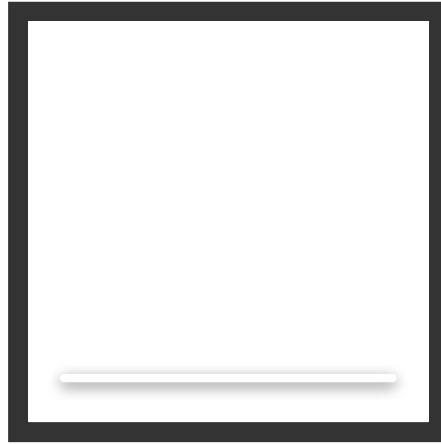


# QUIZ! Which you are you right NOW!?



- ☐ I am human
- ☐ I am raced
- ☐ I am gendered
- ☐ I am abled
- ☐ I am othered

☐ I am

☐ I am me

## Activity: Reinvent Yourself!

### Materials Needed:

Paper bag, a piece of paper, something to write with, scissors (optional)

### Directions:

1. make a list of what makes you "you" in order of importance (don't number anything)
2. cut or tear the list into individual items
3. place items in a small paper bag
4. Blow up the paper bag with air
5. squeeze the top
6. pop it

The pieces of you fall out, reorganizing your being.

## A THEORETICAL DIVERSION

Words become the texture through which we remember great thinkers as their faces become lost and distorted through time. We erase as we canonize, dissect, pull apart, excerpt, analyze. We make bits of a corpus primary texts as we create meaning and context for the thoughts from the past. Through this process of creating and erasure we silo, separate, and sometimes miss when two people are making the same noise, especially when they are speaking across languages and cultures. We translate, reformat, and re-publish, and paraphrase the words of others as we mix them with our own and through this practice our thought grows. We tend to erase ourselves along with the author. We reframe their words with our own, not allowing the image of their faces to obscure our understanding of primary texts. The face and embodiment of the thinker can be just as important as the words said though. Lived experience colors our understanding of the world. Our texts are an extension of that

experience. The textural layer is superimposed on a person, often times obscuring that at the center of the words was someone trying to make sense of their world so they could become.

The thing that always struck me about Zora Neale Hurston and Frantz Fanon is how their life experience is central to their thought and practice as performative practice (for Hurston) and as clinical and cultural psychiatric therapy (for Fanon). The reflexive practice of remembering is central to their understanding of the world, of the world's potential. It is this reflective practices that places their work in a performative space even as it does the hard work of moving forward theories of the human, society, and psychic colonization and decolonization.

Both Hurston and Fanon are positioned as people who spoke of black subjectivity. They do, that is the reflexive practice of their experience. However, they also focus on society and being human in general, in a historical world where race and ethnicity have become central nodal points that literally change how a body is able to move through the world. The limits are more obvious for the black body, but all bodies are limited. Being able to pinpoint the limits, while disorienting and painful as is illustrated by the primary texts, is also the thing that allows the black body to be closer to a transcendental or cosmic consciousness. The ability to transcend race, those moments where the human is able to just be and to achieve mutual recognition as human, as being in the same bag, or part of the cosmic yes, is the gift and the pain of the racialized body.

Frantz Fanon starts *Black Skin, White Masks* with "The explosion will not happen today. It is too early... or too late" (5). The experience of being human for Fanon is being trapped in a cultural box, constantly in a state of missing the instances where man can leave "the zone of non-being," the place where man is "stripped bare of every essential from which genuine departure can "emerge," if he is willing to descend into a "veritable hell" (xii), the space of soul murder. By the time we reach chapter five of *Black Skin, White Masks*, "The Lived Experience of the Black Man", the explosion cannot be missed. He sees the completion of this process as a violent, explosive death followed by a reconfigured new being, a new "me". Zora Neale Hurston's essay, "How It Feels to Be Colored Me" describes a similar process of becoming a social being once the black human is encountered and scripted by the Other. Though she does not go into the details of this experience the framework is nearly identical to Fanon's.

"I left Eatonville, the town of the oleanders, a Zora. When I disembarked from the river-boat at Jacksonville, she was no more. It seemed that I had suffered a sea change. I was not Zora of Orange County any more, I was now a little colored girl."

Though the new Zora does not become from an explosion, the omission of details, and the context of the experience, in a state high-speed social travel, is the same as Fanon, who experienced his explosive transformation on a train. Despite Hurston's attempt to not speak of the violence, by the end of the essay the central role of being emptied, evacuated, is clear. She speaks of herself as a bag amongst other bags, full of things both meaningful and worthless. By the end of the essay, we have a better sense of what this means.

"In your hand is the brown bag. On the ground before you is the jumble it held--so much like the jumble in the bags, could they be emptied, that all might be dumped in a single heap and the bags refilled without altering the content of any greatly".

For both Fanon and Hurston, there is no such thing as a new cultural space. We do not get to exist beyond the limits of the human world in life. There is only destruction or emptying and refilling, the space of culture and of self, with a torn or wrinkled bag. As we work towards a radical reflexivity in our own work, we have to ask not just what we are breathing in, but what we are breathing out as we attempt to move our bags with enough force to make them explode so we can make something new.