

# REVOLUTIONARY JOY/ INFECTIOUS FEELING

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**Abstract:** Political solidarity confounds our political theory when the latter is grounded in economies of interest, cultures of responsibility or instruments of rights. The gratuitous materialisation of solidarity might be rethought from the perspective of affect if by the latter we indicate a field of interpretive capacity, sometimes called recognition, not limited to or by personal attachments. This capacity we might liken to a ‘shared situation’ to quote Jean Laplanche (1989, 126). Following this train of thought through the figure of revolutionary joy and ‘adherence’ in Jean Genet’s last work, *Prisoner of Love*, and its uptake in Mahmoud Darwish’s memoir of the siege of Beirut, *Memory for Forgetfulness*, this paper envisions an affect studies that materialises modes of affinity and adherence by tracing an example of affect’s echo between two texts, each attuned to the fading of a revolutionary moment as it is forced underground.

**Keywords:** revolutionary joy, biopolitics, nihilistic joy, Icarian subterfuge, affective affinity, prisoners of love, bourgeois son, Palestinian revolution, Darwish, self immolation, human rights, anti colonial, anti capitalism

1. Revolutionary joy gets no respect. Suspect, evanescent, of dubious motivation, disruptive by nature, chaotic and violent, the joy of collective resistance and large scale manifestations such as we have seen globally since the first surge of civil disobedience in Tunisia on December 18, 2010, presents a problem of naming that remains unresolved. It was impossible to predict that outrage over the self-immolation of Mohammed Bouazizi and his subsequent death eighteen days later would spark a movement that successfully routed a dictator of twenty-three years and inaugurated a new government founded on

principles of civil liberty. The ‘Dignity Revolution’ (*thawrat al karaamah*) in Tunisia set in motion the ‘Revolution of 25 January’ in Cairo yet both were immediately and dismissively renamed in the western press under the sign of flowers and passing season: names like ‘Jasmine Revolution’ or ‘Arab Spring’ reflect a wish that this too shall pass and like all such wishes are symptomatic of a fundamental ambivalence. We might expect such reaction from the political right and its various organs, but the cool reception of Arab insurgency by many on the left still strikes a note of surprise – Alain Badiou’s impromptu comments in the early days of the Tunisian revolution, transcribed by Daniel Fischer sitting in on the seminar entitled ‘What does “change the world” mean?’, register a generalised left discomfort with revolutionary joy (Fischer). That he elaborated his position by publishing in the pages of *Le Monde* does not change the fact that caution and empathy were prescribed, along with what is read by some as a condescending tone, in the place of jubilation (Badiou).

Vijay Prashad in his *Arab Spring, Libyan Winter* understands joy to be one of the pitfalls of national consciousness. ‘Libya’s cities celebrated the fall of Qaddafi. But what are the people celebrating? Certainly there is jubilation at the removal from power of the Qaddafi of 1988-2011. That Qaddafi had alienated everyone. It is in the interest of NATO and the neoliberal clique to ensure that in this auto-da-fe the national liberation anti-imperialist of 1969-1988 is liquidated, and that the neoliberal era is forgotten, to be reborn anew as if not tried before. That is going to be the trick: to navigate between the joy of large sections of the population who want to have a say in their society . . . and a small section that wants to pursue the neoliberal agenda . . .’ (Prashad 230). One step from frenzy, the mobility or instability of the mob is quite capable, Prashad fears, of forgetting that before IMF restructuring and neoliberal economics squeezed the nations of North Africa in the vise of global debt, there had been a period of prosperous anti-imperialism. Joy is simply not to be trusted.

Another example, Aijaz Ahmad interviewed on May day 2012 by the online journal *FullStop* contends: ‘ . . . if you can be inspired into left-wing commitments only by the passing excitement of a transitional historical moment – May ’68, Arab uprising, Chilean student movement – you are more likely to settle back into inertia and nostalgia. If, however, your main motivation is the sense of outrage at cruelty and injustice – fascism, imperialism, what capitalism does to the vast majority of human beings – then you may not need the stimulation of good news to keep yourself going in what then becomes for you an obligation’ (Ahmad). In this assessment, the millions who assembled globally and in public, intermittently yet steadily from December 2010 to May day 2012 are consigned to

a ‘passing excitement’ and denied the sense of outrage at cruelty and injustice in a judgment that at minimum must ignore the ample evidence of anti-capitalism and assertion of human rights in the Arab crowds alone. Even from the postcolonial or anti-colonial perspective, Ahmad and Prashad share with Badiou a leftist distrust of popular jubilation when it is inspired by pain and outrage as the Dignity Revolution irrefutably was. In this distrust we hear the legacy not only of nineteenth century fears of mobility of the mob – the source of the word ‘mob’ – and bourgeois terror of the popular insurgencies that struck France, for instance, at regular intervals, but also a trace of an eighteenth century anxiety over barbarism, which Michel Foucault locates as a leitmotif of discourses on revolution and revolutionary fervor that project a destructive drive on the landless and the dispossessed while retaining a mythology of pre-modern freedoms connected with early mercantile accumulation and commerce. For France this takes the form of Gaulish barbarism celebrated as a pre-political source of the nation that can be recalled against the disorder of the under-classes massing in the streets (Foucault).

Committed to an ethic of exposure and outrage at injustice, recent trends in postcolonial criticism have unearthed the necropolitical shadow of biopolitics and registered grim and truncated accounts of diminished life. Even before the moment of revolutionary foment of this decade, Jean Comaroff lamented the elegiac turn that biopolitics via Agamben has injected in the fields and with it a sense that the clamor of rights extinguishes the imagination or feeling (Comaroff). And if anti-colonial work is or must be written as elegy, what then might postcolonial studies have to say of ‘joy’? With this question in mind, I turn now to three authors entangled by their shared commitment to something like revolutionary joy but refusing the sacrifice of feeling in response and responsibility. They begin the decolonisation of affect by setting feeling to work.

2. As early as 1929 Georges Bataille saw with clarity the shortcomings and force of André Breton’s surrealism. The essay, ‘The Old Mole and the Prefix Sur in the Words Surhomme and Surrealist’, written that year but not published until 1968 in *Tel Quel* during the heady days of a student insurrection, lays out the challenge of a materialist approach to revolutionary practice over and against the idealism of bourgeois theorists and artists like the surrealists (Bataille 32-44). Reproaching Breton and through him others, Bataille asserts that revolution demands of the bourgeois son a complete betrayal of his social class and an identification with the ‘old mole/vielle taupe’ of proletarian struggle. Short of becoming a class traitor, he is committed to a ‘puerile’ and oedipal revolt against the mores of the bourgeoisie in forms of transgression that are at once servile yet aspiring to triumph over existing structures of authority and value, which the text represents through an

allegory of the son's desire to vanquish his father. Like Icarus, the bourgeois son in revolt seeks to be more than the father, to meet the maker and defying him, fly higher. Nihilistic joy is a form of this drive to triumph over the triumph of the other; Icarian sovereignty of this kind ends in flames. Opposing the mole with the imperial eagle, Bataille is convinced that this self-consuming joy is the only true rebellion available to the bourgeois son. Without wishing to collapse a metaphor of burning and the real instance of Bouazizi's self-immolation, we must at minimum note that whereas it is the bourgeois revolution that has been exhausted by 1929, Bataille still holds out a hope for the worker's revolution in relation to which Icarian excess is merely a sign. In our present moment and despite the essential contribution of Tunisian labour unions to the success of the Dignity Revolution, the successful collective formation lies not in the workers but between the involuntary idleness of entire generations of youth from Morocco to Iran and beyond and a middle class whose call for civil liberties joins the demand of rural and urban poor for basic sustenance. The class betrayal, which Bataille identifies as voluntary in bourgeois unity with anti-capitalism aims, has by now exceeded the in/voluntary choice because it is a feature of the terrain, Fanon's terrain of socially deformed relations<sup>1</sup>, while an unworking class of youth, who struggle to be present even in the present, who are being forcibly absented from the present, merges with the present-absence of other figures like the refugee, the Palestinian, the shanty town dweller. Their revolt, emblematised by the outbreak of self-immolations and drownings as young men, in particular but not only they, attempt the crossing from Morocco to Spain in flimsy inner tubes, retains an Icarian dimension though the risk is absolute and suicide sometimes openly avowed (Pandolfo).

Of course, Bataille's mole harkens back to at least three other moles. Hamlet's father's ghost, Hegel's Spirit breaking the crust of earth to bask in the sun and Marx's subterranean tunneling proletariat. From an emblem of injured sovereignty to emergent world spirit and intermittent class consciousness the mole has been called upon to figure the ignominy of dispossession in these three distinct imaginaries. For Bataille the mole's slow labors are distinct from Icarian flight and the eagle's soaring triumph and thus from the nihilism of a refusal to accept and think through one's own mortality and base vulnerability. The mole does not need to exhibit his abjection for he suffers oppression in earthly communion with an intermittent, only sometimes possible emergence. Neither the figure of sovereignty nor the emblem of a messianic triumph, the mole digs his hollows and tunnels persistently incorporating both the psychological struggle of subjectivities dominated by normative order and proletarian consciousness emergent in the worker's revolutions of the early twentieth century. The enemy is a drive for homogeneity that refuses the heterogeneous substance of experience and matter, which for Bataille provides indisputable limits to the

abstractions of capital and the idealism of philosophy, two forms of the ‘high’ that his writing practice undermines by consistently opposing exalted language and images to base foundations. The nihilistic euphoria of his opponents is ridiculed and delimited as devoted to a hierarchy of ever escalating triumph over the former structure of authority. ‘All claims from below have been scurrilously disguised as claims from above’ (Bataille 39) in an Icarian attempt to preserve class superiority of a kind. For Bataille, another path emerges through his critique: attending to base matter *not* as waste or loss but as inevitable decay and fragility. Excavating the ‘low’ would allow the bourgeois son to examine, work through, experience and share his puerile rebellion by exposing himself to the affects as well as the judgement of abjection, but this self-examination by means of self-abjection is limited because unassailably framed by class. To ‘betray his social class’ is both possible in the sense that the almost ascetic re-examination of value within subjectivity, his own, is always already a class betrayal, but it is also impossible for the labour of puerile revolution cannot turn an eagle into a mole. The intuition of base materialism is fundamentally that of an edge or limit.

But Bataille does not accept the metaphoric limitations of political philosophy and so steps out of the exclusive fixation on fauna to develop his suspended dialectics in other directions. ‘The Language of Flowers’, an essay dating from the same year, 1929, and also in response to one of Breton’s provocations, offers an example of this therapeutic intervention on resistant idealism:

. . . nothing contributes more strongly to the peace in one’s heart and to the lifting of one’s spirits, as well as to one’s loftier notions of justice and rectitude, than the spectacle of fields and forests, along with the tiniest parts of the plant, which sometimes manifest a veritable architectural order, contributing to the general impression of correctness. No crack, it seems conspicuously troubles the decisive harmony of vegetal nature. Flowers themselves, lost in this immense movement from earth to sky, are reduced to an episodic role, to a diversion, moreover, that is apparently misunderstood: they can only contribute, by breaking the monotony, to the inevitable seductiveness produced by the general thrust from low to high. And in order to destroy this favorable impression, nothing less is necessary than the impossible and fantastic vision of roots swarming under the surface of the soil, nauseating and naked like vermin (Bataille 13).

The ‘decisive harmony of vegetal nature’ finds its echo in the 1939 essay ‘The Practice of Joy Before Death’ published in the journal *Acephale* where Bataille revives the happy condition of a ‘beautiful spring morning’ to disrupt our serenity with a ‘practice’ of de-

sublimation, writing, ‘when a man finds himself situated in such a way that the world is happily reflected in him, without entailing any destruction or suffering . . . he can let himself be carried away by the resulting enchantment or simple joy. But he can also perceive at the same time, the weight and the vain yearning for empty rest implied by this beatitude. At that moment, something cruelly rises up in him that is comparable to a bird of prey that tears open the throat of a smaller bird in an apparently peaceful and clear blue sky’ (Bataille 235).

Cautioning against the affective resemblance between religious mysticism and the practice of joy before death, Bataille warns that ‘only a shameless, indecent saintliness can lead to a sufficiently happy loss of self.’ The ‘joy before death means that life can be glorified from root to summit’ (Bataille 237) by robbing ‘of meaning everything that is an intellectual or moral beyond, substance, god, immutable order or salvation’ (Bataille 237). In more prosaic terms, this practice affirms the confusion of a materially communicable joy that exceeds identity, neither before nor after it, possibly beneath. And Bataille believes this practice to be the only path to a new terrain or map of social discords conventionally disguised by ideological and idealist investments for ‘there is no possibility for any class until bourgeois principles have become altogether and for everyone principles of derision and general disgust – including Icarian subterfuge, even if this subterfuge will be regarded someday as a kind of dawn of mental liberation’ (Bataille 43). Accepting the limitation of its class position, this attitude does not appropriate the mole but understands itself as witnessing another’s revolution, a work unlike that to be done by the bourgeois sons.

As witness to the joy of the other, Bataille’s practice of joy before death respects the division of labor within a joy that aims at resignifying life from ‘root to summit’.

3. ‘*Who will Write the History of the Moss?*’ This question is posed by Mahmoud Darwish in *Thakira li Inisyan/ Memory for Forgetfulness: August, Beirut 1982*, his testimony of the Israeli siege of Beirut; it is in direct communication with Jean Genet’s account of the same events in *Un Captif amoureux/Prisoner of Love*, which like Darwish’s text, is generally understood as both a personal memoir and an act of cosmopolitan witnessing. That summer Israel laid siege to the city for 88 days, cutting off water, supplies, movement and subjecting the population to constant bombardment, including the use by the IDF of vacuum bombs, prohibited by the Geneva Convention. With simplicity, Darwish’s question digs out an image, one that embodies the division of adherence *from* witnessing and which circumscribes the *problématique* of solidarity.

‘Who will Write the History of the Moss?’ is a response to Genet’s *text*, but though it may be the first such reference for Darwish, it is not the last. Years later when writing another memoir (Darwish 2011) the poet narrates receiving the news of the massacre at Shatila and Sabra by quoting from Genet’s 1983 essay ‘Four Hours at Shatila’(Genet 2004) which details the time he spent in the camps recording the murder and torture of thousands, the numbers are disputed, by the Phalangists and under the watchful eye of Israeli command, which did nothing to stop the slaughter. Far from it. As Genet notes in one of his last interviews, they turned their search-lights on the camps to facilitate the proceedings. This fact is underlined by Darwish when he quotes from Genet’s description of a festival of death. Genet’s essay then reappears segmented with changes in *Prisoner of Love* where Genet affirms a materialisation at the heart of his ‘*adhérence*’ to the Palestinian revolution over and against the international politics of the image which captures it. Darwish’s question of the moss acknowledges the importance of a Genetian theory of adherence to the necessity of a history of the not-yet vanquished. For Darwish, Genet’s theory and ethics of adherence escapes the economy of tactical sacrifice. For the Genet of Darwish’s citations, direct and indirect, witnessing and adherence are interdependent yet distinct; it is to this figuration of sticky yet rootless attachment, rather than the demanding solidarity of strategic sacrifices, that Darwish turns.

Between *Memory for Forgetfulness*, 1987, and *In the Presence of Absence*, 2006<sup>2</sup>, Genet’s ghost materialises again but in a form legible only to those who have been following the moss in Darwish and Genet, and this time as an explanation of Darwish’s resignation from the Executive Council of the Palestine Liberation Organisation where he had been charged in 1988 with drafting the peace charter. In ‘Before Writing My Resignation,’ Darwish offers a poet’s plaint: ‘the creative Palestinian is prohibited from the luxury of vacated and dedicated time for the sake of creativity, because this is bound to a direct cessation from patriotic activity. Yet prisoners grow flowers in their prison yards. And in front of the zinc huts mothers planted basil and mint. The creative person must create his flexible margin between the patriotic, the political, the daily, the cultural, and the literary. But what am I to do? What does a poet do in the executive council? Will I be able to write a book of love when color falls on the ground in autumn?’(Darwish, 2007).

Moss, basil, mint, a prisoner’s flower, a book of love written in the autumn years: so many materialisations of an entanglement between two distinct networks of poetic flora. Today I will follow the moss from the question of history and who will write it to the explanation of adherence in Genet.

Genet's last novel was published in 1949 (*Journal du voleur / Thief's Journal*) and for the next 37 years he divided his writing between political essays, interviews and poetic articles and plays. This was a prolific time of diverse interests that culminated in the publication of the dense and complex memoir, 'commissioned' by Yasser Arafat. *Prisoner of Love* weaves political and aesthetic reflections on revolution with detailed memories of his sojourns among the Black Panthers and the PLO. Although he spent less than two years in the camps at Ajloun, Irbid and Beirut, his involvement with the movement and his intimate contacts with individuals continued for 15 years. The text is held loosely together by interweaving acute ideological critiques of French colonialism, American imperialism, Zionism and Israeli violence with an extended avowal of his strong attachment for which he was prepared in advance by his experience of French sovereignty. As a foster child and juvenile delinquent but also, by 1940, a felon and deserter of the foreign legion, Genet's heterogeneity within France acts as an impermeable barrier between the grace he witnesses and his own fallen state. No mediation is possible and this impossibility is heightened by his status as writer; he observes the union of his nation, but no sublimation of his difference can overcome the distance between the acts of affinity he witnesses and his own betrayals of home. By 1940, the ground had been seeded for a national alienation most palpable in the fictions he produced to excoriate and redress this harm. If France was suddenly homogeneously French by dint of German invasion, Genet was all the more foreign at home because of his desertion. In *Prisoner of Love*, he recalls this souvenir of youth and war to explain his attachment to Palestinians and their cause, at the end of his five hundred page examination of contemporary and historical imperialism, colonialism and revolutionary affirmation.

By the end reflecting on his years spent in juvenile prison, he is ready to avow his affection for a people as a love of *home*: 'as my statement of my position has shown, I've never thought of myself as a Palestinian. But there I was at home.' And it is here that the Genetian flower, signature of his writing since at least *Notre dame des fleurs* (1943) and commented by Derrida to develop the floral network in Genet's novels as a counter to Hegel on kinship in *Glas* (Derrida, 1990), here flora emerges in the text with political force:

It was the Palestinian phenomenon that made me write this book, but why did I stick so closely to the obviously crazy logic of that war? I can only explain it by remembering what I value: one or another of my prisons, a patch of moss, a few bits of hay, perhaps some wild flowers pushing up a slab of concrete or granite paving-stone. Or, the only luxury I'll allow myself, two or three dog roses (eglantine) growing on a gaunt and thorny bush' (Genet, 2003: 386).



Genet then embroiders the phrase ‘moss, lichen, dog rose’ into a major meditation on his own status as national abject, which became a basis for his fellowship with the dispossessed and later the attachment to ‘home’.

Between the ages of 6 and 8 I felt like a stranger in France . . . France was all around me and thought she was hemming me in all the time I was there, though really I was far away . . . that foolishly proud empire, never troubled before except by the empire of India, was invaded, almost without opposition by a few battalions of handsome fair-haired soldiers. Whether it was because they had too much beauty, too much fairness, or too much youth, France before them. I was there. Finally she fled, terrified. With my own eyes I saw a whole nation from behind, saw their backs running away, caught between the suns of June, of the south, and of the Germans. And where did that herd of backs and suns make for? For the sun . . . . In that ruined temple, mosses and lichens appeared, and sometimes kindness and even stranger things: a kind of almost happy confusion, elemental and classless. I kept my distance. In the pride I’d inherited from the former master of the world, I watched the metamorphosis with jubilation, but with the carefully hidden distress of being excluded from it” (Genet, 2003: 386).

Genet saw strange acts of kindness and grace among Parisians in flight from the Nazis: a bejeweled woman tended dirty and naughty children. A disheveled dandy festooned with medals cared for an elderly hobo. These signs of the abjection of wealth and luxury are also signs of ‘grace’ growing between the widening cracks of social class opened up by the chance happening of military defeat, which he says, fell like rain. Linking such signs to his own travels to Palestine he writes ‘moss, lichen, grass, a few dog roses capable of pushing up through red granite were an image of the Palestinian people breaking out everywhere through the cracks’ (Genet, 2003: 388).

Political philosophy takes up the question of sovereignty and the beast, as they are entangled within the law and right though assumed to be exterior to both. Genet recasts this couple as a difference between *justice* and *justesse* or law and rightness which, though bound up with conventional figures of bestial power allows him to take the leap of invoking flora as a (better) figure for revolutionary serenity and the affirmation of existence.<sup>3</sup> Following Bataille’s lead he prefers the sovereignty of the artist for whom ‘poetic expenditure ceases to be symbolic in its consequences’ because its consequences become a material price to be paid (Bataille 120). Professing the need to ‘dig in my own tongue’, *Prisoner of Love* understands the ‘old mole’ of fundamentalist nationalisms, which he describes as ‘digging up ancestry to justify present political claims’ by which he

means Israel/Phalangists et al., as distinct from the revolution practiced by Palestinians. Genet ends his book of “souvenirs” with ‘the most beautiful of all’, likening Palestinians to his most valued memories and therefore a property of that which preciously exceeds himself, the memory of dog roses in granite, ‘breaking out’ all over.

Genet’s readers have often dismissed his politics altogether, and this is a tendency even in friendly encounters. For instance, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri commit the error of instrumental reading when it comes to Genet’s avowal of revolutionary affinity, saying he was ‘enchanted by [the] revolutionary desire’ [of the Palestinians and the Black Panthers] ‘but he recognised that becoming a sovereign nation would be the end of their revolutionary qualities. “The day when the Palestinians are institutionalised,” he said, “I will no longer be at their side. The day the Palestinians become a nation like the other nations, I will no longer be there”’ (Hardt and Negri 109).

These lines taken from an interview, one of his last, in 1983 with an Austrian journalist, circulate infamously severed from their context for Genet goes on to elaborate and even qualify his remarks.

What the Palestinian Revolution will become once it has its territory and is made into an institution, I don’t know. In the camps you can already see the basis of what might become a territorial gain and an institution of the Palestinian Revolution . . . I’m afraid that by becoming a set pattern, this schema will be reproduced again when Palestine has a territory. For the moment, I *adhere* completely to Palestine in revolt. I don’t know if I will *adhere* – I will probably, even certainly be dead by then – but if I were alive I don’t know if I could *adhere* to a Palestine that has been made into an institution and has become territorially satisfied. But is that important? I wonder (Genet, 2004: 251-2. My emphasis).

He pauses to consider whether his personal sovereignty should trump that of the people he loves and with whom he has made a home both in writing and in memory. And in wondering this he accepts another surprising property of national belonging: serenity.

I think that for the Palestinians . . . there is a certain serenity despite the violence they experience, despite the living conditions, I think that the reason for this serenity lies precisely in the fact that the Palestinians, before becoming warriors –that is, before their expulsion from Palestine and the beginning of the organised military rebellion, from 1948 to about 1965 – they lived as a very calm, well-behaved people, with no arms or military operations, with no PLO, no Fatah, no hijackings, without disturbing the well-being of

Western citizens, without filling the pages of the press. And I think that during this period you didn't see a lot of serenity in people's faces (Genet, 2004: 251-2).

When directly queried about his commitment, Genet speaks of the singular affirmation of existence rooting a collective and political struggle:

I think that there is an affirmation of existence in the very fact of rebelling. . . after the birth of the political movement . . . there was a physical transformation of the people . . . and beginning at that moment, they felt that they existed. Without a national territory. But they existed nonetheless. And I think that this was, this is what is most important for them. To continue to feel that they exist. In their actions, even if their final objective is the liberation of their national territory: but the most important thing is that while they are on this road they continue to have the freedom to exist precisely in their actions (Genet, 2004: 251-2).

As he begins to write his memoir in 1983 and in a race against his own imminent death Genet remembers a material transformation of the people written on their faces and legible in their actions, comportment, hospitality and laughter. The expression of serenity as palpable evidence of freedom to exist in our actions repeats Bataille's insistence upon the unity of high and low or freedom and materialism that he persistently figured by highlighting such dialectical images as the radiant rose, whose roots lie in base matter "seething" under the earth's crust. Revolutionary serenity derived not from the justice of the cause but from its "*justesse*" or rightness is another such figure of a dialectic that foregrounds Marx's industrious mole while refusing to sacrifice Hegel's luminous spirit. What is a suspended dialectic in Bataille and what we might call 'dialectics at a standstill' to quote Benjamin is for Genet a dilation, gaining time, creating the conditions of life.<sup>4</sup> Very different from a notion of state sovereignty as the authors of *Empire* rightly note, yet inescapably linked to it, Genet's serene image of the moss, lichen and rosacina, drawn from childhood but recognised as Palestinian, affirms his adherence or as he chose to name his tribute to a people, his captivity in love.

4. In her reading of a founding text of the enlightenment, *The Critique of Judgment*, Gayatri Spivak notes that Kant quickly dispenses with the aboriginals of Tierra del Fuego and New Holland (Australia) as representing the limit of man's free will. This "raw man" or wild man is a mere detail for Kant, one that in Spivak's critical strategy emerges as more than minor for it inaugurates a tradition of aesthetic thinking through a foreclosure of the Aboriginal, one that leaves a trace of Aboriginality to be followed through literary and philosophical texts haunted by the spectre of the minor and the

marginal. She argues that in drawing a distinction between culture and nature, reason and sentiment, the enlightenment enacted a foreclosure not only on a figure but also cut off an affective connection and affinity between western and Aboriginal men. This loss of feeling is disguised as identitarian difference – the difference between Kant and an inhabitant of Tierra del Fuego – with the result that identity becomes in the present moment the basis for human rights talk. Against the reduction of ethics (which in her accounting surely depends upon something not yet inter-relational, not yet a matter of subject and object, but of being affected by the other “before” identity and difference establish dominion) to identity Spivak proposes the ‘ethical move of deconstruction, where the body’s metapsychological script ... is a figure of the alterity that defines the human as being called by the other – to responsibility – rather than as a repository of an ‘unique and essential quality’ that can only clamor for rights’ (Spivak 389). Retrieval of lost affinity is one result of reading Bataille, Darwish and Genet together, and certainly affective affinity or ‘love’ is a major element of Genet’s politics.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> In *A Dying Colonialism* Frantz Fanon elaborates the idea that before social transformation can come about, the monstrosity of social relations must first be felt and perceived. ‘For Fanon, political transfiguration of the social field happens through the intercession of affective factors that challenge and shift the boundaries of intelligibility.’ (Al-Kassim, 128).

<sup>2</sup> These are the original publication dates in Arabic.

<sup>3</sup> Jacques Derrida situates sovereignty and its bestiary as a question of right and law in *The Beast and the Sovereign, Vol. 1* (Derrida 2009).

<sup>4</sup> Limitation on time and space prevent full development of this argument here; what is at stake in the triangulation of suspense, halt and dilation where these temporalities stand in for Bataille, Benjamin and Genet is an argument over the legibility of power and injustice and what can be articulated through that legibility. A suspended dialectic promises to thwart the triumph of sovereign power; dialectics at a standstill apprehends the sudden visibility of a historical connection or conjunction such that the cost of the present shines forth in high relief as the “waste products” of the past or experiments that were destined to fail become newly visible and potentially accessible. Genet offers a different reflection on

the intrusion of the past in the present and by writing he sets to work reminiscence to yield new life. The paradigmatic reference for the phrase “dialectics at a standstill” can be found throughout Benjamin’s *The Arcades Project*: “Ambiguity is the appearance of dialectic in images, the law of dialectics at a standstill. This standstill is utopia and the dialectical image, therefore, dream image. Such an image is afforded by the commodity per se: as fetish” (Benjamin, 2002: 10).

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