

Gradiations of the Body-Politic

Non-Dualism and the Intensities of Colonialism

Paul Stevens

In his third book, *The Wretched of the Earth*, psychiatrist and political philosopher Frantz Fanon justifies the use of violence by colonized peoples to throw off their oppressors, relying upon study of both changes in socioeconomic arrangements and examples of specific case studies from both torturers and the tortured during the 1954 Algerian Revolution. The book rightfully concerns itself with those who have experienced the height of depravity in the name of “civilizing” them: those who have endured conditions of slave labour, extreme violence, and expropriation of the wealth of their land, all to be granted only the chance of being considered civilized by their colonizers. Fanon states clearly that they, and all those whom he has examined, should emphatically be done with the judgment of Europe, a stance that is emphatically laid out in the conclusion of the book.

The conclusion can be read as a call to action or even a manifesto of sorts, concerning itself with what comes next rather than dwelling on a sordid history of totalizing abuse. Despite the book’s focus on the liberation of the oppressed, Fanon addresses the conditions that would lead the European thinker to commit such egregious acts, writing that:

The West saw itself on a spiritual adventure. It is in the name of Spirit...that Europe justified its crimes and legitimated the slavery in which it held four fifths of humanity....All the elements for a solution to the major problems of humanity existed at one time or another in European thought. But the Europeans did not act on the mission that was designated them and which consisted of virulently pondering these elements, modifying their configuration, their being, of changing them and finally taking the problem of man to an infinitely higher plane.¹

This is a concerning paragraph to read. The indictment is more than justified, and anyone with the self-awareness to be considered responsible would react with some modicum of humility upon reading it; the suggestion, however, that the solutions to all of humanity's problems have not only existed for decades—even centuries at this point—and have simply not been implemented by those who have the ability to enact those solutions is possibly the most alarming suggestion. How is it that an entire continent of nations that are more or less in league with one another, whose name has become synonymous with the concept of a "Renaissance" and an "Enlightenment" period, that has produced several philosophers who claim a quality of universality in their systems, is capable of such privation? How could such a hypocritical dereliction of their duty to their fellow man be so blatant?

It is not without a streak of irony that Jean-Paul Sartre adds an introduction to this book—an introduction that admits, in its own text, that it is unnecessary. One could guess at what compelled Sartre to write such a strange interpretation of the text, given his introduction's self-centring and appropriative tone. He does, however, make clear a point

¹ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (Diana Publishing, 1961), 237.

that is suggested in the conclusion to *The Wretched of the Earth*: colonial violence is just as much a problem for those living within the imperial core as it is for those at its periphery. This point is suggested by Fanon in a similar passage:

There were Europeans, however, who urged the European workers to smash this narcissism and break with this denial of reality. Generally speaking, the European workers did not respond to the call. The fact was that the workers believed they too were part of the prodigious adventure of the European Spirit.²

The kind of cultural engineering that it would take to warp minds to the extent that they can accept—and even celebrate—such horrific violence should not be overlooked, especially when it is laid out that the workers within the European or North American core are not in fact “in on it” save for the convenience and labour power that their bodies offer to those who have the power to force decisions on another people or land. But how is it possible, or even fair, to draw a comparison between the violence experienced by the Western worker and colonized peoples? The Western worker does not have their hands cut off for not meeting their daily quotas of cold-calls; they are not mauled by dogs for failing to complete an Excel spreadsheet; their homes are not casually destroyed for the sake of opening up yet another nondescript branch.

It is not that there is an equivalence between the types of violence that Western and colonized workers experience; that would be a wholly unfair, self-pitying, and appropriative suggestion. Rather, this violence should be examined as a continuity of a singular “Body of Violence” that radiates out from its true core—the locus of a real power that can force decisions in these matters—for a singular purpose: to rob and, thereby, to enrich those who are

² Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 237.

able to wield this violence most effectively. A difference in the type of violence may be notable when comparing the colony and the core, but, as this body of violence "does" one thing, we must come to understand it as one body of multiple attributes; that is, one body capable of more than one type of action that gives rise to its many affectations.

Baruch Spinoza, a philosopher who extensively discussed the topics of both metaphysics and politics, addressed both of these topics with a single stroke. In his magnum opus, *The Ethics*, he proposes the idea of an ontological universe which is no different from the name(s) of God or Nature, while showing that from unity can come multiplicity and admitting no true separation of bodies from their originating substance. In the *Theologico-Political Treatise*, he expounds upon the proper use and interpretation of biblical texts in the structuring of society at large and describes how political arrangements are just as prone to superstitions and abuse as theological texts under the right circumstances. The former book is relevant as it concerns itself with the distinguishing of bodies, as is laid out in Proposition 4 of Book I: "Two or more distinct things are distinguished from one another either by the difference of the attributes of the substance or by the difference of the affectations of the substance."³ The latter book is relevant as it concerns itself with the question of power and how it can be wielded. Finally, while his writing comes at a time before the ramifications of colonial conquest could come into focus (especially for those forced to observe at its core), his work on political and psychological domination provides an effective model for understanding how the new arrangements imposed on the world have their roots in these tactics. Specifically, his writing on the concepts of non-dualism and parallelism will be of use for this examination. These concepts lend a mechanism that illuminates

³ Baruch Spinoza, *The Ethics* (Hackett Publishing Company, 1992), 33.

how a singular body could act in different ways while maintaining its continuity.

A common refrain throughout the *Theologico-Political Treatise* is the power of the prophet's word, which was always accompanied by a sign from God to prove the efficacy of the prophet as God's messenger. This sign is always a miraculous show of force in these texts, and we will come to quickly see how it quickly relates to our current understanding of (mediating) spectacle. The event of the sign is the scission between the types of violence experienced in colonial imperialism, a subtle and mobile division whose model is not unlike the intertwining of the attributes of thought and extension that are found within the same, living body. These separate attributes are considered to be the two actions that a human body can take, and therefore, generate the body's entire affectivity; but, much more than proposing parallelism in place of Cartesian dualism, they also provide a working model from which we can understand our current organization of global systems, at their core and their periphery.

This paper examines colonial violence as a singular continuity, affecting both its working-class core and its colonized periphery as a single "Body of Violence" whose differentiation in affectations can be viewed similarly to attributes affecting the body in separate ways: a violence of thought and a violence of extension. This scission is put into effect through the use of the sign, an apparent miracle which allows leaders to gain purchase with those who remain close enough to the imperial core to experience its affectations in two notable ways: the conjuring of riches and the (alleged) abandonment of violence as a coercive method. In this way, the violence of the periphery is made known in the imperial core through its inversion, which here appears as miraculous reward.

The Sign and its Development

Before we can fully understand the conjunction of these two (soon to be several) thinkers, we have to have a proper understanding of two topics and how they relate: the sign and the attribute.

In its original sense, the sign was considered to be a proof of the efficacy of the prophet as the voice of God. It would have been a regular request that the prophet produce a sign as a means of proving that they were directly communicating the words of a higher power. Necessarily, this elevates the prophet as being a specially elected being who not only has the capability of immediately interfacing with the creator of all reality but also is able to communicate with urgency/immediacy. In each example, the sign is produced as a miracle of some type, displaying something that is believed to exist outside the order of nature through either a demonstration of awe-inspiring impossibility or a show of great force.

Spinoza's critique of miracles is that they are logically a diminishment of a being whose acting itself is its power, a power that is coextensive with its thought:

Nothing comes about in nature, therefore, which conflicts with its universal laws. Nor yet is there anything that does not agree with them or follow from them. For whatever comes about, comes through God's will and eternal decree: that is...whatever comes about, comes about in accordance with laws and rules which involve eternal necessity and truth.⁴

Something that steps outside this order is considered to be unnatural, even perverse for Spinoza, but a purpose is served by such a break. Its unnatural quality is something

⁴ Baruch Spinoza, *Theologico-Political Treatise* (Focus Publishing, 2004), 69.

that inspires immediate attention for the very fact that it interrupts the laws of nature. It imposes itself on the mind of the observer:

For the vulgar deem that God's power and providence are established as clearly as possible when they see something appearing in nature which is unusual and contrary to the opinion they have of nature from custom, especially if it turns out to their profit and advantage.⁵

The election of a finite being as the voice of an infinite being poses a problem of communication: how does one communicate the full message of the divine if one oneself does not have the capacity to think on the full scale that divinity requires? As it turns out, this problem is insurmountable and requires a work around: "signs were not given unless to persuade the Prophet.... Signs were given with respect to the opinions and capacity of the Prophet."⁶ It follows that the prophets, blessed with a greater capacity for imagination, still required accommodation to their disposition and would have been in a position of needing to communicate with those less gifted than them. As a result, they would have been required to further accommodate their dictums to "suit the grasp and mental cast"⁷ of the people.

Furthermore, the sign was not only useful; it was essential in establishing not only obedience to God, but obedience to God as mediated through the prophet, as is exemplified in Spinoza's analysis of Exodus 19:8:

Everyone approached God equally in the first instance, to hear what he wanted to command; but at this first

⁵ Spinoza, 67.

⁶ Spinoza, 19.

⁷ Spinoza, 56.

meeting they were so terrified, and on hearing God speak were so thunderstruck, as to deem that their last moment had arrived. Full of dread, therefore, they approached Moses anew as follows: *Behold, we have heard God speaking in the fire, and there is no cause why we would want to die. Certainly this immersive fire will devour us. If the voice of God is to be heard by us again, we will certainly die. You, therefore, go and hear everything said by our God, and you—not God—will speak to us. Everything that God speaks to you, we will obey, and we will execute it.* By these words, they clearly abolished the first compact and transferred their right to consult God and interpret his edicts to Moses absolutely.⁸

Whether this mediation was incidental to the circumstances of the situation or required by the disposition of those consulting Moses for aid is not of consequence. Shows of force outside the order of nature inspire fear and awe, and under the circumstances can be made to effect a transfer of right to those whom are perceived as up to the task. Hence the essential pairing of the word and the sign as far as the establishing of the rights of the leader. The example of the rule of the Levites, who never produced a miracle during or after their ascendancy to power, provides a counterexample of how weary a populace can become if their rulers are only backed by the words of other mortals: "Hence for the populace there was a desire to observe the doings of the Levites—who without a doubt were human beings—and, as it came about, to accuse them of the shortcomings of one."⁹

But how does the sign enter the scene? The display of divine fire or the producing of water from a stone has a

⁸ Spinoza, 196.

⁹ Spinoza, 207.

tenuous connection at best to the words being spoken by the prophet, save for the fact that a request was honoured in a timely and awe-inspiring manner. It is perhaps part of a greater difficulty in human perception that simultaneity is taken to mean that events are connected when in fact they are not. *The Ethics* furbishes us with a reason why we would be convinced otherwise in Proposition 7, Book II: "The order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things."¹⁰ Originally this proposition is used to set up the parallelism argument, which we will revisit when discussing what an attribute is. It also begins to account for the association of events that the subject experiences. In our current case, we can see how an event perceived as outside of the order of nature can overwhelm one such that they experience strong emotions; the words that this event accompanies become associated, as if the words themselves produced the show of might or abundance. A higher power has allegedly been displayed in this moment. Moreover, this power seems to be at the discretion of a fellow human being, granting them a moment of divine power. The word goes unquestioned, as this example from Chapter 17 of the *Theologico-Political Treatise* shows:

[Moses] could not calm them by any plan: but when a miracle was brought in as a sign of faith, all were extinguished. Hence there arose a new and universal sedition of the whole populace, believing that they had been extinguished not by God as judge but by the *art* of Moses—who, worn out, calmed them at last after a great disaster of pestilence, yet so that everyone preferred dying to living. At that time, therefore, it was more that the sedition was over than that harmony had begun.¹¹

¹⁰ Spinoza, *The Ethics*, 66.

¹¹ Spinoza, *Theologico-Political Treatise*, 208–9.

Such grandeur becomes an effective tool in gaining the consent of the public. Whether it is gained through positive or negative means is not of consequence here; all that matters is the bypassing of senses through shows of force and grandeur that inspire the appropriate emotions. It is not unlike the methods outlined at the beginning of Guy DeBord's *Society of the Spectacle*, in which he outlines the spectacle's role as the mediator of relations between images presented to us as the image of society:

1: In societies where modern conditions of production prevail, all of life presents itself as an immense accumulation of *spectacles*. Everything that was directly lived has moved away into representation.

2: The images detached from every aspect of life fuse in a common stream in which the unity of this life can no longer be reestablished. Reality considered *partially* unfolds, in its own general unity, as a pseudo-world *apart*, an object of mere contemplation. The specialization of images of the world is completed in the world of the autonomous image, where the liar has lied to himself. The spectacle in general, as the concrete inversion of life, is the autonomous movement of the non-living.

3: The spectacle presents itself simultaneously as all of society, as part of society, and as *instrument of unification*. As a part of society it is specifically the sector which concentrates all gazing and all consciousness. Due to the very fact that this sector is *separate*, it is the common ground of the deceived gaze and false consciousness, and the unification it achieves is nothing but an official language of generalized separation.

4: The spectacle is not a collection of images, but a social relation among people, mediated by images.¹²

¹² Guy DeBord, *Society of the Spectacle* (Black & Red, 1977), 2.

Again, it bears mentioning that Spinoza was writing at the dawn of modernity and was likely not capable of fully perceiving the development of dialectical thinking in the manner displayed by DeBord in these quotes. However, being influenced heavily by Descartes, he had a well-developed grasp of subjectivity as it pertains to the body, advancing Cartesian theory greatly by reuniting the body and the mind through the proposition of parallelism. This subjectivity is a predicate to this development of a system that shows how two seemingly non-related things are in fact in a dialogue with one another, as has been shown with the earlier quotation of Proposition 7, Book II. My purpose for quoting DeBord will become clear later in this essay; for now, it suffices to focus on the fourth point, suggesting that the sign is spectacular in its content, allowing a leader to gain purchase with the public by the mere association of images.

Attributes, Parallelism, and the Folly of Dualism

Before we continue to the focus of this essay, it is essential for us to understand our second object outlined in the introduction: what an attribute is in Spinozist thought.

An attribute is an action or way of affecting that a body is said to irreducibly do. This irreducibility forms this body's essence; without this attribute, the body does not exist in the same way that it would with the attribute and therefore cannot be called the same body, as Definition 1 in Book I indicates: "By attribute I mean that which the intellect perceives of substance as constituting its essence."¹³ This is a radical redefinition of "doing" in some sense, as the mere being of an object becomes coextensive with the object's doing. We can see the beginnings of this argument in Proposition 2, Book II: "Extension is an attribute of

¹³ Spinoza, *The Ethics*, 31.

God; i.e., God is an extended thing."¹⁴ I will omit the full extrapolation of the argument for the unity of substance through *Deus sive Natura*, as it is not fully relevant and can be better argued through a different topic; for now, it suffices to say that if "nothing exists from whose nature an effect does not follow"¹⁵ (Prop. 36, I), then the mere being of an object is part of its affectation. Hence why we might not consider a stone as having an effect until we stub our toe on it or make it skip across the water.

Bodies are capable of acting in more than one determinate way, allowing them to have more than one attribute. Extension is only one that we determinately know of. Living beings are composed of a second attribute, that of thought: "Thought is an attribute of God; i.e., God is a thinking thing"¹⁶ (Prop. 1, II). These two attributes are what constitute the human body (as well as the bodies of all fauna as we know them)—"The object of the idea constituting the human mind is the body exclusively—i.e., a definite mode of extension actually existing, and nothing else"¹⁷ (Prop. 13, II). Where Descartes proposes a separation between mind and body due to how unique each phenomenon is, Spinoza proposes that the phenomenon, their doing, *is their only difference*. The unity of the being is already established by its having one body.

Thought and extension do not communicate directly with one another; they are considered separate attributes and, therefore, actions that do not have something in common. However, they are produced by the same body; as a result, they are capable of forming ideas and approximations of one another (which can be seen in Prop. 7, II); this

¹⁴ Spinoza, 64.

¹⁵ Spinoza, 57.

¹⁶ Spinoza, 64.

¹⁷ Spinoza, 71.

is the formation of the subject in parallelist terms, rather than dualist terms. This point is well developed throughout the conclusion of Henri Bergson's *Matter and Memory*, a book that seemingly dedicates itself to solving the difficulties of Proposition 13, Book II:

The difficulties of ordinary dualism come, not from the distinction between the two terms [matter and pure perception], but from the impossibility of seeing how the one is grafted upon the other. Now, as we have shown, pure perception, which is the lowest degree of mind—mind without memory—is really part of matter, as we understand matter. We may go further: memory does not intervene as a function of which matter has no presentiment and which it does not imitate in its own way. If matter does not remember the past, it is because it repeats the past unceasingly, because, subject to necessity, it unfolds a series of moments of which each is the equivalent of the preceding moment and may be deduced from it: thus its past is truly given in its present. But a being which evolves more or less freely creates something new every moment: in vain, then, should we seek to read its past in its present unless its past were deposited within it in the form of memory. Thus, to use again a metaphor which has more than once appeared in this book, it is necessary, and for similar reasons, that the past should be *acted* by matter, *imagined* by mind.¹⁸

An attribute is something that a body does, rather than something that is. Attributes can't be said to be something as simple as a shape or a colour of the object; this would be to name something inessential to the category of that affectation. A stone is not an iron ingot, and yet both are extended; a chicken is not a man, and yet both have the

¹⁸ Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory* (Zone Books, 1988), 222–23.

capacity for some mode of thought. Rather, we see the primacy of doing in the creation of this universal category:

[Prop. 9, II:] The idea of an individual thing existing in actuality has God for its cause not insofar as he is infinite but insofar as he is considered as affected by another idea of a thing existing in actuality, of which God is the cause insofar as he is affected by a third idea, and so on ad infinitum.¹⁹

This proposition can be interpreted as saying that God (and, therefore, Nature as well) is not a static archive of all of its modal expressions. There is no index with which one "looks up" a being or a thought; *Deus sive Natura* is an active exchange of affectations that is constantly in motion, a motion that allows us to begin to know things through how we are affected by them:

[Prop. 2, I:] Two substances having different attributes have nothing in common.

[Prop. 3, I:] When things have nothing in common, one cannot be the cause of the other.

[Prop. 4, I:] Two or more distinct things are distinguished from one another either by the difference of the attributes of the substance or by the difference of the affectations of the substance.²⁰

In his work to create an ontological proof of the existence of God, Spinoza not only dispenses with the idea of a God in the likeness of a human, but also demonstrates a quality of both simultaneity and resonance between attributes; if a body is capable of doing more than one thing (affecting in more than one way), then that body is known

¹⁹ Spinoza, *The Ethics*, 68.

²⁰ Spinoza, 32-33.

by how it specifically affects. Moreover, we can see that this way of examining affectation leads us to the conclusion of a resonance or communication between beings of determinate attributes; a steel ingot cannot perceive why it would be shaped into a blade and only enacts its molding in a determinate process, but even the most trusting house pet might recoil at the sight of a kitchen knife being pulled from a block. Any principal of discernibility would have to be applied discriminately to distinguish components of a singular body as entirely separate, as a body that acts in many different ways can be imbued with different attributes, or, rather, distinct ways of affecting. A body that affects in multiple ways must still be considered as a whole, with its different ways of affecting only constituting discernible methods of communication; its scission between its affectations is known through the affectation it imparts on the subject rather than an impossible allotment of determinate, fixed matter dedicated to acting in this way or that. We know through doing, and we know through what is done to us. So, what is it that is being done on a societal level?

The Use of the Sign in Political Economy

Spinoza's century was a time of great change for Europe. Following the movement that led to the creation of the first city-states in fifteenth century Italy, European nations began to change their economic relations internally, leading to the abolishment of the commons via expropriation by the mercantile class, as well as the dismantling of the Great Chain of Being that had separated the feudal lords and the serfs into fixed, impenetrable classes. At the dawn of this age, people were offered what appeared to be a new freedom—the freedom to sell their labour and to appropriate whatever goods they could afford as a result of payment for their labour. Karl Marx stands as a figure in philosophy and economics whose extensive work on the

subject details this new system's historical conditions, imposition, operation, and development. As we are speaking of the dawn of capitalism, we will concern ourselves with the imposition of this system, which Marx writes of in his introduction to the *Grundrisse*:

The more deeply we go back into history, the more does the individual, and hence also the producing individual, appears as dependent, as belonging to a greater whole: in a still quite natural way in the family and in the family expanded into the clan; then later in the various forms of communal society arising out of the antitheses and fusions of the clans. Only in the eighteenth century, in 'civil society', do the various forms of social connectedness confront the individual as a mere means toward his private purposes, as external necessity. But the epoch which produces this standpoint, that of the isolated individual, is also precisely that of the hitherto most developed social (from this standpoint, general) relations. The human being is in the most literal sense a [political animal], not merely a gregarious animal, but an animal which can individuate itself only in the midst of society.²¹

This quote addresses the changes to the formation of the individual or the subject within this new set of economic relations. Marx goes on to write of the alterations creating a new system of production:

The aim is, rather, to present production...as distinct from distribution etc., as encased in eternal laws independent from history, at which opportunity *bourgeois* relations are then quietly smuggled in as the inviolable natural laws on which society in the abstract is founded.... Quite apart from this crude tearing-apart of production and distribution and of their real relationship,

²¹ Karl Marx, *Grundrisse* (Penguin Group, 1973), 84.

it must be apparent from the outset that, no matter how differently distribution may have been arranged in different stages of social development, it must be possible here also, just as with production, to single out common characteristics, and just as possible to confound or to extinguish all historic differences under *general human laws*.²²

An impetus to develop social relations in a highly atomistic way—both in terms of the formation of the subject and the mystification of society's methods and stages of production—begins to take hold only a few decades after the publication of Spinoza's major works. Though the developments that would come as a result of these changes could not be foreseen at the time, we still find the first notions of what would be useful for creating and maintaining these arrangements in the coming age. Marx indicates as much in the second quotation, proposing that the relations used are not necessarily new, but their arrangement is. Whether they were a result of intuition or of his studious commitment to the idea of eternal truths, Spinoza's notions of both the formation of the subject and the insights he developed as a biblical critic and political philosopher hold water in the present argument. Certainly, being part of a merchant family of modest success from Amsterdam would have given him firsthand knowledge of the expansion of trade routes happening in the port cities throughout Europe as well.

The abolishment of the feudal order could not come about without provoking some consternation, especially since the new system would rely so heavily on social atomization, a condition that Spinoza warned would guarantee the development of superstitions:

Fear makes human beings go that insane. Accordingly, the cause from which superstition arises, is preserved

²² Marx, 87.

and fostered is dread ... only while dread lasts do human beings struggle with superstition; that all the things they have ever worshipped by vain religion have been nothing but phantasms and the hallucinations of a sad and fearful psyche²³

This quote can be taken in conjunction with the difficulties presented by individual interpretations of the law:

But since human beings err in the greatest degree about religion and in view of the diversity of their mental casts fantasize many things with great contentiousness, as experience testifies more than enough, it is certain that if no one is bound to comply with the highest power in those things that he deems to pertain to religion, then the right of the city would depend on each's different judgment and emotion. For no one who judged a statute to be contrary to his own faith and superstition would then be bound by it; and so, under this pretext, each could assume a license for everything.²⁴

Isolation begets fear; fear causes vacillation between hope and dread; meaning is desperately searched for and poor associations arise as a result of happenstance events; superstitions develop to fill in the gaps and are clung to in the hope that they will provide order; the whole cycle repeats, driving men insane with fear. Whether serf or lord, the disjunction from the old order would cause an upset to the whole procedure of one's life; in either case, the freedom granted to these individuals also includes the freedom to starve.

The mercantile class's expropriation of the commons was only a first step in this new system. Concurrent with the conversion of the commons into private property, the

²³ Spinoza, *Theologico-Political Treatise*, xvi-xvii.

²⁴ Spinoza, 189.

atomization of the individual subject, the obscuration of society's production and distribution process, and the establishment of the sale of labor as the norm, trade began to take on a new character. Colonial outposts were established in resource-rich countries with the explicit purpose of expropriating any commodity that was deemed useful for the development of their corresponding nations. These commodities included, but were not limited to, building materials, textiles, foodstuffs and enslaved people. Slave labour—now considered under the commodity-form as well—was utilized for the enrichment of the colonies and of the nations that they were connected to. This incredible violence, no doubt, takes an immense toll on the violated communities, as is well documented in Fanon's writings. How was this incredible violence sold to the public of the imperial core? Obscuration of these crimes could not have been so perfect as to allow anyone to claim ignorance of them, especially considering the amusement drawn from zoo exhibits that featured kidnapped humans and the inclusion of slaves in certain Christmas celebrations (Sinterklaas lore, etc.), to name a few non-commerce related instances. An argument against shared humanity would require a staggering show of cognitive dissonance, one that would have to bypass an entire continent's common sense.

Social domination is one of the many themes that appears in Spinoza's *Theologico-Political Treatise*. As developed at the beginning of this essay, social domination can be used as a hot and fast means for a government to gain purchase with the public, allowing them to skip the hard work of earning trust through just and charitable rule. An extreme example can be found in Spinoza's assessment of the battle between Joshua and the Five Kings:

At the time of Joshua, the Hebrews...believed with the vulgar that the sun moves with a diurnal motion, as they call it, and that the earth is at rest; and to the preconceived opinion, they adapted the miracle that

happened to them when they fought against those five kings. For they did not simply narrate that that day was longer than usual, but that the sun and moon stood still, or ceased from their motion—which at the time could serve them in no small way of convincing the Heathens, who prayed to the sun, and for proving by experience itself that the sun is under the imperium of another deity, on the basis of whose nod it is bound to change its natural order.²⁵

Miracles share something in common with the spectacle in that they connect images in ways that produce obscuring conclusions for the affected subject. Miracles, however, do not need to be an overt demonstration of force in every situation, as the perceived violation of nature's order *is* the show of force. Such signs as the production of water from a stone in the desert, the resurrection of Lazarus, or the conversion of water into wine aim at awe and can be perceived as indicating wealth and wellness. No less, the production of riches, seemingly out of thin air, would certainly be considered miraculous as well. This is exactly what was coming about from colonial expropriation. Like water from a stone, the social and industrial development of Europe accelerated in ways that might appear to be miraculous to one who had grown up in a culture that was still figuring out a newly implemented and precarious economic system. The conjuring of riches, only made possible in such a spectacular way by the newly atomized social system within the continent, had proven its worth. Now we can see why DeBord can be quoted at length: Spinoza's notion of the sign provides a tool for the capture of the mind, but the extent to which it must be used to create this new society could only occur under a near-totally atomized one. The sign became appropriated as a tool of the mediation of images, demonstrating that this new ruling class was now

²⁵ Spinoza, 77.

capable of miracles and deserving of the transfer of right. Having now a history that has been so obscured as to not be able to predict the future, the sign appears as the event that perpetually advances the subject from zero to one, just for them to find that they never moved from their original spot. Spinoza, in the *Theologico-Political Treatise*, now resonates with DeBord's second proposition on the spectacle:

Human nature is constituted quite otherwise. All do seek what is useful to them, yet hardly on the basis of the dictate of sound reason; but they most often desire things and judge them solely on the basis of lust and the emotions of a broken spirit (which take no account of future times and other matters).²⁶

The transformation of social relations makes it possible to pull the veil over enough eyes at the imperial core. Yet, Fanon suggests that this form of mystification is not enough to fool everyone into thinking that such gratuitous wealth would just spring from the earth in a faraway land. This arrangement does not stand up to scrutiny for anyone paying attention. And so, something of the old violence must remain lurking in the shadows in the imperial core. While attempting to claim a more highly developed humanism and culture, the ever present threat of the return to the old ways lingers as a rearguard to those who might not buy into the signs produced for the public. Perhaps, given the theme of superstition and insanity in this section, it is most appropriate to quote Foucault's book, *Madness and Civilization*, to furbish an example of this threat:

In the dialectic of insanity where reason hides without abolishing itself, religion constitutes the concrete form of what cannot go mad; it bears what is invincible in reason, it bears what subsists beneath madness as quasi-nature and around it as the constant solicitation

²⁶ Spinoza, 59.

of a milieu "where, during lucid intervals, or the state of convalescence, the patient might enjoy the society of those who were of similar habits and opinions." Religion safeguards the old secret of reason in the presence of madness, thus making closer, more immediate, the constraint that was already rampant in classical confinement.²⁷

Here fear is addressed to the invalid directly, not by instruments but in speech; there is no question of limiting a liberty that rages beyond its bounds, but of marking out and glorifying a region of simple responsibility where any manifestation of madness will be linked to punishment. The obscure guilt that once linked transgression and unreason is thus shifted; the madman, as a human being originally endowed with reason, is no longer guilty of being mad; but the madman, as a madman, and in the interior of that disease of which he is no longer guilty, must feel morally responsible for everything within him that may disturb morality and society, and must hold no one but himself responsible for the punishment he receives. The assignation of guilt is no longer the mode of relation that obtains between the madman and the sane man in their generality; it becomes both the concrete for of coexistence of each madman with his keeper, and the form of awareness that the madman must have of his own madness.²⁸

As the section on the overlapping of the attributes suggests, the material that they act upon remains too mixed to separate in the same way that a body's extended actions and thought thoughts bleed into each other; we come to know what is produced by each attribute by *how* it affects. The sign acts as an obscuring image, hiding the realities of

²⁷ Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization* (Random House, 1988), 244.

²⁸ Foucault, 246–47.

where such grand wealth really comes from. It allows the populace to overlook the details of colonial conquest so long as the beneficiary is provided for by the benefactor. It is the scission in a great "Body of Violence" that is known one way or another through the affectations it produces. In the name of prosperity, the sign does a violence to thought that allows one to ignore the ill-gotten quality of Western wealth while threatening a return to violence that produces a self-policing effect, rearguarding it against questioning of its order. This is the violence of the periphery, appearing in its inversion as jubilee in the core. The inability to sell one's labour, the violation of property rights, the challenging of the atomized order of production and distribution, are nothing less than insanity, as far as those who have seen the signs of divine providence with their own eyes are concerned. The sign has imprisoned the Western order within its own alienating system.

A permanent dialogue with itself, an increasingly obnoxious narcissism inevitably paved the way for a virtual delirium where intellectual thought turns into agony since the reality of man as a living, working, self-made being is replaced by words, an assemblage of words and the tensions generated by their meanings.²⁹

Conclusion

A pair of quotations come to mind from the first chapter of *The Wretched of the Earth*. Both refer to the sharing of cultural signifiers in different stages of the struggle for liberation. The first pertains to the rituals of the colonized nation, and reads as follows:

²⁹ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 237.

Another aspect of the colonized's affectivity can be seen when it is drained of energy by the ecstasy of dance. Any study of the colonial world therefore must include an understanding of the phenomena of dance and possession. The colonized's way of relaxing is precisely this muscular orgy during which the most brutal aggressiveness and impulsive violence are channelled, transformed, and spirited away. The dance circle is a permissive circle. It protects and empowers.... During the struggle for liberation there is a singular loss of interest in these rituals. With his back to the wall, the knife at his throat, or to be more exact the electrode on his genitals, the colonized subject is bound to stop telling stories.³⁰

The second passage suggests that stories are shared in place of ritual under dire circumstances:

In order to maintain their stamina and their revolutionary capabilities, the people also resort to retelling certain episodes in the life of the community. The outlaw, for example, who holds the countryside for days against the police, hot on his trail, or who succumbs after killing four or five police officers in single-handed combat or who commits suicide rather than "give up" his accomplices, all constitute for the people role models, action schemas, and "heroes." And there is no point, obviously, in saying that such a hero is a thief, a thug, a degenerate. If the act for which this man is prosecuted by the colonial authorities is an act exclusively directed against a colonial individual or colonial asset, then the demarcation line is clear and manifest. The process of identification is automatic.³¹

³⁰ Fanon, 19–20.

³¹ Fanon, 30.

The functional reasons for why such a shift would occur in cultural sharing are apparent: to exchange the allegorically interpretable ritual that teaches through cultural symbols, which speak through the ages, for brutal stories that not only inspire violence but also potentially instruct as to how to carry out that violence is to exchange the nurturing for the functionally relevant. A parallel can be drawn to the imperial core, also within this great Body of Violence: a nation that has effectively atomized their culture and unwittingly (as far as the workers are concerned) abandoned their history, as a means of deluding the masses into a false understanding of the order of the (or rather, their) world, a nation who are either blinded by the implementation of the sign within their culture or menaced into not pulling the veil back through the lingering threat of the violence that will be visited on them if they do; this nation in opposition to a nation that experiences incredible physical violence that leaves both physical and mental scars while stealing the land's resources and leaving them empty handed and broken, a nation who is now forced to abandon their history for what is functionally pertinent to their survival and eventual liberation. An acknowledgement of this social engineering can be seen in Fanon's fourth chapter in his first book, *Black Skin, White Masks*: "To understand something requires that we make ourselves ready for it, that we prepare ourselves for it; in entails the shaping of a new form."³² Such complimentary forms share a resonance with each other, as if they are part of a single body that affects in many different ways, a body with multiple attributes and a single purpose: theft.

Again, this paper is in no way an attempt to create an equivalence between the violence experienced in the imperial core and that experienced in the colonized country. There is no comparison to be made in type and experi-

³² Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (Grove Press, Inc., 1967), 95.

ence. Rather, this paper has proposed a direct connection between the core and the periphery through a continuity of violence that takes a two-pronged approach at affecting bodies differently: one of cognitive dissonance and one of physical duress. It is impossible to relegate either attribute, with a perfect exclusivity, to one place or the other, as clearly affectations that can be said to be attributes are not fixed to a single place in this body (as is true of any body); rather, they tend to blend and overlap in ways that make their isolation from one another impossible. Instead, the different attributes of violence are known by their doing—how they affect and compel their victims—in that the sign could not affect an individual without context for the religious structuring in the same way. The colonized are shown violence that is supposed to instruct as to what is needed to civilize them, but this instruction never comes, as the symbols cannot communicate with them unless they are prepared for this spectacular-in-gesture mode of communication first. The seemingly gossamer thin separation between the colonies and the imperial core is only constituted by who can glean the context of what is being presented to them, allowing for separate strategies to be achieved by the same one continuity. Proximity is only the appearance of separation; its reality finds its meaning where it needs to.

A single body must be comprehended as such if it is to be addressed and amended properly. To treat a problem of this scale as divided simply because of its modal appearance or because of qualia assigned to its locations—its organs—is to ignore the wider connections, or, in this case, affectations. This paper's intertwining of theorists—one who wrote at the dawn of capital and one who believed he was writing at its dusk—is made to suggest that, in fact, colonialism is the problem of the core, too. It is a problem that must be taken seriously, to the utmost degree, regardless of the appearance presented at its various sites.