

A PHENOMENOLOGY OF DIFFERENCE: LEARNING FROM FRANTZ FANON'S ENCOUNTER WITH EXISTENTIAL PHENOMENOLOGY

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Abstract For several critics, phenomenology is instituted on universalist views which ignore the historical realities of class, race, and gender. They also maintain that phenomenology implies suppression of difference. One of these critics was the political philosopher, psychiatrist, and activist Frantz Fanon. Usually associated with Sartre, who influenced his *Black Skin, White Masks*, and who wrote the preface to *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon was also engaged with Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. Drawing on Merleau-Ponty's and Fanon's writings, as well as on black and queer critical studies' on the body, nature, and exclusion (Achille Mbembe, Jasbir K. Puar, Melanie Chen, and others), this paper will focus on aspects of this engagement, including the notions of 'corporeal schema' (Merleau-Ponty) and 'historical-racial schema' (Fanon). It will outline potential tenets for a phenomenology of difference and emancipation, highlighting aspects of Fanon's thought and practice which may foster a deeper understanding of freedom difference, and distress.

Key words: Phenomenology, Fanon, Merleau-Ponty, difference, emancipation.

The body, not the 'subject'

Fanon's active engagement with Sartre is well-documented if seldom examined in current writings and practices nominally informed by existential phenomenology. His seminal text *Black Skin, White Masks* (whose original title was, interestingly, *Essay on the Disalienation of the Black*) published when he was only 27 (Fanon, 1986), brings to life several Sartrean tropes, including authenticity, bad faith, and the subject's power/ability of being-for-others. Virtually unknown – let alone examined within majoritarian existential therapy – is Fanon's fruitful dialogue with Merleau-Ponty, and this despite the thriving literature on the subject (e.g. Weate, 2001; Salomon, 2006; Mahendran, 2007; Pish, 2016; Whitney 2018; Stawarska & Ring, 2023; Laubscher et al, 2021).

Fanon's route to Merleau-Pontian phenomenology is significant, I believe, for any practitioner interested in embodied difference. Born in 1925 in the island of Martinique in the Eastern Caribbean sea, as a young man Fanon became a pupil at the Lycée Schoelcher of the poet, educator, and founder of the *Négritude* movement Aimé Césaire, a key literary and anti-colonialist political figure who famously referred to the process of colonization as

thingification, the commodification of human beings. Originally published in 1955, his *Discourse on Colonialism* (Césaire, 2001) is still relevant today. This is because, as Jasbir Puar (2007) points out, current culture is still characterized by “a lack of engagement with postcolonial theory” which leaves racial dynamics unexplored” (p. 48). It is not contentious to suggest that this is also true of psychotherapy culture – including majoritarian existential therapy. One of Fanon’s merits is to have developed and expanded the anti-colonialist direction of Césaire’s work. He saw Negritude as “the emotional if not the logical antithesis of that insult which the white man flung at humanity” (Fanon, 1963, p. 212), a shift in thought and praxis which necessitates in his view the expansion of mere cultural identity (in this case *racialized* cultural identity) into the context of wider political struggle, including a struggle for national liberation (Wallerstein, 2009). As a young black man in the early 1940s, Fanon experienced first-hand the violence and bigotry of the collaborationist Vichy regime, accelerating a contextual, racial-historical understanding of *lived experience* (what phenomenologists call *Erlebnis*) – not as universal factuality but as an occurrence *specific* to the black person under the yoke of colonialism and racism. Factuality is only *one* aspect of facticity, and the one that is more relevant here is *contingency*. Factual lived experience is subjected to historico-political contingencies. These are felt at the level of the skin. Consequently, it is inaccurate to speak of subjective experience in terms of a universal ‘subject’, as the philosophical tradition has done since time immemorial. It has done so not because the tradition is marred by some sort of epistemological impediment, but because the language of universality is historically closely allied to Empire and to its *legacy of violence*, in Caroline Elkins’s well-chosen turn of phrase (Elkins 2022).

It would be likewise inaccurate to bound psychological/psychotherapeutic explorations to a unitary (Cartesian, Husserlian) self, a variation of which is the notion of a self-existing, fundamentally self-bound ‘psychic apparatus’ as the Freudian tradition has it (despite its own genial, now largely discarded hypothesis of the unconscious). It would also be inaccurate, while we’re on the subject, to speak of ‘relatedness’ as a *given* in human interactions (rather than an aspiration) if one then breezily bypasses both the asymmetry of human interactions and the contingency integral to facticity.

What is the alternative to the debateable notion of the (universal) *self*? The answer is straightforward: *the body*. In particular, the lived experience of the *subjugated* body. The pathos and passion of bodies itemised, reviled, and subjected to the violence of the state

and of dominant culture – to the xenophobia, racism, misogyny, homophobia, transphobia, and aporophobia (hatred of the poor and contempt for the homeless) circulated by majoritarian views and orchestrated by our societies of control. Fanon's books were not written for the powerful but for the 'wretched of the earth'. His learning and praxis, as a psychiatrist and political activist, was *not* motivated by the desire to curry favour from institutions. His focus was elsewhere.

We do not learn of the vicissitudes of the psyche and the tribulations of experience by passively reciting the constructs of an arbitrary existential 'canon' dished out in the classrooms of costly and cultish existential training schools. We may want to pay close attention instead to those who know in their marrow 'ontological insecurity' and 'existential uncertainty': not as the tropes of a 'universal human condition' but more concretely as unemployment, displacement, illness exile, exclusion, poverty, as tragic/ecstatic upheavals of bodies subjected to hatred, prejudice, and all sorts of normative phobias.

We may want to pay close attention to those who edge close to anguish and dread, who in their experience of deep existential crisis feel on their skin the fragility and fragmentation of the 'universal' human subject. We may want to listen to those who, having seen through the vain promises of neoliberal ideology, may need assistance in affirming their lived experience, in actively resisting the psychological control exerted by a monological psych world bent on replicating *ad infinitum* the view that the only thing that matters is profit, and that the only way to know how well one is doing is by measuring the success of the self-entrepreneurial model peddled by neoliberal psychology.

The counter-traditional line of thought I am conjuring here, anchored on contingency, specificity, and the asymmetry of human interactions is redolent of the more critical takes on the implications of the Hegelian master/slave dialectic (Adorno, 1993) and has been extensively developed by an overlooked but stimulating perspective: feminist *standpoint theory*.

Standpoint Theory and Disembodied Research

For Sandra Harding (2008), who coined the terms, standpoint theory is several things at once. It is an inquiry into the nature of epistemology, a way of asking *who* can produce dependable knowledge and *how* knowledge can be supported. It is a philosophy of science, asking which are the best practices and goals for scientific research. It is also a sociology of

science, looking closely at the different conditions which generate particular forms of knowledge. As a methodology, it has a rich and interesting lineage: from Marx, who suggested that the surest way to learn about the class system is by examining the life of a worker rather than the life of a member of the elite, to feminists who one hundred plus years later applied the same method to the life of women. This methodology can be organically applied to any new group which at different historical turns bears the brunt of injustice and oppression – think of the civil rights and postcolonial movements, of LGBTQIA+ movements and so forth.

For Brenda J. Allen (2023), knowledge is born out of *power relations* between dominant and nondominant groups and the latter – Fanon ‘wretched’ or ‘damned’ of the Earth – are the ones who can provide a more extensive and incarnate knowledge of a reality dominated by power dynamics. An analysis of power dynamics, let alone of contingent/embodied *Erlebnis*, is invariably lacking in a majoritarian world of ‘research’ hellbent in turning knowledge into another *product* on the market, particularly since the 1980 Bayh-Dole Act in the United States and Thatcher’s REF (Research Excellence Framework) in the UK (Davies, 2023) – a ‘nihilistic’ cultural turn encouraging universities to become what they have now become: *businesses*, and nothing else besides.

These ‘situational’ – hence implicitly existential and phenomenological perspectives – find echoes in contemporary philosophies who rebuke so-called ‘pluralism’, i.e., the multiplication of the subject in order to “accommodate all sorts of differences (i.e., a politics of inclusion)”, intersecting the subject “with every variable of identity imaginable, split it to account for the unknown realms of the subconscious, infused it with grater individual rights” (Puar, 2007, p 206).

For those of us who care about the lived experience of subjected bodies – of black, queer, transgender bodies; of poor, foreign, exiled, bodies, of bodies nonaligned, noncompliant to majoritarian views and the dogmas *du jour*. For those who want their practice to become *praxis* – that is, allied to active rather than reactive forces, and as such “a political force in the wider, transformational sense of the term” (Bazzano, 2023, p. 193) – the writings of Frantz Fanon are a rich and stimulating source of inspiration.

An important aspect of Fanon’s legacy concerns his discussion on the “racialization of thought” and culture, something which he ascribes to *those Europeans who have never stopped setting up white culture in order to fill the gap left by the absence of other cultures*

<https://newleftreview.org/issues/ii57/articles/immanuel-wallerstein-reading-fanon-in-the-21st-century>) :

The racialization of culture was the responsibility initially of the colonizers, 'those Europeans who have never ceased to set up white culture to fill the gap left by the absence of other cultures'.. ...

His closing thrust is quite the opposite of identity politics:

If man is known by his acts, then we will say that the most urgent thing today for the intellectual is to build his nation. If this building is true, that is, if it interprets the manifest will of the people and reveals the eager African peoples, then the building of a nation is of necessity accompanied by the discovery and encouragement of universalizing values. Far from keeping aloof from other nations, therefore, it is national liberation which leads the nation to play its part on the stage of history. It is at the heart of national consciousness that international consciousness lives and grows. And this twofold emerging is ultimately only the source of all culture.^{footnote¹¹}

In the Conclusion to *Wretched of the Earth*, however, as though he had gone too far in understating the merits of a different path for Africa—a non-European path—Fanon points to the example of the United States, which had made as its goal that of catching up with Europe, and succeeded so well that it 'became a monster, in which the taints, the sickness and the inhumanity of Europe have grown to appalling dimensions'. For Fanon, then, Africa must not try to 'catch up' and become a third Europe. Quite the contrary:

Humanity is waiting for something other from us than such an imitation, which would be almost an obscene caricature. If we want to turn Africa into a new Europe and America into a new Europe, then let us leave the destiny of our countries to Europeans. They will know how to do it better than the most gifted from among us. But if we want humanity to advance a step further, if we want to bring it up to a different level than that which Europe has shown it, then we must invent and we must make discoveries . . . For Europe, for ourselves and for humanity, comrades, we must turn over a new leaf, we must work out new concepts, and try to set afoot a new man.

In Fanon's weaving, in both books, around the question of cultural identity, of national identity, we see the fundamental dilemma that has plagued all anti-systemic thought in the last half-century and probably in the next as well. The rejection of European universalism is fundamental to the rejection of pan-European dominance and its rhetoric of power in the structure of the modern world-system—what Aníbal Quijano has termed the coloniality of power. But, at the same time, all those who have been committed to the struggle for an egalitarian world, or to what might be called the historic socialist aspiration, are very wary of what Fanon called

the 'pitfalls of national consciousness'. So we continue to weave, for to do so seems the only way to remain on a path to a future in which, in Fanon's words, humanity 'advances a step further'.

Disalienation

The trajectory of Fanon's life and of his innovative thought and praxis progressed from the Caribbean to Europe to North Africa to sub-Saharan Africa, each time altering in a significant way his views and modes of being in the world – a journey documented in his posthumously published *Toward the African Revolution* (Fanon, 1994).

Essential to our discussion are the two years (1947-1948) he spent at the University of Lyon attending Merleau-Ponty's lectures on language and communication before qualifying three years later as a psychiatrist under the supervision of the radical Catalan psychiatrist François Tosquelles, one for whom the role of culture and society distress is pivotal in experiences of mental distress.

In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau Ponty (1962, p. 253) writes:

We must learn to find the communication between one consciousness and another *in one and the same world*. In reality, the other is not shut up inside my perspective of the world, because this perspective itself has no definite limits, because it slips spontaneously into the other's, and because both are brought together in the one single world in which we all participate as anonymous subjects of perception (my emphasis).

By engaging and critiquing Merleau-Ponty's comprehensive notion of 'world', Fanon fashioned his own creative hypothesis of *disalienation*.

Fanon's disalienation is, therefore, an exact reverse of the all-too-common alienation. The process of disalienation would be to integrate and understand a group that could be the potential "other" in alienation. To begin the chapter, Fanon outlines his observation of alienation between white society and black people (<https://blackintellectualthought2015.wordpress.com/2015/10/08/fanon-and-disalienation/#:~:text=Fanon's%20disalienation%20is%2C%20therefore%2C%20an,white%20society%20and%20black%20people.>)

<https://www.radicalphilosophy.com/article/fanon-phenomenology-race>

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/frantz-fanon/#WretEart>

From the

Stawarska's text in its entirety: <https://journals.openedition.org/hel/3458>

Pish's text in Download file

also: <https://newleftreview.org/sidecar/posts/psycho-politics?pc=1539>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=omPUaAr0pLU> For Fanon, a revolutionary humanist, it's not race that creates racism but the other way around. Secondly, building on Marx, he went further by emphasizing the psychic impact has on the living person

"Fanon's corpus of work is luminously suggestive of the homosexual fantasies and fears that found nationalism, whereby his anxieties about interracial heterosexual relations filter out homoerotic charges and antagonisms between colonized and colonizing men (and, by inference, colonized and colonizing women") (p. 49)

Puar refers above to Fanon's 'Algeria Unveiled' "which names women as the lynchpin of the nation" (paraphrase)

"...incorporation of death [for Fanon] saturates every stratum of being". In *A Dying Colonialism* (New York: Grove Press, 1965 p. 57) he writes: "The terrorist, from the moment he undertakes an assignment, allows death to enter his soul".

More notes from Puar in A2 Notebook dark blue hardcover

From Chen, Mel Y. (2012) *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect*. Durham and London: Duke University Press:

She quotes Fanon: "When we consider the efforts made to carry out the cultural estrangement so characteristic of the colonial epoch, we realize that nothing has been left to chance and that the total result looked for by colonial domination was indeed to convince the natives that colonialism //came to lighten their darkness. The effect consciously sought by colonialism was to drive into the natives' heads the idea that if the settlers were to leave, they would at once fall back into barbarism, degradation and bestiality" (*The Wretched of the Earth*, New York: Grove Press, 1963, pp. 210-211).

Chen comments "Because a process of economic and territorial domination in the history of European colonialism has inevitably summoned forms of psychological support in one domain or another, colonial subjects are often understood to be represented and treated as in some way 'less' than fully human subjects, less than fully self-possessed, readily 'subject to subjugation', and further, potentially pressed to see themselves in such terms ... Colonialism was, and continues to be, driven by capitalism and hence invested in the management of domains of private ownership. (p. 50)

"Frantz Fanon's *Black Skins, White Masks*, in analyzing the postcolonial psychic state of a racialized subject, theorizes relations among animality, castration, and black (sexual) threat,

and in so doing offers a condensed image of the social possibility of simultaneous *castration* and phallic *presence*, even hypermasculinity. Given the sacrosanct importance of the penis or the phallus, we might extend the concurrence of castration and phallic presence to the possibility that nongenitality could impute genitality or the threat of genitality's eventual presence. But if the absence or presence can sometimes be intensified as a threat that// *consolidates* maleness, the pairing can also be attenuated in such a way that transsexuality emerges as curiously legible" (pp 148-49).

"We have multiplied [the subject] to accommodate all sorts of differences (i.e., a politics of inclusion), intersected it with every variable of identity imaginable, split it to account for the unknown realms of the subconscious, infused it with grater individual rights (the rights-bearing subject). Foucault's own provocations include the claim that sexuality is an *intersection*, rather than an interpellative identity, of the body and the population... the entities that intersect are the body (not the subject)... and population" (p 206).

See many articles on Fanon in *Radical Philosophy*

Do not build on the good old days, but on the bad new ones W Benjamin

Necroliberalism Mbembe

From Mbembe *Franz Fanon and the Politics of Viscerality* (2016) Presentation at the Franklin Humanities Institute, Duke University https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lg_BEodNaEA

Notes: Fanon's understanding of madness is not far from Lacan's. Lacan developed a double perspective on the relationship between madness and freedom (a) *madness as the most faithful companion to freedom*; freedom may be coterminous with madness; madness as the ultimate consummation of freedom, the one shadowing the other's every move; to be free is to be mad;

(b) *madness as the limit to our freedom*

A similar double perspective is found implicitly and explicitly in Fanon's theorization of madness. However, they both believed a feeble organism, or a derailed imagination were not enough to make a madman or a madwoman. Fanon believes that political systems have a mental life and can be affected by mental disorders.

Our moment is *Fanonian* in that sense that we still have to deal with the relationship between madness and freedom.

Our moment is *post-Fanonian* in the sense that the dualism between colonized/colonizer (typical of Fanon's cartography of power) have been substituted by two parallel forms of cynical power and their attendant nihilism; one motivated by 'security'; the other suffused with the passions and dreams of the caliphate to the point where we don't know what pertains the domain of *murder* and what pertains the domain of *justice*. Fanon did not experience this technocratic power and its desire to complete control, but...

Reacting 'against the constitutionalist tendency of the late nineteenth century, Freud insisted that the individual factor be taken into account through psychoanalysis. He substituted for a phylogenetic

theory the ontogenetic perspective. It will be seen that the black man's alienation is not an individual question. Beside phylogeny and ontogeny stands sociogeny ... [it] is a question. of a sociodiagnostic (Fanon, 1986, p. 13)

CRUCIAL: Fanon, M-Ponty and the Difference of Phenomenology, doc in affect file, full details here: <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9781003037132-15/fanon-merleau-ponty-difference-phenomenology-jeremy-weate>

below are extracts:

As Fanon's method in *Black Skin, White Masks* is in part phenomenological, an excursus into the chapter entitled *The Lived Experience of the Black*, and an examination of the final chapter, *En guise de conclusion*, will lead to a radical phenomenology of difference. It will also lead to a reformulated genealogy of political ideals, grounded in a phenomenology of the body.

It is not difficult to show how The Lived Experience of the Black involves a dialogue with Merleau-Ponty. The most obvious references are given in the first few pages of the text, with Fanon's substitution of Merleau-Ponty's notion of 'corporeal schema' (schéma corporel) first of all for the 'schéma historico-racial' and secondly in terms of the 'schéma épidermique racial.' [racial/epidermal schema] Put briefly, the corporeal schema in Merleau-Ponty's work refers to the body's agency and its work in relating to and disclosing the historical world. At all stages in his oeuvre, Merleau-Ponty espouses a pre-dualistic ontology which affirms the reproductive synergy between body and world. He writes,

We grasp external space through our bodily situation. A "corporeal or postural schema" gives us at every moment a global, practical, and implicit notion of the relation between our body and things, of our hold on them. A system of possible movements, or "motor projects," radiates from us to our environment. Our body is not in space like things; it inhabits or haunts space. It applies itself to space like a hand to an instrument, and when we wish to move about, we do not move the body as we move an object. We transport it without instruments as if by magic, since it is ours and because through it, we have direct access to space. For us, the body [...] is our expression in the world, the visible form of our intentions. The Primacy of Perception, Northwestern University Press, 1964, p5.

The corporeal schema lies between the body and the world, as that which engenders communication between one and the other. This does not imply an exchange between two independently subsisting entities suspended from temporality. Rather, this communication, which Merleau-Ponty elsewhere describes as 'more ancient than thought' ('plus vieille que la pensée') [Phenomenology of Perception, p254] is the moment where body and world re-order each other according to a 'perpetual contribution'[ibid] of reciprocal transfer. Being 'embedded' within a cultural-historical horizon therefore means, in Merleau-Pontyan terms, that that horizon itself is open to be altered, transformed or disrupted. For example, no-one could separate the history of the guitar from its players. Somebody comes along, 'learns' the guitar and manipulates it as never before, and the history of guitar music is altered. With

fingers and stance, their body communicates with the guitar through a pre-thetic schema that opens up the parameters of possibility (and therefore the history) of the instrument, at the same time as transforming the player's life. Moreover, even those who will not change the history of guitar music themselves are liable to be 'altered' as their practice develops and that music communicates itself through their increasingly expressive being. s also engaged in a dialogue with Merleau-Ponty.

Ultimately, Merleau-Ponty's concept of the corporeal schema reveals the relation between agency, freedom and temporality. For Merleau-Ponty, the corporeal capacity of the body allows for a 'communication' with the expressive patternings of the cultural traditions to which it belongs or has attached itself. Within the interplay between body and world prior to intellectual representation, the possibility of the creative inflection between both engenders a corporealised conception of freedom. The body is 'free' to the extent that it can participate in the transformation of its expressive horizons. As with the guitar player, this conception of freedom entails a fundamental relation to the historical: being free involves the body's capacity through expression to transfigure (and be transfigured by) what is given as history. In this way, Merleau-Ponty's notion of the corporeal schema leads implicitly to a conception of history as characterised essentially by difference. Each moment of a culture's transfer across time through the agency of bodies is at the same time the site of its own differentiation. Moreover, there is therefore no 'originary' moment to any culture: every culture that attempts to assert its sameness across time has to repress the difference at work in its origin in every present. Although there is some ambiguity in Merleau-Ponty's thought here, it is on the whole the case that he posits this relation between agency and historical freedom as a condition of habituation. In other words, it is a matter of habit and inhabitation that we perpetually contribute to the differentiation of our historical world (our 'habitus'), from one moment's action to the next.

*We are now in a position to begin to explain Fanon's substitution of terms. In *The Lived Experience of the Black*, Fanon's opening argument is that a phenomenology of blackness cannot be understood in the context of the 'Black among his own.' It is only in the encounter with whiteness and more specifically the white imagination that an analysis of the experience of skin difference, of being the black other, can be undertaken. For Fanon at home in the Antillean setting of Martinique, the coercion and internalisation of racial inferiority could not be encountered as a form of experience. Before entering the 'white world', Fanon was content with 'an intellectual comprehension of these tensions.'¹⁴ It was only after Fanon moved to Paris that he began to be aware of the pre-intellectualist dynamics of the interracial encounter. With the first explicit reference to Merleau-Ponty's terminology, Fanon writes, *In the white world the man of color faces difficulties in the elaboration of his bodily schema.*¹⁵ Fanon proceeds to explicate Merleau-Ponty's notion of corporeal schema in the following paragraph. He ends the paragraph with the summary statement, *A slow construction of my self as a body in the midst of a spatial and temporal world, such seems to be the schema. It is not imposed on me; rather, it is a definitive structuring of the self and the world - definitive because in this way an effective dialectic is settled between my body and the world.*¹⁶ Fanon clearly concurs initially with Merleau-Ponty's insight that the self and the world are constructed through the work of the schéma*

corporel. However, his detour through phenomenology is adopted in order to theorise the interracial encounter of black bodies in the west. It immediately becomes clear that in this case Merleau-Ponty's terminology is inadequate, Below the corporeal schema I created a historico-racial one. The elements that I used were provided to me not by "residual sensations and perceptions primarily of a tactile, vestibular, kinesthetic, and visual order," but by the other, the White, who has woven me out of a thousand details, anecdotes and stories.

The move announced here against the primordial unity of the perceived world in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology is dramatic. Fanon is suggesting that Merleau-Ponty's conception of the corporeal schema, hitherto the iterative locus of the reciprocal emergence of self and world, is undercut or undermined in the case of the black subject in Europe.

Fanon writes:

And then the occasion arose when I had to meet the white man's eyes. An unfamiliar weight burdened me. The real world challenged my claims. In the white world the man of color encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema. Consciousness of the body is solely a negating activity. It is a third-person consciousness. The body is surrounded by an atmosphere of certain uncertainty. I know that if I want to smoke, I shall have to reach out my right arm and take the pack of cigarettes lying at the other end of the table. The matches, however, are in the drawer on the left, and I shall have to lean back slightly. And all these movements are made not out of habit but out of implicit knowledge. A slow composition of my self as a body in the middle of a spatial and temporal world—such seems to be the schema. It does not impose itself on me; it is, rather, a definitive structuring of the self and of the world—definitive because it creates a real dialectic between my body and the world.

(Black Skin, White Masks, pp 110- 111)

It is necessary to grow a new skin, to develop new thoughts, to set afoot a new human being
Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, p. 314, translation modified

Paraphrase: By the first half of the twentieth century, this question of radical reflectivity had¹ as at least one of its major proponents¹ Merleau-Ponty.

Richard Sennett, *Flesh and Stone: The Body and the City in Western Civilization*, Fanon attended M-Ponty's lectures; he was influenced by him as well as by Lacan; see **Alienation and Freedom**, doc in Affect file, p. 171

[Fanon] underlines Lacan's insistence on the social constitution of personality ('he envisages madness within an intersubjectivist perspective') and adds, in an interesting praeteritio: 'Madness', he says, 'is lived within the register of meaning.' ... I would have liked to have written at length here about the Lacanian theory of language

From Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth* (doc in Affect file), pp 249-250:

We have since 1954 in various scientific works drawn the attention of both French and international psychiatrists to the difficulties that arise when seeking to "cure" a native properly, that is to say, when seeking to make him thoroughly a part of a social background of the colonial type.

Make links between monologism and colonialism Make links with Israel (see Mbembe's talk above on YouTube)

The colonized personality (p. 250)

From LARB's review of Susan Neiman's *Left is not Woke*: scholars like Uday Singh Mehta have helped us to see that the Enlightenment's understanding of reason was a particularly European one that viewed the rest of the world as "a vacant field, already weeded, where history has been brought to a nullity," a dark morass receptive to being enlightened. In so doing, Enlightenment thought often relied on modern science to argue that white Europeans were constitutionally superior to people in other parts of the world. They were thus the privileged vessels of reason, a precious commodity that needed to be brought to the rest of the world, by force if necessary. That version of Enlightenment reason was not a value-neutral heuristic, but rather an imposition of European power on a global scale. After all, Mozart's famous opera *The Magic Flute*, which historian Paul Robinson has described as "fully explicit in its Enlightenment values," stakes a claim that only white men can access reason.

On Foucault and Fanon:

<https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/5ef1/924663d2bec83a572f0fc4c2542d207ff198.pdf>

On Caroline Elkins' *Legacy of Violence*:

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2022/mar/13/legacy-of-violence-a-history-of-the-british-empire-by-caroline-elkins-review-the-brutal-truth-about-britains-past>

Fanon and identity politics. Ganesha similar argument to the one given at Kingston, October 2023: <https://www.thesocialjusticecentre.org/blog/2019/8/24/the-use-and-abuse-of-identity-samir-gandeshas-fanonian-critique>

Jacqueline Rose on Stuart Hall: <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2023/09/21/the-analyst-stuart-hall-jacqueline-rose/> :

I suspect there are many who, as the crises of our times unfold, find themselves thinking: if only we could hear what Hall has to say. If I now turn to migration and sexual difference, it is because in both cases, as I see it, the parameters of his thinking are so clearly at play, as mobility is confronted by dogmatism in new and disquieting ways. We are living in a moment when, to use Hall's own words, "a disturbing truth, which seems to arise at the margins of society, somehow floods the mainstream, changing all perceptions as it goes."

The first of these issues—borders between peoples across land and sea—presses daily on public attention as a flailing UK government, along with other European nation-states, attempts to retrieve credibility and electoral support by tightening the screws. People on "immigration bail" in the UK are to be tracked via fingerprint scanners, criminalizing the

whole bunch. Activists have noted—though in fact this clearly has not played even the smallest part in government deliberations—that such a move will be disastrous for those who have been tortured or trafficked.

On the Greek island of Lesbos, twenty-four NGO volunteers went on trial for assisting migrants fleeing the Syrian civil war—another criminalization, this time a “criminalization of solidarity,” which is part of an assault on rescue missions across Europe. Along the borders of Hungary, Croatia, and Romania, defiance of EU law and UN conventions means that migrants are being left to freeze in no-man’s-land. All attempts to create a refugee-sharing mechanism across the European member states have failed.

In the UK, the government repeats its mantra that “illegal migrants” in small boats will be stopped by any means necessary from landing on British shores. When it is pointed out that there is no such thing as an “illegal migrant” under international law, they are redescribed as “irregular,” although what a “regular” migrant would look like is unclear. (In fact the bill is still today referred to as the Illegal Migration Act, which at least presents a wondrous ambiguity about whether it’s the migrants or the bill itself that falls outside the remit of just law.)

This is the border that hardens at the first hint of social anxiety, as those struggling to cross it find themselves scapegoated for disruption inside the nation. Already in 1992 Hall witnessed what he described as “one of the largest forced and unforced mass migrations of recent times,” when those displaced by the destruction of indigenous economies, the pricing out of crops and the crippling weight of debt, as well as by poverty, drought and warfare, buy a one-way ticket and head across borders to a new life in the west. (Again, he could be talking about today.) Ten years later he returned to the question as “tens of thousands who can no longer survive at the margins of the system are loosed from their moorings and sent drifting across the world.” They are caught in what he described as the “double helix”—the collapse and entrenchment—of modern nation-states. Migration, he wrote, is the “dark side...the unacknowledged underbelly...of globalization, where everything moves—capital, goods, élites, images, currencies—and only people and labour are supposed to stay put.” Migration then gets blamed for the fact that “unfortunately” things don’t “seem to stand still and be recognisable anymore”—as if they ever were.

The twenty-first-century challenge of global migration “will not be met,” The Guardian wrote in its leading editorial on January 13 this year, “by brutally battering down the hatches”—which does not mean, of course, that many European nations will not continue to try. “Could Europe be a home for some of the homeless and hopeless?” Hall asked, once again with uncanny prescience, twenty years ago. Or, he continued, “as it lowers its frontiers within, is it proving only too effective at raising them, fortress-like, to face the new, straggling armies of the night?” He was referring to the migrants who were “nightly hurling themselves at passing Euro-star trains at the mouth to the Channel.” Faced with such a reality, that image of migrants from the Caribbean pouring out of Paddington Station in 1951 starts to feel like a lost dream.

Illegal or irregular, economic migrants or refugees, black or European (meaning Syrians and Ethiopians and Yemenis pushed back at the border, versus blond, blue-eyed Ukrainians who have been welcomed with open arms)—we are witnessing a politics of definition, where life-and-death decisions are being made on the basis of a single word, and where the state claims a monopoly of meaning, telling people desperate for their lives not only where they are from but also who and what on earth they might be.

*Clinching the definitions feels like both a means to an end (reducing the numbers) and an end in itself (a vocabulary of unfreedom in a foreign tongue). I would call this the curse of naming—what Hall, as we have seen, termed the syntax or grammar of politics. In *Familiar Stranger*, he calls up the famous moment from Frantz Fanon’s writing when he was a young child walking the streets with his mother and another child, white, called out, “Tiens, Mama! Un nègre!” (Look, Mother! A Negro!) The word was enough, a word from which Fanon will never escape. Language must be arrested if we are to hold on to a racist world. (As Hall pointed out, the encounter occurred at the time of Windrush.)*

It then follows that the more that race, appealed to as a biological fact justifying inequality and injustice, is exposed as an empty category, as lacking scientific credibility—there are no “pure” races in the world—the more vehemently it is invoked in the vain hope, Hall writes, “that it will bring the argument to a close.” Like sexual difference, race as a category makes its fraudulent appeal to anatomy or physiology to “wind up” the question. One thing is clear: invoking either race or sexual difference as a physiological or moral absolute (often both together) is, to his mind, simply a way of bringing all discussion—including the need to acknowledge that, especially in politics, we are mostly wrong—to a standstill.

The border of sexual difference is at the forefront of the so-called culture wars today, provoking vitriol so toxic that it is indeed effectively shutting down all debate. There is no “seamless category of women,” Hall insisted in 1996. If there is one thing that trans experience has brought irreversibly to the surface, it is surely that the argument about what constitutes sexual difference, like the internal process of uncovering your sexuality, never stops—although you would be forgiven for thinking otherwise when politicians refuse trans people the right to self-define their genders, when certain kinds of health care are banned in the US, when gender surgery is banned in Russia, and when the category of women is presented as an absolute to which trans women have no right to appeal or belong.

As with the refugees being called out as “illegal” or “irregular,” it is the vocative voice—“I will tell you who you are”—that is for me the underlying message of these forms of intolerance and the crime, surely at odds with any political battles being fought in the name of freedom. What also gets lost in these debates is the psychoanalytic insight that we all start with a polymorphous bisexuality and a diffuse eroticism that, at great cost, has to be crunched into shape. Instead, it is claimed that men and women are distinct, from the beginning and forever. The echoes of the fear directed at migrants who threaten the world’s illusory safety by refusing to stand still are unmistakable.

Let us compare that way of thinking with Hall's appeal for a more flexible, unsettled, and changeable way of thinking and a more transformable world:

Because it is relational, and not essential, can never be finally fixed, but is subject to the constant process of redefinition and appropriation: to the losing of old meanings, and appropriation and collection and contracting of new ones, to the endless process of being constantly resignified, made to mean something different in different cultures, in different historical formations at different moments in time.

Or, in the words of a friend in New York who has recently transitioned from female to male: "I am just so happy to be able to live another life in this life we are living." I don't think you can get more open-ended than that. "Another life in this life"—or world—"we are living" must surely today be what we are all aiming for

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