

The World as Police

James Trafford
University for the Creative Arts

Abstract: This article argues that colonial modernity birthed the police as a world-shaping force that came to define both civil society and the world itself. By staging a relationship between plantation Barbados and Kant's Enlightenment, I suggest that the transformation from European frontier to established world required subjugating violence to be everywhere made pervasive and entrenched. The ascent to humanity under colonial modernity conjoined the construction of whiteness to the subjugation and death of Black people. As such, the supposed absorption of enslavement into legal frameworks became the pre-condition for its continuation as white collective society was strengthened through and as policing Black people. Since the literal blood and sand of the colonised continue to be the grounds of white life, the question of abolition thus requires us to reach far beyond the institution of the police.

You are in the breach and of it
— Jared Sexton

The [black human] can be disciplined and cultivated, but is never genuinely civilized
— Immanuel Kant

Barbados: This Earth, This Realm, This Little England
— Condé Nast Traveler

The question of the police is also the question of the world itself.

The ebb and flow of breach and suture

As European cosmologies shuddered amidst the globalising traces of 1492, rather than acknowledge entanglement and violence, a “world” would be made from the material of the earth.^[1] Across a Manichean infrastructure, as Frantz Fanon wrote, a breach of order and disorder; slave and master; colonizer and colonized; law and nature. In the ebb of breach and suture, contingency and alterity would be both absolutized and domesticated.

Reverberating across this ‘radical breach introduced by the Middle Passage,’^[2] Jared Sexton considers that ‘tear in the fabric of the world’ as an epochal trans-formation inaugurated on a global scale: ‘not something that happens solely to Africans; it is something that happens to *everyone*, and with radically incommensurate effects.’^[3] The breach reaches across the reorganisation of the earth as “world”: its tendrils the expulsion of the Moors from Iberia,

early enslavement of Black Africans by the Portuguese, plantations on Sao Tomé worked by Congolese slaves.^[4] In the furnace of the vehement conscription of non-Europeans into modernity, discontinuity and partition were shaped in the force of genocide, destruction of religion and culture, deracination, concentration, working people to death.^[5]

In the breach Black African and Indigenous peoples of the Americas were figured not in terms of complex relationship and difference, but written into the metaphysics of the world as irrevocable state of nature, as waste, plague, threat, 'absolute evil.'^[6] As Cavin Warren writes, '[t]he African becomes Black being and secures the boundaries of the European self – its existential and ontological constitution – by embodying utter alterity (metaphysical nothing).'^[7]

The breach is also suture. This supposedly inherent and fundamental alterity is permanently sutured to the formatting of Europe. It is defined apophatically as void and absence yet also co-constitutive: without laws, property, or reason, 'incapable of civilisation.'^[8] Fanon saw clearly that the breach is not a practice of "othering", it is a production of a world whose *internal* splitting is redacted and disavowed: 'not only must the Black man be Black; he must be Black in relation to the white man.'^[9] Breach is rupture that is also passage, catastrophe that is also consolidation.^[10]

I suggest below that in the transformation from European frontier to established world the violences of the breach were everywhere made pervasive and entrenched. The ascent to humanity under colonial modernity conjoined the construction of whiteness to the subjugation and death of Black people. As such, the supposed absorption of enslavement into legal frameworks became the pre-condition for its continuation as white collective society was strengthened through and as policing Black people. Colonial modernity birthed the police as a world-shaping force that came to define both civil society and the world itself. Since the literal blood and sand of the colonised continue to be the grounds of white life, the question of abolition thus requires us to reach far beyond the institution of the police.

From frontier to world

The breach troubles the way attention is often drawn to unilateral conquest and frontier, with savage and civilizer supposedly bound together at Europe's edges. It is often argued that the modern world was just built on a contradiction between emancipation and democracy on the one hand, and enslavement and genocide on the other.^[11] The idea is that the violent excesses of the modern world are either an anomaly or that they indicate the unequal application of otherwise universal achievements in reason, freedom, and law. The thought can be traced to a kind of frontier logic in which violence at the edges of civil society might be disavowed by those within. This is the case even where a civilised interior is posed against, or perhaps on condition of, colonial violence as its supposed exterior. For instance, Enrique Dussel's work poses Europe as a re-established *ego cogito* grounded in this *ego conquiro*, to 'constitute itself as a unified ego exploring, conquering, colonising an alterity that gave back its image of itself.'^[12]

Whilst distinct in context, Schmitt's reading of the Leviathan also encapsulates this supposed movement, from an absence of law in violence at root and in exception to the collective security of reason and state:

The terror of the state of nature drives anguished individuals to come together; their fear rises to an extreme; a spark of reason (*ratio*) flashes, and suddenly there stands in front of them a new god.^[13]

On this picture a violent boundary is imposed at the frontier of civilisation to maintain and produce the security of civil order.^[14] Control seemingly descends from hegemony to unmediated domination where the latter secures the edges of European order and is often consigned to history.^[15] Police is written as thin blue line in the contemporary rewriting of this story: of ever-present crises of potential societal disintegration (knife-crime; drugs; gangs; migrants) and the potential for regression of civil order into that bestial state of nature.

The picture relies on a characterisation of colonialism as irrational or libidinal whose excesses can be reduced to violence at the boundaries of an otherwise civil order.^[16] This is why enlightenment – as it became known – is seen to contain a contradictory pull towards freedom and democracy on the one hand, and colonial expansion, enslavement, and genocide on the other. This antinomy offers two possible resolutions. The first, that reason, law, and civil order might be redeemed through the enlargement of universal concepts, and the second that they are irredeemable and therefore must be abandoned.^[17]

I aim to show how the antinomy is inadequate to the breach. Freedom was not defined against slavery but through its universalisation as collective mastery; civil order was not defined against brutish violence but through its internalisation and legalisation. Rather than accepting that the “civil orders” of colonial modernity relied on the elimination of disorder and violence, I want to draw attention to how it required its continued presence.

If colonial modernity ties together the expropriation of Black and indigenous lives and labour with the excision and subjugation of Blackness as its outside, then asking how the world produced through that relationship might lead us to reconsider the form that world takes. I'll suggest that with Kant enlightenment becomes carceral in aspirations not to Cartesian certainty so much as stability through the manufacture of a world in its enclosures, borders and limits. This drive to regulate and limit required building white relationality as collective enslavement and enforcement, whose socio-material instantiation I find in the legal, economic, and social technologies of seventeenth century plantation Barbados. In distinction with the image of thin blue line, this is suggestive of a view of policing that is far more pervasive and insidious – built-in to the formation of white collective, property regimes, politics, and the horizon of freedom itself.

In the beginning, all the world was Barbados

The trans-Atlantic slave trade, colony, and plantation formed the coordinates for the consolidation of colonial modernity.^[18] In the process, the Caribbean basin became the engine of wealth for European shifts from mercantilism to industry, bringing together ‘English capital, American land and African slavery.’^[19] Though white indentured servants had been transported to the island since English settlement in 1627, Barbados’ sugar mills and plantations were primarily worked by Black African slaves.

Growing and producing sugar was arduous and intensive. Forced to fertilize the land with excrement and urine, in conditions of starvation and gruelling work that destroyed their hands, slaves were subject to painful work and early death.^[20] Tasks were monotonous, often using gang systems dividing and apportioning labor to maintain

discipline. Slaves were whipped, tortured, and killed or worked to death. From underground incarceration in West African forts, the hold, and plantation, these were the sites of absolute subjugation and annihilation: around 'half of Barbados' slave population had to be "renewed" every eight years.^[21]

Whilst abjuring mythic origins, we might trace the solidifications of the world in the image of police to Barbados. There slave codes and patrols set up configurations that were later translated across what became the United States, across empire, plantation, and colony. Many have argued that the codes both justified and wrote race into law, whilst signifying the existence of early forms of institutionalized police in slave pass check searches, patrols, targeting.^[22]

But rather than think of law as edifice that makes explicit and codifies, I want to consider both what the codes implicitly express and rely on and also the material and concrete capacities that are afforded through their abstractions, systems, and institutions. Barbados is emblematic of shifts from frontier to island-world. As we'll see below, law-making in Barbados formed the matrix for a shift from a foundational condition of slavery as brutish and capricious violence into a pervasive violence legitimated and legible under a framework of rationality, freedom, and social order.

Kant, whose work is so often seen as the pinnacle of modernity, provides the co-ordinates for thinking how the violence and alterity produced through the breach could be brought under a lawlike system.^[23] A principal problem for colonial modernity lies in its desire to control the relation with alterity such that its dependence on the violent inclusion of non-Europeans would not be destabilising. Kant points to a solution that assumes coherence between the European subject and the world *insofar* as the world is limited to what can be dominated and enclosed by that subject.

What is novel in Kant is not that thought pre-empts content (which we might also attribute to pre-critical rationalism), but rather that 'with Kant something absolutely new begins: the other within thought.'^[24] He argues against both rationalism and empiricism that whilst input from the world is necessary for the subject to develop new knowledge, that relationship is mediated through an organisational framework. This is supposed to both delimit and condition experience such that the "other" can be known only through a matrix of possible experience that is necessary for experience *as such*.^[25] Kant writes that, 'the conditions of the possibility of experience in general are at the same time conditions of the possibility of the objects of experience.'^[26] We experience the world as meaningfully ordered, as objects with persistence and in relation, because of an infrastructure of rules that determine the possibility of all objects of experience. So any new information is processed through this field of relations within which all empirical objects must be instantiated such that they can be known at all. This world with which the subject has no contact then appears as delimited and organized insofar as it is constituted by the thinking subject themselves.^[27]

The result is that any relationship to alterity is filtered through this framework – there is no direct contact with the "other."^[28] The assumption that the world must correlate to the subject is a process of synthesis in which the other is reduced to legibility with the European frame. Access to alterity is delimited – the lawlike consistency of appearances relies on its pre-emptive limitation, with the "other" fully domesticated under the synthetic activity of the subject. This defines a chasm between alterity as it is inscribed within the matrix of possible experience, and alterity that is rendered absolute – as unknowable and beyond the limits of possible assimilation.

Ashon Crawley writes of how the creation of this subjective “inside” is thus grounded on an ‘impenetrable incapacity,^[29] with Enlightenment thought dependent upon the continued displacement of alterity to make possible a world of seeming coherence, calculability, and rationality. As the slave is required for accumulation and transactions they are barred from involvement in, so the “other” provides the conditions under which synthesis can produce a field of experience upon which it cannot impinge. Synthesis is not the exclusion of difference but the attempt to pre-emptively annihilate and police the alterity upon which the system is dependent.

Whilst Kant is well known as a philosopher of limits, I want to foreground not only how Kant defines limits of thought such that thought is possible. Rather, the violence of the breach is both repudiated and filtered through a limiting process in which a calculable and quarantined “other” can appear as legible within the regime of colonial modernity.^[30] In other words, the drive toward a unified world in correlation with thought is also the continued attempt to engineer a domain that is sutured against those on whom it depends.

White kin

Let us consider this movement constitutive of Kant’s domesticated and quarantined alterity in conversation with plantation Barbados. There, the transformation from European frontier to established world would write slaves into legible form whilst also reproducing ‘that Blackness is in some fundamental sense meaningless; that it can be understood as a void or unexplainable difference.’^[31] In 1661 ‘An act for the good governing of Servants, and ordaining the Rights between Masters and Servants’ and ‘an act for the better ordering and governing of Negroes’ were written into law. Known as the slave codes, legislative distinctions between indentured servant and slave were foregrounded, with servant’s rights codified and expanded. The legal relationship to work via contract allowed the indentured to develop rationality, to engage in civil order, and to have rights under the law.

In contrast, the codes did not just ensure that slaves were ‘precluded from the possession of rights’^[32]; they made slaves as Black, using “negro” interchangeably with “slave” for whom ‘the object of gratuitous violence was a perpetual structural constant.’^[33] The codes characterise slave as chattel property, which previously had ‘never required any law; it was firmly embedded in custom from the beginning of slavery in the colony.’^[34] Long established forms of violence became prescribed in slave codes, and which have four essential characteristics: lifetime status; that the status of slave follows the mother; racial identification; slave as chattel.^[35]

Whilst these characteristics followed English legal concepts typically applied to chattel as exchangeable commodity, slaves were also subject to legal concepts of real estate that were distinct in English law.^[36] Left implicit in the codes, their prescription emerges in formulations of the use of slaves for bequeathment in wills and deeds of sale, as gifts, for payment, as loan security, and plantation inventory.^[37] Slaves functioned as fungible commodity and source of further financial accumulation through widespread English investment and collateral whilst also forming an enduring source of inherited labor.^[38]

Perhaps, since as Robert Nichols argues, “theft is the mechanism by which property relations are generated,”^[39] the middle passage might be considered as a process of slave-making somewhat analogous with the colonial making of land in the Americas into property ratified by Locke.^[40] Where Locke saw it as necessary to expropriate and enclose land against a threat of those in the state of nature, rights over slaves were similarly interwoven with a legal right to protect property from incursion. But we should not forget that, as Hortense Spillers details, the middle passage ‘marked a theft of the body’ through ‘actual mutilation, dismemberment, and exile.’^[41] Forced to embody

disordering threat, the slave was made both subject of property rights and the object of forcible proscription against incursion on those same rights. As such, the Black slave 'serves as *pure function* rather than relation,'^[42] within the nascent structure of the plantocracy, enabling distinctions between slave and servant to be made through the proscriptive force of property relations.

In this sense, and following Orlando Patterson, the violence productive of the slave as outside the domain of law yet object of it should not lead us to simply characterize the slave as object of property. Rather, it is 'the notions of "ownership" and "thingness" as legal and social concepts which must be explained and defined in terms of the idea of slavery', rather than the other way around.^[43] The property relationship is 'a legally enforceable relationship of power and delimitation holding between people.'^[44] So rather than think of property as a singular relationship with an object (which is often the supposed debasement that forms the basis of the master-slave relationship) property should be understood as a set of relations making legal the assertion of claims to limit and exclude access and power over things or persons.^[45] The status of the slave is not derived from ownership, labor, or economy so much as that status allowed for whiteness to be set as their boundaries.^[46]

The codes make explicit how the form that the property relationship takes is primarily one of proscription 'as a tool of domination.'^[47] As Rinaldo Walcott writes,

Possession had to be something more than ownership, so it also became authority invited in white people to direct all inferiors. This meant that even when a white person did not actually own slaves, he or she still possessed authority over Black people.^[48]

From a context in which white servants often worked alongside slaves, the collective subjection of slaves was the process through which whiteness could be congealed – deputising white servants to capture runaway slaves, and work as part of an emerging police force.

Ratifying a collective responsibility for whites to control and capture slaves, patrols were formed to search slave quarters, chase runaways, and watch over gatherings like markets or ceremonies.^[49] They were to enforce the codes through surveillance and coercion, being required to live-on or enter plantations and search quarters, as well as inflicting punishment and martial law on suspected runaway slaves and those found without passes.^[50] Slave mobility and resistance were embedded as fundamental threats that would consolidate civil order not just through policing, but as policing. The codes scaffolded a system where all white people were conscripted to uphold authority of white possession over Black people, whether they owned slaves or not.

Property and policing were interwoven much more deeply than is sometimes suggested by the idea of a police force charged with protecting private property. The collective possessiveness and subjection engendering 'the submission of the slave to all whites,'^[51] was the means through which "whites" as collective order would be congealed.^[52] The creation of civil order as white community was one and the same as the creation of a collective police force. This exemplifies Tiffany Lethabo King's argument that the ascent to whiteness involved the 'death of others' as 'exclusive and privileged site of unfettered self-actualization.'^[53]

Freedom as siege

I want to think about the implications of the embedding and universalisation of this white collective mastery in the constitution of freedom. Many enlightenment accounts invoke the image of the slave as negative infraction of liberty, with freedom defined as self-possession.^[54] Kant (following Rousseau) is primarily concerned to think of freedom as mastery over the state of nature such that it cannot possibly bleed into the realm of law, reason, and order. As such he requires that autonomy has no source other than universalized reason: 'it is requisite to reason's lawgiving that it should need to presuppose only *itself*, because a rule is objectively and universally valid only when it holds without the contingent, subjective conditions that distinguish one rational being from another.'^[55] Freedom consists in being bound to laws of our own making.

But, in brief, ensuring that such rules are universally valid relies on 'the subjection of inclination to the rule of reason and its demand for universalizability.'^[56] Freedom is thus set against corruption by the particular, contingent, and subjective. It is possible to escape the *metaphorical* slavery of inclination and external intrusion on our actions by nurturing and enforcing rationality and decreasing the power of that which lies outside it, which is to say the state of nature. Whilst freedom is sutured to order and ordering as the condition of being in the world, one becomes free only under submission to law and limit, and in vigilance against the insurgency of nature and desire. The frontier is at once universalized and internalized.

In distinction with the metaphorical slave that so animated colonial modernity, the Barbados codes made legible a framework of relative freedoms against the Black slave whose 'being, his capacity to act, his will and his autonomy were all invested in another person.'^[57] In contrast with those who would be freed from metaphorical slavery, Walcott describes how the slave and any child of matrilineal descent could not possibly be free because they were by their nature destined to remain under domination in violence:

The Black enslaved person literally had no autonomy or control over either their body or biological kin: the child followed the condition of the mother and thereby became at birth the white master's property.^[58]

By virtue of their inclusion in collective mastery white indentured servants were granted the possibility of freedom even whilst under contract. As such, freedoms lay along a continuum between plantation owner (master) and indentured servant (unfree laborer). In distinction, the slave cannot appear along this continuum, but rather functioned to render freedom possible *at all* insofar as their subjection provides the infrastructure for that collective mastery.

This is embedded and universalized in Kant. Black people, according to Kant, 'have by nature no feeling that rises above the ridiculous', and so without 'capacity to act in accordance with concepts and principles', they are by nature not just unfree but beyond even the possibility of freedom.^[59] But as state of nature, Black people are positioned not simply as antithesis to the lawful subject whose freedom would be guaranteed under social order produced through lawfulness. Since for Kant anybody existing outside of a (European) nation-state embodies the state of nature, they represent a threat to order. As he writes, '[somebody] in the state of nature deprives me of this security; even if he doesn't do anything to me – by the mere fact that he isn't subject to any law and is therefore a constant threat to me.'^[60] In other words Black and Indigenous people – slaves and colonized – were a perpetual threat.^[61] The threat is not limited to political sovereignty, but as disordering alterity that could open out thought and law – destabilising both – undoing property and so also undoing freedom. In part Kant's concern in conjoining freedom with mastery is due to what remains from Hobbes in that that the state of nature is *spectral* – it is omnipresent in its possible return and 'threatened regression.'^[62]

As such, this war against nature is also a war ‘against our vulnerability to that not within rational control.’^[63] This requires an endless struggle against that which is disordering and pathological, and which is ensconced in those ‘lawless savages’ who for Kant have a fundamental incapacity to think.^[64] The impurities of subjective inclination, desire and concrete particularity index an insecurity in the structure of autonomy that always must be staved-off: the fantasies and material realities of anti-Black violence are both inscribed and redacted from within the structures of reason itself.^[65]

Black people are legible to colonial modernity as naturalized and permanent slave: ‘Americans and Negroes cannot govern themselves. Thus are good only as slaves.’^[66] Here, as Ronald Judy argues, Kant makes an illegitimate appeal to a transcendental account of Blackness, so operating as necessary condition of thought itself.^[67] This presupposition and naturalisation of Black people slaves thus allows for the continuation of violence under collective and legal formations of the kind exemplified above whilst that violence is made unthinkable as violence since it is pre-requisite for rational autonomy. As such, the slave forms the ongoing condition of possibility for collective self-legislation that would be universalized far beyond formal abolition.^[68] Freedom is not defined as measure against metaphorical slavery so much as it is defined through its universalisation as collective mastery.

Under permanent sentence of death

Kant’s cosmopolitanism has often been read as a form of gradualism in which the ultimate telos of history is the global ordering of humanity through the perfection of reason and its transformation of the earth.^[69] For Kant culture and order are understood as a recursively emergent and embedded system supposedly tending towards a ‘systematic union of different rational beings under common laws’. This coheres with a supposedly “civilising mission” of imperial expansion through which the earth is to be re-formed in accord with reason and law. Whilst every free act must begin within the realm of lawful rules (rather than natural causes), this makes way for a *constructive* project that turns the material of the earth into the world.^[70] This is to say that the machinery of colonial modernity – urban restructuring; plantation; internment; mass enslavement – generatively entrenched the absolutisation and domesticated absorption of alterity.

However, there is a radical fissure in Kant’s universe since the Black enslaved person indexes a state of disorder that cannot be ordered under universal history. The state of nature for Black people is explicitly stated to be permanent (which is also later found in Hegel’s depiction of ‘unhistorical, undevelopable’ Africans). Any commitment to the progression of the human species cannot possibly involve Black people, who ‘infect or compromise the very idea of humanity as Kant conceived it.’^[71] The “civilising mission” immediately comes undone.

If the world were to escape from this threat of possible disordering –which is presumably required for reason to reach its asymptotic goals – it would therefore be necessary for colonial modernity to tend towards and eventually reach the conclusion of a process of *passive* racial genocide.^[72] As Kant put it in his notes on anthropology, the progression of *Man* tends towards an end in which ‘all races will be extinguished [...] only not that of the Whites.’^[73] The telos of Reason is therefore White destiny grounded on the eventual wiping-out of ‘all of the Americas.’^[74] Whilst Kant considers this genocide to be passive, it is pre-determined by nature as its ‘hidden plan.’^[75] Therefore, a central tension of Kant’s supposed gradualism is that the disordering chaos “outside” is not possibly subsumable under the ideal form of the subject, or under the world that would be remade under colonial modernity.

Colonial modernity is reliant on violent inclusion within a global order whose completion is thereby made impossible – the alterity upon which Kant’s entire project relies is that which it must see extinguished to bring that project to its fulfilment. The tension at the core of the Kantian project is exactly that which underlies enslavement and colonisation more broadly: that they cannot engage in either total assimilation or total genocide since both would redistribute power globally and destroy colonial modernity altogether. As Calvin Warren writes, this ‘world needs [Black people], even as it tries to eliminate them [actively through brutality and passively through neglect] (this is the tension between necessity and hatred),^[76] and Abdul JanMohamed states that ‘the colonial system simultaneously wills the annihilation and the multiplication of the natives.’^[77] The eschatological framework for the redemption of disorder that is required to pre-emptively sever that system from absolute alterity is thereby recuperated within a materialist dialectic propelled towards the impossible completion of the eradication of violence. Perhaps just as Kant asks us to *act as though* it is possible for the autonomy of reason to be ‘directly mapped onto the phenomenal world,’^[78] so too we are here to act as if the slave and the colonized are *already* subject to extinction.

The resulting staving-off of genocide produces a species of violence and vehemence against those whose spectral presence ‘necessarily haunt[s] the distorted perceptual terms of the Kantian-subject and thought-world relationship.’^[79] This protracted genocide of colonial modernity is forced to inhere in the body of the slave, whilst simultaneously operating as an abstract form of domestication and discretionary violence from all whites. Not only has this enhanced whiteness as integral relation across a continuum of social positions, but civil order was forged through the rights and privilege of whites to engage in the ever-present potential for subjection of Black people.^[80] What resulted, as enshrined in Barbados law, is the slave under pervasive and interminable suspension of execution, as ‘literally a person under sentence of death.’^[81] It is this status which, as Nahum Chandler observes, forms the ‘unconditional conditions of the operations of thought.’^[82]

A world as police

The alleged antinomy I discussed at the start of this article resonates wherever attention is drawn to how so-called liberal democracies are ceaselessly violent and brutal engines for extinction. Instead, I have shown that the so-called freedoms of colonial modernity not only depend upon the unfreedoms of others, but produced a world in which other’s freedoms cannot even be figured. This requires us to consider how alterity is both produced as infinite threat and domesticated as function that continues to stabilize colonial order as policing.

In Kant and Barbados, the problem of the frontier is resolved in an ‘irreversible alienation’ whilst gaining pre-emptive immunity from ‘contingency, fracture, and disorder.’^[83] If the thin blue line depends upon the manufacture and protection from a remainder of violent alterity inscribed along frontiers, here that frontier would be internalized such that the breach is sutured *a priori*. In Kant, we thereby see the attempt to end contact with alterity *apart* from within the system produced under Europe. If the world Kant hopes for is ‘[a]n island, enclosed by nature itself within unalterable limits,’^[84] then, as Rebecca Kukla writes,

Its orderliness and freedom from intrusion is transcendently guaranteed, because of the necessary constitutive role that our ordering faculties play in producing the island in the first place. This island has no outside of the sort that could ever permeate or interrupt it.^[85]

The eschatological framework of redemption from disorder that is required to pre-emptively sever colonial modernity from absolute alterity is recovered only through the incessant limiting of the world against a supposedly inherent and immovable evil whose impossible absorption is the true ground of reason. This allowed reason to seem to be its own progenitor and legislator by determining boundaries that are internalized to ensure that danger, threat, and chaos is voided, since no-thing lies outside the world as relational totality.

In staging a relationship between Barbados and Kant's Enlightenment, we have seen the prefiguration of the distribution of violent relationships between master and slave; conquistador-settler and Indigenous, becoming embedded into the structure of 'civil society/Black void.'^[86] The supposed absorption of the slave into legal frameworks was the pre-condition for its continuation and afterlives, whilst the naturalisation of slavery as equivalent with Black people made them unthinkable as part of social relations.^[87] This is to say, the *attempted* universalisation of mastery remains an unthinkable presupposition of a social order whose brutish violence could thereby be analytically known and affectively felt as rational and lawlike.

With Saidiya Hartman's consideration that 'acts of breach are endlessly perpetuated,'^[88] this allowed for mechanisms through which protracted genocide – via deracination, hyper-exploitation, dispossession, extinction – can persist whilst naturalised, redacted, and forged into the stability of a supposedly liberal world-order. In protracted genocide this world is required to continually relate to that which is constitutively destabilising. Here, proximities and segregations are enfolded under the incessant displacement of violent relation by filtering the terms of that relation through absolute control (domestication) and absolute alterity (generative disorder). The breach continues to provide purpose in filtration, regulation, and limitation to produce a world whose incapacity to process contingency, alterity, and plenitude is its supposed advantage.^[89] It is within this hovering tension and threat that the criminal emerged not only as index of omnipresent disorder and chaos, but as primarily a way of making legible the position of the slave in a domesticated imperialist environment.^[90]

The world is produced not only as horizon of possibility, but as cage. As such, this 'self-imposed incarceration', as Rebecca Kukla puts it, does not only index the mastery of a specific and secure domain but also a drive towards imperial recreation as global domestication.^[91] This is a containment strategy as programme of domination. Colonial modernity has required that police have no determinable limit across our carceral island-world.

Abolitionary impossibilities

What is typically called police is a continuum of militarized, institutionalized, and embedded policing that has a more or less explicit form as a mode of control and horizon of imagination. We see this continued through pervasive policing strategies but also through proscription of the accumulation of wealth and the marking out of communities as "out of place" (having to be in the order of place) or inherently suspicious.^[92] Policing forms a necessary component for continuing the hyper-exploitation of migrant and racially cheapened labor together with the dispossession of racially segregated and intensified zones of poverty for resource and wealth extraction. Globally this operates through political groups, human rights agencies, international conglomerates, treaties, financial extortion, limits on food-sovereignty, encampment, tracking movement, supply chains, and cross-border operations. The co-constituting functions of the carceral, bordering, policing, ensure the flows of value and protection of accumulation for some, and the disposability and extinction for many.

Reverberating from Barbados across Lampedusa and Rana Plaza, this also includes dispossession by managed decline of racialized communities, geographies, and infrastructures *inside* the imperial nation-state. For instance, policing is required as management strategy for our proximity with those “perpetual outsiders” upon whom the collective wealth of and phantasies of the core absolutely depend. Fanon’s analysis of the colony stretched beyond tightly segregated spatial zones and filtered through more pervasive and insidious modes of control. The universality of Black policing is embedded and entrenched across the world: as Wilderson writes, “[Black people] are policed all the time and everywhere.”^[93] Its violences are so built-in to the normative ways that we think and order our existence that they are made practically mundane. As Walcott observes, “deaths at the hands of police and other state actors and substate actors are so frequent and so numerous as to be a normal part of Black life.”^[94]

But, our attention should also be drawn by the above to the incapacity of the political to gain traction on that which provides its supposed conditions of possibility – particularly as we address abolition. Police and politics can neither exhaust *policing* nor grasp that breach which must ceaselessly be displaced through it. Enduring far beyond its formal end, as Alvaro Reyes writes, “the colonial situation is in fact composed from top to bottom as a relation of force, or a war, that exceeds the institutions of what in the West has been termed “the political.”^[95] Insofar as police constitutes an institutionalized super-structure, its foremost role is to secure and submerge violence under policing as the unity of white order.^[96]

This world and its worlding – however it appears – is not a coherent, stable, and civil order: it is held together as police. The perverse proliferation of policing everywhere and without determinable limit causes us to rethink abolition beyond political limits and horizons. Abolitionary movement embodies the impossibility of life in this world. We have been forced to partake in worlds of subjection – a modernity-dream in which freedoms index collective mastery, justice indexes depravity, reason indexes the fractious indexing of thought to a myopic world. Policing reaches into the ways subjectivities have been formed in control, scrutiny, and limit. Within this world freedom is a cage.

Born from this ongoing dependence of whiteness on an impossible drive toward anti-Black annihilation, police is less a thin blue line between civility and chaos, and more the form of the world itself.

Notes

1. This conception of the world develops from: Harney, Stefano, and Fred Moten. “Base faith”. *E-Flux Journal*. 86 (2017); Wilderson III, Frank. *Red, White, and Black: Cinema and the Structure of US Antagonisms* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008); Palmer, Tyrone. “Otherwise than Blackness: Feeling, World, Sublimation”. *Qui Parle: Critical Humanities and Social Sciences*. 29:2 (2020), pp.247-283; Wynter, Sylvia. “Unsettling the coloniality of being/power/truth/freedom: Towards the human, after man, its overrepresentation—An argument”. *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3:3 (2003), pp.257-337.
2. Hartman, Saidiya. *Scenes of subjection: terror, slavery, and self-making in nineteenth-century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010) p.72.
3. Sexton, Jared. “Unbearable blackness”. *Cultural Critique*. 90 (2015) pp.159-178, p.166.
4. Buscaglia-Salgado, José. *Undoing empire: Race and nation in the mulatto Caribbean*. (Minnesota: U of Minnesota Press, 2003). This transformation of earth into world should not indicate absolute conquest across *terra nullius*, but how colonial modernity attempted to produce a singular world.
5. Barrett, Lindon. *Racial Blackness and the Discontinuity of Western Modernity*. (Illinois: University of Illinois

- Press, 2013); Scott, David. *Conscripts of modernity: The tragedy of colonial enlightenment*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).
6. Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. (New York: Grove, 2004).
 7. Warren, Calvin. *Ontological Terror: Blackness, Nihilism, Emancipation*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), p. 38.
 8. Kant, Immanuel. *Anthropology, History, Education*. eds. Zöllner, Günter and Louden, Robert (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
 9. Marriott, David. *Whither Fanon?: Studies in the Blackness of Being*. (Redwood: Stanford University Press, 2018).
 10. Alagraa, Bedour. "The Interminable Catastrophe". offshoot (2021). Available at offshootjournal.org/the-interminable-catastrophe/ (Accessed 10.3.21).
 11. This is practically endemic to liberal political philosophy, but see the discussion in Hesse, Barnor. "Racialized modernity: An analytics of white mythologies". *Ethnic and Racial Studies*. 30:4 (2007) pp.643-663; Mills, Charles W. "The Chronopolitics of Racial Time." *Time & Society* 29, no. 2 (May 2020): 297-317; Mignolo, Walter. *The darker side of western modernity: Global futures, Decolonial options*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011); Young, Iris Marion. *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2011). An excellent examination of this supposed contradiction is Reddy, Chandan. *Freedom with Violence: Race, Sexuality, and the US State* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).
 12. Dussel, Enrique. "Eurocentrism and modernity". *boundary 2*. 20:3 (1993), pp.65-76.
 13. Schmitt, Carl. *The Leviathan in the state theory of Thomas Hobbes: meaning and failure of a political symbol*. ed. George Schwab, trans. George Schwab and Erna Hilfstein. (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1996).
 14. Wall, Tyler. "The police invention of humanity: Notes on the "thin blue line"". *Crime, Media, Culture*. 16:3 (2020), pp.319-336.
 15. Wilderson III, Frank. "Gramsci's Black Marx: Whither the Slave in Civil Society?". *Social Identities*. 9:2 (2003), pp.225-240.
 16. Marriott, *Whither*.
 17. Indicative examples are: the former, Young, *Justice*; the latter, Mignolo, *Darker*.
 18. Barrett, *Racial*, p.4; Lowe, Lisa. *The Intimacies of Four Continents*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015).
 19. Anievas, Alexander, and Nişancioğlu, Kerem. *How the West Came to Rule: The Geopolitical Origins of Capitalism*. (London: Pluto Press, 2015) p.158. See Beckford, George. *Persistent Poverty: Underdevelopment in Plantation Economies of the Third World* (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 1972); Benítez-Rojo, Antonio. *The repeating island: The Caribbean and the postmodern perspective*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996); Robinson, Cedric. *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*. (London: Zed, 1983).
 20. Rugemer, Edward. (2013). "The Development of Mastery and Race in the Comprehensive Slave Codes of the Greater Caribbean during the Seventeenth Century". *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 70:3 (2013).
 21. Benítez-Rojo, *Repeating*, p.70.
 22. An indicative example is Vitale, Alex. *The end of policing*. (London: Verso Books, 2017).
 23. See Foucault, Michel. *History of Madness*. ed. Jean Khalifa, trans. Jonathan Murphy and Jean Khalifa (London: Routledge, 2006). An overview of scholarship on Kant and race is Bernasconi, Robert. "Will the real Kant please stand up". *Radical Philosophy* 117 (2003), pp.13-22.
 24. Deleuze, Gilles. "Kant, Synthesis and Time". *Cours Vincennes*, 14 (1978).
 25. Kant, Immanuel. 2015. *Critique of Pure Reason*. eds. and trans. Guyer, Paul and Wood, Allen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). See Allison, Henry. *Kant's transcendental idealism*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004); Banham, Gary. *Kant's transcendental imagination*. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Bennington, Geoffrey. *Kant on the Frontier: Philosophy, Politics, and the Ends of the Earth*. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017); Derrida, Jacques. "Force of Law: 'The Mystical Foundation of Authority'". In Cornell, Drucilla and Rosenfeld, Michael (eds.). *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*. (New York: Routledge, 1992); Kitcher, Patricia. *Kant's transcendental psychology*. (Oxford: Oxford university press, 1990);

- Malabou, Catherine. *Before tomorrow: Epigenesis and rationality*. (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2016).
26. Kant, *Critique*, A158/B197.
 27. Crawley, Ashon. *Blackpentecostal breath: The aesthetics of possibility*. (New York: Fordham Univ Press, 2016). pp.116-7.
 28. That this characterises the entire critical and phenomenological tradition since, see Meillassoux, Quentin. *After finitude: An essay on the necessity of contingency*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2010.
 29. Crawley, *Blackpentecostal*, p.121.
 30. See Jackson, Zakiyyah Iman. *Becoming Human*. (New York: New York University Press, 2020); Shilliam, Robbie. "Decolonising the grounds of ethical inquiry: A dialogue between Kant, Foucault and Glissant". *Millennium*. 39:3 (2011), pp.649-665.
 31. Marriott, *Whither*, p.343.
 32. Rugemer, *Development*, p.439.
 33. Kilgore, Ivan. "Not Worker, But Chattel". *Propter Nos*. 63 (2019). See also Wilderson, *Red*, p.17.
 34. Handler, Jerome. "Custom and law: The status of enslaved Africans in seventeenth-century Barbados". *Slavery & Abolition* (2016), p.8.
 35. Handler, *Custom*, p.4.
 36. Barbados heralded the 'breakdown of the ancient distinction between real and chattel property during the colonial period' (Park, K-Sue, *Conquest and Slavery as Foundational to Property Law* (February 22, 2021). Georgetown Law Faculty Publications, p.47).
 37. Handler, *Custom*, p.16.
 38. Pares, Richard. "Merchants and Planters". *Economic History Review*. 4 (1960).
 39. Nichols, Robert. "Theft is property! The recursive logic of dispossession". *Political Theory* 46:1 (2018), pp.3-28.
 40. Taylor, Chris. "Divine servitude against the work of man: dispossessive subjects and Exoduses to and from property". *Religion*. (2020), pp.1-22.
 41. Spillers, Hortense. "Mama's baby, papa's maybe: An American grammar book". *Diacritics* 17:2 (1987), pp.65-81.
 42. Kaplan, Le'ah. "(Non)Presence: The Hole of Metaphysics". *Propter Nos*. 3 (2019), pp.5-18, p.10.
 43. Patterson, Orlando. "On slavery and slave formations". *New Left Review*. 117 (1979) pp.31- 67. p.38.
 44. Patterson, *Slavery*, p.38.
 45. Harris, Cheryl. "Whiteness as property". *Harvard law review*. (1993), pp.1707-1791.
 46. Marriott, *Whither*, p.143.
 47. Nichols, *Theft*.
 48. Walcott, Rinaldo. *On Property*. (La Vergne: Biblioasis, 2021) p.11. See also Hartman, *Scenes*: 'the absolute submission mandated by law was not simply that of slave to his or her owner, but the submission of the enslaved before all whites' (p.83); Jackson Sow, Marissa, *Whiteness as Contract* (January 24, 2021). *Washington and Lee Law Review*, Vol. 78, No. 5 (2021).
 49. Beckles, Hilary. "From land to sea: Runaway Barbados slaves and servants, 1630-1700". *Slavery & Abolition*. 6:3 (1985) pp.79-94; Hadden, Sally. *Slave patrols: Law and violence in Virginia and the Carolinas*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).
 50. Craton, Michael. *Sinews of empire: a short history of British slavery* (New York: Anchor, 1974).
 51. Hartman, *Scenes*, p.24.
 52. On the plantation as formation of relationality see McKittrick, Katherine. "Plantation futures". *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism*. 17:3 (2013), pp.1-15.
 53. King, Tiffany Lethabo. *The Black shoals: Offshore formations of Black and Native studies*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019) p.xii. See Ignatiev, Noel. *How the Irish became white*. (London: Routledge, 2009).
 54. Da Silva, Denise Ferreira. "Toward a Black Feminist Poethics: The quest(ion) of Blackness toward the End of the World." *The Black Scholar*. 44:2 (2014), pp.81-97.
 55. Kant, Immanuel. *Practical Philosophy*. ed. and trans. Gregor, M. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,

- 1996), 5:21.
56. Guyer, Paul. "Freedom: Will, autonomy". In Dudley, W. (ed.). *Immanuel Kant: Key Concepts – A Philosophical Introduction*. (Stocksfield: Acumen Publishing, 2010) pp. 85-102.
 57. Patterson, *Slavery*, p.39.
 58. Walcott, *On Property*, p7.
 59. Kant, *Anthropology*.
 60. Kant, *Political*, p.73.
 61. Slotkin, Richard. *Regeneration through violence: The mythology of the American frontier, 1600-1860*. (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000).
 62. Nyquist, Mary. *Arbitrary rule: Slavery, tyranny, and the power of life and death*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), p.260.
 63. Scott, *Conscripts*, p.13.
 64. Kant, Immanuel. Political writings. ed. and trans. Brinton, Donna and Goodwin, Janet. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp.45-9.
 65. See Brickman, Celia. *Aboriginal populations in the mind: Race and primitivity in psychoanalysis*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).
 66. Kant in Larrimore, Mark. "Sublime waste: Kant on the destiny of the 'races'". *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 29:1 (1999), pp.99-125.
 67. Judy, Ronald. "Kant and the Negro". *Surfaces* 1, (1991).
 68. Garba, Tapji, and Sorentino, Sara-Maria. "Slavery is a metaphor: A critical commentary on Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang's "decolonization is not a metaphor"" *Antipode*. 52:3 (2020): 764-782, p. 776. See also Sorentino, Sara-Maria. "The Abstract Slave: Anti-Blackness and Marx's Method". *International Labor and Working Class History*. 96 (2019), pp. 17-37: 'the freedom for self-mastery is itself what the slave is compelled to produce for the collectivity of capitalist subjects' (p.32); Walcott, Rinaldo. 2021. *The Long Emancipation: Moving Toward Black Freedom*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021).
 69. With perfectibility no longer secured by God, Kant looks to reason to realise the universal within the particular; Allison, Henry. *Kant's groundwork for the metaphysics of morals: A commentary*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2011) pp.41-43.
 70. Bennington, *Kant*, p.153.
 71. Bernasconi, *Will*. See also Kant's essay "Of the different races of human beings" (1775).
 72. See Bernasconi, *Will*; Harfouch, John. *Another Mind-body Problem: A History of Racial Non-being*. (Berlin: Global Academic Publishing, 2018).
 73. Kant, *Anthropology*, note 1520.
 74. Kant, *Anthropology*.
 75. Kant, *Anthropology*. See Eze, Emmanuel. "The Color of Reason: The Idea of "Race" in Kant's Anthropology". *The Bucknell Review*. 38:2 (1995).
 76. Warren, *Ontological*, p.10.
 77. JanMohamed, Abdul. *Manichean aesthetics: the politics of literature in colonial Africa*. (Amherst, Mass: University of Massachusetts Press, 1989).
 78. Shilliam, Robbie. *German thought and international relations: the rise and fall of a liberal project*. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p.73.
 79. Jackson, *Becoming*, p.112.
 80. See Hartman, *Scenes*, p.25.
 81. Patterson, *Slavery*, p.33.
 82. Chandler, Nahum Dimitri. *X: The Problem of the Negro as a Problem for Thought*. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), p.140-1.
 83. Kukla, Rebecca. "The Antinomies of Impure Reason: Rousseau and Kant on the Metaphysics of Truth-Telling". *Inquiry*. 48:3 (2005), pp.203-231, p.227.

84. Kant, *Critique*, (A235/B294).
85. Kukla, *Antinomies*, p.226.
Wilderson, *Red*, p.80. The phrase “conquistador-settler” is from Lethabo-King, *Black*.
86. See Sorentino, *Abstract*; Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995).
87. Hartman, *Scenes*, p.77.
88. See Da Silva, *Toward*.
89. Hartman, *Scenes*.
90. *Ibid*, p.225.
91. See Trafford, James. *The Empire at Home: Internal Colonies and the End of Britain*. (London: Pluto Books, 2020).
92. Wilderson III, Frank. ““We’re Trying to Destroy the World”: Anti-Blackness and Police Violence After Ferguson.” In Gržinić, Marina and Stojnić, Aneta (eds.). *Shifting Corporealities in Contemporary Performance*,. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp. 45-59, p.46.
93. Walcott, *Long*. p.12.
94. Reyes, Alvaro. “On Fanon's Manichean Delirium”. *The Black Scholar* 42:3-4 (2012), pp.13-20, p.18.
95. See Felicia Denaud’s incisive concept of the “unnameable war”; *At the Vanishing Point of the Word: Blackness, Imperium, and the Unnameable War*, Doctoral Thesis (forthcoming).

With thanks to Petero Kalulé for reading and commenting on a draft of this paper, as well as their ongoing thinking-with.

Cite this Essay

Trafford, James. “The World as Police.” *Rhizomes: Cultural Studies in Emerging Knowledge*, no. 38, 2022, doi:10.20415/rhiz/038.e04