

Violence and Raciality: Toward an ‘Ethics With/out the Subject’

Mackenzie Smith
University of Sydney

Abstract: This article argues that an analysis of the operations of raciality requires a description of violence whose interpretive ground is not sustained by the individual subject. By drawing on the work of Denise Ferreira da Silva, Stefano Harney, Fred Moten and others, I suggest such a description might prove a disruptive mechanism in the capacity for raciality to function as both authorizing force and the conditions of existence. In doing so, I expand on existing scholarly work that identifies manifold failings in post-enlightenment thinking and its tethering of racial subjugation to selfhood, sovereignty and agency. Moreover, I demonstrate why ethico-judicial interpretations of violence against nonwhite subjects consistently fail to identify its authorizing force, raciality.

2.6 seconds passed between the first shot and the second shot. 0.53 seconds passed between the second shot and the third shot. The second and third shots were fired at a distance of no more than 5 cm from the deceased. Either the second or the third shot was fatal. [...] However, the defence says that there is a factual dispute about what the police body-worn cameras recorded and the defendant’s state of mind when he fired the second and third shots. [...] The Crown accepts that when the defendant entered House 511 to arrest the deceased, he genuinely believed he was exercising the power of arrest under the Police Administration Act, and also there is a temporal connection between the defendant entering the house to arrest the deceased and the discharge of the second and third shots.

—*The Queen v Rolfe* (No 5) [2021] NTSCFC 6

In the rush of bodies, it is difficult to make sense of what unfolds in House 511 in Yuendumu, a small town in Australia’s Northern Territory. Then, a sudden flash. A white police officer raises his weapon at a 19-year-old Aboriginal man and shoots. 2.6 seconds pass, another bullet, then another. Count the moments between these collisions. The centimeters. Statement of facts: the Aboriginal man stabbed the defendant with a pair of surgical scissors. He was resisting arrest. He was a threat. There is footage from body-worn cameras. But no matter what we see take place in House 511, the defendant may have experienced these events differently. This is to say, he may have been juridically and ethically required to kill Kumanjayi Walker at his family home at 7:22 pm on November 9, 2019. Just as a jury was required to acquit the defendant on all charges, thereby establishing his authority—and that of anyone else in his position—to execute Walker. How to even begin to make sense of these events? How to describe what takes place in between the first and second shots? To be sure, there is a temporal connection between these two moments. We know as much because the juridical architecture uses these moments, their brevity, to ethically resolve a deployment of total violence that would otherwise be unconscionable: in this case, it was decided the police officer could not have established murderous intent in such a short span of time.^[1] And yet, Walker’s execution is only comprehensible in time, in seconds, because the scene’s authorizing force—raciality—has no temporal connection to those moments.

Raciality is defined here in terms of its capacity to delimit ethical notions of humanity, thereby authorizing discriminate deployments of violence. As Denise Ferreira da Silva writes, raciality ‘constitutes an effective tool precisely because of the way its main signifiers—the racial and the cultural—provide an account of human difference, an account in which particularity remains irreducible and unsublatable.’^[2] While its origins can be found in the events of violence—primarily, the bloody trail left by colonization and Atlantic slavery—that have shaped racial and cultural differences over the past 500 years or so, ‘the arsenal of raciality functions so well as a political operator precisely because it is not a referent of linear time.’^[3] This is to say, Walker’s execution was not only authorized but guaranteed by raciality’s capacity to act as a fissiparous figuring of human difference that remains uninterrupted by historical progress.^[4] No matter the defendant’s ‘state of mind’ when he shot down Walker, the trouble in describing this event lies in that it cannot be understood as an aberration—a stain on the record of liberalism—but rather as essential to our present order of things; that each and every Black death in custody or community serves, in the words of Frank B. Wilderson III, as ‘a finger that points to humanity as being deserving of destruction because of its very being and not just its actions.’^[5] ^[6]

Taking the acquittal of Walker’s killer as exemplifying the unrealized and impossible demand for global justice, this ethical moment is my point of departure from the case and, as will become clear, the very image of the subject. To do this, I situate this singular instance of violence within ‘globality,’ which Ferreira da Silva defines ‘as the onto-epistemological horizon assembled by modern social scientific projects.’^[7] The nationwide rallies in protest of Walker’s killing that swept Australia in 2019 instantly recall those following the 2013 acquittal of George Zimmerman, the neighborhood watch leader who shot dead 17-year-old Trayvon Martin, a moment that helped spark Black Lives Matter. As a global movement calling attention to violence against Black people by state and citizen alike, Black Lives Matter makes clear the failure of equality and liberty as ethical descriptors to disrupt raciality. For, when raciality is understood as an ethically delimiting force that survives abolition, enfranchisement and so on, such political freedoms no longer hold any explanatory purchase. The ceaseless iterations of white-on-Black killings such as Walker’s—and, just as constant, how people must take to the streets in protest time and again—underscore what Sylvia Wynter calls ‘our unbearable wrongness of being.’^[8] How is it, Ferreira da Silva allows us to ask of Walker’s execution, that this violence ‘does not unleash the ethical crisis expected by those who argue that racial subjection contradicts modern ethical principles’?^[9] The apparent congruence in the liberal imagination between these systems and ethical notions of humanity makes the urgency of this question increasingly apparent. This article is an attempt to chart an answer through a description of violence without the subject.

To do this, I read through the work of Ferreira da Silva, Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, who collectively, I suggest, expose how human difference is made comprehensible through individuation, an arm of self-consciousness that forecloses on questions that could be posed of violence in the global present. Rather than concede subjectivity as an interpretive ground that indexes human difference in space and time, these scholars apprehend raciality as a symbolic order that anticipates the subject’s emergence in the scene of violence—and, thus, that is irreducible to the spatiotemporal grounds pronounced to authorize it. In this sense, I am trying to find a way to describe violence that does not take for granted its totalizing function as that which, as Moten puts it, is ‘visited upon the figure.’^[10] By displacing this ‘figure’ as the very image of the subject, I follow Ferreira da Silva in understanding raciality as ‘a juridico-economic structure that yields a symbolic order mapped onto the captive body.’^[11] Moreover, I consider how the failure of post-enlightenment thinking to interrupt global systems of

violence is sustained by the limits of phenomenology and its preoccupation with the individual subject. If violence can only be comprehended through the subject and their interior experience, temporality and spatiality emerge as obstructions to describing raciality's function as an authorizing force situated outside spacetime. Yet when the subject is extricated from a description of violence, I suggest it opens up a dialectical analysis—a description that, in moving between each and every moment, interrupts raciality's coherence as an authorizing force and exposes the uncertain conditions of existence.

Violence and Law

'My wound becomes the Law.'

—Jackie Wang, *The Sunflower Cast a Spell to Save Us from the Void*, 2021

Walter Benjamin's 1921 treatise, 'Critique of Violence,' offers a useful departure point from ethical interpretations of violence sustained by the individual subject. He wrote the essay in response to the deadly use of military force against the Spartacist uprising in Berlin in 1919, a workers' strike that sought to overthrow the German government. State violence cast in this light, Benjamin writes, is 'explained not by the intention of preserving legal ends but, rather, by the intention of preserving the law itself.'^[12] His first move is to expose how the state authorizes violence in accordance with self-preservation, rather than any ethical notion of justice. It then becomes possible to upend an interpretation of violence as concerned with the event (as cause) and its adjudication (as effect): for, when violence always already acts in preservation of legal ends, these ends become the *cause* of the means. Or, as Moten puts it, 'violence is a regulatory brutality that is imposed upon something that, for lack of a better word, was already there, and that anticipates the structural brutality that is already imposed.'^[13] The anticipatory nature of what Benjamin calls 'law-preserving violence' captures violence as constitutive, rather than symptomatic, of our present order of things.^[14] No matter how an ethico-juridical interpretation might interpret violence—namely, as an occurrence that can be situated in space and time—the law is, in Jacques Derrida's words, 'always to come, always promised, because it is immanent, finite and so already past. Every "subject" is caught up in this aporetic structure in advance.'^[15] Law-preserving violence, then, can be understood as a force that extends global systems of socio-economic exploitation, expropriation and dispossession, precisely because that is the law's essential function. The law is, as Ferreira da Silva would have it, the 'horizon of death.'^[16]

Yet while, for Benjamin, 'all violence as a means is either law making or law-preserving,' because violence is only made available to subjects through the law, 'its mere existence outside the law' represents an existential threat to the state.^[17] Benjamin calls violence without means 'law-destroying.'^[18] He considers how a nonbloody revolutionary strike might, as Derrida puts it in his analysis of Benjamin's essay, 'transform the relations of law [...] and so to present itself as having a right to law.'^[19] It would do so because, again following Derrida, 'Violence is not exterior to the order of *droit* [law]. It threatens it from within. Violence does not consist essentially in exerting its power or a brutal force to obtain this or that result but in threatening or destroying an order of given right and precisely, in this case, the order of state law that was to accord this right to violence, for example the right to strike.'^[20] That is, violence without means constitutes an upheaval not in its actual occurrence, but rather in its suspension of the ethical and legal grounds for its occurrence. In this sense, law destroying violence exposes the myriad contradictions at play in any presumption it is separable from the conditions that anticipate it.

Benjamin's distinction between law-preserving and law-destroying violence interrupts the state's claim to violence as an ethically discernible act. For, when violence is always structured in relation to the law, as either its essential instrument (violence with means) or an existential threat to its coherence (violence without means) the circumstances of any given event have very limited bearing on its ethical determination. Subjects in the scene of violence, as actants in a structural antagonism essential to securing the conditions of existence, are anticipated by an ethical framework that forecloses on individual agency. In this sense, violence as a relation of the law allows us to push back against what Eric Stanley identifies as 'the idea that all forms of violence are interchangeable [... which] renders minoritized defense as equal to the mechanisms of the settler state.'^[21] Hannah Arendt's critique of the global 1960s student uprisings exemplifies this troubled equilibrium. In her 1970 book *On Violence*, she argues the unrest reinforced the false notion that 'violence in the shape of war and revolution may appear to constitute the only possible [historical] interruption.'^[22] Yet Benjamin's essay allows us to ask, against Arendt, whether ethical interpretations of violence sustained by the individual subject—be it the revolutionary or the warmongering politician—prevent us from understanding how violence secures raciality as the conditions of existence. In other words, Benjamin allows us to ask whether any given deployment of violence merely exposes the brutality that is already there.

Beyond Brutality

The description of violence I am interested in, then, does not presuppose subjects with individual agency, but rather exposes raciality as a horizon that anticipates their positions before the state. In this sense, I suggest the German for violence, *gewalt*, provides a more useful scope because, as Derrida notes, it 'signifies, for Germans, legitimate power, authority, public force.'^[23] With this in mind, *gewalt* loosens the state's grip on violence as an interchangeable (universal) ethical given, and exposes its self-preserving (determinative) function. In attempting to retain *gewalt*'s denotation to consider how raciality anticipates structural violence against subjects, I am also following a correlation that Moten and his interlocutor Harney draw between brutality and individuation. During a joint lecture on violence the pair gave in Berlin in 2022, Moten explains:

Brutality is a function of the ontological presumption [...] of an individual subject who has internal experience, who has knowledge of the world and knowledge of its objects and whose existence is separate from those objects in a way that allows for that knowledge to occur, and that knowledge, which one could think of in a certain kind of philosophical vernacular English as "grasp," is inseparable from possession. [...] The interiority of that subject, which phenomenology presumes, only fully comes into its own when that interiority has a possessive relation to the world and its objects.^[24]

By distinguishing brutality from violence, Harney and Moten expose the former as foundational to the subject and its attendant knowledge systems. Phenomenology falls within their crosshairs as a philosophical program that interprets violence through the individual subject, even when the grounds for subjectivity are determinative correlates for that violence. The presumption of self-knowledge charted through interiority yields a closed loop, whereby individuation requires difference (uniqueness) to make sense of selfhood, which then paves the ethical grounds for violence deployed in the name of that difference. In this sense, phenomenology, which 'attends to the tactile, vestibular, kinaesthetic and visual character of embodied reality,' can act as a linchpin for making violence against non-white groups comprehensible (ethically discernible).^[25]

If violence can only be comprehended through the subject—the relation between its body and the world—self-consciousness emerges as a bodily inscription. Fanon gives us one such example in *Black Skin, White Masks*: ‘Below the corporeal schema I had sketched out a historic-racial schema, [... provided] by the other, the white man, who had woven me out of a thousand details, anecdotes, stories.’^[26] Fanon directs our attention to a sunken, symbolic layer of the Black man as an affectable subject/thing through which the white gaze announces ‘a new type of man, a new species. A Negro, in fact!’^[27] In this sense, Fanon captures the brutal logic by which, as Frank B. Wilderson III writes, ‘White and non-Black subjectivity cannot be imbued with the capacity for self-knowledge and intersubjective relationality without anti-Black violence.’^[28] By exposing humanity as an ethico-symbolic ground determined by the intersubjective recognition of particularity—‘Look, a Negro!’—Fanon’s task is to ‘shut off the circuit’ of the autopoietic collective unconscious, or what Wynter later extrapolates as the sociogenic code—the neuro-biological means by which antiblackness is *experienced* as extra-humanly ordained, an experience that is only possible because the social order enacting it remains, at present, outside subjects’ conscious awareness.^[29] Fanon again: ‘The only way to break this vicious circle that refers me back to myself is to restore to the other his human reality, different from his natural reality, by way of mediation and recognition.’^[30] In other words, he asks us to seek out, through cognitive rupture, a world in which raciality does not provide the objective conditions of existence. According to Fanon, this would require detaching from reality the schema by which subjects can only make sense of themselves through the (racialized) Other.

Yet in keeping with Harney and Moten’s use of brutality—a structural form of violence anticipated by the state, and that announces subject formation—I suggest the pair deviate from Fanon’s phenomenological foundations. Given that Harney and Moten break with the subject and its ‘internal experience’ of the world, they can be read alongside Ferreira da Silva’s observation that post-enlightenment thinking is underwritten by the subject ‘as an interior/temporal thing along with statements that elaborate on the separation—between the self-positing mind and world—that sustains Human uniqueness.’^[31] In other words, the presumption of possessive self-knowledge among subjects is inseparable from the mechanisms for authorizing violence against them in accordance with human difference. Yet when we break with the presumptions that Ferreira da Silva, Harney and Moten trace to the thinking tools that phenomenology makes available—namely, how interior knowledge presumes both temporal and spatial separation between subjects and objects, and a subject who has individual agency or will—it becomes possible to expose raciality as a force that makes no ethical sense without the subject. As Rizvana Bradley writes, ‘blackness marks phenomenology’s constitutive negation.’^[32]

What Ferreira da Silva, Harney and Moten are interested in, then, is an interruption in the ethical program that can only occur when violence is described in excess of the individual subject. They ask us to view violence as always entangled with the means to resist the systems of knowledge that render this violence comprehensible: as Moten puts it, while ‘brutality produces individual subjects, violence messes individual subjects up.’^[33] This distinction between violence and brutality, then, skirts past the discursive fusing of the subject with their violent subjugation, *à la* Foucault. Much like Benjamin’s invocation of ‘law destroying violence’ as the suspension of the juridical grounds determining the right to strike, when the subject is extricated from the frame of our thinking, we can consider how the grounds for subjectivity emerge from that moment and every other like it. Such a description underscores how interpreting violence through the individual subject cannot but substantiate the impossibility of any ethical notion of justice. This move away from individuation, then, does not presume the subject and its interiority: that is, a subject who is separate from the world in which they are ‘naturally’ ordered in accordance

with human difference, or where the modality of sovereignty is only made available when the subject's uniqueness can be measured against the 'Other'. Instead, this description of violence exposes the myriad negations of raciality. We might call this, by way of Valentino Desideri and Ferreira da Silva, an 'ethics with/out the subject.'^[34]

'The Racial Event'

What becomes possible when we describe violence without the subject? In Ferreira da Silva's 2022 talk, 'The Racial Event,' she punches through violence as a state of exception, identifying it as an iteration, not as an instance that can be located temporally or spatially:

the racial event [...] as always already a composition or a decomposition or recomposition and always as a moment that is a single assembling of that which constitutes what has happened and also what is yet to happen. So, the moment and movement of occurrence as distinguished from the site and cause for the occurrence, it becomes a composition that necessarily becomes composed of the same elements, similar to other possible compositions, meaning what has happened and what has yet to happen.^[35]

What concerns Ferreira da Silva is that, while the ethical programs that accord human rights have secured enfranchisement over time (suffrage, marriage equality and anti-discrimination laws, for instance), raciality defies linear movement. Thus, the racial event as a 'single assembling' exposes how raciality has not changed and remains deeply embedded in post-enlightenment thinking, namely in its renderings of space and time and their privileging of historicity. What the racial event accounts for—and that could not emerge from an ethico-juridical interpretation—is a description of violence that makes zero distinction between the now, already and not yet. If only because, the presumption of separation between these elemental compositions extends the subjugation of particular groups into the global present: for, any ethical notion of justice becomes incomprehensible when raciality is understood as an authorizing force that anticipates structural violence. In this sense, Ferreira da Silva exposes linear historicity as an interpretive ground that obscures racial subjugation across time by excepting it from the conditions for existence.

When the subject, as a figure who indexes temporality and spatiality through self-consciousness, is extricated from the frame of our thinking, it becomes possible to attend to violence as a ceaseless guarantee in the global present. As Benjamin writes, 'the tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the "state of emergency" in which we live is not the exception but the rule.'^[36] In Ferreira da Silva's racial event we are looking at something similar to what Benjamin calls the 'dialectical image,' where 'what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation. In other words, image is dialectics at a standstill. For while the relation of the present to the past is a purely temporal, continuous one, the relation of what-has-been to the now is dialectical: is not progression but image, suddenly emergent.'^[37] The dialectical image, like the racial event, interrupts linear conceptions of time to expose how they secure the social, economic and political conditions of modernity—conditions that are then taken to be immovable, caught in the gears of a monadic history.^[38] The dialectical image allows us to do this because it does not index (an image of) a subject or event bound to the same spatio-temporal ground that sustains ethical interpretations of violence. Rather, by moving through and between each and every moment, this image allows us to apprehend raciality as that which is irreducible to time.

Toward Decolonization

To be sure, we do not yet have the means to describe violence in such a way that would halt raciality's function as both its authorizing force and the conditions of existence. The task remains ongoing and unfulfilled, if not unthinkable. Yet with neither subject nor event acting to index human difference in time, an ethical framework that presupposes individual agency has very limited application to interpreting violence. Intersubjective relationality, in effect, pre-determines violence as that which secures the positions of white subjects and those relegated outside the symbolic fold of humanity. The conditions that whiteness indexes—liberty, self-determination, prosperity and other sovereignties offered up by the liberal imagination as attainable universal ideals—cannot be sustained without maintaining, as Ferreira da Silva puts it, the absolute dereliction of subjects 'placed on "the Other" (cultural) side of humanity.'^[39] Despite liberalism's claims to historical progress, social and political gains disappear from a description of violence that exposes how raciality delimits the ethical reach of humanity and figures whiteness as a parasite in the flesh of the world. What kind of shift in the thinking of existence, then, would be required to dislodge raciality in the interminable crisis of the present moment?

Returning to the legal judgment that opened this essay, *The Queen v Rolfe*, the ethical scene that authorizes this violence is defined by the interior realm: it retains interpretive sense from the 'defendant's state of mind,' how the scene unfolded in time, and the legal authority under which it was performed (the Police Administration Act). Yet what happens when this scene unfolds before an image of existence not guided by the individual subject and its interior, temporal worlds? For one, following Ferreira da Silva, I argue that this scene would have to be placed in the objective economic and juridical conditions—raciality—which unfold alongside it, and which ultimately anticipate its unfolding. That is, this police shooting, which marks out not the availability of justice and peace but the unrealized and impossible demand for it, allows us to place racial subjugation in a moment of exterior determination. If the individual subject, as an actant situated in the interior stage, were extricated from this scene, it would totally disintegrate the ethical program that dictates *The Queen v Rolfe*: this move would situate that unconscionable act—and every other like it—in the constitution of the liberal, self-determining subject, and name decolonization as that which necessitates the very end of that subject.

Bibliography

Ahmed, Sara. 'A Phenomenology of Whiteness,' *Feminist Theory*. Vol. 8, no. 2, (2007): 149–168.

Amnesty International. 'Stop Black Deaths in Custody.' [action.amnesty.org.au/act-now/stop-black-deaths-in-custody](https://www.action.amnesty.org.au/act-now/stop-black-deaths-in-custody). Accessed February 14, 2023.

Arendt, Hannah. *On Violence*. Orlando, Florida: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1969.

Benjamin, Walter. 'On the Concept of History.' In *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings Volume 4 1913-1926*, 389–400, edited by Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, trans. Edmund Jephcott. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003.

_____. *The Arcades Project*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1999.

____. 'Critique of Violence.' In *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings Volume 1 1913-1926*, 236-252, edited by Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, Cambridge; London: Harvard University Press, 1996.

Bradley, Rizvana. 'On Black Aesthetics,' *Diacritics* 49, no. 4 (2021): 21-53.

Desideri, Valentino and Ferreira da Silva, Denise. 'Another Image of Existence.' *Performance Philosophy*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2022.

Derrida, Jacques. 'Force of law: The "mystical foundation of authority".' *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*. Routledge, 2016. 3-67.

Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. New edition., Pluto, 2008.

Ferreira da Silva, Denise. *Unpayable Debt*. London: Sternberg Press, 2022.

____. *Toward a Global Idea of Race*. New edition, vol. 27, Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2007.

____. 'DENISE FERREIRA DA SILVA Negative Accumulation: The Racial Event or That Wich [sic] Happens Without Time.' *YouTube*, uploaded by Fondazione Gramsci Emilia-Romagna, July 7, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PvodP3z3nec&ab_channel=FondazioneGramsciEmilia-Romagna. Accessed February 14, 2023.

____. 'Globality.' *Critical Ethnic Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2015, pp. 33–38. doi:10.5749/jcritethnstud.1.1.0033. Accessed February 14, 2023.

____. 'Denise Ferreira da Silva: The Racial Event.' *YouTube*, uploaded by CLASBerkeley, March 5, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jo9MF7Y8SfE&ab_channel=CLASBerkeley. Accessed February 14, 2023.

____. 'On Difference Without Separability.' *Catalogue of the 32nd São Paulo Art Biennial*, 'Incerteza Viva,' 2016, 57-65.

Harney, Stefano and Moten, Fred. 'On Violence #2: with Stefano Harney, and Fred Moten.' *Vimeo*, HAU Hebbel am Ufer, June 7, 2022.

King, Tiffany Lethabo and Wilderson III, Frank B. 'Staying Ready for Black Study: A Conversation.' *Otherwise Worlds*, Duke University Press, (2020): 52-76.

Marriott, David. 'Inventions of Existence: Sylvia Wynter, Frantz Fanon, Sociogeny, and "the Damned."' *CR: The New Centennial Review* 11.3 (2011): 45-89.

Stanley, Eric A. *Atmospheres of Violence: Structuring Antagonism and the Trans/queer Ungovernable*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2021.

Weheliye, Alexander G. *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2014.

Wilderson III, Frank B. *Red, White & Black Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010.

Wynter, Sylvia. 'On How We Mistook the Map for the Territory, and Re-imprisoned Ourselves in an Unbearable Wrongness of Being, of Desêtre: Black Studies toward the Human Project.' In *Not Only the Master's Tools: African-American Studies in Theory and Practice*, 107–169, edited by Lewis R. Gordon and Jane Anna Gordon. London: Routledge, 2006.

Wynter, Sylvia and McKittrick, Katherine. 'Unparalleled Catastrophe for Our Species? Or, to Give Humanness a Different Future: Conversations.' In *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis*, 9–89, edited by Katherine McKittrick, Duke University Press, 2020.

Notes

1. Here I follow a distinction Ferreira da Silva makes between 'total violence' in the form of arrests, shootings, torture and abuse, and 'symbolic violence,' such as debt-saddling, income discrimination and other means of exploitation and expropriation. Denise Ferreira da Silva, *Unpayable Debt*, London: Sternberg Press, 2022, 26.
2. Denise Ferreira da Silva, *Toward a Global Idea of Race*. New edition, vol. 27, Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2007, xix.
3. Denise Ferreira da Silva, 'DENISE FERREIRA DA SILVA Negative Accumulation: The Racial Event or That Wich [sic] Happens Without Time,' *YouTube*, uploaded by Fondazione Gramsci Emilia-Romagna, July 7, 2022, [youtube.com/watch?v=PVodP3z3nec&ab_channel=FondazioneGramsciEmilia-Romagna](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PVodP3z3nec&ab_channel=FondazioneGramsciEmilia-Romagna).
4. As Frank B. Wilderson III reminds us, 'The social and political time of emancipation proclamations should not be confused with the ontological and epistemological time of modernity itself, in which Blackness and Slaveness are imbricated ab initio.' Frank B. Wilderson III, *Red, White & Black Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010, 339-40.
5. Hereafter I capitalize Black when referring to persons. I use the lowercase blackness and whiteness to signify not groupings, but rather a series of power structures that, as Alexander Weheliye writes, 'apportion and delimit which humans can lay claim to full human status and which humans cannot.' Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2014, 3.
6. Frank B. Wilderson III, and Tiffany Lethabo King, 'Staying Ready for Black Study: A Conversation,' *Otherwise Worlds*, Duke University Press, 2020, 57. Here I refer to the more than 450 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia who have died in custody since 1991. Since that year, when a Royal Commission into the deaths made 339 recommendations to the government, none have been implemented. Amnesty International, 'Stop Black Deaths in Custody,' <https://action.amnesty.org.au/act-now/stop-black-deaths-in-custody>
7. Ferreira da Silva, 'Globality,' *Critical Ethnic Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2015, pp. 33–38. doi:10.5749/jcritethnstud.1.1.0033.
8. Sylvia Wynter, 'On How We Mistook the Map for the Territory, and Reimprisoned Ourselves In Our Unbearable Wrongness Of Being, Of Desêtre: Black Studies Toward the Human Project,' in Jane Anna

- Gordon, and Lewis R. Gordon, *Not Only the Master's Tools: African American Studies in Theory and Practice*, Routledge, 2015, 107-169.
9. Ferreira da Silva, *Global Idea of Race*, 175.
 10. Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, 'On Violence #2: with Stefano Harney, and Fred Moten,' *Vimeo*, HAU Hebbel am Ufer, June 7, 2022 vimeo.com/717890841?embedded=true&source=vimeo_logo&owner=50104276.
 11. Ferreira da Silva, *Unpayable Debt*, 13; 33.
 12. Walter Benjamin, 'Critique of Violence,' in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings Volume 1 1913-1926*, edited by Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, Cambridge; London: Harvard University Press, 1996, 239.
 13. Harney and Moten, 'On Violence.'
 14. Benjamin, 'Critique,' 241.
 15. Jacques Derrida, 'Force of Law: The "Mystical Foundation of Authority,"' in Cornell, Drucilla., et al. *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*, New York; London: Routledge, 1992, 36.
 16. Ferreira da Silva, *Global Idea of Race*, 25.
 17. Benjamin, 'Critique,' 239.
 18. *Ibid.*, 249.
 19. Derrida, 'Force of Law,' 35.
 20. *Ibid.*, 34.
 21. Eric A. Stanley, *Atmospheres of Violence: Structuring Antagonism and the Trans/queer Ungovernable*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2021, 7.
 22. Hannah Arendt, *On Violence*, Orlando, Florida: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 30.
 23. Derrida, 'Force of Law,' 6.
 24. Harney and Moten, 'On Violence.'
 25. Sara Ahmed, 'A Phenomenology of Whiteness,' *Feminist Theory*, vol. 8, no. 2, 2007, 153.
 26. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, New edition, Pluto, 2008, 91.
 27. *Ibid.*, 95.
 28. Frank B. Wilderson III, 'Social Death and Narrative Aporia in 12 Years a Slave,' *Black Camera*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (Fall 2015): 144.
 29. Fanon, *Black Skin*, 192. Wynter draws the theory of autopoiesis from the Chilean biologists Humberto R. Maturana and Francisco J. Varela, as first outlined in their 1980 book *Autopoiesis and Cognition: The Realization of the Living*. The pair argue that biological systems determine their environments self-referentially and in constant relation to that entity. For more discussion of Wynter's work in this area, see Sylvia Wynter and Katherine McKittrick, 'Unparalleled Catastrophe for Our Species? Or, to Give Humanness a Different Future: Conversations,' *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis*, edited by Katherine McKittrick, 9–89, Duke University Press, 2020.
 30. Fanon, *Black Skin*, 191.
 31. Ferreira da Silva, *Unpayable Debt*, 90.
 32. Rizvana Bradley, 'On Black Aesthetics,' *Diacritics* 49, no. 4 (2021): 39.
 33. Harney and Moten, 'On Violence.'
 34. Valentino Desideri and Denise Ferreira da Silva, 'Another Image of Existence,' *Performance Philosophy*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2022, 138.
 35. Denise Ferreira da Silva, 'Denise Ferreira da Silva: The Racial Event,' *YouTube*, uploaded by CLASBerkeley, March 5, 2022, youtube.com/watch?v=Jo9MF7Y8SfE&ab_channel=CLASBerkeley.
 36. Walter Benjamin, 'On the Concept of History,' in Walter Benjamin, *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings Volume 4*, edited by Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, trans. Edmund Jephcott, 1938–1940, Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003, 392.
 37. Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1999, 263.
 38. In both the dialectical image and the racial event, Benjamin and Ferreira da Silva call into question the underlying presumptions of historical materialism. As black studies theorists from Cedric Robinson to

Ferreira da Silva have shown, racial subjugation consistently disappears in the original historical materialist account because its analysis is rooted in wage labour that renders non-Western societies outside the bounds of History. Ferreira da Silva writes: ‘The original presentation of historical materialism is determined by the formulation of labor—namely, “wage labor”—that has a quantitative (time) and a qualitative (liberty) aspect, both of which are (historically) specific to the historical (social) conditions it was designed to explain.’ Ferreira da Silva, *Unpayable Debt*, 187.

39. Denise Ferreira da Silva, ‘On Difference Without Separability,’ *Catalogue of the 32nd São Paulo Art Biennial*, ‘Incerteza Viva,’ 2016, 57.
-

Cite this Essay

Smith, Mackenzie. “Violence and Raciality: Toward an ‘Ethics With/out the Subject’.” *Rhizomes: Cultural Studies in Emerging Knowledge*, no. 39, 2023, doi:10.20415/rhiz/039.e06

RHIZOMES ISSN 1555-9998 ★ 230 East Hall Bowling Green State University Bowling Green, OH 43403

Editors: Ellen Berry and Carol Siegel. Reviews editor: Craig J. Saper. Technical editor: Helen J Burgess