

To Be Announced

Radical Praxis or Knowing (at) the Limits of Justice

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Let me begin with Hegel and Fanon:

Negroes are enslaved by Europeans and sold to America. Bad as this may be, their lot in their own lands is even worse, since there a slavery quite as absolute exists; for it is the essential principle of slavery, that man has not yet attained a consciousness of his freedom, and consequently sinks down to a mere Thing—an object of no value. . . .

—G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*

It needed more than one native to say “We’ve had enough”; more than one peasant rising crushed, more than one demonstration put down before we could today hold our own certain in our victory. As for we who have decided to break the back of colonialism, our historic mission is to sanction all revolts, all desperate actions, all those abortive attempts drowned in rivers of blood.

—Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*

Everyone knows what has happened: A young black man was killed by a police officer.¹ Fires broke out in north, east, and south London as well as other cities of England, from Leicester to Birmingham. Fires have broken out in Watts in 1965 and in Los Angeles in 1992, to recall two other occasions. Every time fires followed justice, its realization as/in its failure.² Always a response to a resolution, these urban revolts are about justice. Yet they can’t be comprehended in ethical-political programs informed by historical materialist, sociological, and postmodern descriptions of social subjugation.

For each of these descriptions presupposes the operation of *causality*, and by doing so each comprehends the event in explanations that

always already resolve its transformative potential back into objectivity, into facts. Knowing at the limits of justice, refusing to resolve the London revolts—and the others that have preceded and will follow it—into objectivity (either as the raw material or result of analysis) requires that one abandon warm and familiar intellectual comforts, such as methods (calculation/measurement, classification, and interpretation) that have characterized modern knowledge since the earliest statements on the how (Bacon’s instrumentalism) and why (Descartes’s formalism) of knowledge with certainty. Knowing at the limits of justice must start before, but facing the beyond of, representation. From there, *The Thing* enables the subject, the “I,” mediating formulations of the object, the other, and the commodity.³

Knowing the limits of justice then requires critique and something else. It demands an engagement with what is taken for granted in the explanations, or rather in the confusion that ensues when explanations of urban revolts rely on our dear social categories: Was it black London? Racism explains the revolts. No, no, it was class: Class struggle without class consciousness! It was both! Neither! Thinking the limits of justice does, however, require a plan of sorts, a certain procedure, but one not committed to resolving the conditions it exposes into a more effective measure, grid, or account that can inform preemptive actions or preventive mechanisms. Knowing at the limits of justice is at once a kind of knowing and doing; it is a praxis, one that unsettles what has become but offers no guidance for what has yet to become. Knowing the limits of justice, nonetheless, is an ethical-political praxis; it acknowledges all the effects and implications as well as the presuppositions informing our accounts of existing with/in one another. Knowing at the limits of justice, as an ethico-political praxis, requires ontoepistemological accounts that begin and end with relationality (affectability)⁴—that do no more than to anticipate what is to be announced, perhaps, a horizon of radical exteriority, where knowing demands affection, intention, and attention.

Having started with Hegel and Fanon, I will proceed with a discussion of justice, a discussion that begins not with a plea to its realization but with a consideration of its im/possibility. Regarding the revolts, I do not return to what has happened, the “facts” or their (scientific or otherwise) representation, for I am not interested in the meaning(s)—on the whys and because—of the event. Instead, I consider the dissolution of that which is at the basis of any and every explanation of any event. I close with some notes on radical praxis. Not a program or a project: forcing out that which sustains prevailing plans for knowing and doing, I contemplate another horizon, one that has been consistently articulated and disavowed in modern thought, considerations of relationality (affectability).

“Justice in Itself, If Such a Thing Exists, Outside or Beyond Law, Is Not Deconstructible”

Because this paper has been animated by the 2011 urban revolts in Britain, my consideration of justice is already delimited by that particular mode of intervention (the revolts), by how I chose to respond, to react to these events. To be sure, the exercise here is not that much different than Derrida’s addressing justice as *droit*.⁵ What distinguishes the kind of intervention I hope for, the point from which I address justice, is the fact that I consider justice as a referent of force (as in Derrida’s reading of the law) but also of social scientific and historic signification. Either in regard to legality or rights, as in Weber and Foucault, respectively, teach us, justice unites law and morality as a referent to the transcendental meaning, presumed in all versions of the modern subject. Let me take a short, very short cut with Hegel’s formulation of the civil society to resituate, in the discussion of the social, my thesis that raciality, precisely because it signifies an im/possible relationship, collapses justice (in the name of law and rights) into violence.⁶

In “Ethical Life,” the third section of his *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel describes the social as an economic and juridic domain, which he comprehends in the moment of the civil society, where “particularity” and “universality” coexist independently: “this unity is present here not as freedom but as necessity.”⁷ Fully in the moment of immanence, or in negation, civil society is where, according to the familiar theme of his dialectic, individuality (which is pure universality in abstract rights) finds itself in the realm of particularity, just before returning to (a now) true universality in ethical life (i.e., the State). Following the disintegration of the family “into a plurality of families” is the “stage of difference”: in the social, where individuals play in juridic and economic scenes where, he postulates, “the universal merely shows in the particular as its form.” This is “the world of ethical appearance—civil society.”⁸

When writing the social (Civil Society) as the “stage of difference,” a domain ruled by Necessity not Freedom—and locating there both the administration of justice (the courts) and the police—Hegel allows a question that addresses justice (the courts) without the demand that it refer back immediately to a transcendental law. (This possibility is not in Kant’s *The Science of Right*, at least, where the discussion of law, which begins with right of property, is placed in the domain of formal [pure] inquiry.)⁹ For Civil Society, in Hegel’s formulation, constitutes solely of “an association of members as self-subsistent individuals in a universality which, because of their self-subsistence, is only abstract. Their association is brought about by their needs [economic], by the legal system—the means to security of person and property—and by an external organization for attaining their

particular and common interests.”¹⁰ Fully circumscribed in the domain mediated by Necessity (not Freedom), between the (natural/moral ties of the) family and the (“transcendental” formal/ethical bound of the) state, in Hegel’s account, justice, though thoroughly universal, remains in the contingent sphere of relationships between persons, the stage of difference, namely, in exteriority. When Hegel writes law and morality, administration of justice and law enforcement in the realm of Necessity, in the juridic, economic, and symbolic domains that constitute the social, he allows the question of the limits of Justice. Limits, not in the sense that justice cannot go beyond them but because it is/becomes in them: justice, when addressed in the registers of the economic and the juridic (in civil society), is immanent (it remains within), and as such it is inherently limited and limiting of the *relationships between persons* it comprehends.

Perhaps it has been so difficult to address justice with the question of its limits—of the economic and juridic bonds it presupposes—because neither theorists of the social, nor theorists of law, or theorists of morality seem interested in situating the economic, legal, or moral subject. For these figurings of the modern subject, at the level of the symbolic, retain, as Foucault notes, a transcendental quality, even when worked through biopolitical and disciplinary apparatus. In each symbolic (scientific or historical) rendering, the social (economic, juridic, ethical) subject retains the ontological attributes (interiority/historicity) that ensure its writing as a thing of reason (of formal understanding or self-unfolding spirit) with self-determination—that is, in the modern symbolic regime, the social subject resides in the stage of freedom.¹¹

To Be Announced

How to unsettle this neat symbolic assemblage of the theater of difference, with assigned stages for Freedom and Necessity? I think that it requires a return to The Thing—Hegel’s “object of no value,” to be more precise. I can’t even begin to describe the treasures The Thing hides. For Hegel, when considered in the register of the object of knowledge, The Thing has three moments: “It is (a) an indifferent, passive universality, the *Also* of the many properties or rather ‘matters’; (b) negation, equally simply; of the One, which excludes opposite properties, and (c) the many properties themselves, the relation of the two moments, or negation as it relates to the indifferent element, and therein expands into a host of differences.”¹² Being the Many without/before/after resolution into a One or a Whole, The Thing hosts all possibilities, including those that are not contemplated (announced or postponed) when it is named and becomes, for instance, an object. As such, The Thing hosts the possibility of violence,

of that which threatens to undo any resolution; because it is a mediator, it necessarily unsettles the limits of justice itself.

How so? Remember, social scientific knowledge populated Hegel's stage of difference with objects of *necessitas*, with political/symbolic tools that inscribe bodies and territories with formal abstractions that have resisted even the Hegelian resolution of difference as a temporary moment of the trajectory of spirit. Now *necessitas* remains in the categories deployed in the knowledge of the human without dissolving self-determination as the privileged ontoepistemological attribute of certain human beings—those whose white bodies locate their origins in the parts of the European space where Hegel found inscriptions of realized spirit. Nevertheless, by their very nature—as an effect of comparison, measurement, and classification—social categories do necessarily pair *self-determined and affectable* (outer-determined) subjects. When doing so, however, social categories do not preempt The Thing's promises. For categories hold violence in the subjects of affectability produced by the biopolitical and disciplinary apparatuses that deploy them: the black other, the female other, the sexual other, in which other possibilities also hide.¹³

Let me try and expose this effect of the categories with a conversation about slavery, blackness, and violence between Saidiya Hartman, Lindon Barrett, and Fred Moten. My goal in this invented exchange is to follow racial violence to find the gifts of The Thing, the “object of no value” Hegel reads in blackness (of the African native and the slave). Lest this conversation be resolved in the possibilities circumscribed by blackness, recall that considerations of violence, as Derrida (and others before and after him) has forcefully pointed out, guide any description of the juridico-political moment.

The Racial Body = Value + Excess

The task of a critique of violence can be summarized as that of expounding its relation to law and justice. For a cause, however effective, becomes violence, in the precise sense of the word, only when it bears on moral issues. The sphere of these issues is defined by the concepts of law and justice.

—Walter Benjamin, *Critique of Violence*

It is certain that erotic life cannot be settled [reglee]. It was given rules but these rules could only assign it a domain outside the rules. And once eroticism was dismissed from marriage, the latter tended to assume a chiefly material aspect, the importance of which Lévi-Strauss was right to underscore: the rules ensuring the sharing out of women as coveted object did in fact ensure the sharing out of women as labor power.

—Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share*

In his “Critique of Violence,” Walter Benjamin disrupts the body’s dialectical slumber when, in the move to denaturalize violence, he contains law in two moments, namely, “law preserving” and “law-making violence.”¹⁴ He offers no resolution. Law preserving and law making are modalities of violence that do no more, and yet go further, than describing figurations of law-morality in classical philosophical writings of the juridicopolitical modality of power. For if “law-preserving” violence in Benjamin’s rendering refers to law enforcement, to the state’s obligation to protect life, limb, and property, and if “law-making” violence refers to the very founding the juridico-political moment of power, at the end of the essay both are disarmed by divine violence, which for Benjamin is the sovereign signifier of an Other—a just perhaps—mode of collective existence, which is both at the origins and beyond the comprehension of existing writings of law and morality. It could be said then that divine violence—because sovereign—exceeds law and morality in the same way that erotic expenditure in Bataille’s reading overflows the positive operations of law in economic production and patriarchy.¹⁵ The difference (one of many instances of departure) being that exteriority, in the figuring of the body and territory, as far as modern knowing is concerned, is presupposed in both registers of excess: in violence and in the erotic. However, in Benjamin’s essay, the male body (arrested or violated) is the presupposed referent—while the female body remains ignored. In Bataille’s text, the wastefulness of the erotic (which is the critique of utilitarian thought it holds) would have no significance without the articulated irrelevance of the object of the erotic embrace, namely, the sexual female body. In these two renderings of sovereignty against modern political (juridical, economic, and ethical) forms, the male body consistently signifies that which does not play in the scene of regulation or the scene of representation and does not enter the ontoepistemological stages, interiority and exteriority, on which these are rehearsed. Precisely because both critics comprehend “sovereignty” in the male body—subject or object of Benjamin’s regulated or divine violence, and always the sole subject of Bataille’s regulated and unregulated sexual desire—they open up the possibility of exploring the female body as referent of unregulated and unrepresentable desire.

More particularly, I ask, what might one find if the sexual female body is deployed to guide a reading of the tripod, namely, Colonialism, Capitalism, and Patriarchy, upon which global ethico-juridical structures, such as the human rights framework, do their work? Note that I am not approaching the sexual as a social category, which is a consistent referent in writings of the black and the female bodies, because this is just one partial engagement with a rather complex matrix, the apparatus of power in which the sexual body is consistently articulated to be disavowed as a possible site for consideration in the analysis of political existence. Nevertheless,

the disavowed sexual female body will be summoned throughout because, in modern knowing, it is still the most prolific signifier of excess; that is, it is that determinant of value—or, if you will, in a historical materialist rendering, the sine qua non for a rather profitable ultimate determinant of value, namely, the black and other enslaved laborers—for colonial and national (postcolonial) economies, to which no place is assigned in the ethico-political self-accounts inscribed in these juridico-economic architectures. What I do is to track the unrepresentable sexual female body, as a figuring of excess, which in national and global moments exposes, without resolution or apologies, the violence of racial/colonial subjugation.

Nowhere is the violence in the equation the “other,” racial body = value + excess, more productively exposed in the disavowed sexual female body than in the indirect three-way conversation about slavery, blackness, and violence between Saidiya Hartman, Lindon Barrett, and Fred Moten.¹⁶ Whether it is a coincidence or not that such engagement involved three critical writers of blackness is beside the point because blackness lies, along with the other racial signifiers that write the “other of Europe” in affectability, at the center of the modern matrix. What I find in this conversation I have assembled is how all three interventions write blackness back into the political (very much in accordance with the US national text) with/out the sexual female body, when addressing racial violence. Doing so, however, they necessarily challenge us to return our attention to the colonial, against the grain of contemporary critical considerations of global market capitalism which, as I develop elsewhere, seem to be very comfortable enlaced by the disavowal of exteriority—the production in another place (the colonial land)—and, or, by the laboring bodies (the Slave’s and the Woman’s) that enabled its assemblage.¹⁷ The sexual body of the female native/slave, a usually disavowed referent of the texts that support many of the now-available racial and gender-sexual theoretical critiques, remains inaccessible precisely because she, as a subject of desire, cannot be recuperated in ethico-political accounts that presupposed Locke’s and Hobbes’s writings of the polity. Though she might be spotted in writings of the postcolony, she enters these texts always already a woman, always already resolved in the patriarchal economy where she can only be as the object of an unruly or ruling desire, that is, as subject of protection and reason for punishment.

My thesis: the black body exhibits the equation racial other = value + excess, but only in the absence, in representation, of that other figuring of the sexual hosted by the female body. For her body only enters accounts of racial violence as always already in the juridical, economic, and ethical register of coloniality-patriarchy-slavery, that is, in accounts of domination, in bondage, marriage, and rape. My intuition here is that the sexuality of the female body refers to a power other than the sovereign’s—as it is

described in Fanon's account of the colonial as the scene of violence and Bataille's account of erotic expenditure—one that is beyond and before the re/productive capabilities of the fe/male native/slave body. It is always already defined in a given—economic and symbolic—productive regime: as object, other, or commodity.

Let me restate the thesis with a description of racial violence: black body = value + excess. In *Scenes of Subjection*, Saidiya Hartman refuses to recount the violent scenes—in particular the beating of Frederick Douglass's Aunt Hester—that mark the lives of slaves in the colonial and postcolonial United States, and elsewhere in the Americas, for that matter. Refusal is Hartman's response to the implications of the "=": "I have chosen not to reproduce Douglass's account of the beating of Aunt Hester," Hartman states, "in order to call attention to the ease with which such scenes are usually reiterated, the casualness with which they are circulated and the consequences of this routine display of the slave's ravaged body."¹⁸ This refusal to rehearse what she calls the "spectacle of black suffering" is a political-intellectual gesture that, rather than disavowal, urges a consideration of how accounts of suffering do the work of racial subjugation. Here, however, I am interested in other aspects around and about this decision not to retell. I am interested in racial violence as a figuring of excess—which is what justifies otherwise unacceptable occurrences, such as police shooting unarmed persons.

In support of this intuition, I turn to two other black radical intellectuals, who have not shied away from considering blackness as a figuring of value and excess. What I find in Fred Moten's and Lindon Barrett's writings is precisely an in/articulation of the radical potential the juridicoeconomic figure of the (native/enslaved) female affords—namely, her sexual body, which insists on signifying Other-wise—The Thing, the mediator, that third element (virtual particle/free radical) that troubles representation. As already noted, this radical potential resides precisely in how this excess points to female desire, that which threatens the accomplishment of colonial and national juridicoeconomic goals and has no place in the ontoepistemological grammar that governs post-Enlightenment accounts of existence.

Framing racial violence in the equation Laboring Black Body = value + excess, I want to acknowledge the relationship—as in the "I" and the "other(s)"—that is at the center of accounts of juridico-political power, both in regard to the colony and to the polity designed by European philosophers from the eighteenth century onward. Now, while in these earlier accounts, in Locke and Hobbes for instance, the writing of the human as the individual considers this political entity as a thing with reason, later, after Hegel's rewriting of reason back in the scene of representation, in the symbolic register, the human as subject will be comprehended as also a

product of reason. To be sure, this is an effect of Kant's version of reason as the transcendental mediator of experience, in knowledge and morality. However, the writing of racial difference to capture universal reason's workings on the human (body and mind) is enabled by another move, in which that which distinguishes a particular mode of being human, the one found in post-Enlightenment Europe—that is, self-determination—becomes the realization of sovereign reason's design. Precisely this move imposes Hartman's, Barrett's, Moten's, and Fanon's writings of racial violence in the equation $\text{black body} = \text{value} + \text{excess}$.

Reading Billie Holiday's *Lady Sings the Blues*, Lindon Barrett finds that relationship, between the racial "I" and the racial "other," signified in the white steps of one of the houses Holiday cleaned. With Marx and Baudrillard, guided by Holiday's excessive pricing of her nonvalued labor (here *The Thing* works by checking exchange value), Barrett decomposes the differential dimension that the notion of value both presupposes and communicates. Much like Fanon, he disregards the dialectic, perhaps searching for the cracks that undermine an otherwise seemingly stable power configuration, and he splits value, into "form" and "force" to sustain his notion of "seeing double." In doing so, while acknowledging the hierarchy governing the relationship, he refuses to disappear blackness in reading no-value solely as negation. Negotiation—Holiday's exacting of her excess—is possible, according to Barrett, because the boundary, signified in the white steps she alone can clean adequately, keeps the "inside" (the white housewife) and the "outside" (the black cleaning lady) in full view of each other, exposed.¹⁹ Nevertheless, this same move dissolves excess in the very system. For the violence suggested in his writing of value "as force" is suspended in the proximity it also refigures: "No matter how overwhelmingly value seems to impose itself as a normative design," Barrett concludes, "a noncontingent form, a singular objective validity, it nonetheless reserves for itself an Other—a negative resource—and from the perspective of the reserved Other, the force and promiscuity of value are, with equal invariability, dis-covered. Invariably and paradoxically, value reserves for itself an Other perspective from which 'value as form' bursts forth as 'value as violence.'" ²⁰

Turning it around, as the white steps, as a referent of labor, comprehend blackness/whiteness, then $\text{excess} = \text{value} + \text{violence}$. The workings of value, "as form" and "as force" in racial subjugation, both in the colonial and the national moments of US history, are re-presented in precisely the scenes of subjection Hartman refuses to retell. For Barrett, however, these figurations of violence do more than spectacularize black suffering because the boundaries they seek to protect, by ex-posing, also refer to the proximity value (im)poses. I will not follow further Barrett's exposition of the duality of value here because I am more interested in how his

working through this distinction between “value as form” and “value as force” dissolves the excess in the form of value he names, namely, force or violence, which is both more or less than value, into a difference that is of value in itself.

My interest is in how, when value becomes both “force” and “form,” the very force that destabilizes the form becomes Excess—much like sexual desire, which is not represented by the female slave body or the female maid body. This preposed excess—that is, the violence that is desire itself and the desire that is violence, not subjected to the rules of Colonial and Patriarchal (re)production—seems to have no place in Fanon’s and later writings on colonial and racial subjugation. For even in works that refuse the liberal version of racial domination (the logic of exclusion) and describe the scene of violence, the black body is given to representation, already the body of violence, the body of the slave, the body of the maid, the body of the lynched black child, female, and male. Always already the black and violated/violent person by the also already valued/protected white other—that is, a body that can only signify the juridico-economic architectures of Slavery, Patriarchy, and Capitalism. My point is this: The excess that is the never-exposed violence, the violence resolved in law, the state, contained in Hegel’s civil society, enters into the very constitution of the political categories themselves, in blackness and whiteness, the maid and the housewife, as in the native and the settler, the master and the slave. In regard to the laboring black body, for instance, racial violence permits the excess that is expropriation (beyond exploitation of surplus value), or excess = value (form and violence) + violence.

What if, then, moving otherwise, dismissing value, entertaining excess—that which in a thing has no value—one stays with violence? If then excess = value (form and violence) + violence—value here in all its figuration, namely, judgment (ethical), measurement (scientific), calculation (economic), and appreciation (aesthetic)—what account of racial subjugation and of black response would emerge from it? Recall that my contemplations already presuppose Fanon’s description of the colonial space as a product of a particular kind of juridicoeconomic violence. There the distinction between the native’s and the settler’s position refers to a valuation, which is always already excess, which Fanon captures when he recalls that this distinction is named through the articulation of extreme moral signifiers, namely, good and evil, which allows for just one way to reconfigure the colonial space, that is, a kind of violence akin to Benjamin’s divine violence—which might be taken as the proper figuring of sovereignty? That being the case then, I submit that Hartman and Barrett have counterintuitively tapped into a potential venue for a post-Fanonian plan, a radical praxis, when each, respectively, refuses to write violence in the racial table where black means suffering and white means freedom or

(black) means nonvalue and white means value. Moving further up the road they open, one could take a short cut with Fanon and foreground the exposition of the violence that constitutes the colonial space to set up the explosion of the subject of colonial violence that would enable the obliteration of the Settler and his town and the Native (which then become a “new man”) and “his” quarters. That would not take us far because here still, as in Benjamin’s critique of violence and Bataille’s writing of the erotic, the subject of be-coming in revolutionary/emancipatory excess refigures what is represented by the male body and the account of desire it signifies: the nation to come, the Native as a Man, a self-determined collective, alone is liberated.

Moving beyond this point, away from self-determination and its limits, in pursuit of a figuring of the sexual (as power) hidden in the writing of the female as Other—which for the time being I will apprehend in the phrase “the sexual in the female body”—another path would begin with an evocation of the body as excess. Here the body is a figuring of an unrepresentable/unregulated desire which, unlike Benjamin’s moment of divine violence and Bataille’s erotic scene, does not refigure the sovereign (the prime figuring of self-determination) but remains without the legal-moral order and without economic and symbolic production, as a figuring of The Thing. I can anticipate the questioning of reading the body in the space of self-determination, the domain the mind has monopolized in modern representation. This is not my goal. I am interested in a frame of intervention that appreciates the body as a referent of The Thing, without (outside) modern signification, that is, one that exposes precisely that referent Hegel’s version of sovereign reason has protected in interiority, namely, desire. To be sure, by evoking the body in the register of excess (value [form and force] + violence), I do no more than to track its disavowal, to indicate how, when desire threatens to become a descriptor of the Other as Subject, the racial subaltern subject (the affectable I), it is immediately returned to the proper place, to the white side of value, from where authorized violence is done in the name of a regulated desire.

Not surprisingly, the black subject of violence—as expressed in official accounts of the latest revolts in Britain—bothers radical black thinking because the tools of racial knowledge, the analytics of raciality, already resolve the unauthorized black male violence as pathology, an expression of Kant’s affect, the actualization of the non-self-regulated desire of the black Other. Black radical thinking, I gather, will only be able to dissolve this very consistent effect of raciality if, inhabiting the limits of justice, it begins and stays with excess—and embraces violence as a referent of other desires, other figurations of existence, or any other and all possible modes of being human in the world.

In his book *In the Break*, Fred Moten does not evoke Fanon as the

point of departure of his thinking, but he does stay with violence and contemplates the emancipatory gifts hidden in the inaccessible excess, in that which it forces into re-presentation without signifying, without value, a sound that is an uncomprehensible expression of affectability. Refusing to repeat Hartman's gesture, Moten reproduces Frederick Douglass's account of the beating of Aunt Hester. He does not follow with a commentary on her violated black body—which would return violence to the white perpetrator and suffering to the black female slave, which sit all too comfortable in the post-Enlightenment political (juridic, economic, ethic) scene. Instead he takes up her utterance, her scream, an expression that is not a response. "Let," Moten invites us, "the call of call and response, passionate utterance and response—articulated in the scene of Douglass identifies as 'the bloodstained gate' through which he entered into subjection and subjectivity. . . . Let the articulation of appositional encounter be our encountering: a nondetermining invitation to the new and continually unprecedented performative, historical, philosophical, democratic, communist arrangements that are the only authentic ones."²¹ This evocation of aurality, hovering before the letter and the phoneme, constitutes an acknowledgment of excess that avoids the two writings of racial violence, namely, the one that stays with the account that it is solely black, as in Hartman's view of depictions of black suffering, and the one that writes it as always already involving black and white, the latter being the perpetrator, as in Barrett's discussion of value.

Alternatively, Moten reproduces neither because, instead of attending to the violated black body in the regimen of signification of white violence, the racial table, he listens for past and contemporary reverberations of Aunt Hester's screams. In Douglass's mother-like figure, he traces the moment of emergence of the subject of blackness in resistance, in a response to torture that does not reduce itself to word—perhaps because doing so would legitimize the power relationship, because doing so as a plea, a begging, would reinstitute the master's place of power—which is that which Hartman suggests rehearsals of black suffering always do and Barrett indicates that in this doing so resides, if not black emancipation, at least the possibility of negotiation. Now, if the black subject emerges in a response which is a refusal of representation—without the letter and its signification, before writing but also not in speech—the possibility opens that violence can be contemplated without being immediately resolved in already given blackness and whiteness.

The exposure of racial violence might then open up to considerations of the Other-wise of Excess, of violence twice a referent of all the possibilities offered in the no-value—the unresolved "Also," "One," "Many" (which Hegel calls merely differences)—of The Thing.²² Becoming black in the exposure of excess, in the refusal to signify in letter and phoneme is,

for Moten, the “resistance of the object.” For the body of excess does not need the (racial, gender/sexual, etc.) Other to signify; the body of violence is the body, a referent of that which exceeds modern signification, of that which is constitutive of a particular kind of colonial space—as Fanon describes to us—of that which may be a better name for, because it is out of another account of, whatever matters in/as justice. More importantly, the scream, the expression/exposure without signification, that is, outside signification under the rule of pure reason and its tools (Kant’s pure intuitions and categories of the understanding) makes one wonder. For there is always a possibility that when in response to a touch, even one with maximum force, there is no way to state that the scream refigures pleasure or pain. In that undecidable lies the in/distinction of violence/desire, the one which the body always signifies, and for that reason modern philosophers had to work hard to keep it at bay, to deny the body any determining ontological or epistemological role. Tamed, apprehended as a signifier of exteriority, the body in modern Western thought has consistently referred to other ways of existing as human beings, of that which exceeds and hence threatens the accounts of law and morality authorized by sovereign reason. Here I am attending to Moten’s invitation to rescue the body from spatiality-exteriority, the signifying moment where modern philosophy has imprisoned it, but I do so by attending to the very figure, the colonial (native/slave) female, through which he locates the emergence of resisting black su(o)bject. A referent of The Thing, without value (not in knowledge, morality, or exchange), she resists/exists as/in excess.

“Female Lover”

“She is not a figure at all”—I imagine Irigaray’s reply to such move.²³ She is only, perhaps, the catalyst of the ethical relation—between man and God, father and son. She does not figure in the relationship that signifies power. Not, for instance, in Benjamin’s account of violence. In Bataille’s writings of the erotic, she does, in mediating between humanity and animality (Irigaray might say) following over onto the other side of the Human, while the male lover returns to his ethical position without relinquishing excess, which here resides in the lessening of the Human she signifies. Moving toward the sexual female body, without the mother and the daughter that is the end of her, is then a dangerous necessary task precisely because of how she refigures excess, as the abyss. “Tuned differently to the rhythm of the earth and the stars. Intimately tied to universal circulation and vibration that go beyond any enclosure within reproduction. Turning in cycle that never resolves back to sameness,” the “female lover,” Irigaray says, houses in her flesh the im/possibility of an Other-wise.²⁴ I highlight the im/possibility of an Other-wise because

I find Irigaray's "female lover" still very much implicated in the patriarchal economy of desire, of which the sociohistorical category of gender is just one, though a crucial, product. However, Irigaray's "female lover" is a productive critical tool because she is also in her flesh, in which her uncomprehensible desire, that sexual which is the female's unresolvable (undeterminable, unpredictable, unmeasurable) power. What can she allow us to say that has not been said before? I am not sure. By the way, I do not take her as a signifier. In Aunt Hester's scream and in the widow's burning body, I find the void, the Abyss (which Irigaray might call the cosmic)—populated by all the possibilities hosted by the "Also," the "One," and the "Many" referents of *The Thing*. There from where our juridical, economic, and ethical texts retreat because *there* is no site for the reproduction of modern politics, commodities, or communities.

For this reason, one might want to pause before appropriating the sexual female body to refer to the closure of a relationship she has never been fully apprehended to produce. My point here is that the sexual female body, the descriptor for a cosmic (because unmeasurable) excess (to juridical, economic, and symbolic production), is an opening to a radical critique of the global present that avoids the pitfalls of cultural difference. For one thing, as the unresolvable trace of an Other desire, it unsettles easy appropriations of the figure of the Woman, which contain her within the patriarchal bounds of motherhood. Further, as in the case of the three-times productive—(a) as the dead (slave) labor of primitive accumulation; (b) as the domestic worker, the service worker, the factory worker, the day laborer; and (c) as the reproducer of laborers—black female body retains the possibility of an Other desire. A desire that can never fuel the machineries of global capitalism and the existing critiques of it because the political text both draw from does not contemplate her. Without Patriarchy and without History (the narratives of the transparent subject [a thing of interiority and freedom]), the desire promised by the sexual female body remains an untraced guide for a radical praxis, which is also a racial critique and a feminist intervention, able to counter the effects of subjugation produced by appropriations of the global female subaltern in the name of freedom—as we saw in the "war on terror" and now in European media coverage of the revolts in North Africa and the Middle East—to curb the dangerous breaking away of another ontology announced by the revolts occurring in today's postcolonial politics.

Yes, I am laboring in the scene of representation. More specifically, I want to appropriate the sexual female body to describe a cutting through, and a way away from, the confines of universal reason which, in spite or perhaps because of Hegel's writing of universal reason as the subject of desire, signals an other-wise, an other ontoepistemology which might be also another account of existence and the possibilities it does foreclose.

More precisely, I hope that an attention to the sexual in the female body, without Irigaray's female lover, the sexual without Bataille's erotic expenditure, might invite another reading of the Kantian program, a reading that does not find solace in his investment in transcendental (pure) reason—the seat of self-determination. No, these are not the madman's holdings; I am still playing in the poet's grounds. If, as I have claimed early in this article, Benjamin's, Fanon's, and Bataille's writings of violence recall sovereignty, an attribute the male body never fails to signify, the un-representable sexual female body as figuring of desire offers other possibilities; another text, perhaps, to be more precise, a grammar that exceeds existing articulations of the human as a thing of self-determination, which is *the* stuff of violence.

What might it be? I can't even pretend to be able to map out the various possibilities this question promises. So I will remain with or within representation. Very briefly, I will accept the celebrated ruling of the Kantian writing of universal reason to say that the sexual in the female body signals the uncharted territory articulated and negated in Kant's version of knowledge and morality. More precisely, it signals, in Moten's scream and, why not, in the proximity Barrett identifies, and in the other possible accounts of blackness Hartman wishes to protect from suffering, that which is a necessary moment for knowledge and morality, but which can never become determinant, because it precedes the intervention of pure reason—namely, apprehension (when knowledge demands attention and intention) and affection (when the will is mediated but by the object/other). Excess figures in Kant's notions of apprehension (in cognition) and affect (in desire). Each corresponds to a moment in which a human being responds or reacts to that which is outside, to exteriority:²⁵ the moment of confused, unclear ideas and unchecked (by pure reason) inclination and passions the moment before reflection, before thought, without the moral law and the understanding.

If Foucault's reading is valid, if the modern episteme, and the categories of knowledge it has allowed, owes its possibility to the Kantian formal transcendental and the Hegelian “animated” version of it, then the sexual female body (not in her mind as already resolved by the understanding) signals another ontoepistemology. Not because she can never signify self-determination, as many writings of female difference have defended, but because the unrepresentability of her sexual desire exposes that which modern thought has carefully disavowed, which is that which is also promised but not articulated in Benjamin's, Fanon's, and Bataille's writings of liberation because they too reproduce the Kantian ontoepistemological grammar. What I am suggesting here is something that is not new because it has already been signaled in Sylvia Wynter's reading of the modern episteme,²⁶ in Gayatri Spivak's analysis of modern representation,²⁷ and in Irigaray's writings of the woman: that is, the possibility that

the other-wise is something more than that which can be signified by a mode of being human, which has been written as other in the Kantian or Hegelian framing of productive reason—as form or life. Fifty years later Fanon’s new humanity might just signal another ontoepistemology, one which is located in the abyss, the always already given beginning of existence. Immersed, confused, diffused, in the resolved (temporal-spatial) and virtual possibilities of becoming human offered in existence, in the world, that is, without the constraints of the understanding. Fifty years later, there is no reason to imagine Fanon’s “new man” existing any other way than Other-ways.

“The Final Failure of Causality”

Whatever a radical praxis, following in the footsteps of black radical thought, may open, getting it/there will take contemplating The Thing, away from the universal toward the cosmic (the abyss). Of course, one could stay with Fanon and hope that a “new man,” a new human, would arrive through it. As I said, however, I am not interested in the end point, in grounds, basis, or measures. Without modern (economic, juridic, ethic) signification, if the sexual female body \approx force (excess—value) + violence figures a frame of intervention, radical praxis,²⁸ that works as both a free radical and a virtual particle. Both referents of force operate in the ontoepistemological space which modern thought has assigned to exteriority-free radicals (released as an effect of external force) and virtual particles (force carriers, which transfer momenta between adjacent particles). Radical praxis, as a frame of intervention (a descriptive device), allows a reading of the latest riots in Britain as urban revolts that neither fear nor desire reciprocity, that signify precisely what they mean, that is, the very oblivion to that yet-another killing, which is already resolved in racial violence, when the state immediately (its law enforcement agents) judges/executes an unarmed black person without moral/legal justification. Free radicals/virtual particles, as referents of the excess that always already justifies (renders just) racial violence, expose a horizon of possibilities, which The Thing, between the I and its objects, others, and commodities, holds and hosts. How to recuperate excess? This is done by focusing on the relationship exposed when The Thing is addressed as a mediator and not a measure. The Thing houses the radical possibilities residing in Hegel’s “no-thing.” It has no value. Without space/time, and the categories of social scientific knowledge it sustains, The Thing immediately/instantaneously registers (mediates without transforming, reducing, or sublating) the *relationships* (violent and otherwise) that constitute our conditions of existence.

For many years now particle physics has been challenging us to

take relationality and affectability seriously. Beyond and more radically than Einstein's relativity, the major statement in quantum physics, the uncertainty principle, has been demanding another positioning not only from physicists but also from philosophers.²⁹ Both Schrodinger's wave-function collapse theory (the statement that all possibilities are open until measurement is taken and one [or many other possibilities] collapses into another) and Heisenberg's statement that, at the subatomic level, things fail to behave as objects of classical knowledge and insist on behaving in erratic ways have brought measurement (and other producers of value, such as calculation and classification) into a crisis.³⁰ Undermining prediction, these statements forfeit the possibility celebrated in Bacon's instrumentalist view of knowledge and certainty, that which the Cartesian subject of knowledge could rely on because nature itself came to depend on his ability to know it, objectively. A radical praxis would then stay with *The Thing*, exposing the constitutive violence; it releases free radicals and virtual particles, which by unsettling—through affection, intention, and attention—expose the relationship that is knowledge itself and its effects. Again, I cannot pretend to anticipate the many implications of such a modality of intervention. What I can do, however, is to suggest two possible starting points. First, such radical praxis could begin, as I have already begun, by assuming that our frames of intervention, any apparatus deployed in the knowledge of human affairs, produce the very results they acquire. That is, when the tools of racial knowledge are deployed to explain events such as London's latest revolts, they both produce and reproduce the writing of those living in these urban territories as subjects of violence. What is my point then? This is a crucial point: what knowledge produces, the value it attributes, when it comprehends *The Thing* and transforms it into an object, an other, or a commodity (as signifier of social relations) is already less and more than everything, than any and every possibility these figurings—as themselves effects of *The Thing*—host because there is always already excess, a threatening abyss (the end of meaning or order or law).

Second, going for *The Thing*, and staying with violence, a radical praxis would also have to pay attention. Navigating the excessive disturbance of the field of forces, it cannot be oblivious to anything, not to what is already known (in knowledge) or not what can never be (the virtual particles that are the possibility of that which becomes). Intending, affecting/ed, attentive, and attending to both the effects of knowledge and the possibilities it postpones, the ethical promise charging this knowing as a radical praxis refers to that point after apprehension but before abstraction where Kant locates confused and unclear impressions; that abstraction will finally resolve in concepts (or categories), and reflection will return to the subject of knowledge and the world itself. Let me end here, at this threshold, before this possible beginning of knowing at the limits of justice.

Notes

1. The revolts lasted from 6 to 10 August 2011. Following a protest in Tottenham for the killing of Mark Duggan, who was killed by a police officer on 4 August, they spread throughout several of the London boroughs (especially in east, north, and south London) and cities like Birmingham, Bristol, Liverpool, and Leicester. For coverage of the events and later related developments, see guardian.co.uk/uk/london-riots (accessed 10 August 2012).

2. Each of these revolts followed episodes of police brutality. For an argument of how police violence both realizes and reveals the failure of justice see Denise Ferreira da Silva, “No-Bodies: Law, Raciality, Violence,” *Griffith Law Review*, 18, no. 2 (2009): 212–36.

3. A note on usage: there is a distinction between *The Thing* (as an ontological referent) and *a thing* (the generic term for something yet to be named but which is already approached as an *object*). In this regard, my move toward *The Thing* resonates with David Lloyd’s analysis of Samuel Beckett’s visual works, in particular to the consideration of Beckett’s statements on the “breakdown of the object” or “the breakdown of the subject,” in which he finds “the question of the thing that exceeds both object and subject, expression and representation” (David Lloyd, “Beckett’s Thing: Bram Van Velde and the Gaze,” *Modernist Cultures* 6, no 2 [2011]: 270). In Lloyd’s reading, I find Beckett’s move away from modernism, in the refusal of the “anteriority” of the subject in the field of arts, an instance of the general critique of modern representation, one that this article claims should be extended to social scientific and historical texts.

4. For a discussion of the role of affectability/relationality in modern representation and, in particular, how the tools of racial knowledge reproduce it, see generally Denise Ferreira da Silva, *Toward a Global Idea of Race* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

5. The title quote is from Jacques Derrida, “Force of Law: ‘The Mystical Foundation of Authority,’” in *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*, ed. David Gray Carlson, Drucilla Cornell, and Michael Rosenfeld (New York: Routledge, 1992), 14. The general discussion of law as *droit* is also from the same text.

6. For a discussion of Max Weber’s formulation of legality and Michel Foucault’s critique of rights in regard to a critique of racial subjugation that centers the state, see generally Silva, “No-Bodies.”

7. G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 124.

8. *Ibid.*, 122.

9. Instead of placing property in the web of social relationships, Kant begins his account of rights with the statement on the abstract character of property relations. While recognizing that obligation is at the center of the conception of right, Kant states that it is already mediated by universal law. Hence, the “universal law of rights” reads: “Act externally in such a manner that the free exercise of thy will may be able to coexist with the freedom of all others, according to a universal law.” See Immanuel Kant, *The Science of Right* (Radford, VA: A and D Publishing, 2009), 5.

10. *Ibid.*, 110.

11. The guiding distinction here between self-determined and outer-determined (affectable) subjects, which is an effect of the tools of the analytics of raciality, in particular racial and cultural difference, appears in Silva, *Toward a Global Idea*.

12. G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 69.

13. For an extended discussion of how social scientific knowledge would populate the stage of necessity with subjects of racial truths, see generally Silva, “No-Bodies” and *Toward a Global Idea*.

14. The opening quote is from Walter Benjamin, *Reflections* (New York: Schocken, 1978), 277.

15. The opening quote is from Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share, Volumes II and III* (New York: Zone Books, 1999), 49.

16. What I do not follow here is the line of interrogation that takes blackness in/to an interrogation of the very basis of the “original” question of being. Beginning and staying with historicity/temporality, Nahum Chandler exposes a whole field of philosophical reflection that blackness (of the African and the Negro) refigures precisely because it poses questions of existing itself as a problem. See Nahum Chandler, “Of Exorbitance: The Problem of the Negro as a Problem for Thought,” *Criticism* 50, no. 3 (2008): 345–410. Further, the effort here also resonates, and hopefully contributes to Hortense Spillers’s interrogation of psychoanalysis and its object. See Hortense Spillers, “‘All the Things You Could Be by Now, If Sigmund Freud’s Wife Was Your Mother’: Psychoanalysis and Race,” *boundary 2* 23, no. 3 (1996). Perhaps more explicitly, my argument resonates with her exposure of racial violence, in the distinction between body and flesh, in which the latter becomes the ethical point of departure. “This body,” she states,

at least from the point of view of the captive community, focuses a private and particular space, at which point of convergence biological, sexual, social, cultural, linguistic, ritualistic, and psychological fortunes join. This profound intimacy of interlocking detail is disrupted, however, by externally imposed meanings and uses: (1) the captive body becomes the source of an irresistible, destructive sensuality; (2) at the same time—in stunning contradiction—the captive body reduces to a thing, becoming *being* for the captor; (3) in this absence *from* a subject position, the captured sexualities provide a physical and biological expression of “otherness”; (4) as a category of “otherness,” the captive body translates into a potential for pornotroping and embodies sheer physical powerlessness that slides into a more general “powerlessness,” resonating through various centers of human and social meaning.

See Hortense Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book,” *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (1987): 67. When appropriating the sexual in the female body as a referent of what The Thing makes available, I follow Spillers’s retrieval of “the flesh” as the register of violence but also as the path to another ontological horizon. I present a more elaborated engagement with her and other black feminist writings of the female as an interruption of the apparently seamless modern European text in “A Critique of Racial Violence,” a book manuscript of which this article is just a rather brief summary.

17. This argument is developed in Silva, *A Critique of Racial Violence*, forthcoming.

18. Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 3.

19. Lindon Barrett, *Blackness and Value: Seeing Double* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

20. *Ibid.*, 27–28.

21. Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 22–23.

22. This articulation of Hegel’s “no-value” of The Thing appears in the subsection “Perception: Or the Thing and Deception” of *Phenomenology of Spirit*. He begins with the object as the universal (the other being the I), by nature mediated, which is apprehended at once in the movement of perception (act of perceiving) and the movement (the event) of being perceived. Now this mediated universality is expressed by the object, as “the thing with many properties”—as the referent of multiplicity captured with terms such as “Also,” the “One,” and “Many.” See Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 67.

23. See Luce Irigaray “The Fecundity of Caress: A Reading of Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, ‘Phenomenology of Eros,’” in *Feminist Interpretations of Levinas*, ed. Tina Chanter (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001), 119–44.

24. *Ibid.*, 27.

25. Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

26. Sylvia Wynter, “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, after Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument,” *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 3 (2003): 257–337.

27. Gayatri Spivak, *Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

28. Please note the difference between “=” (equal) and “≈” (approximately equal).

29. Werner Heisenberg, “The Physical Content of Quantum Kinematics and Mechanics,” in *Quantum Theory and Measurement*, ed. John Wheeler and Wojciech H. Zurek (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983).

30. There are numerous popular and specialized books and articles on particle physics. Since the 1920s, this reconfiguration of physics has animated even more complex and counterintuitive statements than Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle. In this paper, I am drawing from what is known as the Copenhagen interpretation of quantum mechanics, which has been identified with Niels Bohr, Werner Heisenberg, Wolfgang Pauli, and Max Born. It should be noted that this reference to physics is not a recourse to the authority of science but is actually a reference to particle physics as a domain of knowledge, in which the practitioners have been forced to renounce their claims to any authority. That is, I am more interested in the philosophical openings their acknowledgment of the impossibility of certainty provides, in particular in the possibility of dismantling Kant’s account of knowledge, which is still at the basis of most social scientific, legal, and common-sense views of the movement of knowledge. See, for instance, Werner Heisenberg, *Physics and Beyond: Encounters and Conversations* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972); Niels Bohr, *Atomic Physics and Human Knowledge* (New York: Dover, 2010); and Max Born, *Natural Philosophy of Cause and Chance* (New York: Dover, 1964).