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**CARNAL CORPOREALITY: TENSIONS IN CONTINENTAL AND CARIBBEAN  
THOUGHT**

The notion of flesh played an important role in early elaborations of the principles of liberation philosophy. Between 1969 and 1975 Enrique Dussel published three books cataloguing models of the body in Hebrew Scriptures, Greek literature, and the New Testament. He contrasted two basic ideas that influenced Western thought: “Semitic anthropology,” based on the flesh that viewed the human being as an integration of the spirit of life and the flesh, and Hellenistic anthropology, based on the body that assumed the separability between body and soul. He concluded that only a model based on the relationship between flesh and spirit — rather than body and soul — could lead to a wholistic anthropology and thus ground an ethics of liberation. Dussel wrote: “John said: ‘the word became flesh’. A Greek would have said: ‘the word took a body’ — which is radically different.”<sup>1</sup> Dussel returns to this anthropological issue in more recent works, arguing that a critical ethics derived from the experience of victims would develop an ethical criterion based on a “carnal corporeality” and not on the soul.<sup>2</sup> As a historical account, one would need to interrogate interpretations that assume impermeable boundaries between a semitic Judaism and a Hellenistic culture. However, genealogical considerations aside, his philosophical goal was to provide an anthropology that avoided the separation between body and soul, one that could inform an ethics attuned to the material needs of human beings — basic necessities such as food, health, and protection against violence. As long as the essence of human life was assumed to reside in an immaterial principle such as the soul, material necessities would be deemed as secondary or derivative, merely supporting something more lasting and true.

The most heated contemporary debates about corporeality may no longer assume the relationship between body and soul (or flesh and spirit) as an ontological foundation, but some of the tensions foregrounded by the distinction between body and flesh are still significant and continue to affect philosophical debates on corporeality and its ethical ramifications. In common parlance, the terms evoke different associations. “Body” suggests an entity complete in itself and visible to those around it. It is easily imagined as an object of perception and

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<sup>1</sup> *El Humanismo Semita* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Universitaria 1969), 28, my translation.

<sup>2</sup> Enrique Dussel, *Ética De La Liberación: En La Edad De La Globalización Y De La Exclusión* (Madrid: Trotta, 2002).

a sign legible in society. Thus “the body” as a category helps us analyze the dynamics of social re-presentation at work in processes of racialization, gendering, and other forms of social normalization. In contrast, “flesh” evokes the very materiality of the body, which relates it to the non-human and to broader processes of material exchange that constitute bodies. This makes flesh an important category for thinking about the *embodied* effects of socio-economic practices as well as ecological ones — the quality of food, air, and water, for instance — all of which demand attention to the matter of life.

I am interested in pursuing this insight of the significance of “flesh” as a supplement to contemporary body-talk in philosophy and theology.<sup>3</sup> But flesh has ambiguous connotations. Indeed its materiality often carries the weight of sin — either as dead and decaying matter or as an unruly force threatening rationality. Flesh commonly evokes what is despised and feared in human bodies—physically and morally. And as metaphysical presuppositions and associations inflect socio-political representations, these descriptions of the body in general influence descriptions of particular types of bodies. People described as “carnal” are likely to be despised and feared. Any account of flesh in contemporary thought must consider the term’s long association with sensuality and instincts, and thus its role in racializing discourses.

In this short essay, I can only address these questions very broadly. My interest here is on the intersections between continental and Caribbean contributions to the discussion. I will first present key elements of the debates about flesh in continental philosophy as brief engagements with Michel Foucault and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, focusing on the definitions of “flesh” as distinct from “body.” I then move to an engagement with Franz Fanon’s representation of colonial racialization and the counter-narratives of the Negritude poets, where the philosophical debates converge with political ones. In doing so, I foreground the risks and possibilities of developing a critical philosophy of carnal corporeality.

## **Discredited as Flesh**

The details of Foucault’s work on the flesh are shrouded in mystery due to the indefinitely deferred publication of *Confessions of the Flesh*, yet in an interview with the same title Foucault offers his account of the argument in a nutshell. “We have had sexuality since the eighteenth century and sex since the nineteenth. What we had before then was no doubt flesh. The basic originator of

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<sup>3</sup> I am completing a book-length project on this topic, tentatively entitled *Poethics of the Flesh*.

all of it was Tertullian.”<sup>4</sup> This flesh that Foucault follows through the history of sexuality is Christian flesh — but not only. He tells the story of its emergence repeatedly — each version assuming previous ones and modifying them.<sup>5</sup> It is told as a fable: “from the day Tertullian began saying to the Christians, ‘where your chastity is concerned...’ ” — Foucault mocked his own fabulation.<sup>6</sup>

As is well known, the broad framework of the analysis is the description of the emergence of technologies that deploy power-knowledge to shape and control life. Foucault describes sexuality as one of the arrangements of such technologies of power. The story is clearly a complex one, but for the purposes of following the role of “flesh” in discourses about sexuality and instinct, we can identify three distinct stages and conceptions of flesh: as a general principle vaguely associated with sin, as the cause of corporeal sensibility, and as the location or substance of instincts. Before the transformations in Christian understandings of confession, which Foucault traces in the *Abnormal*, “corporeal materiality” was “merely identified as the origin of sin.”<sup>7</sup> The identification of the origin of sin with corporeal materiality is hardly inconsequential, of course, and it would have been considered appropriately Pauline.<sup>8</sup> If anything, Foucault’s statements sound like the fulfillment of what Paul described in Romans 7 — the “recognition” of sin, another law, dwelling within his “members,” in the flesh. Indeed, Foucault describes the outcome of the modern transformations in suggestive terms: “Now the sin of the flesh dwells within the body itself.”<sup>9</sup> This discursive pattern — *defining* flesh as the cause of sin and then *recognizing* sin in the flesh — is consonant with Foucault descriptions of the emergence of such categories of knowledge/power.<sup>10</sup> For Foucault, the significant difference of modern practices of examination is that in them the “complex and floating

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<sup>4</sup> Michel Foucault, *Power/ Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings 1972-1977* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 211.

<sup>5</sup> I will refer only to *Abnormal* (1975), *Power/Knowledge* (1977), *History of Sexuality* (1978), and *Government of the Living* (1980).

<sup>6</sup> Foucault, *Power/ Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings 1972-1977*, 213.

<sup>7</sup> Michel Foucault, *Abnormal: Lectures at the Collège De France 1974-1975* (New York: Picador, 2003), 201.

<sup>8</sup> Examples: Melanchton read “flesh” as including the whole human nature, accentuating that the best in humanity was still “according to the flesh.” This he contrasted with Duns Scotus’ use of the term. “The ‘tinder’ is an inordinate quality of the flesh that inclines the sensitive appetite to an act which in relation to the judgment of reason is deforming and defective” (Duns Scotus, In sent., lib II, d. 29.4, Melanchton, *Loci Communes*

<sup>9</sup> Foucault, *Abnormal*, 189.

<sup>10</sup> See for example *Ibid.*, 193. The discourses on sexuality represented sexuality as emerging from biology rather than from those discourses.

domain of the flesh as a domain of the *exercise of power* and *objectification* begins to stand out from the body.”<sup>11</sup>

In Foucault’s reading, modern in views about confession refine the skills of examination, showing a gradual intensification of its importance, progressively extending a scheme for transforming sex into discourse from the monastery to all laity, making such discourse obligatory, regular, and exhaustive. This emerging system of questioning would not only bring more areas of everyday life under the purview of confession, but also shift the focus of the examination to the flesh. A key turning point occurs when attention shifts from an *act* to something else deemed as, or constructed as, the *cause* of an act; in this case there is a shift from sin as a transgression of a law — mainly concerning relations to other people — to a “kind of illness that is sin’s *raison d’être*.”<sup>12</sup> “It is no longer the relational aspect that is now at the very heart of questioning concerning the Sixth Commandment, but the movements, senses, pleasures, thoughts, and desires of the penitent’s body itself, whose intensity and nature is explained by the penitent himself.”<sup>13</sup> As the source of knowledge about the flesh, the body becomes an object for endless, exhaustive examination. The questioning is targeted to different parts of the body and different sensory levels. These are confessions *of the flesh*.

“We are witnessing the flesh being pinned to the body,” Foucault observed.<sup>14</sup> This influential aspect of modern understandings of the relationship between body and flesh presumes and codifies earlier associations between flesh and sin. Flesh figures as an obscure element working inside bodies—one that must be examined and controlled. “What I wanted to show was that this description of the body as flesh at the same time *discredits the body as flesh*.”<sup>15</sup> The effects of this process would extend beyond Christian institutions, shaping also discourses that bring anatomical elements, and biological functions, conducts, sensations and pleasures under unifying principles of human normality. Foucault argues that the examination and control of flesh is eventually transferred to the jurisdiction of medicine. “What was called the ‘nervous system’ in the eighteenth century was a codification of the domain of the flesh.” And around 1850, psychiatry “ceased being the analysis of error, delirium and illusion in order to become the analysis of all the disturbances of instinct.”

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 201.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 179.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 186.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 188.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 202. My italics.

The tendency to treat flesh as the cause of sensations and sexual desires and eventually “instincts” influenced colonial anthropological descriptions and the racializations emerging from them. “Race” would emerge as a concept vaguely related to instincts, similarly imagined as indwelling in the flesh.<sup>16</sup> Like the sexualized body, the racialized body was identified with carnality — discredited as flesh — it is not surprising that postcolonial discourses tend to focus exclusively in its deconstruction. But flesh has also been praised as that which exceeds and can unsettle the limiting frameworks of Cartesian discourses and their objectifications.

### **Excessive Flesh**

Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s *The Visible and the Invisible* remains a crucial reference in discussions of the flesh in continental philosophy.<sup>17</sup> It tried to overcome the limitations arising from taking consciousness as a point of departure and from understanding knowledge as the pursuit of an autonomous subject set up above the world it surveys. It is impossible to capture here the subtleties of Merleau-Ponty’s account of flesh, one that relies on nuanced language and style. Instead I offer a few notes about his remarkable use of “flesh,” particularly when compared to the uses that concerned Foucault.

Merleau-Ponty described “flesh” as the very relationship between the body and the world — indeed as the condition of possibility of corporeality as such. He proposed that bodies perceive things because they share with them their sensible nature, their visibility — the flesh. Thus, in contrast to the idea of flesh as an invisible cause operating within bodies, Merleau-Ponty’s descriptions focus on outward movements, “coiling” from the body toward the world and from the world back to the body — as dynamic processes of corporeal constitution. “Bursting forth of the mass of the body toward things...this magical relation, this pact between them and me according to which I lend them my body in order that they inscribe upon it and give me their resemblance, this fold...”<sup>18</sup> This “intertwining” between the flesh of the body and the flesh of the world is not merely a fusion between them. Merleau-Ponty insists that the sensing and the

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<sup>16</sup> See for example, Roberto Esposito, *Bios: Biopolitics and Philosophy*, trans. Timothy Campbell (University of Minnesota Press, 2008). and Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995).

<sup>17</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968).

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

sensed never fully coincide; there is always a “lining of invisibility” in the visible, there is always opacity in all things.

In common parlance, flesh evokes materiality. But Merleau-Ponty wanted to distance the notion from prevailing understandings of “matter.” “The flesh is not matter, is not mind, is not substance,” he writes. He seems to be wrestling with the logic of a Cartesian dualism that would immediately cast his “flesh” as “matter” as the very opposite of rationality — as simply dead stuff. Thus he reaches back briefly, though enticingly, to pre-Cartesian metaphysics. To designate flesh, he states,

we should need the old term ‘element,’ in the sense it was used to speak of water, air, earth, and fire, that is, in the sense of a general thing, midway between the spatio-temporal individual and the idea, a sort of incarnate principle that brings a style of being wherever there is a fragment of being. The flesh is in this sense an ‘element’ of Being.<sup>19</sup>

Flesh stands between the individual — a body at a particular moment in space-time — and the idea, connecting them from within. This gesture toward an elemental grounding of philosophy could productively shift ontological frameworks, provoking more rigorous attention to the material character of relations. Merleau-Ponty’s caution against simply equating flesh with one side of the Cartesian dualism would be crucial for such a project. I will return to this point. Yet some of the best-known criticisms of Merleau-Ponty’s project focus on the dangers not of reductive readings of flesh as dead matter, but rather of reading flesh as more than flesh — as soul or spirit.

Jean Luc Nancy associates the notion of flesh with ontotheology, a symptom of that desire for presence that postmodern philosophy is intent on diagnosing and dispelling, if and when possible.<sup>20</sup> They read Merleau-Ponty’s work as an example of this tendency. Invocations of flesh signal for them the persisting influence of Christian ideas about incarnation, specifically of the claims to immediacy of divine presence and the absorption or sublimation of flesh into the domain of the spirit. Flesh is associated with the possibility of immediate contact and thus full knowledge of the world, the self, or God — true and absolute sense. Arguing against such metaphysical accounts, and their tendency to absorb bodies, and thus pain and suffering into higher spiritual meanings, Nancy declares: “the ‘passion’ of the ‘flesh,’ is finished and this is why the word body

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>20</sup> Jacques Derrida, *On Touching--Jean-Luc Nancy*, trans. Christine Irizarry (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).

ought to succeed the word flesh, which was always overabundant, nourished by sense, and egological.”<sup>21</sup>

The misgivings about Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy, extended to philosophies of flesh in general, were that flesh would end up on the other side of the dualism, as another term for Spirit or Reason. Where flesh stands for some other source of meaning — whether theological (as the locus of spirit) or anthropological (as biological essence) — it may shift the attention away from concrete, finite corporeality just as much as some accounts of the “soul.” The needs and suffering of a body would be explained by appeals to something external to or more fundamental than the body. Such an outcome would undermine the efforts to provide a truly material account of being and relationships — including social, ecological, and economic ones. It would also occlude the limits, vulnerability, fractures, and loss of bodies, which must be at the heart of an ethics of corporeality. However, it does not follow that flesh is necessarily “nourished by sense” or “egological.” On the contrary, the worldly relationality evoked by Merleau-Ponty’s flesh can hardly be reduced to spiritualization and may instead ground a rethinking of bodies and materiality beyond the dichotomy of dead matter and absolute spirit. But such a thought would have to wrestle more explicitly with social constraints to carnal flourishing.

## **Racialized Flesh**

The critiques of flesh in continental philosophy — as the focus of sin and thus irremediably moralistic or as the locus of an incarnational imaginary and thus inherently spiritualizing — are crucial for evaluating the promise of a critical ethics based on a carnal corporeality. The concept of carnality in Caribbean thought is not fully disentangled from these interpretations. The assumption that carnality is the place of sensibility, instinct, and erotic desire is contiguous with its representation as the underlying principle and cause of sinfulness, translated and displaced as flesh became a category of medical and colonial discourses. In his commentary on Édouard Glissant’s work, Michael Dash comments: “For a long time, the Caribbean has been *trapped* in a discourse that accentuates carnality.” While he does not distinguish clearly between body and flesh, Dash refers to the feminization of the Caribbean in relation to the European metropolis. Thus assuming common associations between flesh, sensuality, femininity, and race. But although the use of flesh needs to be understood in relation to these

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<sup>21</sup> Jean Luc Nancy, *The Sense of the World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 149. Nancy’s *Corpus* builds on Merleau-Ponty’s work, although it rarely mentions it.

complex discursive connections and displacements, it can hardly be reduced to these traits.

Franz Fanon's contribution to the discussion in his essay "The Lived Experience of the Black" complexifies the discussion of corporeality by engaging it as part of his incisive critique of colonial racialization. One of the most remarkable features of this essay is its style. It uses corporeal language to draw the reader into the disturbing experiences it describes, namely how discourses mark, wound, incite, elevate, or shatter bodies. Through a non-linear narrative, we see the author performing, as it were; he tries on himself alternative modes of being, adopting attitudes other thinkers recommend, and eventually showing where those alternatives break down. This writer inhabits the texts he reads and writes about.

The argument in his essay can be divided into two distinct parts: one relates to European discourses, the other to Caribbean ones. In the first part he adopts and shows the limits of Merleau-Ponty's account of the constitution of the body in relation to the world. Fanon tries to perform the role Merleau-Ponty imagines for any human being: "I came to the world imbued with the will to find meaning in things, my spirit filled with the desire to attain the source of the world," Fanon affirms. But the harmonious aims of a subject in the world expressed by that statement are at odds with the society in which it seeks actualization. The objectifying phrase "Look, a Negro!" has already been uttered—at the beginning of the essay, before anything else is said, as well as before the beginning of the lives of Fanon and his readers. The statement captures, fixes, seals identity into a "crushing object hood," before any encounter takes place. For the racialized person, the desire to "attain the source of the world" always arrives too late. But it is a change in context — from Martinique to France — that sets its dynamics evidently in motion. The Martinique of Fanon's youth was hardly outside the reach of the colonial systems, yet it is the encounter with the racializing gaze that reveals for Fanon colonialism's most intimate, embodied dimensions: "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."<sup>22</sup> His encounters with others were mediated by elaborate discursive systems, racist mythologies of primitivism, savagery, and biological deficiency.

While Merleau-Ponty described flesh as the connective and co-constitutive *tissue* between body and things, the site of reversibility between seeing and seen, Fanon describes a body seen and being *woven* "out of a thousand details, anecdotes, stories," a site of alienation.<sup>23</sup> All this stood in the way of his attempts to

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<sup>22</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 110.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

relate meaningfully with the world he now inhabited. In an instant the weight of centuries of such stories falls on one person. Under that weight, the sense of a body composed organically in relation to the world, the “corporeal schema” just crumbles.

Another schema becomes visible: one woven by racism. And Fanon laments, “There are times when the black man is locked into his body.” A self trapped in a body? The statement expresses an idea related to what Foucault described as having the flesh “pinned to the body.” Foucault described the effects of relentless examination of the body as one in which flesh seen merely as the site to unruly sensuality and instincts — the cause of degeneracy — is “incorporated.” In contrast, Fanon describes the problem as being locked in the body. Still the racialized body to which Fanon refers is defined in colonial contexts as flesh conceived as the cause of degeneracy, just as in the discourses Foucault examines. Despite their differences, both formulations seem to trouble easy appeals to the body as sources of knowledge that could counter social narratives. Even though the image of a self (or soul) trapped in a body may seem archaic, the trope of confinement persists. Mayra Santos-Febres adopts this same language to say that still in the twenty-first century, it is as if we, women of the Caribbean, could not leave the narrow cell of our bodies.<sup>24</sup> What Fanon and Santos-Febres express is not a longing for an interior, spiritual self, hidden in the body, to which one could turn to find true, unmediated knowledge or absolute sense. On the contrary, the point is that as bodies we are visible and exposed, and societies learn to use that visibility to regulate relations to the world. What these thinkers lament is being blocked from the kinds of relations they need for the becoming of their flesh, indeed for positive incarnations.

The second part of Fanon’s essay is a critique of strategies intended to *counter* colonial narratives and their demeaning representations of blackness. For this Fanon focused on the works of Négritude poets, especially Senegalese Leopold Senghor and Martinican Aimé Césaire. The poets were part of an international movement that, at the beginning of the twentieth century, claimed what they assumed to be African cultural and aesthetic values.<sup>25</sup>

Fanon cites Césaire’s cosmological appeals to the flesh in his celebrated *Return to the Native Land*, where he praises the people as being:

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<sup>24</sup> Mayra Santos Febres, *Sobre piel y papel*.

<sup>25</sup> The movement had already started in Puerto Rico and Cuba in the 1920s, with poets like Luis Palés Matos and Nicolás Guillén. By the 1930s it had taken ground in the Caribbean, and among black intellectuals in the United States and France. The celebrated poet of Harlem Renaissance, Langston Hughes, translated Nicolás Guillén’s poetry into English, and the Senegalese Léopold Senghor translated Langston Hughes’ poetry into French.

truly the eldest sons of the world  
open to all the breaths of the world  
meeting-place of all the winds of the world  
undrained bed of all the waters of the world  
spark of the sacred fire of the World  
flesh of the flesh of the world, throbbing with the very movement of the  
world!<sup>26</sup>

In Césaire we find again the idea of flesh as a site or means of connection with the world. We observed before that for Merleau-Ponty the flesh was the medium and condition of a relation to the world that he also described as the “flesh of the world.” But for Césaire that world is encountered specifically in his native land, to which he says, “Your mud enters in the composition of my flesh,” as he declares the end of the days of dead flesh.<sup>27</sup> He imagines giving himself, plunging into the flesh of the world and receiving an embrace that links him to the world.<sup>28</sup>

Fanon was clearly troubled by all this. It reminded him of colonial anthropologies that exoticized African culture as a source of primitive religion, animism and ritualized sex. Fanon was imagining the European gaze. Talk of the elements — winds, water, fire, *flesh* — immediately sparked fears of a primitivism imagined as the spiritualization of the merely material. And Fanon would have none of it! He aspired to be a man among men. Indulging in such ecstatic dreams, seeking wisdom in an imagined ancestral culture, or legitimacy in a community of blood relations was to accept representations and assumptions that had to be challenged.

Fanon’s reading of Césaire’s poetics is problematic inasmuch as it reduces those poetics to a simple denial of rationality or a naïve appeal to bonds of blood. But warnings are crucial. Surely, we cannot afford to adopt a flesh defined as the substance of primitive impulses, a material element assumed to be more securely attached to dark bodies than to lighter ones. We cannot ignore the colonial inflections of flesh, even in affirmative depictions. More important, appeals to a cosmic flesh could take on problematic metaphysical overtones, like those to which I alluded before, where flesh is implicitly spiritualized. However, I wonder if the pain caused by the colonial logic, and the fear of reproducing it, has led postcolonial studies to develop a kind of allergy to *any* talk of flesh or earth, instead focusing mostly on social and discursive dimensions of corporeality. In

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<sup>26</sup> Césaire, *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, cited in Fanon 124.

<sup>27</sup> Aimé Césaire, *Cahier D'un Retour Au Pays Natal* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1983), 22.

<sup>28</sup> “enroule-toi, vent, autour de ma nouvelle croissance...je te livre ma conscience et son rythme de chair...lie ma noire vibration au nombril même du monde (64-64). See also *Ibid.*, 47.

running away from flesh in search of a truly liberated body, crucial insights might be lost.

## **Carnal Longings**

As these debates illustrate, even when the debates do not appeal to religious notions about body and soul, the challenges of engaging the body in ways that do not reduce it to dead matter, moral corruptibility, or the promise of absolute knowledge or spiritual presence have not disappeared. The important liberationist aim to offer an integral anthropology in order to place material human necessities as a central concern for philosophical discussion entails not only the deconstruction of received dualisms but also an articulation of the many dimensions of the body's constitutive relation to the world. The notion of flesh can help foreground the materiality of such relationships, to see the corporeal intertwining of discursive, ecological, and all social practices.

This does not imply that flesh as a category is any less shaped by discourse than body. To the contrary, the fact that flesh has been such an ambiguous notion in Western discourses suggests that it names important assumptions and values about corporeal materiality — even if only implicitly, through vague associations that surface as negative affective reactions to the notion. The associations between flesh and materiality, sexuality, and degeneracy, for instance, offer significant insights about what is considered problematic or threatening in Western ideas about corporeality and its social dimensions. For thinkers wrestling with the legacy of destructive views of racialized bodies, evaluating carnal corporeality entails not only exploring that history and its persistent effects, but also analyzing how that history has influenced and limited our own thought about bodies. What corporeal dimensions are still foreclosed? How can contemporary discussions of corporeality accentuate its materiality, including the materialization of social arrangements at the level of the body, in addition to related discussions of the body as a visible sign?

This would imply seeing in flesh not a condemnable corruptibility but undeniable vulnerability, a source of transformation that is not reducible to absolute spiritualization. When speaking about the spiritualizing tendencies of some appeals to the flesh, I noted the risks of representing flesh as more than flesh. But I do not mean to suggest that we can or should strive to know something that is purely flesh, perhaps even purely material, and nothing more. I wonder if there is such a thing. The promise of flesh might lie precisely in helping us conceive things as irreducibly material and yet neither passive nor corrupting, as

intimately in our bodies and yet also in dynamic relation to the eco-social processes of the world.

Carnality and mud, water and soil: we cannot avoid these themes when seeking better ways to understand corporeality. Appeals to a common, soil-less humanity or abstract notions of culture are not enough to ground visions of a livable planet. Thought of human bodies necessarily moves us toward broader relationality with the non-human. We might also need to acknowledge the poverty of our philosophical language and embrace poetic dimensions of thought. I envision a reintegration between Fanon's postcolonial critique and elements of the very poetic sources he rejected. I am especially intrigued by the poetics of Caribbean thought, that while being aware of the intimate reach of colonial and racist ideologies, explored the links between flesh and the land, the elements, and the sea. Their poetics of flesh would be read not simply as direct and thus problematic metaphysical descriptions, but rather to ponder again the potential of attempts to perform in language what we seek to understand and envision in the world as another productive element of carnal thought. That is to interpret such poetic dimensions complex flows of carnal exchange as words that "burst forth" from the body toward the world, seeking to inscribe the world with affirmations of corporeal possibilities and longings.

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