatial*. So conceived, dance foregrounds the importance of attending to the roles that various kinds of spaces play in structuring the relations between oppressed communities and both larger, oppressing communities as well as the oppressed communities themselves.

## Nonindividualism

“During the struggle for liberation . . . all the Mediterranean values, the triumph of the individual, of enlightenment and Beauty turn into pale, lifeless trinkets” (*WE*, p. 11). Focus on the individual is replaced by a focus on the community. As opposed to these “White” values, the “colonized intellectual,” according to Fanon, comes to learn “the strength of the village assemblies, the power of the people’s commissions and the extraordinary productiveness of neighborhood and section committee meetings” (*WE*, p. 11). Although many popular instances of dance in Western culture may make dance seem like an individualistic activity, even in the solo performance of a Fred Astaire or Michael Jackson, the soloist is dependent on the audience and, usually, the live or prerecorded music as well as the choreographer and instructor who prepared the dance for performance, not to mention the tradition(s) of dance practice informing and guiding the contemporary performance.

Most often, however, in the West and beyond, dance is a thoroughly social practice, with partners, groups of dancers, observers interacting symbiotically with the performers through cheers, comment, silence, palpable energy, intensified movement, and so on. In most of its realizations, and in the many incentives it offers for community and socialization, dance arguably serves the cause of resisting the hyperindividualism of traditional White cultures. To promote dance, then, might mean indirectly to promote a set of values with the potential to bring White and Black communities into greater commonality and respect. Dance: Transindividualism. Perhaps, then, dance foregrounds the importance of attending to the ways that individual-community relations manifest themselves in oppressing and marginalized communities.

## Showing Versus Saying

“The unemployed and starving do not lay claim to the truth. They do not say that they represent the truth because they are the truth in their very being” (*WE*, p. 12). The wretched of the earth for Fanon are the very performances of their own truth, the Wittgensteinian “showing” to the “saying” of the colonizers. This, he claims, is the only hope of the wretched, insofar as their voices, along with Black voices up to the present, tend more often to be silenced and ignored than White voices. It probably goes without saying that dance is a form of art completely accustomed to going without saying. Or, at least, dance is largely independent of verbal language. Put differently, it achieves by choice that on which Black persons and communities have historically

been forced to rely without any choice whatsoever—the communicative power of visible demonstration. Black dance performance harnesses a professionally chosen form of showing to emphasize and valorize a racially unchosen one, retroactively legitimizing the truth which is possible despite verbal silence. Dance: Showing in and for Itself. One could say, therefore, that dance foregrounds the benefit of methodological openness, including not only straightforward rational argumentation but also aesthetically rich descriptions, such as are found in poetry.

## Perpetual Muscular Tension

“Hence the dreams of the colonized subject are muscular dreams” (*WE*, p. 15). Repressing their rage toward their oppressors, the stress builds in their very bodies, and thus the “muscles of the colonized are always tensed” (*WE*, p. 16). Later, Fanon describes the withdrawal from Westernization of the colonized intellectual who “feels he must escape this white culture,” a movement which, Fanon claims, “above all calls to mind a muscular reflex, a muscular contraction” (*WE*, p. 157). For this reason, the colonized intellectual’s style is an “energetic style, alive with rhythms, bursting with life” in preparation for a “swift, painful combat where inevitably the muscle had to replace the concept” (*WE*, p. 157). To be a dancer, similarly, is to be in constant muscular ready awareness, storing energy in tension to be released in a display of powerful grace or desperate aggression. This muscular, physiological awareness is important in the struggle of Black persons and communities for genuine equality, as a significant marker or litmus test for the success of that struggle. Dance: Beautiful Tension. Finally, then, dance foregrounds the importance of the physical or bodily dimension of being a raced being as well as the importance of ensuring that theoretical insights can also be applied at the level of concrete human embodiment.<sup>6</sup>

By way of conclusion, I will now revisit the central argument of this essay. Although Fanon’s explicit treatment of dance is brief and negative, the phenomenological similarities between dancing embodiment and Fanon’s accounts of Black embodiment in racist and colonized societies suggest that dance may have much more to offer race theory than Fanon would have granted. More specifically, there may be ways to tap into the constructive and affirmative values typically attributed to dance to find ways to better construct and affirm the lives of Black persons and communities under anti-Black racism.

Put more specifically and concretely, the aspects of embodiment that dancing and Black embodiment under racism share—namely, (a) total objectification, (b) impeded bodily schema, (c) symbol of the race, (d) overdetermination

from without, (e) valorization of the spatial, (f) nonindividualism, (g) showing versus saying, and (h) perpetual muscular tension—suggest the possibility that positive aspects of these eight aspects of dance—namely, the (a) aesthetic and voluntary aspects of total objectification, (b) pluralization and enhancement of bodily schemata, (c) symbolizing of the entire human species, (d) making visible of such overdetermination from without, (e) liberation of space, (f) benefits of transindividualism, (g) pursuit of showing in and for itself, and (h) beauty of tension—can be imaginatively extended into the arena of Black embodiment. For example, one can encourage (a) an assertion of greater control on the part of Black communities over the ways that Black people are objectified via the visual arts; (b) an awareness of the skill involved in navigating our world with a Black body; (c) an emphasis on the ways that Black embodied experiences teach everyone about human embodiment in general; (d) an awareness of the ways in which all humans are overdetermined by external forces; (e) an emphasis on how spatiality affects all human lives in various ways; (f) an attempt to reach outside our individualistic isolation toward meaningful community; (g) a respect for the centrality of gesture, demonstration, and showing in human communication; and (h) a recognition of tension's potential benefits for human life.

When dance is seen in this context, not only is there a place for dance in general in Fanon's philosophy—his negative remarks about dance notwithstanding—but dance (like Black embodiment) is in fact also highly deserving of valorization—in dance's case, as an ally in the struggle for a more virtuous society. Finally, I have tried to show in this essay that following Fanon's own thinking, dance deserves to be enlisted, alongside what he terms "combat literature," as a kind of "combat dance" in the continuing fight against racial discrimination and oppression.

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1. Ultimately, these strategies are variations on strategies both as old and as habitual as the oppressions themselves (including U.S. slaves' mocking improvisations on White European dances) and also famously put forward by great thinkers on race,

- such as Du Bois (especially double consciousness). The primary benefit, then, might be having reached the same conclusions by a different theoretical route, thus affirming the multiplicity of resistances available to the oppressed. Most importantly, these claims are based not on some pretense of the author's intuitive insight into Black experiences but on the phenomenological accounts of Fanon and can be relevant and worthwhile only insofar as the reader finds those accounts to be so.
2. Important critiques of the claim that Black persons are biologically essentially rhythmic or musical can be found in Cornel West (2003) and Leopold Sedar Senghor (2003).
  3. This also recalls de Beauvoir's (1952) famous account of the human-man relationship: "Man is defined as a human being and a woman as a female—whenever she behaves as a human being she is said to imitate the male" (p. 47). In this vein, Fanon has been criticized by bell hooks (1984), among others, for neglecting the role of gender difference in his account of the Black experience. See, for an early example, Susan Brownmiller (1975).
  4. The latter two examples demonstrate that this overdetermination also occurs with amateur dancers, non-Western dancers, improvisation artists, and spontaneous participants, even though professional dancers in the West are perhaps the best examples for this running comparison.
  5. This argument follows the suggestion by Thomas DeFrantz (2005) that "the performance of blackness, then, may refer constantly to absent, discarded, and elided performances which form an offstage background to the social category of 'black'" (p. 96).
  6. Given the easy applicability of Fanon's analyses of Black embodiment in anti-Black racist cultures to the experience of dancers, it is interesting that in the contemporary White United States, there is a stereotype that Black persons are essentially better dancers than White persons. It is also interesting that dancing is generally understood to be the privileged province of other oppressed or disadvantaged groups as well, including women and gay men. Women more than men, alternatively oriented more than exclusively heterosexual, non-Westerners more than Westerners, rural folk more than urbanites, and the conventional more than the unconventional are perceived as being both interested and proficient in dance.

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## Bio

**Joshua M. Hall** recently successfully defended his PhD dissertation in philosophy, on the philosophy of dance, at Vanderbilt University. He has journal articles forthcoming in the *Journal of Aesthetic Education* and *Philosophy Today* as well as poetry in journals internationally, recently including *White Whale Review*, *Crucible*, *Lilliput Review*, and *Chiron Review*. He also has 18 years of experience as a dancer and choreographer.