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The Black Atlantic as a
Counterculture of Modernity

We who are homeless,—Among Europeans today there is no lack of those who are entitled to call themselves homeless in a distinctive and honourable sense . . . We children of the future, how could we be at home in this today? We feel disfavour for all ideals that might lead one to feel at home even in this fragile, broken time of transition; as for "realities," we do not believe that they will last. The ice that still supports people today has become very thin; the wind that brings the thaw is blowing; we ourselves who are homeless constitute a force that breaks open ice and other all too thin "realities."

> *Nietzsche*

On the notion of modernity. It is a vexed question. Is not every era "modern" in relation to the preceding one? It seems that at least one of the components of "our" modernity is the spread of the awareness we have of it. The awareness of our awareness (the double, the second degree) is our source of strength and our torment.

> *Edouard Glissant*

STRIVING TO BE both European and black requires some specific forms of double consciousness. By saying this I do not mean to suggest that taking on either or both of these unfinished identities necessarily exhausts the subjective resources of any particular individual. However, where racist, nationalist, or ethnically absolutist discourses orchestrate political relationships so that these identities appear to be mutually exclusive, occupying the space between them or trying to demonstrate their continuity has been viewed as a provocative and even oppositional act of political insubordination.

The contemporary black English, like the Anglo-Africans of earlier generations and perhaps, like all blacks in the West, stand between (at least) two great cultural assemblages, both of which have mutated through the course of the modern world that formed them and assumed new configurations. At present, they remain locked symbiotically in an antagonistic relationship marked out by the symbolism of colours which adds to the conspicuous cultural power of their central Manichean dynamic—black and

white. These colours support a special rhetoric that has grown to be associated with a language of nationality and national belonging as well as the languages of "race" and ethnic identity.

Though largely ignored by recent debates over modernity and its discontents, these ideas about nationality, ethnicity, authenticity, and cultural integrity are characteristically modern phenomena that have profound implications for cultural criticism and cultural history. They crystallised with the revolutionary transformations of the West at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries and involved novel typologies and modes of identification. Any shift towards a postmodern condition should not, however, mean that the conspicuous power of these modern subjectivities and the movements they articulated has been left behind. Their power has, if anything, grown, and their ubiquity as a means to make political sense of the world is currently unparalleled by the languages of class and socialism by which they once appeared to have been surpassed. My concern here is less with explaining their longevity and enduring appeal than with exploring some of the special political problems that arise from the fatal junction of the concept of nationality with the concept of culture and the affinities and affiliations which link the blacks of the West to one of their adoptive, parental cultures: the intellectual heritage of the West since the Enlightenment. I have become fascinated with how successive generations of black intellectuals have understood this connection and how they have projected it in their writing and speaking in pursuit of freedom, citizenship, and social and political autonomy.

If this appears to be little more than a roundabout way of saying that the reflexive cultures and consciousness of the European settlers and those of the Africans they enslaved, the "Indians" they slaughtered, and the Asians they indentured were not, even in situations of the most extreme brutality, sealed off hermetically from each other, then so be it. This seems as though it ought to be an obvious and self-evident observation, but its stark character has been systematically obscured by commentators from all sides of political opinion. Regardless of their affiliation to the right, left, or centre, groups have fallen back on the idea of cultural nationalism, on the overintegrated conceptions of culture which present immutable, ethnic differences as an absolute break in the histories and experiences of "black" and "white" people. Against this choice stands another, more difficult option: the theorisation of creolisation, métissage, mestizaje, and hybridity. From the viewpoint of ethnic absolutism, this would be a litany of pollution and impurity. These terms are rather unsatisfactory ways of naming the processes of cultural mutation and restless (dis)continuity that exceed racial discourse and avoid capture by its agents.

This book addresses one small area in the grand consequence of this historical conjunction—the stereophonic, bilingual, or bifocal cultural forms originated by, but no longer the exclusive property of, blacks dispersed within the structures of feeling, producing, communicating, and remembering that I have heuristically called the black Atlantic world. This chapter is therefore rooted in and routed through the special stress that grows with the effort involved in trying to face (at least) two ways at once.

My concerns at this stage are primarily conceptual: I have tried to address the continuing lure of ethnic absolutisms in cultural criticism produced both by blacks and by whites. In particular, this chapter seeks to explore the special relationships between "race," culture, nationality, and ethnicity which have a bearing on the histories and political cultures of Britain's black citizens. I have argued elsewhere that the cultures of this group have been produced in a syncretic pattern in which the styles and forms of the Caribbean, the United States, and Africa have been reworked and reinscribed in the novel context of modern Britain's own untidy ensemble of regional and class-oriented conflicts. Rather than make the invigorating flux of those mongrel cultural forms my focal concern here, I want instead to look at broader questions of ethnic identity that have contributed to the scholarship and the political strategies that Britain's black settlers have generated and to the underlying sense of England as a cohesive cultural community against which their self-conception has so often been defined. Here the ideas of nation, nationality, national belonging, and nationalism are paramount. They are extensively supported by a clutch of rhetorical strategies that can be named "cultural insiderism."[1] The essential trademark of cultural insiderism which also supplies the key to its popularity is an absolute sense of ethnic difference. This is maximised so that it distinguishes people from one another and at the same time acquires an incontestable priority over all other dimensions of their social and historical experience, cultures, and identities. Characteristically, these claims are associated with the idea of national belonging or the aspiration to nationality and other more local but equivalent forms of cultural kinship. The range and complexity of these ideas in English cultural life defies simple summary or exposition. However, the forms of cultural insiderism they sanction typically construct the nation as an ethnically homogeneous object and invoke ethnicity a second time in the hermeneutic procedures deployed to make sense of its distinctive cultural content.

The intellectual seam in which English cultural studies has positioned itself—through innovative work in the fields of social history and literary criticism—can be indicted here. The statist modalities of Marxist analysis that view modes of material production and political domination as exclu-

sively *national* entities are only one source of this problem. Another factor, more evasive but nonetheless potent for its intangible ubiquity, is a quiet cultural nationalism which pervades the work of some radical thinkers. This crypto-nationalism means that they are often disinclined to consider the cross catalytic or transverse dynamics of racial politics as a significant element in the formation and reproduction of English national identities. These formations are treated as if they spring, fully formed, from their own special viscera.

My search for resources with which to comprehend the doubleness and cultural intermixture that distinguish the experience of black Britons in contemporary Europe required me to seek inspiration from other sources and, in effect, to make an intellectual journey across the Atlantic. In black America's histories of cultural and political debate and organisation I found another, second perspective with which to orient my own position. Here too the lure of ethnic particularism and nationalism has provided an ever-present danger. But that narrowness of vision which is content with the merely national has also been challenged from within that black community by thinkers who were prepared to renounce the easy claims of African-American exceptionalism in favour of a global, coalitional politics in which anti-imperialism and anti-racism might be seen to interact if not to fuse. The work of some of those thinkers will be examined in subsequent chapters.

This chapter also proposes some new chronotopes[2] that might fit with a theory that was less intimidated by and respectful of the boundaries and integrity of modern nation states than either English or African-American cultural studies have so far been. I have settled on the image of ships in motion across the spaces between Europe, America, Africa, and the Caribbean as a central organising symbol for this enterprise and as my starting point. The image of the ship—a living, micro-cultural, micro-political system in motion—is especially important for historical and theoretical reasons that I hope will become clearer below. Ships immediately focus attention on the middle passage, on the various projects for redemptive return to an African homeland, on the circulation of ideas and activists as well as the movement of key cultural and political artefacts: tracts, books, gramophone records, and choirs.

The rest of this chapter falls into three sections. The first part addresses some conceptual problems common to English and African-American versions of cultural studies which, I argue, share a nationalistic focus that is antithetical to the rhizomorphic, fractal structure of the transcultural, international formation I call the black Atlantic. The second section uses the life and writings of Martin Robison Delany, an early architect of black

nationalism whose influence still registers in contemporary political movements, to bring the black Atlantic to life and to extend the general arguments by introducing a number of key themes that will be used to map the responses to modernity's promises and failures produced by later thinkers. The final section explores the specific counterculture of modernity produced by black intellectuals and makes some preliminary points about the internality of blacks to the West. It initiates a polemic which runs through the rest of the book against the ethnic absolutism that currently dominates black political culture.

Cultural Studies in Black and White

Any satisfaction to be experienced from the recent spectacular growth of cultural studies as an academic project should not obscure its conspicuous problems with ethnocentrism and nationalism. Understanding these difficulties might commence with a critical evaluation of the ways in which notions of ethnicity have been mobilised, often by default rather than design, as part of the distinctive hermeneutics of cultural studies or with the unthinking assumption that cultures always flow into patterns congruent with the borders of essentially homogeneous nation states. The marketing and inevitable reification of cultural studies as a discrete academic subject also has what might be called a secondary ethnic aspect. The project of cultural studies is a more or less attractive candidate for institutionalisation according to the ethnic garb in which it appears. The question of whose cultures are being studied is therefore an important one, as is the issue of where the instruments which will make that study possible are going to come from. In these circumstances it is hard not to wonder how much of the recent international enthusiasm for cultural studies is generated by its profound associations with England and ideas of Englishness. This possibility can be used as a point of entry into consideration of the ethnohistorical specificity of the discourse of cultural studies itself.

Looking at cultural studies from an ethnohistorical perspective requires more than just noting its association with English literature, history, and New Left politics. It necessitates constructing an account of the borrowings made by these English initiatives from wider, modern, European traditions of thinking about culture, and at every stage examining the place which these cultural perspectives provide for the images of their racialised[3] others as objects of knowledge, power, and cultural criticism. It is imperative, though very hard, to combine thinking about these issues with consideration of the pressing need to get black cultural expressions, analyses, and histories taken seriously in academic circles rather than assigned via

the idea of "race relations" to sociology and thence abandoned to the elephants' graveyard to which intractable policy issues go to await their expiry. These two important conversations pull in different directions and sometimes threaten to cancel each other out, but it is the struggle to have blacks perceived as agents, as people with cognitive capacities and even with an intellectual history—attributes denied by modern racism—that is for me the primary reason for writing this book. It provides a valuable warrant for questioning some of the ways in which ethnicity is appealed to in the English idioms of cultural theory and history, and in the scholarly productions of black America. Understanding the political culture of blacks in Britain demands close attention to both these traditions. This book is situated on their cusp.

Histories of cultural studies seldom acknowledge how the politically radical and openly interventionist aspirations found in the best of its scholarship are already articulated to black cultural history and theory. These links are rarely seen or accorded any significance. In England, the work of figures like C. L. R. James and Stuart Hall offers a wealth of both symbols and concrete evidence for the practical links between these critical political projects. In the United States the work of interventionist scholars like bell hooks and Cornel West as well as that of more orthodox academics like Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Houston A. Baker, Jr., Anthony Appiah, and Hazel Carby, points to similar convergences. The position of these thinkers in the contested "contact zones"[4] between cultures and histories is not, however, as exceptional as it might appear at first. We shall see below that successive generations of black intellectuals (especially those whose lives, like James's, crisscrossed the Atlantic Ocean) noted this intercultural positionality and accorded it a special significance before launching their distinct modes of cultural and political critique. They were often urged on in their labour by the brutal absurdity of racial classification that derives from and also celebrates racially exclusive conceptions of national identity from which blacks were excluded as either non-humans or non-citizens. I shall try to show that their marginal endeavours point to some new analytic possibilities with a general significance far beyond the well-policed borders of black particularity. For example, this body of work offers intermediate concepts, lodged between the local and the global, which have a wider applicability in cultural history and politics precisely because they offer an alternative to the nationalist focus which dominates cultural criticism. These intermediate concepts, especially the undertheorised idea of diaspora examined in Chapter 6, are exemplary precisely because they break the dogmatic focus on discrete *national* dynamics which has characterised so much modern Euro-American cultural thought.

Getting beyond these national and nationalistic perspectives has become essential for two additional reasons. The first arises from the urgent obligation to reevaluate the significance of the modern nation state as a political, economic, and cultural unit. Neither political nor economic structures of domination are still simply co-extensive with national borders. This has a special significance in contemporary Europe, where new political and economic relations are being created seemingly day by day, but it is a worldwide phenomenon with significant consequences for the relationship between the politics of information and the practices of capital accumulation. Its effects underpin more recognisably political changes like the growing centrality of transnational ecological movements which, through their insistence on the association of sustainability and justice, do so much to shift the moral and scientific precepts on which the modern separation of politics and ethics was built. The second reason relates to the tragic popularity of ideas about the integrity and purity of cultures. In particular, it concerns the relationship between nationality and ethnicity. This too currently has a special force in Europe, but it is also reflected directly in the post-colonial histories and complex, transcultural, political trajectories of Britain's black settlers.

What might be called the peculiarity of the black English requires attention to the intermixture of a variety of distinct cultural forms. Previously separated political and intellectual traditions converged and, in their coming together, overdetermined the process of black Britain's social and historical formation. This blending is misunderstood if it is conceived in simple ethnic terms, but right and left, racist and anti-racist, black and white tacitly share a view of it as little more than a collision between fully formed and mutually exclusive cultural communities. This has become the dominant view where black history and culture are perceived, like black settlers themselves, as an illegitimate intrusion into a vision of authentic British national life that, prior to their arrival, was as stable and as peaceful as it was ethnically undifferentiated. Considering this history points to issues of power and knowledge that are beyond the scope of this book. However, though it arises from present rather than past conditions, contemporary British racism bears the imprint of the past in many ways. The especially crude and reductive notions of culture that form the substance of racial politics today are clearly associated with an older discourse of racial and ethnic difference which is everywhere entangled in the history of the idea of culture in the modern West. This history has itself become hotly contested since debates about multiculturalism, cultural pluralism, and the responses to them that are sometimes dismissively called "political correctness" arrived to query the ease and speed with which European partic-

ularisms are still being translated into absolute, universal standards for human achievement, norms, and aspirations.

It is significant that prior to the consolidation of scientific racism in the nineteenth century,[5] the term "race" was used very much in the way that the word "culture" is used today. But in the attempts to differentiate the true, the good, and the beautiful which characterise the junction point of capitalism, industrialisation, and political democracy and give substance to the discourse of western modernity, it is important to appreciate that scientists did not monopolise either the image of the black or the emergent concept of biologically based racial difference. As far as the future of cultural studies is concerned, it should be equally important that both were centrally employed in those European attempts to think through beauty, taste, and aesthetic judgement that are the precursors of contemporary cultural criticism.

Tracing the racial signs from which the discourse of cultural value was constructed and their conditions of existence in relation to European aesthetics and philosophy as well as European science can contribute much to an ethnohistorical reading of the aspirations of western modernity as a whole and to the critique of Enlightenment assumptions in particular. It is certainly the case that ideas about "race," ethnicity, and nationality form an important seam of continuity linking English cultural studies with one of its sources of inspiration—the doctrines of modern European aesthetics that are consistently configured by the appeal to national and often racial particularity.[6]

This is not the place to go deeply into the broader dimensions of this intellectual inheritance. Valuable work has already been done by Sander Gilman,[7] Henry Louis Gates, Jr.,[8] and others on the history and role of the image of the black in the discussions which found modern cultural axiology. Gilman points out usefully that the figure of the black appears in different forms in the aesthetics of Hegel, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche (among others) as a marker for moments of cultural relativism and to support the production of aesthetic judgements of a supposedly universal character to differentiate, for example, between authentic music and, as Hegel puts it, "the most detestable noise." Gates emphasises a complex genealogy in which ambiguities in Montesquieu's discussion of slavery prompt responses in Hume that can be related, in turn, to philosophical debates over the nature of beauty and sublimity found in the work of Burke and Kant. Critical evaluation of these representations of blackness might also be connected to the controversies over the place of racism and anti-Semitism in the work of Enlightenment figures like Kant and Voltaire.[9] These issues deserve an extended treatment that cannot be provided here. What is essential for the purposes of this opening chapter is that debates

of this sort should not be brought to an end simply by denouncing those who raise awkward or embarrassing issues as totalitarian forces working to legitimate their own political line. Nor should important enquiries into the contiguity of racialised reason and unreasonable racism be dismissed as trivial matters. These issues go to the heart of contemporary debates about what constitutes the canon of western civilisation and how this precious legacy should be taught.

In these embattled circumstances, it is regrettable that questions of "race" and representation have been so regularly banished from orthodox histories of western aesthetic judgement, taste, and cultural value.[10] There is a plea here that further enquiries should be made into precisely how discussions of "race," beauty, ethnicity, and culture have contributed to the critical thinking that eventually gave rise to cultural studies. The use of the concept of fetishism in Marxism and psychoanalytic studies is one obvious means to open up this problem.[11] The emphatically national character ascribed to the concept of modes of production (cultural and otherwise) is another fundamental question which demonstrates the ethnohistorical specificity of dominant approaches to cultural politics, social movements, and oppositional consciousnesses.

These general issues appear in a specific form in the distinctive English idioms of cultural reflection. Here too, the moral and political problem of slavery loomed large not least because it was once recognised as *internal* to the structure of western civilisation and appeared as a central political and philosophical concept in the emergent discourse of modern English cultural uniqueness.[12] Notions of the primitive and the civilised which had been integral to pre-modern understanding of "ethnic" differences became fundamental cognitive and aesthetic markers in the processes which generated a constellation of subject positions in which Englishness, Christianity, and other ethnic and racialised attributes would finally give way to the dislocating dazzle of "whiteness."[13] A small but telling insight into this can be found in Edmund Burke's discussion of the sublime, which has achieved a certain currency lately. He makes elaborate use of the association of darkness with blackness, linking them to the skin of a real, live black woman. Seeing her produces a sublime feeling of terror in a boy whose sight has been restored to him by a surgical operation.

> Perhaps it may appear on enquiry, that blackness and darkness are in some degree painful by their natural operation, independent of any associations whatever. I must observe that the ideas of blackness and darkness are much the same; and they differ only in this, that blackness is a more confined idea.

Mr Cheselden has given us a very curious story of a boy who had

been born blind, and continued so until he was thirteen or fourteen years old; he was then couched for a cataract, by which operation he received his sight . . . Cheselden tells us that the first time the boy saw a black object, it gave him great uneasiness; and that some time after, upon accidentally seeing a negro woman, he was struck with great horror at the sight.[14]

Burke, who opposed slavery and argued for its gradual abolition, stands at the doorway of the tradition of enquiry mapped by Raymond Williams which is also the infrastructure on which much of English cultural studies came to be founded. This origin is part of the explanation of how some of the contemporary manifestations of this tradition lapse into what can only be called a morbid celebration of England and Englishness. These modes of subjectivity and identification acquire a renewed political charge in the post-imperial history that saw black settlers from Britain's colonies take up their citizenship rights as subjects in the United Kingdom. The entry of blacks into national life was itself a powerful factor contributing to the circumstances in which the formation of both cultural studies and New Left politics became possible. It indexes the profound transformations of British social and cultural life in the 1950s and stands, again usually unacknowledged, at the heart of laments for a more human scale of social living that seemed no longer practicable after the 1939–45 war.

The convoluted history of black settlement need not be recapitulated here. One recent fragment from it, the struggle over Salman Rushdie's book *The Satanic Verses,* is sufficient to demonstrate that racialised conflict over the meaning of English culture is still very much alive and to show that these antagonisms have become enmeshed in a second series of struggles in which Enlightenment assumptions about culture, cultural value, and aesthetics go on being tested by those who do not accept them as universal moral standards. These conflicts are, in a sense, the outcome of a distinct historical period in which a new, ethnically absolute and culturalist racism was produced. It would explain the burning of books on English streets as manifestations of irreducible cultural differences that signposted the path to domestic racial catastrophe. This new racism was generated in part by the move towards a political discourse which aligned "race" closely with the idea of national belonging and which stressed complex cultural difference rather than simple biological hierarchy. These strange conflicts emerged in circumstances where blackness and Englishness appeared suddenly to be mutually exclusive attributes and where the conspicuous antagonism between them proceeded on the terrain of culture, not that of politics. Whatever view of Rushdie one holds, his fate

offers another small, but significant, omen of the extent to which the almost metaphysical values of England and Englishness are currently being contested through their connection to "race" and ethnicity. His experiences are also a reminder of the difficulties involved in attempts to construct a more pluralistic, post-colonial sense of British culture and national identity. In this context, locating and answering the nationalism if not the racism and ethnocentrism of English cultural studies has itself become a directly political issue.

Returning to the imperial figures who supplied Raymond Williams with the raw material for his own brilliant critical reconstruction of English intellectual life is instructive. Apart from Burke, Thomas Carlyle, John Ruskin, Charles Kingsley, and the rest of Williams's cast of worthy characters can become valuable not simply in attempts to purge cultural studies of its doggedly ethnocentric focus but in the more ambitious and more useful task of actively reshaping contemporary England by reinterpreting the cultural core of its supposedly authentic national life. In the work of reinterpretation and reconstruction, reinscription and relocation required to transform England and Englishness, discussion of the cleavage in the Victorian intelligentsia around the response to Governor Eyre's handling of the Morant Bay Rebellion in Jamaica in 1865 is likely to be prominent.[15] Like the English responses to the 1857 uprising in India examined by Jenny Sharpe,[16] it may well turn out to be a much more formative moment than has so far been appreciated. Morant Bay is doubly significant because it represents an instance of metropolitan, internal conflict that emanates directly from an external colonial experience. These crises in imperial power demonstrate their continuity. It is part of my argument that this inside/outside relationship should be recognised as a more powerful, more complex, and more contested element in the historical, social, and cultural memory of our glorious nation than has previously been supposed.

I am suggesting that even the laudable, radical varieties of English cultural sensibility examined by Williams and celebrated by Edward Thompson and others were not produced spontaneously from their own internal and intrinsic dynamics. The fact that some of the most potent conceptions of Englishness have been constructed by alien outsiders like Carlyle, Swift, Scott, or Eliot should augment the note of caution sounded here. The most heroic, subaltern English nationalisms and countercultural patriotisms are perhaps better understood as having been generated in a complex pattern of antagonistic relationships with the supra-national and imperial world for which the ideas of "race," nationality, and national culture provide the primary (though not the only) indices. This approach would obviously bring William Blake's work into a rather different focus from that

supplied by orthodox cultural history, and, as Peter Linebaugh has suggested, this overdue reassessment can be readily complemented by charting the long-neglected involvement of black slaves and their descendants in the radical history of our country in general and its working-class movements in particular.[17] Oluadah Equiano, whose involvement in the beginnings of organised working-class politics is now being widely recognised; the anarchist, Jacobin, ultra-radical, and Methodist heretic Robert Wedderburn; William Davidson, son of Jamaica's attorney general, hanged for his role in the Cato Street conspiracy to blow up the British cabinet in 1819;[18] and the Chartist William Cuffay are only the most urgent, obvious candidates for rehabilitation. Their lives offer invaluable means of seeing how thinking with and through the discourses and the imagery of "race" appears in the core rather than at the fringes of English political life. Davidson's speech from the scaffold before being subject to the last public decapitation in England is, for example, one moving appropriation of the rights of dissident freeborn Englishmen that is not widely read today.

Of this infamous trio, Wedderburn is perhaps the best known, thanks to the efforts of Peter Linebaugh and Iain McCalman.[19] The child of a slave dealer, James Wedderburn, and a slave woman, Robert was brought up by a Kingston conjure woman who acted as an agent for smugglers. He migrated to London at the age of seventeen in 1778. There, having published a number of disreputable ultra-radical tracts as part of his subversive political labours, he presented himself as a living embodiment of the horrors of slavery in a debating chapel in Hopkins Street near the Haymarket, where he preached a version of chiliastic anarchism based on the teachings of Thomas Spence and infused with deliberate blasphemy. In one of the debates held in his "ruinous hayloft with 200 persons of the lowest description," Wedderburn defended the inherent rights of the Caribbean slave to slay his master, promising to write home and "tell them to murder their masters as soon as they please." After this occasion he was tried and acquitted on a charge of blasphemy after persuading the jury that he had not been uttering sedition but merely practising the "true and infallible genius of prophetic skill."[20]

It is particularly significant for the direction of my overall argument that both Wedderburn and his sometime associate Davidson had been sailors, moving to and fro between nations, crossing borders in modern machines that were themselves micro-systems of linguistic and political hybridity. Their relationship to the sea may turn out to be especially important for both the early politics and poetics of the black Atlantic world that I wish to counterpose against the narrow nationalism of so much English historiography. Wedderburn served in the Royal Navy and as a privateer, while

Davidson, who ran away to sea instead of studying law, was pressed into naval service on two subsequent occasions. Davidson inhabited the same ultra-radical subculture as Wedderburn and was an active participant in the Marylebone Reading Society, a radical body formed in 1819 after the Peterloo massacre. He is known to have acted as the custodian of their black flag, which significantly bore a skull and crossbones with the legend "Let us die like men and not be sold as slaves," at an open air meeting in Smithfield later that year.[21] The precise details of how radical ideologies articulated the culture of the London poor before the institution of the factory system to the insubordinate maritime culture of pirates and other pre-industrial workers of the world will have to await the innovative labours of Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker.[22] However, it has been estimated that at the end of the eighteenth century a quarter of the British navy was composed of Africans for whom the experience of slavery was a powerful orientation to the ideologies of liberty and justice. Looking for similar patterns on the other side of the Atlantic network we can locate Crispus Attucks at the head of his "motley rabble of saucy boys, negroes, mulattoes, Irish teagues and outlandish jack tars"[23] and can track Denmark Vesey sailing the Caribbean and picking up inspirational stories of the Haitian revolution (one of his co-conspirators testified that he had said they would "not spare one white skin alive for this was the plan they pursued in San Domingo").[24] There is also the shining example of Frederick Douglass, whose autobiographies reveal that he learnt of freedom in the North from Irish sailors while working as a ship's caulker in Baltimore. He had less to say about the embarrassing fact that the vessels he readied for the ocean—Baltimore Clippers—were slavers, the fastest ships in the world and the only craft capable of outrunning the British blockade. Douglass, who played a neglected role in English anti-slavery activity, escaped from bondage disguised as a sailor and put this success down to his ability to "talk sailor like an old salt."[25] These are only a few of the nineteenth-century examples. The involvement of Marcus Garvey, George Padmore, Claude McKay, and Langston Hughes with ships and sailors lends additional support to Linebaugh's prescient suggestion that "the ship remained perhaps the most important conduit of Pan-African communication before the appearance of the long-playing record."[26]

Ships and other maritime scenes have a special place in the work of J. M. W. Turner, an artist whose pictures represent, in the view of many contemporary critics, the pinnacle of achievement in the English school in painting. Any visitor to London will testify to the importance of the Clore Gallery as a national institution and of the place of Turner's art as an enduring expression of the very essence of English civilisation. Turner was se-

cured on the summit of critical appreciation by John Ruskin, who, as we have seen, occupies a special place in Williams's constellation of great Englishmen. Turner's celebrated picture of a slave ship[27] throwing overboard its dead and dying as a storm comes on was exhibited at the Royal Academy to coincide with the world anti-slavery convention held in London in 1840. The picture, owned by Ruskin for some twenty-eight years, was rather more than an answer to the absentee Caribbean landlords who had commissioned its creator to record the tainted splendour of their country houses, which, as Patrick Wright has eloquently demonstrated, became an important signifier of the contemporary, ruralist distillate of national life.[28] It offered a powerful protest against the direction and moral tone of English politics. This was made explicit in an epigraph Turner took from his own poetry and which has itself retained a political inflection: "Hope, hope, fallacious hope where is thy market now?" Three years after his extensive involvement in the campaign to defend Governor Eyre,[29] Ruskin put the slave ship painting up for sale at Christie's. It is said that he had begun to find it too painful to live with. No buyer was found at that time, and he sold the picture to an American three years later. The painting has remained in the United States ever since. Its exile in Boston is yet another pointer towards the shape of the Atlantic as a system of cultural exchanges. It is more important, though, to draw attention to Ruskin's inability to discuss the picture except in terms of what it revealed about the aesthetics of painting water. He relegated the information that the vessel was a slave ship to a footnote in the first volume of *Modern Painters*.[30]

In spite of lapses like this, the New Left heirs to the aesthetic and cultural tradition in which Turner and Ruskin stand compounded and reproduced its nationalism and its ethnocentrism by denying imaginary, invented Englishness any external referents whatsoever. England ceaselessly gives birth to itself, seemingly from Britannia's head. The political affiliations and cultural preferences of this New Left group amplified these problems. They are most visible and most intense in the radical historiography that supplied a counterpart to Williams's subtle literary reflections. For all their enthusiasm for the work of C. L. R. James, the influential British Communist Party's historians' group[31] is culpable here. Their predilections for the image of the freeborn Englishman and the dream of socialism in one country that framed their work are both to be found wanting when it comes to nationalism. This uncomfortable pairing can be traced through the work of Edward Thompson and Eric Hobsbawm, visionary writers who contributed so much to the strong foundations of English cultural studies and who share a non-reductive Marxian approach to economic, social, and cultural history in which the nation—understood as a stable receptacle for

counter-hegemonic class struggle—is the primary focus. These problems within English cultural studies form at its junction point with practical politics and instantiate wider difficulties with nationalism and with the discursive slippage or connotative resonance between "race," ethnicity, and nation.

Similar problems appear in rather different form in African-American letters where an equally volkish popular cultural nationalism is featured in the work of several generations of radical scholars and an equal number of not so radical ones. We will see below that absolutist conceptions of cultural difference allied to a culturalist understanding of "race" and ethnicity can be found in this location too.

In opposition to both of these nationalist or ethnically absolute approaches, I want to develop the suggestion that cultural historians could take the Atlantic as one single, complex unit of analysis in their discussions of the modern world and use it to produce an explicitly transnational and intercultural perspective.[32] Apart from the confrontation with English historiography and literary history this entails a challenge to the ways in which black American cultural and political histories have so far been conceived. I want to suggest that much of the precious intellectual legacy claimed by African-American intellectuals as the substance of their particularity is in fact only partly their absolute ethnic property. No less than in the case of the English New Left, the idea of the black Atlantic can be used to show that there are other claims to it which can be based on the structure of the African diaspora into the western hemisphere. A concern with the Atlantic as a cultural and political system has been forced on black historiography and intellectual history by the economic and historical matrix in which plantation slavery—"capitalism with its clothes off"—was one special moment. The fractal patterns of cultural and political exchange and transformation that we try and specify through manifestly inadequate theoretical terms like creolisation and syncretism indicate how both ethnicities and political cultures have been made anew in ways that are significant not simply for the peoples of the Caribbean but for Europe, for Africa, especially Liberia and Sierra Leone, and of course, for black America.

It bears repetition that Britain's black settler communities have forged a compound culture from disparate sources. Elements of political sensibility and cultural expression transmitted from black America over a long period of time have been reaccentuated in Britain. They are central, though no longer dominant, within the increasingly novel configurations that characterise another newer black vernacular culture. This is not content to be either dependent upon or simply imitative of the African diaspora cultures of America and the Caribbean. The rise and rise of Jazzie B and Soul II

Soul at the turn of the last decade constituted one valuable sign of this new assertive mood. North London's Funki Dreds, whose name itself projects a newly hybridised identity, have projected the distinct culture and rhythm of life of black Britain outwards into the world. Their song "Keep On Moving" was notable for having been produced in England by the children of Caribbean settlers and then re-mixed in a (Jamaican) dub format in the United States by Teddy Riley, an African-American. It included segments or samples of music taken from American and Jamaican records by the JBs and Mikey Dread respectively. This formal unity of diverse cultural elements was more than just a powerful symbol. It encapsulated the playful diasporic intimacy that has been a marked feature of transnational black Atlantic creativity. The record and its extraordinary popularity enacted the ties of affiliation and affect which articulated the discontinuous histories of black settlers in the new world. The fundamental injunction to "Keep On Moving" also expressed the restlessness of spirit which makes that diaspora culture vital. The contemporary black arts movement in film, visual arts, and theatre as well as music, which provided the background to this musical release, have created a new topography of loyalty and identity in which the structures and presuppositions of the nation state have been left behind because they are seen to be outmoded. It is important to remember that these recent black Atlantic phenomena may not be as novel as their digital encoding via the transnational force of north London's Soul II Soul suggests. Columbus's pilot, Pedro Nino, was also an African. The history of the black Atlantic since then, continually crisscrossed by the movements of black people—not only as commodities but engaged in various struggles towards emancipation, autonomy, and citizenship—provides a means to reexamine the problems of nationality, location, identity, and historical memory. They all emerge from it with special clarity if we contrast the national, nationalistic, and ethnically absolute paradigms of cultural criticism to be found in England and America with those hidden expressions, both residual and emergent, that attempt to be global or outer-national in nature. These traditions have supported countercultures of modernity that touched the workers' movement but are not reducible to it. They supplied important foundations on which it could build.

Turner's extraordinary painting of the slave ship remains a useful image not only for its self-conscious moral power and the striking way that it aims directly for the sublime in its invocation of racial terror, commerce, and England's ethico-political degeneration. It should be emphasised that ships were the living means by which the points within that Atlantic world were joined. They were mobile elements that stood for the shifting spaces in between the fixed places that they connected.[33] Accordingly they need

to be thought of as cultural and political units rather than abstract embodiments of the triangular trade. They were something more—a means to conduct political dissent and possibly a distinct mode of cultural production. The ship provides a chance to explore the articulations between the discontinuous histories of England's ports, its interfaces with the wider world.[34] Ships also refer us back to the middle passage, to the half-remembered micro-politics of the slave trade and its relationship to both industrialisation and modernisation. As it were, getting on board promises a means to reconceptualise the orthodox relationship between modernity and what passes for its prehistory. It provides a different sense of where modernity might itself be thought to begin in the constitutive relationships with outsiders that both found and temper a self-conscious sense of western civilisation.[35] For all these reasons, the ship is the first of the novel chronotopes presupposed by my attempts to rethink modernity via the history of the black Atlantic and the African diaspora into the western hemisphere.

In the venturesome spirit proposed by James Clifford in his influential work on travelling culture,[36] I want to consider the impact that this outernational, transcultural reconceptualisation might have on the political and cultural history of black Americans and that of blacks in Europe. In recent history, this will certainly mean reevaluating Garvey and Garveyism, pan-Africanism, and Black Power as hemispheric if not global phenomena. In periodising modern black politics it will require fresh thinking about the importance of Haiti and its revolution for the development of African-American political thought and movements of resistance. From the European side, it will no doubt be necessary to reconsider Frederick Douglass's relationship to English and Scottish radicalisms and to meditate on the significance of William Wells Brown's five years in Europe as a fugitive slave, on Alexander Crummell's living and studying in Cambridge, and upon Martin Delany's experiences at the London congress of the International Statistical Congress in 1860.[37] It will require comprehension of such difficult and complex questions as W. E. B. Du Bois's childhood interest in Bismarck, his investment in modelling his dress and moustache on that of Kaiser Wilhelm II, his likely thoughts while sitting in Heinrich Von Treitschke's seminars,[38] and the use his tragic heroes make of European culture.

Notable black American travellers, from the poet Phyllis Wheatley onwards, went to Europe and had their perceptions of America and racial domination shifted as a result of their experiences there. This had important consequences for their understanding of racial identities. The radical journalist and political organiser Ida B. Wells is typical, describing her

productive times in England as like "being born again in a new condition."[39] Lucy Parsons is a more problematic figure in the political history of black America,[40] but how might her encounters with William Morris, Annie Besant, and Peter Kropotkin impact upon a rewriting of the history of English radicalism? What of Nella Larsen's relationship to Denmark, where George Padmore was held in jail during the early 1930s and which was also the home base of his banned paper the *Negro Worker,* circulated across the world by its supporters in the Colonial Seamen's Association?[41] What of Sarah Parker Remond's work as a medical practitioner in Italy and the life of Edmonia Lewis,[42] the sculptor, who made her home in Rome? What effects did living in Paris have upon Anna Cooper, Jessie Fauset, Gwendolyn Bennett,[43] and Lois Maillou Jones?

It would appear that there are large questions raised about the direction and character of black culture and art if we take the powerful effects of even temporary experiences of exile, relocation, and displacement into account. How, for example, was the course of the black vernacular art of jazz changed by what happened to Quincy Jones in Sweden and Donald Byrd in Paris? This is especially interesting because both men played powerful roles in the remaking of jazz as a popular form in the early 1970s. Byrd describes his sense of Europe's appeal as something that grew out of the view of Canada he developed as a young man growing up in Detroit:

> That's why Europe was so important to me. Living across the river from Canada as a kid, I used to go down and sit and look at Windsor, Ontario. Windsor represented Europe to me. That was the rest of the world that was foreign to me. So I always had a feeling for the foreign, the European thing, because Canada was right there. We used to go to Canada. For black people, you see, Canada was a place that treated you better than America, the North. For my father Detroit was better than the South, to me born in the North, Canada was better. At least that was what I thought. Later on I found out otherwise, but anyway, Canada represented for me something foreign, exotic, that was not the United States.[44]

Richard Wright's life in exile, which has been written off as a betrayal of his authenticity and as a process of seduction by philosophical traditions supposedly outside his narrow ethnic compass,[45] will be explored below as an exemplary instance of how the politics of location and the politics of identity get inscribed in analyses of black culture. Many of the figures listed here will be dealt with in later chapters. They are all potential candidates for inclusion in the latest African-American cultural canon, a canon that is conditional on and possibly required by the academic packaging of black cultural studies.[46] Chapter 4 will discuss what version of the politics and

philosophy of W. E. B. Du Bois will be constructed for that canon from the rich transnational textures of his long and nomadic life. Du Bois's travel experiences raise in the sharpest possible form a question common to the lives of almost all these figures who begin as African-Americans or Caribbean people and are then changed into something else which evades those specific labels and with them all fixed notions of nationality and national identity. Whether their experience of exile is enforced or chosen, temporary or permanent, these intellectuals and activists, writers, speakers, poets, and artists repeatedly articulate a desire to escape the restrictive bonds of ethnicity, national identification, and sometimes even "race" itself. Some speak, like Wells and Wright, in terms of the rebirth that Europe offered them. Whether they dissolved their African-American sensibility into an explicitly pan-Africanist discourse or political commitment, their relationship to the land of their birth and their ethnic political constituency was absolutely transformed. The specificity of the modern political and cultural formation I want to call the black Atlantic can be defined, on one level, through this desire to transcend both the structures of the nation state and the constraints of ethnicity and national particularity. These desires are relevant to understanding political organising and cultural criticism. They have always sat uneasily alongside the strategic choices forced on black movements and individuals embedded in national political cultures and nation states in America, the Caribbean, and Europe.

Martin Delany and the Institution of the Fatherland

The powerful and important figure of Martin Robison Delany—journalist, editor, doctor, scientist, judge, soldier, inventor, customs inspector, orator, politician, and novelist—provides an opportunity to examine the distinctive effects produced where the black Atlantic politics of location frames the doorway of double consciousness. His life also offers an invaluable opportunity to consider some of the issues raised within the histories of black culture and politics by travel and voluntary relocation. Marked by its European origins, modern black political culture has always been more interested in the relationship of identity to roots and rootedness than in seeing identity as a process of movement and mediation that is more appropriately approached via the homonym routes. Focusing on a figure like Delany demands careful attention to the interplay between these two dimensions of racial ontology. His life reveals a confrontation between his nationalism and the experiences of travel that have been largely ignored by historians except where they can be read as Ethiopianist or emigrationist gestures against American racism. This is no longer sufficient.

Delany is vital to the concerns of this book for several other reasons. He

is still regularly hailed as the principal progenitor of black nationalism in America. Though he introduced his 1879 *Principia of Ethnology* with a fawning dedication to the Earl of Shaftesbury which would not find favour among Africentrists these days, his arguments in this final publication do prefigure the tone and content of contemporary Africalogical thought in an uncanny manner. Delany has been identified by Molefi Kete Asante as a pioneer in this field[47] and makes an attractive ancestor for Africentrists thanks to endearing traits like his willingness to don his dashiki while delivering lectures on Africa in the Town Hall, the Baptist church, and "the colored school" in Chatham, Ontario, where he made his home in exile. Apart from his sartorial and ideological proclivities, the proximity to Africa in Delany's family history has the effect of making his political choices look stark and vivid. They are far less ambiguous, for example, than those of his sometime associate Frederick Douglass, who had been sired by a white man, taught to read by a white woman, and had his freedom bought by two more. This much is clear from the closing passage of Delany's first book, *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States Politically Considered* (1852). Though its assertive Christianity strikes a somewhat discordant note, the work ends movingly with a recognisably pan-African flourish that places the forces of science, Enlightenment, and progress in concert with the project of racial regeneration in the period after slavery:

> "Princes shall come forth out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch forth her hands unto God" Ps.lxviii.31. With faith in this blessed promise, thank God; in this our grand advent into Africa, we want "No kettle drums nor flageolets, Bag pipes, trombones, nor bayonets" but with an abiding trust in God our heavenly king, we shall boldly advance, singing sweet songs of redemption, in the regeneration of our race and restoration of our father-land from the gloom and darkness of our superstition and ignorance, to the glorious light of a more pristine brightness—the light of the highest godly civilization.[48]

Delany is a figure of extraordinary complexity whose political trajectory through abolitionisms and emigrationisms, from Republicans to Democrats,[49] dissolves any simple attempts to fix him as consistently either conservative or radical. Thirdly, Delany's life is valuable because of his seven-month spell in England,[50] his exile in Chatham, his travels in the South and in Africa, as well as his dreams of autonomous black settlement in Central and South America. He is justly renowned for having organised and led the first scientific expedition to Africa from the western hemisphere:

the 1859 Niger Valley Exploring Party marshalled by Delany in conjunction with Robert Campbell, a Jamaican naturalist who had been head of the science department at the Institute for Colored Youth in Philadelphia. These peregrinations are re-coded in the wanderings of Henrico Blacus/ Henry Holland, the eponymous hero of Delany's novel *Blake; or, the Huts of America,* his single venture into fiction, serialised in the *Anglo African Magazine* during 1859 and the *Weekly Anglo-African* in 1861. Delany is also interesting because he thought of himself as a man of science.[51] His idea of himself as a polymath aspired to and indeed expressed a competence across disciplines that distinguishes him as an exceptional intellect. He modelled his career on standards of appropriately manly achievement set in the eighteenth century by savants and philosophes whose legacy, as we shall see, was readily appropriated for his theories of racial integrity and citizenship. He was, like William Wells Brown, Sarah Parker Remond, and others, a black person studying and practising medicine in a period when slaves' desires to run away from bondage were still sometimes being rationalised by medical opinion as an illness—drapetomania or dysaesthesia Aetheopis[52]—and when J. Marion Sims was perfecting the procedures of gynaecological surgery on the women he held in bondage.[53] Quite apart from his more practically oriented medical studies, Delany is known to have taken up phrenology in pursuit of answers to the arguments of racist ethnology. His work in this area could be used to initiate some interesting inquiries into the relationship between scientific reason and racial domination. We will see below that his aspirations as a cultivated man of science were intertwined with his political radicalisation in complex ways. Both were given an additional spur by Delany's bitter reaction to being denied the right to patent his 1852 invention for transporting locomotives over mountainous terrain because, though free, he was not formally a citizen of the United States.[54]

Delany was born in Charlestown, Virginia, in May 1812. He was the son of a slave father and a free mother who had both apparently enjoyed the benefits of African blood which was not only pure but royal too. Delany's Mandingo grandfather had returned to Africa after being manumitted and his father, Samuel, had purchased his own freedom in the early 1820s. The family made their home in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania. Active in abolitionist circles as a speaker, journalist, and writer, Delany published the *Mystery* in 1843 and became co-editor with Douglass of the *North Star* (1847). He came under the spell of Garrisonian abolitionism[55] at an early age and complemented his work in the anti-slavery cause with his medical activities as a cupper, leecher, and bleeder.[56] In 1850, having studied medicine under a number of different practitioners, he applied to Harvard to

train in medicine there and was accepted along with two other black students, Isaac Snowden and Daniel Hunt, on the condition that they were sponsored by the American Colonisation Society and would only practice their medical skills outside the United States in Liberia after graduation.[57] A white female student, Harriot K. Hunt, who had been admitted at the same time as the three black men, was persuaded to withdraw after private meetings with members of the faculty. Delany, Snowden, and David Hunt began to attend lectures in November of that year but were asked to withdraw from the college by the Dean—Oliver Wendell Holmes, a celebrated admirer of Samuel Morton's *Crania Americana*—at the end of the winter term after protests from angry white students who felt that their presence would lower educational standards. The bitterness and righteous anger that had been compounded in Delany by a fruitless legal battle to claim his wife's inheritance were elaborated further as a result of this additional humiliation at the hands of Harvard. He returned to Philadelphia eager to make the clarion call for American citizenship *and* in favour of a plan for black emigration to Central or South America that would be announced by his first book.

Published on Delany's fortieth birthday, *The Condition* tempered its emigrationist proposals with a polemic against the American Colonisation Society and its plans for Liberian settlement. The book is notable for the elaborate theories of nationality and citizenship it derived from a reading of European history and perhaps most of all for its outspoken advocacy of a strong state that could focus the zionist aspirations of American blacks and aid in building their political counter-power against the white supremacist state. It began by comparing the lot of blacks in America to that of the disenfranchised minority nations found in Europe.

> That there have [*sic*] in all ages, in almost every nation, existed a nation within a nation—a people who although forming a part and parcel of the population, yet were from force of circumstances, known by the peculiar position they occupied, forming in fact, by deprivation of political equality with others, no part, and if any, but a restricted part of the body politics of such nations, is also true. Such then are the Poles in Russia, the Hungarians in Austria, the Scotch, Irish and Welsh in the United Kingdom, *and such also are the Jews scattered throughout not only the length and breadth of Europe but almost the habitable globe, maintaining their national characteristics, and looking forward in high hopes of seeing the day when they may return to their former national position of self-government and independence let that be in whatever part of the habitable world it may* . . . Such then is the condition of various classes in Europe; yes, nations, for centuries within

nations, even without the hope of redemption among those who oppress them. And however unfavourable their condition, there is none more so than that of the coloured people of the United States.[58] (emphasis added)

From the point of view of the history of the diaspora concept explored in Chapter 6, it is especially interesting that though he does not use that pivotal term Delany looks immediately to Jewish experiences of dispersal as a model for comprehending the history of black Americans and, more significantly still, cites this history as a means to focus his own zionist proposals for black American colonisation of Nicaragua[59] and elsewhere. The acquisition of a powerful fatherland that could guarantee and champion the rights of slaves was, for Delany, far more significant than petty details like a geographical location within what his collaborator, Robert Campbell, called in his own report of their Niger Expedition the African *mother* land. Delany's primary concern was not with Africa as such but rather with the forms of citizenship and belonging that arose from the (re)generation of modern nationality in the form of an autonomous, black nation state. Liberia was rejected in this role because it was not an adequate or sufficiently serious vehicle for the hopes and dreams of black soldier citizens and their families. Its geography was one factor in its disfavour, but its centrality to the "deep laid scheme" of American slaveholders proved to be a more substantial disadvantage.[60] With his appeals to gain American citizenship looking increasingly fruitless, Delany left America in 1856. However, he went north not east, not to Africa but to Canada.[61] It was from this new location that he planned his trip to Africa and to Europe. He left the new world for the old in 1859, arriving in Monrovia, the Liberian capital, on July 12th. There he met with Alexander Crummell and other dignitaries.

Delany's 1859 report of his trip, the *Official Report of the Niger Valley Exploring Party*,[62] is an interesting document that outlines his vision of a dynamic alliance, both commercial and civilising, between English capital, black American intellect, and African labour power. These disparate forces were to collaborate to their mutual benefit in the export of African cotton to England for processing. The *Report* is more interesting in the context of this chapter for the insights it provides into those structures of feeling that might be termed the inner dialectics of diaspora identification. Delany, ever the doctor and rationalist, described in detail the sequence of clinical symptoms he experienced as his initial elation at arriving in Africa gave way to a special and characteristic form of melancholy:

> The first sight and impressions of the coast of Africa are always inspiring, producing the most pleasant emotions. These pleasing sensations continue for several days, more or less until they merge into feelings

of almost intense excitement . . . a hilarity of feeling almost akin to approaching intoxication . . . like the sensation produced by the beverage of champagne wine . . . The first symptoms are succeeded by a relaxity of feelings in which there is a disposition to stretch, gape and yawn with fatigue. The second may or may not be succeeded by actual febrile attacks . . . but whether or not such symptoms ensue, there is one most remarkable . . . A feeling of regret that you left your native country for a strange one; an almost frantic desire to see friends and nativity; a despondency and loss of the hope of ever seeing those you love at home again. These feelings, of course, must be resisted and regarded as a mere morbid affection [*sic*] of the mind . . . When an entire recovery takes place, the love of the country is most ardent and abiding.[63]

The ambivalence over exile and homecoming conveyed by these remarks has a history that is probably as long as the presence of African slaves in the west. At this point, it is necessary to appreciate that any discomfort at the prospect of fissures and fault lines in the topography of affiliation that made pan-Africanism such a powerful discourse was not eased by references to some African essence that could magically connect all blacks together. Nowadays, this potent idea is frequently wheeled in when it is necessary to appreciate the things that (potentially) connect black people to one another rather than think seriously about divisions in the imagined community of the race and the means to comprehend or overcome them, if indeed that is possible. Delany's African tour confirmed the dissimilarities between African-American ideologues and the Africans with whom they treated. Thus it is not surprising that though at the end of his account of his adventures in Africa Delany promised to return to Africa with his family, he never did so.

More than anything produced by Edward Wilmot Blyden, Alexander Crummell, and his other proto-nationalist peers, Delany's writings registered contradictory responses toward Africa. The ancient, ancestral home simply would not do as it was. He was acutely aware that it needed to be remade wholesale. In part, this was to be accomplished through grandiose modernisation schemes like the trans-African commercial railway link he had first proposed in an extraordinary appendix to *The Condition*. Africa's superstition and its heathen culture were to be swept away. These plans revealed that the proposed mission to elevate the black American racial self was inseparable from a second mission to elevate and enlighten the uncultured Africans by offering them the benefits of civilised life: cesspools, furniture, cutlery, missionaries, and "Some sort of a garment to

cover the entire person above the knees, should it be but a single shirt or chemise, instead of a loose native cloth thrown around them, to be dropped at pleasure, at any moment exposing the entire upper part of the person as in Liberia, where that part of the person is entirely uncovered— I am certain that it would go far towards impressing them with some of the habits of civilised life."[64] If this statement can be read as a small sign of Delany's practical commitment to the fruits of Euro-American modernity, it is less surprising that his political positions could shift once more in later life and blend his nationalism anew with a decidedly America-centric brand of patriotism. The civil war was the catalyst for this process. It rekindled his enthusiasm for an American future for American blacks. Delany was commissioned as a major in the Union army, proudly assuming the regalia of the first black field officer in the history of the United States. The publication that had serialised *Blake* now offered its readers glorious photographic postcards of Delany in his dark blue uniform for twenty-five cents.

His decision to remain inside the shell of that patriotism after the war was over was facilitated by the same resolutely elitist version of black nationalism that had animated his earlier projects. It stressed the obligation of blacks to better themselves through the universal values of thrift, temperance, and hard work. This brand of black nationalism had also proved extremely popular with English anti-slavery audiences whose movement Delany's visit had helped to revitalise. He arrived in London from Africa during the spring of 1860 in search of backing for the enterprising colonial schemes: "fearless, bold and adventurous deeds of daring"[65] which were integral to realising the special respect that followed from the possession of national status.

I have already pointed out that the contrasting accounts that Delany and Campbell provided of the Niger Valley experiences are at variance over the gendering of their African homeland. Campbell saw Africa as his motherland while Delany, even when he refered to Africa with the female pronoun, persisted in calling the continent the fatherland. I want to suggest that this obstinacy expresses something profound and characteristic about Delany's sense of the necessary relationship between nationality, citizenship, and masculinity. He was probably the first black thinker to make the argument that the integrity of the race is primarily the integrity of its male heads of household and secondarily the integrity of the families over which they preside. The model he proposed aligned the power of the male head of household in the private sphere with the noble status of the soldier-citizen which complemented it in the public realm. Delany's appeal today is that of a supreme patriarch. He sought a variety of power for the black man in the white world that could only be built on the foundations which

the roles of husband and father provided. There is something of the same attitude conveyed in the way that he named his seven children after famous figures of African descent: Alexandre Dumas, Toussaint L'Ouverture, Rameses Placido, St. Cyprian, Faustin Soulouque, Charles Lenox Remond, Ethiopia Halle. In a section on the education of girls in *The Condition* Delany made his views on the proper relationship between the sexes clearer still.

> Let our young women have an education; let their minds be well informed; well stored with useful information and practical proficiency, rather than the light, superficial acquirements, popularly and fashionably called accomplishments. We desire accomplishments, but they must be useful.
>
> Our females must be qualified, because they are to be the mothers of our children. As mothers are the first nurses and instructors of children; from them children consequently get their first impressions, which being always the most lasting should be the most correct.[66]

Women were to be educated but only for motherhood. The public sphere was to be the sole province of an enlightened male citizenry who seem to have taken their cues from Rousseau's conception of civic life in Sparta. Delany can now be recognised as the progenitor of black Atlantic patriarchy.

With the fundamental question of gender roles and relations still in mind, I want briefly to examine his novel *Blake; or, The Huts of America* as a narrative of familial reconstruction. The momentum of the book is supplied by the zeal with which its hero strives to reconstruct and regenerate his family life. This struggle is presented as absolutely homologous with both the liberation of slaves and the regeneration of Africa which Delany had described thus in the Niger Valley report:

> Africa is our fatherland and we its legitimate descendants . . . I have outgrown, long since, the boundaries of North America, and with them have also outgrown the boundaries of their claims . . . Africa, to be regenerated must have a national character, and her position among the existing nations of the earth will depend mainly upon the high standard she may gain compared with them in all her relations, morally, religiously, socially, politically and commercially.
>
> I have determined to leave to my children the inheritance of a country, the possession of territorial domain, the blessings of a national education, and the indisputable right of self-government; that they may not succeed to the servility and degradation bequeathed to us by

our fathers. If we have not been born to fortunes, we should impart the seeds which shall germinate and give birth to fortunes for them.[67]

Blake was the fourth novel written by a black American and certainly a more radical work than the other comparable early attempts at fiction. The book took its epigraph from Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and was, as Delany's domiciliary title implies, an explicit, intertextual response to that work. Both the structure of the book and its geographical compass confirm Delany's claim to have outgrown the boundaries of North America. *Blake* was written in Canada and concerns a Cuban who, after travelling to Africa as a sailor on a slave ship, is himself enslaved in the United States. He escapes to Canada, but then returns to the United States in order to find the wife who has been unjustly parted from him by an evil slave master and to lead slave resistance there. He discovers her in Cuba and secures her freedom. He then visits Africa again, this time as a senior crewman on a second slaver. This journey, across the Atlantic from west to east—a middle passage in reverse—is undertaken as part of a grand plan to lead a revolutionary slave revolt in Cuba which is at that moment in danger of being annexed by the southern American states. The topography of the black Atlantic world is directly incorporated into Delany's tale. His travelling hero, Blake, assumes various names in the different locations he visits, but his English appellation is surely significant in that it offers an echo of an earlier, explicitly Atlanticist radicalism.

Ships occupy a primary symbolic and political place in the work. One chapter is called "Transatlantic" and another, chapter 52, is entitled "The Middle Passage" and includes a harrowing scene of a slaver throwing overboard the dead and dying just as Turner had depicted it: amidst the rage of nature itself. Delany's use of music is complex and bold and has been understood as further evidence of his deeply contradictory relationship to America and its culture. The sharp parodies of patriotic songs and popular material by Stephen Foster that he has his characters sing can be interpreted as illustrations of the dense cultural syncretisms that double consciousness can generate.[68]

Blake includes some strikingly sympathetic portraits of black women and offers one of the few presentations of the middle passage and life in the barracoons to be found in nineteenth-century black writing. It makes African-American experience visible within a hemispheric order of racial domination. The version of black solidarity *Blake* advances is explicitly anti-ethnic and opposes narrow African-American exceptionalism in the name of a truly pan-African, diaspora sensibility. This makes blackness a matter of politics rather than a common cultural condition. The terror of slavery

is powerfully invoked, only partly from within the conventions of an aboli-
tionist literary genre that exhibits an intense fascination with the image of
divided families. Slavery is seen in an ethical light but is primarily presented
as an exploitative economic system of an international nature. Delany was
a member of the African Methodist Episcopal church, but he used his hero
Blake to convey criticisms of religion in general and Christianity in particu-
lar. It is this representation of religious belief which supplies the key to the
book's anti-ethnic, pan-African stance. Blake refused to "stand still and see
salvation" wherever it was offered to him: by the rituals of the white church
on the plantation, in the Catholic church or in the superstitions of the
conjurers he interacts with during a visit to the Dismal Swamp. His
scepticism and strictly instrumental orientation towards religion, which he
saw as a valuable tool for the political project he sought to advance, are
important because African-American religion is so often the central sign
for the folk-cultural, narrowly ethnic definition of racial authenticity that
is being challenged here in the name of rhizomorphic,[69] routed, diaspora
cultures.

Both Delany and his hero boast of their rational principles. Stealing
from the master was rationalised in terms derived from a labour theory of
value and, from this rationalist stance, blacks were rebuked for confusing
spiritual means with moral ends. Black Americans were not uniquely op-
pressed, and if they were to be free, they must contribute to the establish-
ment of the strong and completely synthetic supra-ethnic nation state that
Delany saw as indispensable to the ongoing struggle to defeat racial op-
pression everywhere in the new world and to the longer-term project of
African regeneration. This anti-mystical racial rationalism required that
blacks of all shades, classes, and ethnic groups give up the merely accidental
differences that served only to mask the deeper unity waiting to be con-
structed not so much from their African heritage as from the common
orientation to the future produced by their militant struggles against slav-
ery. Ethnic and religious differences symbolise intraracial divisions in the
book. Black survival depends upon forging a new means to build alliances
above and beyond petty issues like language, religion, skin colour, and to
a lesser extent gender. The best way to create the new metacultural identity
which the new black citizenship demands was provided by the abject con-
dition of the slaves and ironically facilitated by the transnational structure
of the slave trade itself. Abyssa, a Soudanese slave and former textile mer-
chant, brought from Africa on Blake's second transatlantic trip; Placido, a
Cuban revolutionary poet who is also Blake's cousin; Gofer Gondolier, a
West Indian cook who has attended a Spanish grandee in Genoa; the
wealthy quadroons and octoroons of Cuba; Blake himself; and indeed their

white revolutionary supporters constitute something like a rainbow army
for the emancipation of the oppressed men and women of the new world.
Because religion marks these petty ethnic differences with special clarity, its
overcoming signifies the utopian move beyond ethnicity and the establish-
ment of a new basis for community, mutuality and reciprocity:

> I first a catholic and my wife bred as such are both Baptists; Abyssa
> Soudan once a pagan was in her own native land converted to the
> Methodist or Wesleyan belief; Madame Sabastina and family are Epis-
> copalians; Camina from long residence in the colony a Presbyterian
> and Placido is a believer in the Swedenborgian doctrines. We have all
> agreed to know no sects, no denomination and but one religion for
> the sake of our redemption from Bondage and degradation . . . No
> religion but that which brings us liberty will we know; no God but he
> who owns us as his children will we serve. The whites accept nothing
> but that which promotes their interests and happiness, socially politi-
> cally and religiously. They would discard a religion, tear down a
> church, overthrow a government or desert a country which did not
> enhance their freedom. In God's great and righteous name are we not
> willing to do the same?[70]

Blake is useful to this chapter's argument against ethnic absolutisms be-
cause its affirmation of the intercultural and transnational is more than
enough to move discussion of black political culture beyond the binary
opposition between national and diaspora perspectives. The suggestive way
that it locates the black Atlantic world in a webbed network, between the
local and the global, challenges the coherence of all narrow nationalist per-
spectives and points to the spurious invocation of ethnic particularity to
enforce them and to ensure the tidy flow of cultural output into neat, sym-
metrical units. I should add that this applies whether this impulse comes
from the oppressors or the oppressed.

Black Politics and Modernity

Rereading *Blake* in this way and looking at the routes of its nationalist
author leads us back to the question of whether nationalist perspectives are
an adequate means to understand the forms of resistance and accommoda-
tion intrinsic to modern black political culture. The recent history of
blacks, as people in but not necessarily of the modern, western world, a
history which involves processes of political organisation that are explicitly
transnational and international in nature, demands that this question is
considered very carefully. What, after all, is being opposed by the move-

ments of slaves and their descendants: slavery? capitalism? coerced industrialisation? racial terror? or the ethnocentrism and European solipsism that these processes help to reproduce? How are the discontinuous histories of diaspora resistance raised in fictional form by *Blake* and lived by figures like its creator to be *thought*? How have they been theorised by those who have experienced the consequences of racial domination?

In the final part of this chapter, I want to look more specifically at the positions of the nation state, and the idea of nationality in accounts of black opposition and expressive culture, particularly music. I will also use a brief discussion of black music that anticipates a more extensive treatment of these themes in Chapter 3 to ask implicit questions about the tendencies towards ethnocentrism and ethnic absolutism of black cultural theory.

The problem of weighing the claims of national identity against other contrasting varieties of subjectivity and identification has a special place in the intellectual history of blacks in the west. Du Bois's concept of double consciousness has been referred to already and will be explored in greater detail in Chapter 4. It is only the best-known resolution of a familiar problem which points towards the core dynamic of racial oppression as well as the fundamental antinomy of diaspora blacks. How has this doubleness, what Richard Wright calls the dreadful objectivity[71] which follows from being both inside and outside the West, affected the conduct of political movements against racial oppression and towards black autonomy? Are the inescapable pluralities involved in the movements of black peoples, in Africa and in exile, ever to be synchronised? How would these struggles be periodised in relation to modernity: the fatal intermediation of capitalism, industrialisation, and a new conception of political democracy? Does posing these questions in this way signify anything more than the reluctant intellectual affiliation of diaspora blacks to an approach which mistakenly attempts a premature totalisation of infinite struggles, an approach which itself has deep and problematic roots within the ambiguous intellectual traditions of the European Enlightenment which have, at different moments, been both a lifeline and a fetter?

Delany's work has provided some powerful evidence to show that the intellectual heritage of Euro-American modernity determined and possibly still determines the manner in which nationality is understood within black political discourse. In particular, this legacy conditions the continuing aspiration to acquire a supposedly authentic, natural, and stable "rooted" identity. This invariant identity is in turn the premise of a thinking "racial" self that is both socialised and unified by its connection with other kindred souls encountered usually, though not always, within the fortified frontiers

of those discrete ethnic cultures which also happen to coincide with the contours of a sovereign nation state that guarantees their continuity.

Consider for a moment the looseness with which the term "black nationalism" is used both by its advocates and by sceptics. Why is a more refined political language for dealing with these crucial issues of identity, kinship, generation, affect, and affiliation such a long time coming? A small but telling example can be drawn from the case of Edouard Glissant, who has contributed so much to the emergence of a creole counter-discourse that can answer the alchemy of nationalisms. Discussion of these problems suffers when his translator excises Glissant's references to the work of Deleuze and Guattari from the English edition of his 1981 book *Le discours antillais*,[72] presumably because to acknowledge this exchange would somehow violate the aura of Caribbean authenticity that is a desirable frame around the work. This typical refusal to accept the complicity and syncretic interdependency of black and white thinkers has recently become associated with a second difficulty: the overintegrated conceptions of pure and homogeneous culture which mean that black political struggles are construed as somehow automatically *expressive* of the national or ethnic differences with which they are associated.

This overintegrated sense of cultural and ethnic particularity is very popular today, and blacks do not monopolise it. It masks the arbitrariness of its own political choices in the morally charged language of ethnic absolutism and this poses additional dangers because it overlooks the development and change of black political ideologies and ignores the restless, recombinant qualities of the black Atlantic's affirmative political cultures. The political project forged by thinkers like Delany in the difficult journey from slave ship to citizenship is in danger of being wrecked by the seemingly insoluble conflict between two distinct but currently symbiotic perspectives. They can be loosely identified as the essentialist and the pluralist standpoints though they are in fact two different varieties of essentialism: one ontological, the other strategic. The antagonistic relationship between these two outlooks has been especially intense in discussions of black art and cultural criticism. The ontological essentialist view has often been characterised by a brute pan-Africanism. It has proved unable to specify precisely where the highly prized but doggedly evasive essence of black artistic and political sensibility is currently located, but that is no obstacle to its popular circulation. This perspective sees the black intellectual and artist as a leader. Where it pronounces on cultural matters, it is often allied to a realist approach to aesthetic value that minimises the substantive political and philosophical issues involved in the processes of artistic representation. Its absolutist conception of ethnic cultures can be identified by the way in which

it registers incomprehending disappointment with the actual cultural choices and patterns of the mass of black people. It has little to say about the profane, contaminated world of black popular culture and looks instead for an artistic practice that can disabuse the mass of black people of the illusions into which they have been seduced by their condition of exile and unthinking consumption of inappropriate cultural objects like the wrong hair care products, pop music, and western clothing. The community is felt to be on the wrong road, and it is the intellectual's job to give them a new direction, firstly by recovering and then by donating the racial awareness that the masses seem to lack.

This perspective currently confronts a pluralistic position which affirms blackness as an open signifier and seeks to celebrate complex representations of a black particularity that is *internally* divided: by class, sexuality, gender, age, ethnicity, economics, and political consciousness. There is no unitary idea of black community here, and the authoritarian tendencies of those who would police black cultural expression in the name of their own particular history or priorities are rightly repudiated. The ontologically grounded essentialism is replaced by a libertarian, strategic alternative: the cultural saturnalia which attends the end of innocent notions of the essential black subject.[73] Here, the polyphonic qualities of black cultural expression form the main aesthetic consideration and there is often an uneasy but exhilarating fusion of modernist and populist techniques and styles. From this perspective, the achievements of popular black cultural forms like music are a constant source of inspiration. They are prized for their implicit warning against the pitfalls of artistic conceit. The difficulty with this second tendency is that in leaving racial essentialism behind by viewing "race" itself as a social and cultural construction, it has been insufficiently alive to the lingering power of specifically racialised forms of power and subordination.

Each outlook compensates for the obvious weaknesses in the other camp, but so far there has been little open and explicit debate between them. Their conflict, initially formulated in debates over black aesthetics and cultural production,[74] is valuable as a preliminary guide to some of the dilemmas faced by cultural and intellectual *historians* of the modern, western, African diaspora. The problems it raises become acute, particularly for those who seek to comprehend cultural developments and political resistances which have had scant regard for either modern borders or premodern frontiers. At its worst, the lazy, casual invocation of cultural insiderism which frequently characterises the ontological essentialist view is nothing more than a symptom of the growing cleavages *within* the black communities. There, uneasy spokespeople of the black elite—some of

them professional cultural commentators, artists, writers, painters, and film makers as well as political leaders—have fabricated a volkish outlook as an expression of their own contradictory position. This neo-nationalism seems out of tune with the spirit of the novel Africentric garb in which it appears before us today. It incorporates commentary on the special needs and desires of the relatively privileged castes within black communities, but its most consistent trademark is the persistent mystification of that group's increasingly problematic relationships with the black poor, who, after all, supply the elite with a dubious entitlement to speak on behalf of the phantom constituency of black people in general. The idea of blacks as a national or proto-national group with its own hermetically enclosed culture plays a key role in this mystification, and, though seldom overtly named, the misplaced idea of a national interest gets invoked as a means to silence dissent and censor political debate when the incoherences and inconsistencies of Africalogical discourse are put on display.

These problems take on a specific aspect in Britain, which currently lacks anything that can be credibly called a black bourgeoisie. However, they are not confined to this country and they cannot be overlooked. The idea of nationality and the assumptions of cultural absolutism come together in other ways.[75] It should be emphasised that, where the archaeology of black critical knowledges enters the academy, it currently involves the construction of canons which seems to be proceeding on an exclusively *national* basis—African-American, Anglophone Caribbean, and so on. This is not an oblique plea for the legitimacy of an equally distinctive black English or British cultural inventory. If it seems indelicate to ask who the formation of such canons might serve, then the related question of where the impulse to formalise and codify elements of our cultural heritage in this particular pattern comes from may be a better one to pursue. Is this impulse towards cultural protectionism the most cruel trick which the west can play upon its dissident affiliates? The same problem of the status enjoyed by national boundaries in the writing of cultural history is evident in recent debates over hip hop culture, the powerful expressive medium of America's urban black poor which has created a global youth movement of considerable significance. The musical components of hip hop are a hybrid form nurtured by the social relations of the South Bronx where Jamaican sound system culture was transplanted during the 1970s and put down new roots. In conjunction with specific technological innovations, this routed and re-rooted Caribbean culture set in train a process that was to transform black America's sense of itself and a large portion of the popular music industry as well. Here we have to ask how a form which flaunts and glories in its own malleability as well as its transnational character becomes inter-

preted as an expression of some authentic African-American essence? How can rap be discussed as if it sprang intact from the entrails of the blues?[76] Another way of approaching this would be to ask what is it about black America's writing elite which means that they need to claim this diasporic cultural form in such an assertively nationalist way?[77]

An additional, and possibly more profound, area of political difficulty comes into view when the voguish language of absolute cultural difference associated with the ontological essentialist standpoint provides an embarrassing link between the practice of blacks who comprehend racial politics through it and the activities of their foresworn opponents—the ethnic absolutists of the racist right—who approach the complex dynamics of race, nationality, and ethnicity through a similar set of pseudo-precise, culturalist equations. This unlikely convergence is part of the history of hip hop because black music is so often the principal symbol of racial authenticity. Analysing it leads rapidly and directly back to the status of nationality and national cultures in a post-modern world where nation states are being eclipsed by a new economy of power that accords national citizenship and national boundaries a new significance. In seeking to account for the controversy over hip hop's origins we also have to explore how the absolutist and exclusivist approach to the relationship between "race," ethnicity, and culture places those who claim to be able to resolve the relationship between the supposedly incommensurable discourses characteristic of different racial groups, in command of the cultural resources of their own group as a whole. Intellectuals can claim this vanguard position by virtue of an ability to translate from one culture to another, mediating decisive oppositions along the way. It matters little whether the the black communities involved are conceived as entire and self-sustaining nations or as proto-national collectivities.

No less than their predecessor Martin Delany, today's black intellectuals have persistently succumbed to the lure of those romantic conceptions of "race," "people," and "nation" which place themselves, rather than the people they supposedly represent, in charge of the strategies for nation building, state formation, and racial uplift. This point underscores the fact that the status of nationality and the precise weight we should attach to the conspicuous differences of language, culture, and identity which divide the blacks of the diaspora from one another, let alone from Africans, are unresolved within the political culture that promises to bring the disparate peoples of the black Atlantic world together one day. Furthermore, the dependence of those black intellectuals who have tried to deal with these matters on theoretical reflections derived from the canon of occidental modernity—from Herder to Von Trietschke and beyond—is surely salient.

W. E. B. Du Bois's work will be explored below as a site of this affiliation. The case of his 1888 Fisk graduation address on Bismarck provides a preliminary example. Reflecting on it some years later in *Dusk of Dawn* he wrote, "Bismarck was my hero. He made a nation out of a mass of bickering peoples. He had dominated the whole development with his strength until he crowned an emperor at Versailles. This foreshadowed in my mind the kind of thing that American Negroes must do, marching forward with strength and determination under trained leadership."[78] This model of national development has a special appeal to the bickering peoples of the black Atlantic diaspora. It is an integral component of their responses to modern racism and directly inspired their efforts to construct nation states on African soil and elsewhere. The idea of nationality occupies a central, if shifting place in the work of Alexander Crummell, Edward Blyden, Martin Delany, and Frederick Douglass. This important group of post-Enlightenment men, whose lives and political sensibilities can ironically be defined through the persistent crisscrossing of national boundaries, often seem to share the decidedly Hegelian belief that the combination of Christianity and a nation state represents the overcoming of all antinomies.

The themes of nationality, exile, and cultural affiliation accentuate the inescapable fragmentation and differentiation of the black subject. This fragmentation has recently been compounded further by the questions of gender, sexuality, and male domination which have been made unavoidable by the struggles of black women and the voices of black gay men and lesbians. I cannot attempt to resolve these tensions here, but the dimension of social and political differentiation to which they refer provides a frame for what follows. As indices of differentiation, they are especially important because the intracommunal antagonisms which appear between the local and immediate levels of our struggles and their hemispheric and global dynamics can only grow. Black voices from within the overdeveloped countries may be able to go on resonating in harmony with those produced from inside Africa or they may, with varying degrees of reluctance, turn away from the global project of black advancement once the symbolic and political, if not the material and economic, liberation of Southern Africa is completed.

I want to make these abstract and difficult points more concrete and more accessible by constructing a conclusion for this chapter out of some of the lessons waiting to be learned from considering elements of the musical output of blacks in the West which will be explored in more detail in Chapter 3. The history and significance of these musics are consistently overlooked by black writers for two reasons: because they exceed the frameworks of national or ethnocentric analysis with which we have been

too easily satisfied, and because talking seriously about the politics and aesthetics of black vernacular cultures demands an embarrassing confrontation with substantive intraracial differences that make the easy essentialism from which most critical judgements are constructed simply untenable. As these internal divisions have grown, the price of that embarrassment has been an aching silence.

To break that silence, I want to argue that black musical expression has played a role in reproducing what Zygmunt Bauman has called a distinctive counterculture of modernity.[79] I will use a brief consideration of black musical development to move beyond an understanding of cultural processes which, as I have already suggested, is currently torn between seeing them either as the expression of an essential, unchanging, sovereign racial self or as the effluent from a constituted subjectivity that emerges contingently from the endless play of racial signification. This is usually conceived solely in terms of the inappropriate model which *textuality* provides. The vitality and complexity of this musical culture offers a means to get beyond the related oppositions between essentialists and pseudo-pluralists on the one hand and between totalising conceptions of tradition, modernity, and postmodernity on the other. It also provides a model of performance which can supplement and partially displace concern with textuality.

Black music's obstinate and consistent commitment to the idea of a better future is a puzzle to which the enforced separation of slaves from literacy and their compensatory refinement of musical art supplies less than half an answer. The power of music in developing black struggles by communicating information, organising consciousness, and testing out or deploying the forms of subjectivity which are required by political agency, whether individual or collective, defensive or transformational, demands attention to both the formal attributes of this expressive culture and its distinctive *moral* basis. The formal qualities of this music are becoming better known,[80] and I want to concentrate instead on the moral aspects and in particular on the disjunction between the ethical value of the music and its status as an ethnic sign.

In the simplest possible terms, by posing the world as it is against the world as the racially subordinated would like it to be, this musical culture supplies a great deal of the courage required to go on living in the present. It is both produced by and expressive of that "transvaluation of all values" precipitated by the history of racial terror in the new world. It contains a theodicy but moves beyond it because the profane dimensions of that racial terror made theodicy impossible.[81] I have considered its distinctive critique of capitalist social relations elsewhere.[82] Here, because I want to show that its critical edge includes but also surpasses anti-capitalism, it is necessary to

draw out some of the inner philosophical dynamics of this counterculture and to explore the connection between its normative character and its utopian aspirations. These are interrelated and even inseparable from each other and from the critique of racial capitalism[83] that these expressive cultures construct but also surpass. Comprehending them necessitates an analysis of the lyrical content and the forms of musical expression as well as the often hidden social relations in which these deeply encoded oppositional practices are created and consumed. The issue of normative content focuses attention on what might be called the politics of fulfilment:[84] the notion that a future society will be able to realise the social and political promise that present society has left unaccomplished. Reflecting the foundational semantic position of the Bible, this is a discursive mode of communication. Though by no means literal, it can be grasped through what is said, shouted, screamed, or sung. The politics of fulfilment practised by the descendants of slaves demands, as Delany did, that bourgeois civil society live up to the promises of its own rhetoric. It creates a medium in which demands for goals like non-racialised justice and rational organisation of the productive processes can be expressed. It is immanent within modernity and is no less a valuable element of modernity's counter-discourse for being consistently ignored.

The issue of how utopias are conceived is more complex not least because they strive continually to move beyond the grasp of the merely linguistic, textual, and discursive. The invocation of utopia references what, following Seyla Benhabib's suggestive lead, I propose to call the politics of transfiguration. This emphasises the emergence of qualitatively new desires, social relations, and modes of association within the racial community of interpretation and resistance *and* between that group and its erstwhile oppressors. It points specifically to the formation of a community of needs and solidarity which is magically made audible in the music itself and palpable in the social relations of its cultural utility and reproduction. Created under the very nose of the overseers, the utopian desires which fuel the complementary politics of transfiguration must be invoked by other, more deliberately opaque means. This politics exists on a lower frequency where it is played, danced, and acted, as well as sung and sung about, because words, even words stretched by melisma and supplemented or mutated by the screams which still index the conspicuous power of the slave sublime, will never be enough to communicate its unsayable claims to truth. The wilfully damaged signs which betray the resolutely utopian politics of transfiguration therefore partially transcend modernity, constructing both an imaginary anti-modern past and a postmodern yet-to-come. This is not a counter-discourse but a counterculture that defiantly

reconstructs its own critical, intellectual, and moral genealogy in a partially hidden public sphere of its own. The politics of transfiguration therefore reveals the hidden internal fissures in the concept of modernity. The bounds of politics are extended precisely because this tradition of expression refuses to accept that the political is a readily separable domain. Its basic desire is to conjure up and enact the new modes of friendship, happiness, and solidarity that are consequent on the overcoming of the racial oppression on which modernity and its antinomy of rational, western progress as excessive barbarity relied. Thus the vernacular arts of the children of slaves give rise to a verdict on the role of art which is strikingly in harmony with Adorno's reflections on the dynamics of European artistic expression in the wake of Auschwitz: "Art's Utopia, the counterfactual yet-to-come, is draped in black. It goes on being a recollection of the possible with a critical edge against the real; it is a kind of imaginary restitution of that catastrophe, which is world history; it is a freedom which did not pass under the spell of necessity and which may well not come to pass ever at all."[85] These sibling dimensions of black sensibility, the politics of fulfilment and the politics of transfiguration, are not co-extensive. There are significant tensions between them but they are closely associated in the vernacular cultures of the black Atlantic diaspora. They can also be used to reflect the idea of doubleness with which this chapter began and which is often argued to be the constitutive force giving rise to black experience in the modern world. The politics of fulfilment is mostly content to play occidental rationality at its own game. It necessitates a hermeneutic orientation that can assimilate the semiotic, verbal, and textual. The politics of transfiguration strives in pursuit of the sublime, struggling to repeat the unrepeatable, to present the unpresentable. Its rather different hermeneutic focus pushes towards the mimetic, dramatic, and performative.

It seems especially significant that the cultural expressions which these musics allow us to map out do not seek to exclude problems of inequality or to make the achievement of racial justice an exclusively abstract matter. Their grounded ethics offers, among other things, a continuous commentary on the systematic and pervasive relations of domination that supply its conditions of existence. Their grounded aesthetics is never separated off into an autonomous realm where familiar political rules cannot be applied and where, as Salman Rushdie memorably puts it, "the little room of literature"[86] can continue to enjoy its special privileges as a heroic resource for the well-heeled adversaries of liberal capitalism.

I am proposing, then, that we reread and rethink this expressive counterculture not simply as a succession of literary tropes and genres but as a philosophical discourse which refuses the modern, occidental separation of

ethics and aesthetics, culture and politics. The traditional teaching of ethics and politics—practical philosophy—came to an end some time ago, even if its death agonies were prolonged. This tradition had maintained the idea that a good life for the individual and the problem of the best social and political order for the collectivity could be discerned by rational means. Though it is seldom acknowledged even now, this tradition lost its exclusive claim to rationality partly through the way that slavery became internal to western civilisation and through the obvious complicity which both plantation slavery and colonial regimes revealed between rationality and the practice of racial terror. Not perceiving its residual condition, blacks in the west eavesdropped on and then took over a fundamental question from the intellectual obsessions of their enlightened rulers. Their progress from the status of slaves to the status of citizens led them to enquire into what the best possible forms of social and political existence might be. The memory of slavery, actively preserved as a living intellectual resource in their expressive political culture, helped them to generate a new set of answers to this enquiry. They had to fight—often through their spirituality—to hold on to the unity of ethics and politics sundered from each other by modernity's insistence that the true, the good, and the beautiful had distinct origins and belong to different domains of knowledge. First slavery itself and then their memory of it induced many of them to query the foundational moves of modern philosophy and social thought, whether they came from the natural rights theorists who sought to distinguish between the spheres of morality and legality, the idealists who wanted to emancipate politics from morals so that it could become a sphere of strategic action, or the political economists of the bourgeoisie who first formulated the separation of economic activity from both ethics and politics. The brutal excesses of the slave plantation supplied a set of moral and political responses to each of these attempts. The history and utility of black music discussed in Chapter 3 enable us to trace something of the means through which the unity of ethics and politics has been reproduced as a form of folk knowledge. This subculture often appears to be the intuitive expression of some racial essence but is in fact an elementary historical acquisition produced from the viscera of an alternative body of cultural and political expression that considers the world critically from the point of view of its emancipatory transformation. In the future, it will become a place which is capable of satisfying the (redefined) needs of human beings that will emerge once the violence—epistemic and concrete—of racial typology is at an end. Reason is thus reunited with the happiness and freedom of individuals and the reign of justice within the collectivity.

I have already implied that there is a degree of convergence here with

other projects towards a critical theory of society, particularly Marxism. However, where lived crisis and systemic crisis come together, Marxism allocates priority to the latter while the memory of slavery insists on the priority of the former. Their convergence is also undercut by the simple fact that in the critical thought of blacks in the West, social self-creation through labour is not the centre-piece of emancipatory hopes. For the descendants of slaves, work signifies only servitude, misery, and subordination. Artistic expression, expanded beyond recognition from the grudging gifts offered by the masters as a token substitute for freedom from bondage, therefore becomes the means towards both individual self-fashioning and communal liberation. Poiesis and poetics begin to coexist in novel forms—autobiographical writing, special and uniquely creative ways of manipulating spoken language, and, above all, the music. All three have overflowed from the containers that the modern nation state provides for them.

2

Masters, Mistresses, Slaves, and the Antinomies of Modernity

Every Idea thrown into the mind of the Negro is caught up and realised with the whole energy of his will; but this realisation involves a wholesale destruction . . . it is manifest that want of self-control distinguishes the character of the Negroes. This condition is capable of no development or Culture, and as we see them at this day, such they have always been. The only essential connection between the Negroes and the Europeans is slavery . . . we may conclude slavery to have been the occasion of the increase in human feeling among the Negroes.
    Hegel

How man deals with man is seen, for example in Negro slavery, the ultimate object of which is sugar and coffee.
    Schopenhauer

You had better all die—die immediately, than live slaves and entail your wretchedness upon your prosperity. If you would be free in this generation, here is your only hope.
    Henry Highland Garnet

. . . the free hills of old Scotland, where the ancient "Black Douglass" once met his foes . . . almost every hill, river, mountain and lake of which has been made classic by the heroic deeds of her noble sons. Scarcely a stream but has been poured into song, or a hill that is not associated with some fierce and bloody conflict between liberty and slavery.
    Frederick Douglass

For SOME YEARS now, Euro-American social theory, philosophy, and cultural criticism have hosted bitter and politically charged debates into the scope and status of the concept of modernity and the related ideas of modernism and modernisation. These debates have not always been conducted explicitly, and their key concepts have been nuanced in a variety of ways according to the particular disciplinary context in which they have arisen, yet despite some lack of consistency in their application a surprisingly coherent series of exchanges has taken shape. These exchanges have been dominated by a constellation of formally opposed yet mutually reinforcing theoretical positions from many of the leading theorists of the

Euro-American academic establishment. Jurgen Habermas, Jean François Lyotard, Fredric Jameson, and a host of other women and men have applied themselves to the task of examining these ideas and the distinctiveness of contemporary life in the West to which they point. Sometimes writers have been concerned to identify and account for recent decisive shifts in the cultural climate of the overdeveloped countries and in their relationship to the rest of the world. Many participants have constructed intellectual detours through modernity as a way of demarcating what is novel or historically original in the contemporary postmodern condition. Others have analysed the postmodern as if it had simply effaced or replaced the modern and, like Lyotard, have not delved deeply into the history of the postmodern, its emergence from modernity, or its relationship to the processes of modernisation.[1]

However they approach their task, these authors share a preoccupation with the impact of post-war changes on the cognitive and technological bases of social and cultural life in the overdeveloped world where they have been able to detect "a sort of sorrow in the Zeitgeist."[2] The concept of postmodernism is often introduced to emphasise the radical or even catastrophic nature of the break between contemporary conditions and the epoch of modernism. Thus there is little attention given to the possibility that much of what is identified as postmodern may have been foreshadowed, or prefigured, in the lineaments of modernity itself. Defenders and critics of modernity seem to be equally unconcerned that the history and expressive culture of the African diaspora, the practice of racial slavery, or the narratives of European imperial conquest may require all simple periodisations of the modern and the postmodern to be drastically rethought.[3]

The pivotal relationship between the modern and the postmodern raises a number of further issues not least because it constitutes a small part of wider enquiries into the continuing viability of what Habermas has called the Enlightenment project.[4] These discussions profess to be more than merely scholastic contributions to the intellectual history of the West. They have certainly acquired a broader political currency, particularly where they have pronounced upon the idea of progress and the view of civilisation guided steadily towards perfection by secular, rational principles that sustains that idea. Habermas and others have, for example, focused attention on the relationship between freedom and reason, which has been a fundamental feature of western political discourses since the end of the eighteenth century. This has gained a special resonance during a period in which technological transformations and political upheavals appear to jeopardise both freedom and reason in equal measure. The contemporary restructuring of political and economic relations in the overdeveloped

countries has called many of the historic assumptions of western rationalism into question. Arguing against the defenders of modern rationalism, incredulous voices have drawn critical attention to the bold, universalist claims of occidental modernity and its hubristic confidence in its own infallibility. It is disappointing that the position of the sceptics has sometimes been undersold by a chorus of rhetorical commentary which draws its enthusiasm from the excesses of anti-political post-structuralism in general and deconstructive literary criticism in particular.

I will not attempt to reconstruct the whole complexity of these exchanges here. A number of authors have already provided a valuable secondary literature on the principal positions involved.[5] I am, however, keen to emphasise that this extensive and unusual international debate is clearly tied both to the fate of the intellectual as a discrete, authoritative caste and to the future of the universities in which so many of its learned protagonists have acquired secure perches. In Europe at least, these institutions of higher learning are being ventilated by the chill breeze of downward mobility at a time when the autonomous cultural power and preeminence of their mandarin inhabitants as public intellectuals are also being severely reduced. This is only one of several reasons why it may be possible to argue that what is increasingly perceived as the crisis of modernity and modern values is perhaps better understood as the crisis of the intellectuals whose self-consciousness was once served by these terms.[6] Focusing on the role of intellectuals within modernity is an important way of drawing out the particularity that lurks beneath the universalist claims of the Enlightenment project which was, in theory, valid for humanity as a whole even if humanity was to be rather restrictively defined. The meaning of being an intellectual in settings that have denied access to literacy and encouraged other forms of communication in its place is a recurring question in what follows.

Recent discussions of modernity and its possible eclipse are also inseparable from the currently bleak fortunes of expressly socialistic forces in the overdeveloped countries. It would therefore be wrong to suppose that the political importance of this debate is entirely diminished by its academic origins and special appeal to those dissident affiliates of the bourgeoisie who once, joyfully or regretfully, placed their weapons of criticism in alignment with the proletariat's criticism of weapons. Reformist and revolutionary leftist alike are now being challenged to defend the protocols of secular reason and the ideal of human and social perfectibility irrespective of whether it is carried out under the banner of working class self-emancipation or the standard of more modest and avowedly realist political philosophies.

Though it may not contain the final verdict on the grand narrative of Euro-American progress and the infinite expansion of productive forces that is often seen by left and right alike as an essential precondition for the enhancement of social and political freedoms, this debate is important for several reasons which have not, so far, been noted from within it. It can be argued that much of the supposed novelty of the postmodern evaporates when it is viewed in the unforgiving historical light of the brutal encounters between Europeans and those they conquered, slaughtered, and enslaved. The periodisation of the modern and the postmodern is thus of the most profound importance for the history of blacks in the West and for chronicling the shifting relations of domination and subordination between Europeans and the rest of the world. It is essential for our understanding of the category of "race" itself and of the genesis and development of successive forms of racist ideology. It is relevant, above all, in elaborating an interpretation of the origins and evolution of black politics. This task requires careful attention to the complex intermixture of African and European philosophical and cultural systems and ideas. A concept of modernity that is worth its salt ought, for example, to have something to contribute to an analysis of how the particular varieties of radicalism articulated through the revolts of enslaved people made selective use of the ideologies of the western Age of Revolution and then flowed into social movements of an anti-colonial and decidedly anti-capitalist type. Lastly, the overcoming of scientific racism (one of modernity's more durable intellectual products) and its post-war transmutation into newer, cultural forms that stress complex difference rather than simple biological hierarchy may provide a telling, concrete example of what scepticism towards the grand narratives of scientific reason adds up to.

To note the potential of this debate around modernity to address these pressing issues of race and racism is not to say that all the elements of its successful resolution are already in evidence. In what seems to be a step backwards from what we can call the high modern era, interest in the social and political subordination of blacks and other non-European peoples does not generally feature in contemporary debates around the philosophical, ideological, or cultural content and consequences of modernity. Instead, an innocent modernity emerges from the apparently happy social relations that graced post-Enlightenment life in Paris, Berlin, and London. These European locations are readily purged of any traces of the people without history whose degraded lives might raise awkward questions about the limits of bourgeois humanism. Montesquieu's famous question "how can one be Persian?"[7] remains stubbornly and wilfully unanswered. What might be labelled an easy postmodernism attacks both rationality and uni-

versality through an obvious and banal relativism, but such a position holds no promise for those who retreat from the suggestion that all modes of life are irreconcilable and the related idea that any ethical or political position is as valid as any other. The work of a number of black thinkers will be examined below as part of a general argument that there are other bases for ethics and aesthetics than those which appear immanent within the versions of modernity that these myopically Eurocentric theories construct. This chapter will examine some omissions and absences in these debates as well as some of the unacknowledged and frequently ethnocentric premises from which they have been conducted.

I want also to offer a critique of and a corrective to these exchanges, and my fundamental concern with the history of the African diaspora necessitates the specific starting point—the black Atlantic—that I set down in Chapter 1. The distinctive historical experiences of this diaspora's populations have created a unique body of reflections on modernity and its discontents which is an enduring presence in the cultural and political struggles of their descendants today. I want to bring to the fore elements of this alternative sequence of enquiries into the politics of life in the West. This discontinuous "tradition" has been occluded by the dominance of European and American writing elites whose loud modernist voices have dominated the clamour of philosophical and political discourses that reaches out from the eighteenth century to haunt us now. However, I am suggesting something more than the corrective inclusion of those black commentaries on the modern which have so far been overlooked by western intellectual history. I intend not only to question the credibility of a tidy, holistic conception of modernity but also to argue for the inversion of the relationship between margin and centre as it has appeared within the master discourses of the master race. In other words, I am seeking to contribute to some *re*constructive intellectual labour which, through looking at the modern cultural history of blacks in the modern world, has a great bearing on ideas of what the West was and is today. This initially requires a return to and a rethinking of the characteristically modern relationship between the master and the slave. I see this work as complementing and extending the work of feminist philosophers who have opposed the figuration of woman as a sign for the repressed or irrational other of rationality identified as male. Their exposure of what Rosi Braidotti calls the "unacknowledged and camouflaged sexual distinction at the very heart of philosophy"[8] can be paralleled by an archaeology of the icons of the blacks that appear as signs of irrational disorder or as a means to celebrate the power of human nature uncorrupted by the decadence of the civilising process. In either guise, blacks enjoy a subordinate position in the dualistic

system that reproduces the dominance of bonded whiteness, masculinity, and rationality.

Slavery and the Enlightenment Project

If popular writers like Jurgen Habermas and Marshall Berman are to be believed, the unfulfilled promise of modernity's Enlightenment project remains a beleaguered but nonetheless vibrant resource which may even now be able to guide the practice of contemporary social and political struggles. In opposition to this view, I propose that the history of the African diaspora and a reassessment of the relationship between modernity and slavery may require a more complete revision of the terms in which the modernity debates have been constructed than any of its academic participants may be willing to concede.

Despite the many positive qualities of Berman's work, the persuasive generality of his argument leads him to speak rather hastily of the "intimate unity of the modern self and the modern environment." This is conveyed in an instinctive manner by "the first great wave of writers and thinkers about modernity—Goethe, Hegel, Marx, Stendhal and Baudelaire, Carlyle and Dickens, Herzen and Dostoevsky."[9] Their conspicuous European-centredness aside, remarks like this would seem not only to endorse the view of modernity as an absolute break with its past but also to deny the possibility that the distinctiveness of the modern self might reside in its being a necessarily fractured or compound entity. From Berman's perspective, the powerful impact of issues like "race" and gender on the formation and reproduction of modern selves can too easily be set aside. The possibility that the modern subject may be located in historically specific and unavoidably complex configurations of individualisation and embodiment—black and white, male and female, lord and bondsman—is not entertained. Berman compounds these difficulties by arguing that "modern environments and experiences cut across *all* boundaries of geography and ethnicity, of class and nationality, of religion and ideology: in this sense modernity can be said to unite all mankind"[10] (emphasis added). This could be read as a suggestion that an all-encompassing modernity effects everyone in a uniform and essentially similar way. This approach therefore runs contrary to my own concern with the variations and discontinuities in modern experience and with the decentred and inescapably plural nature of modern subjectivity and identity.

Like Habermas, Berman makes some very bold claims for the Enlightenment's ideological and political bequest: "these images and ideas provide a rich legacy for modern political thought and form a sort of agenda for

nearly all the radical movements of the past two centuries."[11] He notes perceptively, but rather ruefully, that Montesquieu and Rousseau "have given us an agenda, *but no utopia*"[12] (emphasis added). We shall see below that the expressions of black Atlantic radicalism which are explored in subsequent chapters have consistently acquired and sometimes even refined their utopian tones. One of my aims is to defend this choice and illuminate the occasional strengths with which it has endowed diaspora politics and aesthetics.

Elsewhere, in an interesting exchange with Perry Anderson,[13] Berman goes so far as to suggest that his own entirely laudable desire to remain as close as possible to the insinuating rhythms of everyday life, and his admirable belief that left intellectuals should cultivate the capacity to read the signs in the street in defiance of contemporary pressures to retreat into a contemplative state, are both valuable products of this special modernist perspective. Though not immune to the lure of the esoteric, for a variety of reasons black intellectuals, most of whom have not held academic positions, have tended to find it easier to remain in contact with the level of culture which Berman so rightly finds invigorating.

The same set of issues emerges in even sharper focus when, in another article, Berman describes a return to the area of the South Bronx where he spent his boyhood.[14] The breakdancers and graffitists that he observes moving across the shadows of that desolate urban landscape are not so easily to be claimed for the overarching modernism he seeks to affirm. Their history, which for all its appeal does not enter directly into Berman's accounts of the dizzying allure and the democratic potential of modern society, originates in distinctively modern institutions of the western hemisphere like the sugar plantation.[15] It constitutes the lineage of a variety of social thought—a movement or sequence of movements in cultural politics and political culture—which is an extremely ambiguous component of his modernist vision and has little to do with the innocent, European modernity that appears in the wider debates in which he is participating.

Later on we shall see in detail how specific groups of black intellectuals—again not simply writers—have analysed and sought to come to terms with their inherently ambivalent relationship to the West and its dubious political legacies. Here it is only necessary to note that the contemporary descendants and the protective cultural forms of black radicalism also raise queries about the assumption of symmetrical intersubjectivity which features in so much of this discourse on the nature of modernity and modernisation. In view of this, it is unsurprising that Berman speaks of those who make it out of the ruins of the South Bronx simply as "working-class heroes,"[16] as if their membership of or affiliation to an identifiable and cohe-

sive working class is a self-evident fact that somehow confirms his sense of the centripetal effects of modernity.

I should emphasise that Berman is not being singled out for attack here, and that I have a great deal of sympathy with his persuasive and stimulating account of modernity and its attendant political choices. Pointing to some of the lapses in his narrative of the modern should not lead one to overlook the fact that he, unlike many of his theoretical peers, does at least notice the black and Hispanic presence in the ruins of the modern city. He may not be concerned with the impact of racial categories and meanings in the work of "intuitive" modernists like Hegel, but he does recognise the contemporary cultural products of modern black history and seek to portray their positive value. Berman even appreciates that "not much of [their] art is produced in commodity form for sale."[17] However, none of these important insights interrupts his haste to annexe the cultural forms of the black Atlantic for an image of the working class. In a small way, Berman's inability to give due weight to the plurality that I believe is integral to the modern raises further profound problems about his presentation of the continuity of modern identity and the totalising wholeness with which he invests his conception of modern experience.

Pointing out aspects of the particularity of modern black experiences should not be understood as an occasion for staging the confrontation between the regional values of a distinct sector or community and the supposed universalism of occidental rationality. I am not suggesting that the contemporary traces of black intellectual history comprise or even refer to a lifeworld that is incommensurable with that of the former slaveholders. That would be the easy way out, for in focusing on racial slavery and its aftermath we are required to consider a historical relationship in which dependency and antagonism are intimately associated and in which black critiques of modernity may also be, in some significant senses, its affirmation. The key to comprehending this lies not in the overhasty separation of the cultural forms particular to both groups into some ethnic typology but in a detailed and comprehensive grasp of their complex interpenetration.[18] The intellectual and cultural achievements of the black Atlantic populations exist partly inside and not always against the grand narrative of Enlightenment and its operational principles. Their stems have grown strong, supported by a lattice of western politics and letters. Though African linguistic tropes and political and philosophical themes are still visible for those who wish to see them, they have often been transformed and adapted by their New World locations to a new point where the dangerous issues of purified essences and simple origins lose all meaning. These modern black political formations stand simultaneously both inside and outside the

western culture which has been their peculiar step-parent. This complex relationship points once again to the need to engage critically with the way in which modernity has been theorised and periodised by its most enthusiastic defenders and critics. Regrettably, both groups have been equally slow in perceiving the centrality of ideas of race and culture to their ongoing investigations.

Like Berman, whose work bears his influence, Jurgen Habermas's writings convey a deep faith in the democratic potential of modernity. Modernity is understood as a distinct configuration with its own spatial and temporal characteristics defined above all through the consciousness of novelty that surrounds the emergence of civil society, the modern state, and industrial capitalism. Neither writer would accept that the normative potential of this new era has been exhausted, but theirs is not a positivistic or naive enthusiasm. Modernity is apprehended through its counter-discourses and often defended solely through its counterfactual elements, yet their analyses remain substantially unaffected by the histories of barbarity which appear to be such a prominent feature of the widening gap between modern experience and modern expectation. There is a scant sense, for example, that the universality and rationality of enlightened Europe and America were used to sustain and relocate rather than eradicate an order of racial difference inherited from the premodern era. The figure of Columbus does not appear to complement the standard pairing of Luther and Copernicus that is implicitly used to mark the limits of this particular understanding of modernity. Locke's colonial interests and the effect of the conquest of the Americas on Descartes and Rousseau are simply non-issues. In this setting, it is hardly surprising that if it is perceived to be relevant at all, the history of slavery is somehow assigned to blacks. It becomes our special property rather than a part of the ethical and intellectual heritage of the West as a whole.[19] This is only just preferable to the conventional alternative response which views plantation slavery as a premodern residue that disappears once it is revealed to be fundamentally incompatible with enlightened rationality and capitalist industrial production.

Like a good many ex-slaves and abolitionists, Habermas is tenaciously committed to the course of making bourgeois civil society live up to its political and philosophical promises. Drawing his theory of modernity from the work of Kant and Hegel, he notes its contemporary crises but says that they can be resolved only from within modernity itself by the completion of the Enlightenment project. There is perhaps an irony in seeing the affiliates of historical materialism defending the very humanistic rationality which for many years was one of their major intellectual foes. Habermas recognises the intimate ties between the idea of modernity

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Habermas recognises the intimate ties between the idea of modernity

and the development of European art which is able to act as a reconciler of the fragmented moments of reason. Using Weber and Nietzsche, he also defines modernity through its supercession of religious world views and the process of cultural rationalisation whereby science, morality, and art are separated into autonomous spheres, each governed by its own epistemological rules and procedures of validation. The differentiation of these spheres of value is characterised by an emphasis on decentration and reflexivity. Thus the modernisation of the lifeworld sees the concepts of authenticity, aesthetics, and ethics sharply differentiated while the modern is identified in the rift between secular and sacred spheres of action opened up by the death of God and the consequent hole at the centre of the lifeworld. This divergence proceeds closely articulated with the reification of consciousness that can be apprehended in the severing of expert cultures from the lifeworld and the latter's "colonisation" by debased forms of pseudo-reason which serve only to integrate and functionalise the social system. Under these conditions, everyday consciousness becomes a "fragmented consciousness" divorced from the opportunity to engage in reflexive, self-critical practice or the chance to analyse experience in terms of distinct, cognitive, practical, and aesthetic standards.

Habermas does not follow Hegel in arguing that slavery is itself a modernising force in that it leads both master and servant first to self-consciousness and then to disillusion, forcing both to confront the unhappy realisation that the true, the good, and the beautiful do not have a single shared origin. This is probably because though Habermas's theory of modernity draws heavily on Hegel, its Kantian focus absolves it from exploring the dialectic of master and slave in which Hegel's allegory of consciousness and freedom is rooted. I will return to this point later on. It is interesting that when Habermas does finally touch on the master/slave relationship he is exclusively concerned with the psychological dimensions of the allegory. He cites Hegel's observation that it is only the "Wild Moguls" who have their Lords outside themselves whereas the authentic offspring of European modernity remain enslaved even as they carry their Lord inside themselves.[20] It is particularly disappointing that he has not found the modern demand that European masters take their enslaved other seriously worthy of more detailed comment. Habermas is acute in appreciating that Hegel's account of the master/slave relationship is secreted inside many of the writings of contemporary theorists of modernity. He gives this account of the special significance of Hegel's work in initiating the debates over modernity which prefigure contemporary discussions: "Hegel is not the first philosopher to belong to the modern age but he is the first for whom modernity became a problem. In his theory the constel-

lation among modernity, time consciousness and rationality becomes visible for the first time. Hegel himself explodes this constellation, because rationality puffed up into absolute spirit neutralizes the conditions under which modernity attained a consciousness of itself."[21] These words endorse the idea that a journey back to Hegel may be worth making. Struggling to specify the value of the same difficult passages, the historian David Brion Davis describes them thus:

> It was Hegel's genius to endow lordship and bondage with such a rich resonance of meanings that the model could be applied to every form of physical and psychological domination . . . Above all, Hegel bequeathed a message that would have a profound impact on future thought . . . we can expect nothing from the mercy of God or from the mercy of those who exercise worldly lordship in His or other names; that man's true emancipation, whether physical or spiritual, must always depend on those who have endured and overcome some form of slavery.[22]

Brion Davis is not alone in seeking to defend a more directly social reading of Hegel's text than Habermas's own more strictly delimited and essentially psychological concerns would sanction. The writings of Alexander Kojève have been particularly important in popularising an interpretation of the master/slave relationship which, without drifting towards a literal analysis, is both less psychological and more historically specific than is currently fashionable.[23] Kojève's identification of an existential impasse that develops out of the master's dependency on the slave is also interesting because it would seem to offer an interesting point of departure for the analysis of modern aesthetics. These passages in Hegel and Kojève's influential interpretation of them have been widely taken up in social and psychoanalytic theory, forming, for example, an important part of the background to Richard Wright's Parisian revisions of Marxism and appropriations of phenomenology and existentialism. They have also been of great interest to the feminist writers who have returned to Hegel's allegory (via the Lukacs of *History and Class Consciousness*) as part of their clarifying the possibility of "standpoint epistemologies,"[24] particular sociological or experiential locations from which woman-centred knowledge about the world can proceed. This is a big debate and cannot be reconstructed in its entirety here. It has, however, been brought to bear on modern black history and political culture by a number of feminist authors, in particular Patricia Hill Collins, whose argument for the existence of a black women's standpoint epistemology is conducted in something of the same critical, reconstructive, and revisionist spirit that guides my thinking here.[25]

Hill Collins argues that the western traditions of thinking and thinking about thinking to which the human sciences are bound have systematically tried to separate these privileged activities from mere being. This insight is linked in her argument to criticism of the pernicious effects of the dualistic, binary thinking in which one partner in the cognitive couple is always dominated by its repressed and subjugated other half—male/female, rational/irrational, nature/culture, light/dark.

Though I concur with most of Hill Collins's diagnosis of this state of affairs, I disagree with her responses to it. Her answer to the western separation of thinking (and thinking about thinking) from being is to collapse them back into each other so that they form a functional unity that can be uncritically celebrated. She utilises a feminist version of this reasoning as an analogy for understanding what black women can do to produce a critical theory capable of addressing their experiences of marginalisation from truth-seeking and interpretive activities. This begins in an argument for the social construction of "race" and gender. There is no essential woman or woman in general that can focus the emancipatory project of feminist politics; therefore a feminist epistemology must proceed to construct its own standpoint addressed to that lack. This is done in a spirit disabused of the belief that essentially feminine experience can act as the guarantor of feminist knowledge claims. In the (non-black) feminist discourse, the terms woman and feminist are distinguished and must remain separate for the critique to operate plausibly. There is no open counter-argument from Hill Collins for the superior value of an essentialist understanding of black female subjectivity. However, another version of racial essentialism is smuggled in through the back porch even as Hill Collins loudly banishes it from her front door. In her transposition, the term "black" does a double duty. It covers the positions of knowing and being. Its epistemological and ontological dimensions are entirely congruent. Their simple expressive unity joins an act of political affirmation to this philosophical stance: "being black encompasses both experiencing white domination and individual and group valuation of an independent, long-standing Afrocentric consciousness."[26] Her inconsistent deployment of the term Afrocentric, sometimes appearing as a synonym for black and sometimes as equivalent to the sense of the word "feminist" which was opposed to the word "woman," does little to solve the confusion that results from this: "Even though I will continue to use the term Afrocentric feminist thought interchangeably with the phrase Black feminist thought, I think they are conceptually distinct."[27]

Hill Collins repeatedly emphasises that the standpoint she is exploring is "self-defined." This formulation appears at the point where a classically

"Leninist" version of vanguardism is imported into her writing. The mass of black women have experiences that open the way forward to unique forms of consciousness. However, they are incapable of "articulating" the standpoint and need to be helped to do this by an elite cadre of black female intellectuals who vaccinate ordinary folk with the products of their critical theorising, thereby generating resistance. This group also performs what appears to be a low-intensity disciplinary function in areas of black politics other than feminist struggles: "Black women intellectuals who articulate an autonomous, self-defined standpoint are in a position to examine the usefulness of coalitions with other groups, both scholarly and activist, in order to develop new models for social change."[28] Whatever one thinks of the political strategies implied in all this, it is striking how the image of an integral, humanist, and thoroughly Cartesian racial subject underpins and animates the construct of self that has been situated at the core of this "Black women's standpoint—those experiences and ideas shared by African-American women that provide a unique angle of vision on self, community, and society."[29] The elision of black and African-American in this passage is symptomatic of other problems that will be examined below. But what are we to make of the fact that self always comes first in this litany? What understanding of self is it to supply the subjectivity that can focus the subject of black politics?

Hill Collins's answers to these questions suggest that an embeddedness in Enlightenment assumptions continues despite the ostentatious gestures of disaffiliation. Experience-centred knowledge claims, mediated if at all by input from the intellectual vanguard, simply end up substituting the standpoint of black women for its forerunner rooted in the lives of white men. This may have some value as a short-term corrective, but it is less radical and less stimulating than the possibility that we might move beyond the desire to situate our claims about the world in the lives of these whole and stable, ideal subjects. For all its conspicuous masculinism and Eurocentrism, Hegel's allegory is relational. It can be used to point out the value of incorporating the problem of subject formation into both epistemology and political practice. This would also mean taking a cue from a politicised postmodernism and leaving the categories of enquiry open.[30]

My own interest in the famous section at the start of Hegel's *The Phenomenology of Mind*[31] is twofold: First, it can be used to initiate an analysis of modernity which is abjured by Habermas because it points directly to an approach which sees the intimate association of modernity and slavery as a fundamental conceptual issue. This is significant because it can be used to offer a firm rebuke to the mesmeric idea of history as progress and because it provides an opportunity to re-periodise and reaccentuate accounts

of the dialectic of Enlightenment which have not always been concerned to look at modernity through the lenses of colonialism or scientific racism. Second, a return to Hegel's account of the conflict and the forms of dependency produced in the relationship between master and slave foregrounds the issues of brutality and terror which are also too frequently ignored. Taken together, these problems offer an opportunity to transcend the unproductive debate between a Eurocentric rationalism which banishes the slave experience from its accounts of modernity while arguing that the crises of modernity can be resolved from within, and an equally occidental anti-humanism which locates the origins of modernity's current crises in the shortcomings of the Enlightenment project.

Cornel West has pointed out that Hegel was the favourite philosopher of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.[32] The point of entry into the discourse of modernity which Hegel affords is doubly significant because, as we shall see, a significant number of intellectuals formed by the black Atlantic have engaged in critical dialogues with his writings. Their difficult and deeply ambivalent relationship to his work and the intellectual tradition in which it stands helps to locate their uncomfortable position relative to western politics and letters and to identify the distinctive perspectives on the modern world that they have expressed. Amiri Baraka's 1963 poem "Hegel" captures this ambivalence and shows that the appropriation of Hegelian themes is by no means always negative:

> I scream for help. And none comes, has ever
> come. No single redeeming hand
> has ever been offered . . .
> no single redeeming word, has come
> wringing out of flesh
> with the imperfect beautiful resolution
> that would release me from this heavy contract
> of emptiness.[33]

In *Being and Nothingness* Sartre makes the point that Hegel's analysis does not deal with lateral relations between masters or within the caste of slaves let alone with the impact of a free non-slave owning population on the institution of slavery.[34] However, despite these contextual failings, its insights and view of slavery as, in a sense, the premise of modernity also give us the chance to reopen discussion of the origins of black politics in the Euro-American age of revolution and the consequent relationship between the contrasting varieties of radicalism which energised the slaves' struggles for emancipation and racial justice, and which endure in the struggles of their dispersed descendants today. Plantation slavery was more

than just a system of labour and a distinct mode of racial domination. Whether it encapsulates the inner essence of capitalism or was a vestigial, essentially precapitalist element in a dependant relationship to capitalism proper, it provided the foundations for a distinctive network of economic, social, and political relations. Above all, "its demise threw open the most fundamental questions of economy, society and polity,"[35] and it has retained a central place in the historical memories of the black Atlantic.

The way these populations continue to make creative, communicative use of the memory of slavery points constructively away from the twin positions that have overdetermined the debate on modernity so far—an uncritical and complacent rationalism and a self-conscious and rhetorical antihumanism which simply trivialises the potency of the negative. Moving beyond these options requires consideration of what, following Walter Benjamin, can be called the primal history of modernity.[36] Although Benjamin was not attuned to the possibility that modern history could be seen as fractured along the axis that separates European masters and mistresses from their African slaves, there are elements of his thinking, particularly those which derive from his relationship to Jewish mysticism, which make it a valuable resource for my own critique.[37] The time has come for the primal history of modernity to be reconstructed from the slaves' points of view. These emerge in the especially acute consciousness of both life and freedom which is nurtured by the slave's "mortal terror of his sovereign master" and the continuing "trial by death" which slavery becomes for the male slave.[38] This primal history offers a unique perspective on many of the key intellectual and political issues in the modernity debates. I have already mentioned the idea of history as progress. Apart from that thorny perennial, the slaves' perspectives require a discrete view not just of the dynamics of power and domination in plantation societies dedicated to the pursuit of commercial profit but of such central categories of the Enlightenment project as the idea of universality, the fixity of meaning, the coherence of the subject, and, of course, the foundational ethnocentrism in which these have all tended to be anchored. Each of these issues has an impact on the formation of racial discourse and a relevance in understanding the development of racial politics. These problems aside, the slaves' perspectives necessitate a critical stance on the discourse of bourgeois humanism which several scholars have implicated in the rise and consolidation of scientific racism.[39] Using the memory of slavery as an interpretive device suggests that this humanism cannot simply be repaired by introducing the figures of black folks who had previously been confined to the intermediate category between animal and human that Du Bois identifies as a "tertium quid."[40]

In keeping with the spiritual components which also help to distinguish

them from modern secular rationality, the slaves' perspectives deal only sec-
ondarily in the idea of a rationally pursued utopia. Their primary categories
are steeped in the idea of a revolutionary or eschatological apocalypse—
the Jubilee. They provocatively suggest that many of the advances of mo-
dernity are in fact insubstantial or pseudo-advances contingent on the
power of the racially dominant grouping and that, as a result, the critique
of modernity cannot be satisfactorily completed from within its own philo-
sophical and political norms, that is, immanently. The representative figures
whose work I shall explore below were all acutely aware of the promise and
potential of the modern world. Nevertheless, their critical perspectives on
it were only partly grounded in its own norms. However uneasily their
work balanced its defences of modernity against its critiques, they drew
deliberately and self-consciously on premodern images and symbols that
gain an extra power in proportion to the brute facts of modern slavery.
These have contributed to the formation of a vernacular variety of unhappy
consciousness which demands that we rethink the meanings of rationality,
autonomy, reflection, subjectivity, and power in the light of an extended
meditation both on the condition of the slaves and on the suggestion that
racial terror is not merely compatible with occidental rationality but cheer-
fully complicit with it. In terms of contemporary politics and social theory,
the value of this project lies in its promise to uncover both an ethics of
freedom to set alongside modernity's ethics of law and the new concep-
tions of selfhood and individuation that are waiting to be constructed from
the slaves' standpoint—forever disassociated from the psychological and
epistemic correlates of racial subordination. This unstable standpoint is to
be understood in a different way from the clarion calls to epistemological
narcissism and the absolute sovereignty of unmediated experience[41] which
sometimes appear in association with the term. It can be summed up in
Foucault's tentative extension of the idea of a *critical* self-inventory into
the political field. This is made significantly in a commentary upon the
Enlightenment: "The critical ontology of ourselves has to be considered
not, certainly, as a theory, a doctrine, nor even as a permanent body of
knowledge that is accumulating; it has to be conceived as an attitude, an
ethos, a philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at one
and the same time the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on
us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them."[42]

Having recognised the cultural force of the term "modernity" we must
also be prepared to delve into the special traditions of artistic expression
that emerge from slave culture. As we shall see in the next chapter, art,
particularly in the form of music and dance, was offered to slaves as a sub-
stitute for the formal political freedoms they were denied under the planta-

tion regime. The expressive cultures developed in slavery continue to pre-
serve in artistic form needs and desires which go far beyond the mere
satisfaction of material wants. In contradistinction to the Enlightenment
assumption of a fundamental separation between art and life, these expres-
sive forms reiterate the continuity of art and life. They celebrate the
grounding of the aesthetic with other dimensions of social life. The partic-
ular aesthetic which the continuity of expressive culture preserves derives
not from dispassionate and rational evaluation of the artistic object but
from an inescapably subjective contemplation of the mimetic functions of
artistic performance in the processes of struggles towards emancipation,
citizenship, and eventually autonomy. Subjectivity is here connected with
rationality in a contingent manner. It may be grounded in communication,
but this form of interaction is not an equivalent and idealised exchange
between equal citizens who reciprocate their regard for each other in gram-
matically unified speech. The extreme patterns of communication defined
by the institution of plantation slavery dictate that we recognise the anti-
discursive and extra-linguistic ramifications of power at work in shaping
communicative acts. There may, after all, be no reciprocity on the planta-
tion outside of the possibilities of rebellion and suicide, flight and silent
mourning, and there is certainly no grammatical unity of speech to mediate
communicative reason. In many respects, the plantation's inhabitants live
non-synchronously. Their mode of communication is divided by the radi-
cally opposed political and economic interests that distinguish the master
and mistress from their respective human chattels. Under these conditions,
artistic practice retains its "cultic functions" while its superior claims to
authenticity and historic witness may be actively preserved. It becomes dif-
fuse throughout the subaltern racial collectivity where relations of cultural
production and reception operate that are wholly different from those
which define the public sphere of the slaveholders. In this severely re-
stricted space, sacred or profane, art became the backbone of the slaves'
political cultures and of their cultural history. It remains the means through
which cultural activists even now engage in "rescuing critiques" of the
present by both mobilising memories of the past and inventing an imagi-
nary past-ness that can fuel their utopian hopes.

We can see now that the arts of darkness appear in the West at the point
where modernity is revealed to be actively associated with the forms of
terror legitimated by reference to the idea of "race." We must remember
that however modern they may appear to be, the artistic practices of the
slaves and their descendants are also grounded outside modernity. The in-
vocation of anteriority as anti-modernity is more than a consistent rhetori-
cal flourish linking contemporary Africalogy and its nineteenth-century

precursors. These gestures articulate a memory of pre-slave history that can, in turn, operate as a mechanism to distil and focus the counter-power of those held in bondage and their descendants. This artistic practice is therefore inescapably both inside and outside the dubious protection modernity offers. It can be examined in relation to modern forms, themes, and ideas but carries its own distinct critique of modernity, a critique forged out of the particular experiences involved in being a racial slave in a legitimate and avowedly rational system of unfree labour. To put it another way, this artistic and political formation has come to relish its measure of autonomy from the modern—an independent vitality that comes from the syncopated pulse of non-European philosophical and aesthetic outlooks and the fallout from their impact on western norms. This autonomy developed further as slavery, colonialism, and the terror that attended them pitted the vital arts of the slaves against the characteristically modern conditions in which their oppression appeared—as a byproduct of the coerced production of commodities for sale on a world market. This system produced an ungenteel modernity, de-centred from the closed worlds of metropolitan Europe that have claimed the attention of theorists so far.

A preoccupation with the striking doubleness that results from this unique position—in an expanded West but not completely of it—is a definitive characteristic of the intellectual history of the black Atlantic. We will see that it can be traced through the works of a number of modern black thinkers. Frederick Douglass is the first of these representative figures, and his life is an exemplary one as far as this book is concerned. It spanned the Atlantic and involved a record of consistent activism and advocacy on behalf of the slave. There is no space here to discuss the impact of his travels in England and Scotland[43] even though they help to map the spatial dimensions of the black Atlantic world. Unlike the other candidates for the role of progenitor of black nationalism—Martin Delany, Edward Wilmot Blyden, and Alexander Crummell—Douglass had been a slave himself. He is generally remembered for the quality and passion of his political oratory. His writings continue to be a rich resource in the cultural and political analysis of the black Atlantic.[44]

Lord and Bondsman in a Black Idiom

Douglass, who acquired his new post-slave surname from the pages of Sir Walter Scott's *The Lady of the Lake*, published three autobiographies, rewriting his life story and reshaping his public persona at different stages of his life.[45] These texts present a range of important black perspectives on the problem of modernity. Their literary form also raises profound issues

about the aesthetic dimensions and periodisation of black modernism. Both lines of inquiry can be extended by some intertextual consideration of the relationship between Douglass's autobiographies and his only venture into fiction, *The Heroic Slave*. His relationship to modernity was a complex and shifting one, particularly in that he retained and developed the religious convictions that lay at the core of his original opposition to the slave system. Yet Douglass would need no lessons from Habermas and his followers as to the incomplete nature of the Enlightenment project or the need for criticism of religion to precede other forms of social criticism. In his writings he repeatedly calls for greater Enlightenment capable of bringing the illumination of reason to the ethical darkness of slavery. Unlike many of those who were to follow in his footsteps, Douglass conceived of the slave plantation as an archaic institution out of place in the modern world: "[the] plantation is a little nation of its own, having its own language, its own rules, regulations and customs. The laws and institutions of the state, apparently touch it nowhere. The troubles arising here, are not settled by the civil power of the state."[46] The state's lack of access to the plantation illustrated the plantation's general inaccessibility to the varieties of modern, secular political reason necessary to its reform. Douglass compared the slave plantations to the premodern, precapitalist relations of feudal Europe: "In its isolation, seclusion, and self-reliant independence [the] plantation resembles what the baronial domains were during the middle ages . . . Grim, cold and unapproachable by all genial influences from communities without, there it stands; full three hundred years behind the age in all that relates to humanity and morals . . . Civilization is shut out."[47] Douglass's own Christianity may have formed the centre of his political outlook, but he was emphatic that the best master he ever had was an atheist: "Were I again to be reduced to the condition of a slave, next to that calamity, I should regard the fact of being the slave of a religious slaveholder, the greatest that could befall me. For all the slaveholders with whom I have ever met, religious slaveholders are the worst."[48]

Douglass advocated the humanity of African slaves and attacked the exclusion of Africa from history in a celebrated ethnological lecture which he delivered in various venues from 1854 on. Later published as "The Claims of the Negro Ethnologically Considered,"[49] this piece offered a coherent challenge to the scientific racism of Douglass's own time. He discussed, among other things, the work of Samuel Morton.[50] It also conveyed the precision of Douglass's attack on the hellenomaniacal excision of Africa from the narrative of civilisation's development. This was an intensely contested issue at a time when scientific understanding was in motion towards a new version of the relationship among Ancient Greece, the Levant, and

Egypt. As Martin Bernal has pointed out,[51] much of this debate turns on the analysis of the Nile Valley civilisations in general and Egypt in particular. Like many African-Americans, Douglass visited Egypt. He travelled there with his second wife, Helen Pitts, during the late 1880s, making it clear that his journey was part of a long-term quest for the facts with which he could support his ethnological opinions.[52] It is obvious that the appeal of Egypt as evidence of the greatness of pre-slave African cultures, like the enduring symbol that Egypt supplies for black creativity and civilisation, has had a special significance within black Atlantic responses to modernity. At the very least, it helped to ground the cultural norms of diaspora politics outside the pathway marked out by the West's own progress from barbarism to civilisation and to show that the path began in Africa rather than Greece. Egypt also provided the symbolic means to locate the diaspora's critique of Enlightenment universals outside the philosophical repertoire of the West.[53] Though Douglass challenged the ethnological implications of Hegel's view of Africa and Africans from the platforms of numerous political meetings, his autobiographies provide a chance to construct critical revisions of Hegel in a rather different form. Douglass was certainly acquainted with the German idealist tradition. We are indebted to Douglass's biographer William McFeely for important details of his intimate relationship with Ottilia Assing, the translator of the German edition of *My Bondage, My Freedom* published in Hamburg in 1860. Assing came from a cultured and intellectual family background. She enjoyed close connections with her uncle's wife, Rahel Levin, an important figure in the Goethe cult. We know that Assing read both Goethe and Feuerbach to Douglass.[54] It would have been surprising if Hegel's name had not been raised in that illustrious company. Assing took her own life in the Bois de Boulogne in 1884 after Douglass's marriage to Helen Pitts.

With this suggestive connection in mind, I want to propose that we read a section of Douglass's narrative as an alternative to Hegel: a supplement if not exactly a trans-coding of his account of the struggle between lord and bondsman. In a rich account of the bitter trial of strength with Edward Covey, the slave breaker to whom he has been sent, Douglass can be read as if he is systematically reworking the encounter between master and slave in a striking manner which inverts Hegel's own allegorical scheme. It is the slave rather than the master who emerges from Douglass's account possessed of "consciousness that exists for itself," while his master becomes the representative of a "consciousness that is repressed within itself." Douglass's transformation of Hegel's metanarrative of power into a metanarrative of emancipation is all the more striking as it is also the occasion for an attempt to specify the difference between a pre-rational, spiritual

mode of African thought and his own compound outlook—an uneasy hybrid of the sacred and the secular, the African and the American, formed out of the debilitating experience of slavery and tailored to the requirements of his abolitionism.

In all three versions of the tale, this section of the narrative begins with Douglass being leased into Covey's care by Thomas Auld—his "real" master. Having broken up the Sabbath school that Douglass had organised for his fellow slaves, Auld desired his slave to be "well broken" lest he develop into "another Nat Turner." Unlike Auld, Covey was a poor man steeped in a variety of pseudo-piety that Douglass viewed with special contempt. We are told, significantly, that he was a poor singer and relied mainly on Douglass for raising a hymn in the frequent acts of family worship to which his slaves were party. Douglass continually compares him to a serpent and tells us that his new master was as unreasonable as he was cruel. Without going into the detail of Covey's brutal regime or the nature of the confrontation that he engineered to break Douglass, the conflict between them induced Douglass to flee. He describes the first six months of his stay with Covey in dramatic fashion: "A few months of his discipline tamed me. Mr Covey succeeded in breaking me. I was broken in body, soul and spirit. My natural elasticity was crushed; my intellect languished; the disposition to read departed; the cheerful spark that lingered about my eye died; the dark night of slavery closed in upon me; and behold a man transformed into a brute."[55]

After a particularly severe beating, Douglass returned to Auld to display his wounds and to appeal to him on the grounds that Covey's unjust and brutal regime had endangered a valuable piece of property, namely Douglass himself. Auld found excuses for Covey's behaviour and ordered Douglass to return to his custody. Hidden in the woods, "shut in with nature and nature's God," Douglass prayed, like Madison Washington, the fictional hero of *The Heroic Slave*, for deliverance from slavery in general and Covey in particular. Douglass concedes at this point that he experienced doubt about all religion and believed his prayers to be delusory. As night fell he met another slave who was on his way to spend the Sabbath with his wife, who resided on a neighbouring plantation. Later in Douglass's narratives, readers learn that this man, Sandy, betrayed the slaves when they tried to escape. However, at this point in the tale Douglass looks upon him with respect. He was famous among local slaves for his good nature and his good sense: "He was not only a religious man, but he professed to believe in a system for which I have no name. He was a genuine African, and had inherited some of the so-called magical powers, said to be possessed by African and eastern nations."[56]

Douglass "pour[ed] his grief" into the conjurer's ears and, after a meal, they discussed what strategy was most suitable in circumstances where out-and-out flight was impossible. Sandy's belief in the system of ancient African magic led him to offer Douglass a charmed magic root which, if worn on the right side of his body, would make him invulnerable to Covey's blows. Sandy answered Douglass's Christian scepticism by telling him that his book-learning had not kept Covey off him. He begged the runaway to try the African—I am tempted to say Africentric—alternative, saying that it could certainly do no harm. Douglass took the root from Sandy and returned to the Covey household. He tells the eager reader "a slight gleam or shadow of his superstition had fallen upon me."[57] In view of the fact that Douglass makes such great use of the symbolism of light and darkness, the construction "gleam or shadow" is an interesting evasion. Was it a gleam or a shadow? The two ideas are clear alternatives with strikingly different implications for our reading of the episode. The carefully deployed ambiguity may also be a cryptic acknowledgement of the different ways in which black and white readers were likely to respond to the tale.

On his return, Douglass met Covey and his wife en route to church dressed in their Sunday best. Covey had acquired the countenance of an Angel and smiled so broadly that Douglass began "to think that Sandy's herb had more virtue in it than I, in my pride, had been willing to allow."[58] All went well until Monday morning when Covey, freed from his religious observance, returned to his customary and devious brutality. This was the moment when Douglass resolved, with devastating consequences, to stand up in his own defense. The Hegelian struggle ensued, but this time Douglass discovered an ideal speech situation at the very moment in which he held his tormentor by the throat: "I held him so firmly by the throat that his blood flowed through my nails . . . Are you going to resist you scoundrel?" said he. To which, I returned a polite "Yes Sir."[59] The two men were locked together in the Hegelian impasse. Each was able to contain the strength of the other without vanquishing him. Enraged by Douglass's unexpected act of insubordination, Covey then sought to enlist the aid of the other people who were to hand, both slave and free. Covey's cousin Hughes was beaten off by Douglass, then Bill, the hired man, affected ignorance of what Covey wished him to do, and Caroline, the female slave in the Covey household, bravely declined her master's instruction to take hold of Douglass. In the text, each of these supporting characters is addressed by Douglass and Covey in turn. The mutual respect born in their tussle is conveyed by the manner in which they appeal to the others as equals. After two hours, Covey gave up the contest and let Douglass go. The narrator tells us that he was a changed man after that fight, which was

"the turning point" in his career as a slave. The physical struggle is also the occasion on which a liberatory definition of masculinity is produced.

> I was nothing before; I was a man now. It [the fight] recalled to life my crushed self-respect and my self confidence, and inspired me with a renewed determination to be a free man. A man without force is without the essential dignity of humanity . . . I was no longer a servile coward, trembling under the frown of a brother worm of the dust, but my long-cowed spirit was roused to an attitude of manly independence. I had reached a point at which I was not afraid to die.[60]

Douglass's tale can be used to reveal a great deal about the difference between the male slave's and the master's views of modern civilisation. In Hegel's allegory, which correctly places slavery at the natal core of modern sociality, we see that one solipsistic combatant in the elemental struggle prefers his conqueror's version of reality to death and submits. He becomes the slave while the other achieves mastery. Douglass's version is quite different. For him, the slave actively prefers the possibility of death to the continuing condition of inhumanity on which plantation slavery depends. He anticipated a point made by Lacan some years later: "death, precisely because it has been drawn into the function of stake in the game . . . shows at the same time how much of the prior rule, as well as of the concluding settlement, has been elided. For in the last analysis it is necessary for the loser not to perish, in order to become a slave. In other words, the pact everywhere precedes violence before perpetuating it."[61]

This turn towards death as a release from terror and bondage and a chance to find substantive freedom accords perfectly with Orlando Patterson's celebrated notion of slavery as a state of "social death."[62] It points to the value of seeing the consciousness of the slave as involving an extended act of mourning. Douglass's preference for death fits readily with archival material on the practice of slave suicide and needs also to be seen alongside other representations of death as agency that can be found in early African-American fiction.[63] Ronald Takaki and others[64] have discussed these passages as part of a wider consideration of Douglass's changing view of the necessity of violence in the cause of black emancipation—a theme that Douglass developed further in *The Heroic Slave*. Douglass's departure from the pacifism that had marked his early work is directly relevant to his critical understanding of modernity. It underscored the complicity of civilisation and brutality while emphasising that the order of authority on which the slave plantation relied cannot be undone without recourse to the counter-violence of the oppressed. Douglass's description of his combat with Covey expresses this once again, offering

an interesting though distinctly masculinist resolution of slavery's inner oppositions.

This idea of masculinity is largely defined against the experience of infantilism on which the institutions of plantation slavery rely rather than against women. However, it is interesting that this aspect of Douglass's political stance has been discussed elsewhere among the would-be savants and philosophes of the black Atlantic as a symptom of important differences in the philosophical and strategic orientations of black men and women. In his famous essay "On the Damnation of Women" Du Bois recounts a story told to him by Wendell Phillips which pinpoints the problem with precision:

> Wendell Phillips says that he was once in Faneuil Hall, when Frederick Douglass was one of the chief speakers. Douglass had been describing the wrongs of the Negro race and as he proceeded he grew more and more excited and finally ended by saying that they had no hope of justice from whites, no possible hope except in their own right arms. It must come to blood! They must fight for themselves. Sojourner Truth was sitting, tall and dark, on the very front seat facing the platform, and in the hush of feeling when Douglass sat down she spoke out in her deep, peculiar voice, heard all over the hall: "Frederick, is God dead?"[65]

The question which Sojourner Truth detected in Douglass's fiery oratory and pessimistic political conclusion has an important place in philosophical debates over the value of modernity and the transvaluation of post-sacral, modern values. In Germany at roughly the same time, another Frederick (Nietzsche) was pondering the philosophical and ethical implications of the same question. It remains implicit in the story of Douglass's struggles in and against slavery. It may also be a question that cannot be separated from the distinct mode of masculinity with which it has been articulated. To counter any ambiguity around this point in Douglass's tale, I want to pursue similar philosophical conclusions which appeared elsewhere in the history of the abolitionist movement as an important cipher for its emergent feminist sensibilities shortly after Douglass's own tale was published.

The horrific story of Margaret Garner's attempted escape from slavery in Kentucky can usefully be read in conjunction with Douglass's autobiographical story. A version of this tale is still circulating, both as part of the African-American literary tradition inaugurated by works like Douglass's *The Heroic Slave* and as part of what might be called the black feminist political project. This longevity is testimony not simply to Toni Morrison's conspicuous skill as a writer in reinventing this story in her novel *Beloved*[66]

but to the continuing symbolic power of the tale and its importance as an element of the moral critique that anchors black antipathy to the forms of rationality and civilised conduct which made racial slavery and its brutality legitimate.

Contemporary newspaper reports, abolitionist material, and various biographical and autobiographical accounts provide the sources from which this episode can be reconstructed. The simplest details of the case shared by various accounts[67] seem to be as follows. Taking advantage of the winter which froze the Ohio river that usually barred her way to freedom, Margaret Garner, a "mulatto, about five feet high, showing one fourth or one third white blood . . . [with] a high forehead . . . [and] bright and intelligent eyes,"[68] fled slavery on a horse-drawn sleigh in January 1856 with her husband, Simon Garner, Jr., also known as Robert, his parents, Simon and Mary, their four children, and nine other slaves. On reaching Ohio, the family separated from the other slaves, but they were discovered after they had sought assistance at the home of a relative, Elijah Kite. Trapped in his house by the encircling slave catchers, Margaret killed her three-year-old daughter with a butcher's knife and attempted to kill the other children rather than let them be taken back into slavery by their master, Archibald K. Gaines, the owner of Margaret's husband and of the plantation adjacent to her own home. This case initiated a series of legal battles over the scope of the Fugitive Slave Act,[69] Margaret's extradition, her legal subjectivity, and the respective powers of court officers in the different states. Despite pleas that she be placed on trial for the murder of the little girl "whom she probably loved the best,"[70] Margaret's master eventually sent her to the slave market in New Orleans.

The contemporary reports of this episode are contradictory and burdened with the conflicting political interests that framed its central tragedy. One newspaper report suggested that the Garners' original decision to flee from bondage had, for example, been encouraged by a visit to the Gaines household by two English Ladies.[71] The best-known account of the events is set down in the *Reminiscences of Levi Coffin*. Coffin was a local Quaker abolitionist and reputed president of the Underground Railroad who had been peripherally involved in the tragedy. A number of interesting points emerge from that authoritative source as well as from newspaper articles about the case, the American Anti-Slavery Society's annual report, an account given in the biography of Lucy Stone, the distinguished abolitionist and suffragist who visited Margaret Garner in prison and attended the court hearings, and a further version written for the *American Baptist* by one P. S. Bassett, who gave his address as the Fairmount Theological Seminary in Cincinnati.[72]

Hopelessly surrounded by a posse of slave catchers in the house of their kinsman Elijah Kite, Margaret's husband, Simon Garner, Jr., fired several shots from a revolver at the pursuers. In a further struggle that took place after Gaines and his associates had succeeded in entering the house, one marshal had two fingers shot from his hand and lost several teeth from a ricocheting bullet. Coffin writes that "the slave men were armed and fought bravely," while the Anti-Slavery Society makes this resistance a matrimonial rather than gender-based phenomenon: "Robert and Margaret fought bravely and desperately to protect their parents, and their children, in their right to liberty, but were soon overpowered."[73] In this account Margaret's assault on the children takes place between two attacks on the house by Gaines and his henchmen. In Coffin's version of the story it is only _after_ Margaret has appreciated the hopelessness of the slaves' besieged position and seen her husband overpowered that she begins her emancipatory assault on her children.

Some newspaper reports said that after almost decapitating the little girl's body in the act of cutting her throat, Margaret called out to her mother-in-law for assistance in slaying the other children, "Mother, help me to kill the children."[74] Bassett, who claimed to have interviewed both the women, quoted Mary Garner as saying that she "neither encouraged nor discouraged her daughter-in-law,—for under similar circumstances she should probably have done the same." What mode of rational, moral calculation may have informed this appeal from one black woman to another? Other papers reported that the older woman could not endure the sight of her grandchildren being murdered and ran to take refuge under a bed. What are we to make of these contrasting forms of violence, one coded as male and outward, directed towards the oppressor, and the other, coded as female, somehow internal, channelled towards a parent's most precious and intimate objects of love, pride, and desire? After her arrest, Margaret Garner is said to have sat in the Hammond Street Police Station House in a shocked and stupefied state. Archibald Gaines took the body of her dead daughter away so that he could bury it in Kentucky on land "consecrated to slavery."[75]

This tale was immediately repeated within the abolitionist movement as important proof of the venal menace posed by the unbridled appetites of the slave masters. From this perspective, much was to be made of the fact that the slain child had been female, killed by her mother lest she fall victim to this licentiousness. Lucy Stone emphasised this point to her biographer: "She was a beautiful woman, chestnut colored, with good features and wonderful eyes. It was no wild desperation that had impelled her, but a calm determination that, if she could not find freedom here, she would get

it with the angels . . . Margaret had tried to kill all her children, but she had made sure of the little girl. She had said that her daughter would never suffer as she had."[76]

Stone attended the courtroom deliberations over Margaret's fate and was accused of trying to pass a knife to her while visiting her in prison, so that she could finish the job she had begun. We are told by Coffin that Stone drew tears from many listeners when, in explaining her conduct before the court, she made this argument: "When I saw that poor fugitive, took her toil-hardened hand in mine, and read in her face deep suffering and an ardent longing for freedom, I could not help bid her be of good cheer. I told her that a thousand hearts were aching for her, and that they were glad one child of hers was safe with the angels. Her only reply was a look of deep despair, of anguish such that no words can speak."[77] Stone defended Margaret's conduct as a woman and a Christian, arguing that her infanticide sprung from the deepest and holiest feelings implanted alike in black and white women by their common divine father. Coffin quotes her as likening Margaret's spirit to that of those ancestors to whom the monument at Bunker Hill had been erected. She made the proto-feminist interpretation of Margaret's actions quite explicit: "The faded faces of the Negro Children tell too plainly to what degradation female slaves submit. Rather than give her little daughter to that life, she killed it."[78]

Further indication of the power of this narrative in the development of a distinctly feminine abolitionist discourse comes from the lectures of Sarah Parker Remond, a black abolitionist and physician born free in Salem, Massachusetts, who eventually made her home in Italy.[79] Interestingly, we know that Lucy Stone had visited the Salem Female Anti-Slavery Society, to which Sarah belonged.[80] A version of Remond's account of the Garner story is given in a newspaper report of a packed public meeting that she addressed in the Music Hall, Warrington, England, three years after the incident.[81] Remond had discussed the case with John Jolliffe, Margaret Garner's attorney. Her concern throughout the one-and-a-half-hour lecture was to demonstrate the un-Christian and immoral character of slavery and to reveal its capacity to pervert both civilisation and the natural attributes of human beings. According to the conventions of abolitionist discourse, the image of abusive and coercive white male sexuality was prominently displayed. The perversion of maternity by the institution of slavery was a well-seasoned theme in abolitionist propaganda. Frederick Douglass had made this very point in his _Narrative,_ recounting an incident in which a white woman, Mrs. Hicks, murdered her slave—a cousin of Douglass's— for failing to keep the baby she was charged with minding sufficiently quiet during the night.

The offence for which this girl was murdered was this:—She had been set that night to mind Mrs. Hick's baby and during the night she fell asleep and the baby cried. She having lost her rest for several nights previous, did not hear the crying. They were both in the room with Mrs. Hicks. Mrs. Hicks, finding the girl slow to move, jumped from her bed, seized an oak stick of wood by the fireplace, and with it broke the girl's nose and breastbone, and thus ended her life.[82]

These stories raise complex questions about the mediating role of gender categories in racial politics and in particular about the psychological structures of identification facilitated by the idea of maternity. It is impossible to explore these important matters here. The Margaret Garner story corresponds most closely to Douglass's work in her refusal to concede any legitimacy to slavery and thereby initiate the dialectic of intersubjective dependency and recognition that Hegel's allegory presents as modernity's precondition. Like Douglass's, her tale constructs a conception of the slave subject as an agent. What appears in both stories to be a positive preference for death rather than continued servitude can be read as a contribution towards slave discourse on the nature of freedom itself. It supplies a valuable clue towards answering the question of how the realm of freedom is conceptualised by those who have never been free. This inclination towards death and away from bondage is fundamental. It reminds us that in the revolutionary eschatology which helps to define this primal history of modernity, whether apocalyptic or redemptive, it is the moment of jubilee that has the upper hand over the pursuit of utopia by rational means. The discourse of black spirituality which legitimises these moments of violence possesses a utopian truth content that projects beyond the limits of the present. The repeated choice of death rather than bondage articulates a principle of negativity that is opposed to the formal logic and rational calculation characteristic of modern western thinking and expressed in the Hegelian slave's preference for bondage rather than death. As part of his argument against her return to Kentucky, Margaret's lawyer, Mr. Jolliffe, told the court that she and the other fugitives "would all go singing to the gallows" rather than be returned to slavery. The association of this apparent preference for death with song is also highly significant. It joins a moral and political gesture to an act of cultural creation and affirmation. This should be borne in mind when we come to consider how intervention in the memories of slavery is routinely practised as a form of vernacular cultural history.

Douglass's writings and the popularity of the Garner narrative are also notable for marking out the process whereby the division of intellectual

labour within the abolitionist movement was transformed. The philosophical material for the abolitionist cause was no longer to be exclusively generated by white commentators who articulated the metaphysical core of simple, factual slave narratives. It is also important to emphasise that these texts offer far more than the reworking and transformation of the familiar Hegelian allegory. They express in the most powerful way a tradition of writing in which autobiography becomes an act or process of simultaneous self-creation and self-emancipation.[83] The presentation of a public persona thus becomes a founding motif within the expressive culture of the African diaspora.[84] The implications that this has for the inner aesthetic character of black Atlantic modernity will be explored in greater detail below. It is important to note here that a new discursive economy emerges with the refusal to subordinate the particularity of the slave experience to the totalising power of universal reason held exclusively by white hands, pens, or publishing houses. Authority and autonomy emerge directly from the deliberately personal tone of this history. Eagerly received by the movement to which they were addressed, these tales helped to mark out a dissident space within the bourgeois public sphere which they aimed to suffuse with their utopian content. The autobiographical character of many statements like this is thus absolutely crucial. It appeals in special ways to the public opinion of the abolitionist movement against the arbitrary power intrinsic to a slave system which is both unreasonable and un-Christian. What Richard Wright would later identify as the aesthetics of personalism flows from these narratives and shows that in the hands of slaves the particular can wear the mantle of truth and reason as readily as the universal.

It is worth pausing for a moment to examine an especially significant passage at the end of the fifth chapter of Douglass's narrative which has been pointed out by William Andrews in his absorbing book *To Tell a Free Story*.[85] In this passage, Douglass is reflecting on a turning point in his life when, at the age of seven or eight, he was sent by his master to Baltimore to live with the Aulds. Looking back on this event, Douglass describes it as the first plain manifestation of a special providence which has attended him ever since. He acknowledges that the white reader is likely to respond sceptically to his claim to have been singled out for this special destiny: "I may be deemed superstitious, and even egotistical, in regarding this event as a special interposition of divine providence in my favour. But I should be false to the earliest sentiments of my soul if I suppressed the opinion. I prefer to be true to myself even at the hazard of incurring the ridicule of others, rather than to be false and incur my own abhorrence."[86] Andrews points out that Douglass does not appeal to *divine* authority to legitimate this declaration of independence in the interpretation of his own life. The

passage underscores the link between autobiographical writing and the project of self-liberation. Its fundamental importance lies in the clarity of its announcement that truth to the self takes priority over what the readers may think is acceptable or appropriate to introduce into an abolitionist discourse. However, I believe that there is a deeper argument here concerning the status of truth and reason as universal concepts and the need to depart from absolute standards if the appropriate qualities of racial authenticity and personal witness are to be maintained. The distinctive pattern of self-creation evident in this text and many similar texts of the period is not, as some of the aspiring post-structuralist literary critics would have it, simply the inauguration of a new and vital literary genre. Douglass's conclusions direct the reader's attention to a distinct and compelling variety of metaphysical, philosophical commentary. They point to the initiation and reproduction of a distinctive political perspective in which auto-poiesis articulates with poetics to form a stance, a style, and a philosophical mood that have been repeated and reworked in the political culture of the black Atlantic ever since. The vernacular components of black expressive culture are thus tied to the more explicitly philosophical writings of black modernist writers like Wright and Du Bois. They develop this line of enquiry by seeking to answer the metaphysical questions "Who am I?" and "When am I most myself?"

Some years later, Du Bois echoed Douglass with a disarming precision. He developed the argument implied in the earlier text, elevating it to a new level of abstraction:

> This the American black man knows: his fight here is a fight to the finish. Either he dies or wins. If he wins it will be by no subterfuge or evasion of amalgamation. He will enter modern civilisation here in America as a black man on terms of perfect and unlimited equality with any white man, or he will not enter at all. Either extermination root and branch, or absolute equality. There can be no compromise. This is the last great battle of the West.[87]

Like Douglass, Du Bois wanted to establish that the history of blacks in the new world, particularly the experiences of the slave trade and the plantation, were a legitimate part of the moral history of the West as a whole. They were not unique events—discrete episodes in the history of a minority—that could be grasped through their exclusive impact on blacks themselves, nor were they aberrations from the spirit of modern culture that were likely to be overcome by inexorable progress towards a secular, rational utopia. The continuing existence of racism belied both these verdicts, and it requires us to look more deeply into the relationship of racial

terror and subordination to the inner character of modernity. This is the path indicated by Wright, James, Du Bois, and a host of others who have contributed in a variety of ways to the hermeneutics which distinguishes the grounded aesthetics of the black Atlantic. This hermeneutics has two interrelated dimensions—it is both a hermeneutics of suspicion and a hermeneutics of memory. Together they have nurtured a redemptive critique.

In the period after slavery, the memory of the slave experience is itself recalled and used as an additional, supplementary instrument with which to construct a distinct interpretation of modernity. Whether or not these memories invoke the remembrance of a terror which has moved beyond the grasp of ideal, grammatical speech, they point out of the present towards a utopian transformation of racial subordination. We must enquire then whether a definition of modern rationality such as that employed by Habermas leaves room for a liberatory, aesthetic moment which is emphatically anti- or even pre-discursive? In other words, in what follows, the critique of bourgeois ideology and the fulfilment of the Enlightenment project under the banner of working-class emancipation which goes hand in hand with it is being complemented by another struggle—the battle to represent a redemptive critique of the present in the light of the vital memories of the slave past. This critique is constructed only partly from within the normative structures provided by modernity itself. We can see this from the way it mobilises an idea of the ancient pre-slave past, often in the form of a concern with Egyptian history and culture, and uses this to anchor its dissident assessments of modernity's achievements.