CARSTEN JUNKER

Patterns of Positioning

On the Poetics of Early Abolition

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We must try to analyze the problem.

Bayard Rustin
“The Anatomy of Frustration”

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Abbreviations

ap	argumentative pattern/topos
df	discursive field of topoi
ft	function of topoi
gf	generic frame
ms	mode of spection
na	narrative act of positioning
nf	narrative figure
rt	referent of topoi

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Berlin, March 2016 Carsten Junker

Introduction—The Poetics of Early Abolition

1 Positioning and Feeling for the Enslaved

Letter IX from J. Hector St. John de Crèvecœur's *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782) gives an account of the pre-revolutionary British colony of South Carolina, featuring "thoughts on slavery" and its concomitant "physical evil" (151).[1] It provides a scathing critique of the ways in which the inhabitants of "Charles-Town" habituated enslavement practices on Southern hinterland plantations:

> Their ears, by habit, are become deaf, their hearts are hardened; they neither see, hear, nor feel for the woes of their poor slaves, from whose painful labours all their wealth proceeds. Here the horrors of slavery, the hardship of incessant toils, are unseen; and no one thinks with compassion of those showers of sweat and of tears which from the bodies of Africans, daily drop, and moisten the ground they till. The cracks of the whip, urging these miserable being to excessive labour, are far too distant from the gay capital to be heard. (153)

The narrator-protagonist farmer, who goes by the name of James, seeks to counterbalance the brutalizing and blunting effects he here describes in the "melancholy scene" (151) in which his letter culminates. In this canonized

[1] Crèvecœur's (1735–1813) *Letters* are composed of twelve fictionalized "letters" or epistolary essays by a North American farmer identified as James, addressed to a Mr. F. B. in Cambridge, England. First published in England in 1782, the *Letters* soon became a well-known account of everyday life and living conditions in North America for British and European as well as American audiences. See also Greeson.
Years of birth and death provided throughout this study are taken from the database *World Biographical Information System*, as well as from the catalogues of the following institutions: American Antiquarian Society, Cornell University Library, and Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin.

ur-scene of North American writing on slavery, addressed to an English audience, James depicts his encounter with an enslaved man who has suffered severe punishment for supposedly having murdered a plantation overseer. James recounts how, on his way to a dinner invitation at a nearby plantation, he reacts to finding the man imprisoned in a cage suspended from a tree, bleeding to death from numerous wounds that birds had inflicted upon his body: "I found myself suddenly arrested by the power of affright and terror; my nerves were convulsed; I trembled, I stood motionless, involuntarily contemplating the fate of this negro, in all its dismal latitude" (164). Paralyzed at first, James overcomes his momentary powerlessness and struggles to determine how to respond to the enslaved man's plea for some water:

> Humanity herself would have recoiled back with horror; she would have balanced whether to lessen such reliefless distress, or mercifully with one blow to end this dreadful scene of agonizing torture. Had I had a ball in my gun, I certainly should have dispatched him; but finding myself unable to perform so kind an office, I sought, though trembling, to relieve him as well as I could. (164)

James contemplates shooting the victim of such torture in order to release him from his suffering but decides against what he perceives would be an act of merciful deliverance. Instead of ending the dying man's life, James indeed hands him water but eventually chooses to withdraw from the scene that causes his alarm: "Oppressed with the reflections which this shocking spectacle afforded me, I mustered strength enough to walk away, and soon reached the house at which I intended to dine" (164–65).

The second example of early abolition around 1800 is taken from John Wesley's religious treatise *Thoughts Upon Slavery*, published in London in 1774 and reprinted in Philadelphia the same year.[2] In this passage, the co-founder of Methodism does not discuss the enslavement regime installed in the Americas, but focuses on the torture to which the enslaved were subjected during their passage across the Atlantic. Wesley (1703–1791) scolds slave-ship captains for their lack of compassion for the enslaved in direct terms of address:

[2] *Thoughts* went through thirteen editions, which goes to show that it was circulated widely and was immensely popular; see M. Jackson 321n98.

> Are you *a man*? Then you should have an [sic] *human* heart. But have you indeed? What is your heart made of? Is there no such principle as compassion there? Do you never *feel* another's pain? Have you no sympathy? No sense of human woe? No pity for the miserable? When you saw the flowing eyes, the heaving breasts, the bleeding sides and tortured limbs of your fellow-creatures, was you a stone, or a brute? Did you look upon them with the eyes of a tiger? When you squeezed the agonizing creatures down in the ship, or when you threw their poor mangled remains into the sea, had you no relenting? Did not one tear drop from your eye, one sigh escape from your breast? Do you feel no relenting *now?* (52).

In a subsequent passage, Wesley goes on to address slave-trading merchants with a short but remarkable imaginary anecdote about a slave in Liverpool who is so bold as to ask a merchant to fathom what it might feel like if their positions were reversed:

> "Master,[”] (said a slave at *Liverpool* to the merchant that owned him) "what if some of my countrymen were to come here, and take away my mistress, and master *Tommy*, and master *Billy*, and carry them into our country, and make them slaves, how would you like it?" His [the merchant's] answer was worthy of a man: "I will never buy a slave more while I live." Oh, let this resolution be yours! Have no more part in this detestable business. (53–54)

What do these two texts have in common? Both Crèvecœur's episode and Wesley's protestations are part of a larger body of an abolitionist poetics and both employ emotionalized language to articulate a critique of slavery. They expose the violent nature of enslavement practices. Unlike the narratives of Black abolitionists, which may articulate the suffering of enslaved persons in the first person, these are accounts of white witnesses who speak about—and perhaps for—the enslaved.[3] To varying degrees, they go beyond descriptions of the enslaved and their suffering by zooming in on the moral, oftentimes religious convictions of the observers themselves, as in the case of Crèvecœur's James, or on those of slave-trade captains and merchants, as in Wesley's. White abolitionists in the late eighteenth-century transatlantic sphere faced the dilemma of how to induce their audiences to listen to, rather than simply dismissing, their appeals. It should therefore come as no sur-

[3] For a discussion of capitalizing the term "Black" while not capitalizing the term "white," see Junker, *Frames of Friction* 13n2.

prise that they mobilized public responses to enslavement by making their readers see and feel that the trade in Africans and their enslavement in the Americas was objectionable and should be ended. Abolitionist writers deployed specific tools to register, reject, and reflect on enslavement and, even more so, to elicit various kinds of *emotional* responses on the part of their audiences. They went beyond mere rational descriptions of enslavement to incite outrage in their readers against the transatlantic slave trade and the enslavement regime in the Americas, and thus sought to bear directly on the judgment that their audiences formulated about enslavement. Wesley's "language of the heart," his "sentimental rhetoric" (B. Carey, "John Wesley's" 269) is not altogether different from Crèvecœur's appeals to compassion, or rather his critique of the absence of such compassion in the citizens of Charleston. Both texts seek to establish a nexus between "heart" and humanity; feeling for the enslaved and their suffering becomes expressive of the humanity of free people. This raises a wide range of questions: in vying for interpretive control of enslavement, how do these texts conduct lines of argument, how do they use figurative language and mobilize narrative figures, and how are they generically framed?

The enslavement of and trade in Africans in the English-speaking transatlantic sphere reached a peak around 1800.[4] Between 1787 and 1807, the number of Africans imported as trade goods was higher than in any other twenty-year period.[5] Against this backdrop, transatlantic abolition has been credited as a historical movement—a "moral revolution" (Appiah xi, 101–36)—that created the necessary climate for putting an end—or at least a legal barrier—to the transatlantic trade in enslaved Africans.[6] Slave trading across

4 According to the *Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database*, the decade from 1791–1800 marked a peak in the British Caribbean, with an estimate of 322,209 disembarkations of enslaved persons; a peak on mainland North America was reached in the decade from 1801–1810 with an estimate of 87,493 disembarkations of Africans forced to undertake the Middle Passage. These estimates "provide an educated guess of how large the slave trade actually was. […] They raise the final totals to over 12,500,000 Africans forced to undertake the Middle Passage and around 10,700,000 who completed it, the largest forced migration in modern history" (*Voyages*). See also Eltis and Richardson.

5 See Kolchin 79.

6 "Few moral revolutions have been as consequential as the one that brought an end to the systemic enslavement of Africans and people of African descent in the

the Atlantic was a genocidal regime based on rational principles, made up of numbers, tables, and calculations for profit;[7] in order to mobilize a larger public, abolitionists struggled to take the trade out of the mental framework of colonial trade, of which it had been regarded as merely one branch. The British Parliament eventually passed the Slave Trade Act in 1807 that made the slave trade illegal throughout the British Empire, and by 1808, the Congress of the United States also declared the trade in enslaved people unconstitutional.[8]

The transatlantic slave trade as a historical phenomenon has been extensively researched.[9] Historians have examined transatlantic abolition as a movement relevant to historical change for which they have considered legal,

Atlantic world" (Appiah 104). However, Appiah does not refrain from discussing the multiplicity of factors that lead to the abolition of the slave trade and slavery: "morality is not enough" (108).

7 While this study is aware of other genocidal dynamics, it is specifically concerned with discourses about the enslavement of Africans in the transatlantic sphere. For scholarship on genocide see, for instance, Churchill; Gellately and Kiernan; Kiernan; Rothberg; Totten and Parsons; R. Williams; and Rodríguez.

8 The US Act to Prohibit the Importation of Slaves did not, however, prevent human trafficking from continuing in illegal ways; in fact, it led to "an increase in the illegal slave trade captained by U.S. nationals" (Horne 7). Efforts to abolish the trade in enslaved Africans, moreover, preceded efforts to abolish slavery proper. Enslavement practices continued to be legal in the British Empire until 1833 and *de jure* slavery in the United States was only ended in 1865.

9 Historiographical attention to demographic data has been crucial "in order to determine the actual number of enslaved Africans who were sent to the Americas during the period of the Atlantic slave trade" (Araujo 1). The *Voyages* website deserves special mention here (see also Eltis and Richardson).

Numerous studies that emphasize the lived experiences of the enslaved and, increasingly, of the enslavers (Burnard), complement attention to actual numbers. Tracing the "roots and routes" (Gilroy, *Black Atlantic* 133) of enslaved persons of African descend as well as considering their embeddedness in both larger transatlantic and global circuits and regional practices of enslavement regimes has counteracted more narrowly defined national frameworks of inquiry. At the same time, research on slavery has been particularly useful for rewriting national histories. Interrogating the Dutch involvement in Atlantic slavery, Nimako and Willemsen, for instance, have retrieved crucial aspects of Dutch national history that dominant versions of Dutch historiography had previously downplayed, if not ignored (186).

economic, social, political, religious, moral, and humanitarian factors.[10] These scholars have been divided over how to interpret the correlations between the intensification of the trade during the second half of the eighteenth century, acts of resistance on the part of the enslaved, and the formation of the early abolitionist movement, including the rise of public antislavery sentiments.[11] While historians have thus considered abolition as a composite set of historical causes, events, and effects, the fundamental premise of this study is that transatlantic abolition was also a set of formalized practices. The struggle for the freedom of the enslaved called for adequate strategies of agitation that treated the enslavement of and trade in Africans as well as the corruption of its beneficiaries—merchants, captains, and owners—as scandalous. Abolitionists' efforts to define and publicize their beliefs amounted to the generation of what I call "the poetics of abolition." As I argue, this poetics gave formal shape to the discourse of abolition: there was no knowledge about the enslavement regime and no agitation against it beyond the formalized patterns, the poetic forms and norms, which generated abolitionist discourse. When I speak about the poetics of abolition, I use the term "poetics" in a twofold way:

10 A prima-facie look at any online library catalogue or the annual summary bibliography of the journal *Slavery and Abolition* shows that research on slavery, the slave trade, and abolition continues to constitute a "vibrant historiographical field" (Heuman and Burnard 13), perhaps one of the "liveliest areas in international historiography" (Osterhammel 13). Our knowledge of the history of enslavement and abolition today derives from hundreds of specialized studies. The field is marked by an ongoing differentiation of research foci: most recent historiographical scholarship includes studies with special emphases on—and oftentimes considering the interconnections between—political history (e.g. Kornblith), economic history and the history of labor (K. Morgan; Tomich; Wright), finance capital (Baucom; Armstrong), political philosophy (Kelly; Appiah), the history of law and human rights (Blackburn, *American Crucible*; J. Dyer; Walvin, *Zong*), religion (Avalos), cultural history (Dorsey; Fields and Fields; Abruzzo), the history of gender (Foster; Hagemann, Mettele, and Rendall), memorialization (Wood, *Horrible Gift*; A. Rice; Araujo; Candido; Lovejoy), as well as anthologies covering a broad range of foci (Kaplan and Oldfield; Heuman and Burnhard). For recent concise overviews of the history of slavery, see H. Williams; Stevenson. The list is far from exhaustive.

11 For a discussion of diverging scholarly positions on the correlation between public attitudes toward slavery and anti-slavery political action, see Brown's concise "Introduction" to his *Moral Capital*; and Boulukos, "Capitalism and Slavery."

besides referring to the phenomenon of recurrent patterns which give formal shape to the discourse of abolition, it also encompasses an analysis of and reflection on these patterns and their discursive effects.[12]

Both examples by Crèvecœur and Wesley provide an occasion for considering not only the explicit purposes of their intervention—to contribute to the struggle for effecting the abolition of the slave trade, perhaps also the eventual emancipation of the enslaved—but also their implicit effects in the broader discursive field in which questions concerning such monumental notions as humanity and freedom were being negotiated. In other words, they offer the chance to explore how the speakers of the poetics of early abolition positioned the enslaved and in turn positioned themselves. Crèvecœur's and Wesley's texts articulate these positions differently. Crèvecœur's letter stages a scene in which the figure of the slave is sentenced to death, doomed, and thus literally rendered destitute—consigned to a sphere of the dying. Similarly, in his address to slave-ship captains, Wesley sketches a scene of the slave ship as a place of the dying. In the second scene, however, which takes place in the slave port of Liverpool, he imaginatively inverts power structures. Here, a slave engages a slave merchant, demanding his accountability and requesting that the merchant imagine himself in the position of a slave. In this reversal and reconfiguration of positions, the enslaved are restored from a sphere of death and brought back into the sphere of the living where they are not only spoken about but where they speak for themselves as subjects, and stand firm against enslavement.

In performing these different possibilities and envisioning the enslaved in utterly different positions—in a position in which the slave figure features as a disposable good of trade, on the one hand, and in a position in which the enslaved can make claims to integration and participation in society and the sphere of those whose humanity is recognized, on the other—these passages become paradigmatic for different strands in scholarship which envision the relationship between the free and the unfree in divergent ways. I map these divergent stands of scholarship in the following by referring to them as the SUBJECT or OBJECT paradigms and the ABJECT paradigm.

[12] For a useful conceptualization of a "poetics of politics" as an analytical angle which focuses "on a particular, local dynamism that emerges at the intersections of textuality and politicality [and] puts front and center the crossroads of literary and political cultures, of textual aesthetics and political aspirations or effects," see Herrmann, Kanzler, and Schubert (8–9).

2 Conceptual Framework—Desiderata

The SUBJECT and OBJECT Paradigms

To conceptualize the relationship between the free and the enslaved, scholarship in the fields of Black Studies and African American Studies that address slavery and abolition in general and Black agency in the face of enslavement in particular offers useful insights. Literary and Cultural Studies approaches in the field of Black Studies have addressed questions of Black agency with specific reference to Black authorship. They highlight the emergence of a Black literary tradition worthy of attention in its own right and worthy of being interposed into a broader, white literary canon thus deemed in dire need of re-formation. Famously, "the black tradition's first poet in English, the African slave girl Phillis Wheatley" has served as a central, albeit controversial reference point to mark the emergence of Black authorship in the eighteenth century (Gates, *"Race"* 7). The title of June Jordan's 1986 essay on Wheatley (c. 1753–1784), "The Difficult Miracle of Black Poetry in America," speaks to the poet's ability to resist a hegemonic logic, according to which enslavement and authorial self-articulation are considered mutually exclusive. Not only did this discussion around Wheatley tap into the nexus of literacy, reason, and humanity, as well as that of literacy, knowledge, self-determination and freedom; it also put the position of "Black" literature vis-à-vis the unmarked white literary canon and the ambivalent relationship between them on the agenda. The editors of the *Norton Anthology of African American Literature* have therefore noted:

> In the stubbornly durable history of human slavery, it was only the black slaves in England and the United States who created a genre of literature that, at once, testified against their captors and bore witness to the urge to be free and literate, to embrace the European Enlightenment's dream of reason and the American Enlightenment's dream of civil liberty, wedded together gloriously in a great republic of letters. […] African American slaves, remarkably, sought to write themselves out of slavery by mastering the Anglo-American belletristic tradition. To say that they did so against the greatest odds does not begin to suggest the heroic proportions that the task of registering a black voice in printed letters entailed. (Gates and McKay, xxxvii–iii)

I do not seek to give an account of the scholarly debates about the emergence of Black literature or literary canon formation, including more recent

discussions that claim to usher in an end of African American Literature,[13] nor do I wish to lump together highly differentiated perspectives in African American Literary and Cultural Studies. My point here is to highlight, in brief, the assumptions that a "Black voice" is at all conceivable and the ambivalent logic of subjection this assumption entails. According to this logic, the enslaved had to subordinate themselves or rather, were subjugated to dominant parameters of a Eurocentric discourse which registered them as overdetermined property of their owners—in effect, as their objects—in order to become recognizable and intelligible as subjects. Put differently: the SUBJECT and OBJECT paradigms assume that the enslaved are positioned, in the logic of subjection, in an inescapable tension between the discursive poles of a subject-and-object relation. African American sermons by preachers like Absalom Jones (1746–1818) and John Marrant (1755–1791) provide early examples of this ambivalence; they offer, in Hortense Spillers's words, "a paradigm of the structure of ambivalence that constitutes the black person's relationship to American culture and apprenticeship in it" ("Moving On" 253–54). Comparably, a text such as *Interesting Narrative* by Olaudah Equiano (1745–1797)[14]—which has reached canonical status and is "self-consciously designed to stand in for the development of the modern black subject" (Reid-Pharr, "Introduction" xv)—gives expression to the fact that, as Robert Reid-Pharr reminds us, this "modern (black) intellectual" subject is "caught most deeply in the paradoxical reality that the same society that represses

[13] See Kenneth Warren's controversial contention in *What Was African American Literature* (2011) that the time of "African American or black literature" is over. The claim is based on Warren's narrow definition of such literature as "a post-emancipation phenomenon that gained its coherence as an undertaking in the social world defined by the system of Jim Crow segregation, which ensued after the nation's retreat from Reconstruction." As he argues, "with the legal demise of Jim Crow, the coherence of African American literature has been correspondingly, if sometimes imperceptibly, eroded as well" (1–2).
It is needless to say that this position may be seen in a larger context of "post-race" debates which focus on and question the centrality of 'race' as a category of social and cultural structuration. Elam, for instance, speaks of "'post-race' studies" (xxii).

[14] The year of birth 1745 is that given by Equiano himself (4). For a summary of the debate over the accuracy of Equiano's birthplace, see Chiles 283n6. The debate highlights a potential tension between the poetics of abolition and historical facticity that has repercussions for any consideration of Black authorial agency.

him also provides him with the very tools by which to resist that oppression" (xx).

With reference to Black literary production during the nineteenth century, Dwight McBride has spoken succinctly about the "irksome overdeterminacies of abolitionist discourse" (172). These overdeterminacies of the abolitionist discourse shaped by its white hegemonic framework, articulate and result in the structure of ambivalence that Spillers addresses. As McBride notes: "Any testimony that is to be successful—by which I mean in this context, that is to have political efficacy for the cause of abolitionism—must address itself [...] to the very discourse that creates, allows, and enables the situation for the slave to be able to speak to us at all. It must recognize the codes and terms that animate abolitionist discourse" (172). Similarly, Saidiya Hartman has addressed what she calls "scenes of subjection," among them Black-authored texts and everyday practices, with a "focus on the enactment of subjugation *and* the constitution of the [Black] subject" (*Scenes* 4, emphasis mine). Fred Moten transfers a dynamic of ambivalence, which he summarizes as "strife between normativity and the deconstruction of norms," onto "black academic discourse" at large (177). In these conceptualizations, traces and re-articulations of the foundational relationship between the unfree and the free as shaped by enslavement are evident. As Hartman has famously noted: "I, too, live in the time of slavery, by which I mean I am living in the future created by it" (*Lose* 133).

The assemblage of sources above—the poetry of Wheatley, early African American sermons and Equiano's *Interesting Narrative*—attests to repeated antecedent engagements with and contestations of the logic that W. E. B. Du Bois formulated as "double consciousness" (*Souls* 11), albeit implicitly.[15] Here I refer specifically to a reading of the concept that sees it as a reverberation of the Hegelian lord-and-bondsman, or master-and-slave dialectic and its implied notion of reciprocal recognition, as developed in Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind* (first published in German in 1807). Shamoon Zamir, for instance, reads "Of Our Spiritual Strivings," the

[15] "It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder" (Du Bois, *Souls* 11).

first chapter of *Souls*, through Hegel's master-and-slave dialectic: "Du Bois draws heavily on the middle chapters of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind*, particularly the account of the 'unhappy consciousness,' as a resource not only for his famous description of African-American 'double-consciousness' but for his entire narrative" (13).[16] Zamir understands the Hegelian relationship to describe "a complex dialectical process whereby the master is ultimately forced to recognize his dependence on the slave and the slave is able to realize his independence through his own labor," a process "by which the positions of the master and slave are made interdependent and reversed" (127, 131). Zamir, in other words, refers to a logic that has been constitutive for a field of study focused on a relational dynamic in which the enslaved are related to the free in ways that construe the former in both object and potential subject positions. The SUBJECT paradigm is based on the assumption that the enslaved can take a subject position equal to the position which white, free subjects inhabit; free and unfree blacks compose an integrated larger whole, as it were, combining into a sociality marked by a sense of equality, freedom and shared humanity. The OBJECT paradigm, by extension, considers ways in which the unfree are assigned an object position in which they form part of a larger whole but are kept at a distance from the subject position inhabited by

[16] Comparable to Susan Buck-Morss's argument that Hegel knew about the events of the Haitian Revolution and his work was impacted by it, Zamir argues that Du Bois had direct access to Hegel when he studied at Harvard with George Santayana in 1889–90 (113, 248–49n2). Zamir notes: "In the first chapter of *Souls* the moment of radical self-awareness comes through the confrontation between two self-consciousnesses, a moment that, in Hegel, belongs properly within the social and political drama of the master-and-slave dialectic. By collapsing together the two moments in Hegel, Du Bois suggests that the development of Black American self-consciousness is always a political history scarred from the very start by the experience of rejection and subjection, though at this early stage of *Souls* the exact nature of Du Bois's understanding of subjection and power is at best only hinted at. Where Hegel, even at his most concrete and political, works through abstractions, Du Bois is careful to specify historical and social context for his commentary" (136).
Elsewhere, Zamir transfers the Hegelian dialectic of recognition to the relationship between Du Bois as author and his white readership: "By appealing to white liberal sympathetic understanding, Du Bois also circles back to an idealist [Hegelian] conception of recognition" (133).
For a Hegelian reading of Du Bois, see also Siemerling 31–38.

white subjects. The scholars quoted above do not necessarily represent either or any such paradigm; rather, they describe a dynamic or tension between the SUBJECT and OBJECT paradigms.

Using a different set of terminology and transferring it to another plane, that of the "history of African American political thought," the conceptualization of a tension between the SUBJECT and OBJECT paradigms has also been framed as engaging in an "ongoing conversation between assimilationists and separatists, or as is sometimes said, between integrationists and nationalists" (Gooding-Williams 5). Significantly, this dichotomous framing implies that both of its poles are based on the assumption of the *relationality* or 'relationalize–ability' between "African American struggles [and] white supremacy" (Gooding-Williams 7). Both "assimilationist"/"integrationist" and "separatist"/"nationalist" struggles for emancipation—in their various forms—are premised on relationality, precisely because both are assumed to counter white supremacy, only in different modes.

Considerations of these divergent struggles also pertain to the framework of eighteenth-century scholarship, for instance on the significance of enslaved and free Blacks in the contexts of the Haitian Revolution, 1791–1804, and the American Revolutionary War of 1775–1783. Gerald Horne's recent historiographical study *Counter-Revolution of 1776: Slave Resistance and the Origins of the United States of America* stresses the point of relationality by showing the extent to which slave resistance was significant, even constitutional for the formation of American independence. By arguing that the American Revolutionary War did not only serve white settlers in their fight for freedom from British rule but also in their freedom to consolidate their slave-trading and slave-holding practices—and by arguing further that white Americans mobilized revolutionary arms to quell "perpetual sedition and liquidation plots" on the part of the enslaved—Horne emphasizes these white historical actors' recognition of Black agency when they perceived Africans' resistance against enslavement as a threat they averted in what Horne calls the "counter-revolution of slavery" (x–xi). As Maria I. Diedrich reminds us, enslaved Blacks who escaped from their rebel masters and consecutively enlisted in the British forces constituted a "black rebellion within the American Revolution" ("As if Freedom" 99). Her reconstruction of the life narratives of enslaved Black fugitives who joined the Hessian forces during the American Revolution to eventually settle and "re-fashion[ ] themselves as Hessian subjects and residents of Hesse-Cassel" (99), of "people who were thrown together […] by the experience of slavery, resistance, black agency,

and affinities that must of needs be future-directed" (102), teaches us about the affirmative use of "the fugitive as a metaphor of empowerment" (98), not least by situating the life narratives of these enslaved fugitives in the transnational yet specifically local context of the African diaspora.

The ABJECT Paradigm

While SUBJECT and OBJECT paradigms may conceptualize Black-and-white dichotomies through the Hegelian master-and-slave relation based on a logic of reciprocal recognition, an antithetical approach to the master-and-slave relation emphasizes the impossibility of such mutual recognition. Such an approach is provided, for instance, by Frantz Fanon when he contends in *Black Skin, White Masks*: "For Hegel there is reciprocity; here [in the French colonial plantation system] the master laughs at the consciousness of the slave. What he wants from the slave is not recognition but work" (220n8). Orlando Patterson—who takes up Hegel's dialectic and Fanon's reading of it in his influential study *Slavery and Social Death* (1982)—corroborates Fanon's stance, but with a twist. As he maintains, the dynamic of recognition was very well valid, but it was not provided by the enslaved: "the master could and usually did achieve the recognition he needed from other free persons, including other masters" (99).[17]

Recent so-called "Afro-pessimist" approaches in Black Studies have rethought the relationship between the free and the enslaved as a relation in which the unfree are abjected from the social relations of civil society.[18] Put

[17] For further discussions of Fanon's reception of the Hegelian master-and-slave dialectic, see Oliver 23–49; and Zamir 130. Zamir contests Fanon's and Patterson's rejections of Hegel's dialectic of potential mutual recognition, arguing that they are misreadings of Hegel: "neither Fanon nor Patterson does justice to Hegel's model of recognition in the Phenomenology. In the Phenomenology the master does not seek recognition from the slave. Rather, he comes to recognize that his freedom is dependent on the slave and his labor and is therefore a determined freedom and not an absolute and indeterminate one as he had thought" (130). Zamir's assertions might in return be contested by Wilderson's claim that "the slave is not a laborer but an anti-Human" (*Red* 11).

[18] As Wilderson notes, "Afro-pessimists are theorists of Black positionality who share Fanon's insistence that, though Blacks are indeed sentient beings, the struc-

differently, they have reconsidered the master-slave-relation as a non-relation: "the position of the Black is," as Frank Wilderson argues unequivocally, "a paradigmatic impossibility in the Western Hemisphere" (*Red* 9). Such an Afro-pessimist stance of "abjection"[19] is representative of an ABJECT paradigm. Wilderson proposes a shift from a "rubric of conflict (i.e., a rubric of problems that can be posed and conceptually solved)," to what he calls "the rubric of antagonism (an irreconcilable struggle between entities, or positions, the resolution of which is not dialectical but entails the obliteration of one of the positions)" (5). He thus directs attention away from framing Black-and-white relations as potentially resolvable conflicts, including the dynamic of recognition, to a focus on the structural violence inscribed in the "rubric of antagonism" in the aftermath of the Middle Passage. As an Afro-pessimist, Wilderson performs a number of argumentative steps which can briefly be summarized in the following claims: "Africans went into the ships and came out as Blacks" (*Red* 38); "the Black has no social relation(s) […] in a struc-

ture of the entire world's semantic field—regardless of cultural and national discrepancies […]—is sutured by anti-Black solidarity" (*Red* 58).

[19] The term "abjection" derives from Julia Kristeva's psychoanalytic work. In her study *Scenes of Subjection*, Saidiya Hartman uses the term in racially coded ways, transferring it to debates which took place following the Civil War and the formal abolition of slavery in the US in 1865. These centered on anxieties of whites, who asked, "how might this free laboring class be incorporated in the body politic as citizens while maintaining the integrity of whiteness?" (162). Notions of an assumed "threatening physical presence of blackness" among whites denote, as Hartman contends, "the abjection of blackness and the ambivalent character of the abject exemplified by the conflicted and uncertain incorporation of black citizens into the national body and by the containment or expulsion of blackness required to maintain the integrity of whiteness" (163).
Focalized through Kristeva's psychoanalytical perspective, in which the racialized logic of enslavement resonates, the abject refers to "neither subject nor object" (1). Kristeva maintains: "There looms, within abjection, one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable. It lies there, quite close, but it cannot be assimilated" (1). What is abject "is radically excluded and draws me toward the place where meaning collapses. […] It lies outside, beyond the set, and does not seem to agree to the latter's rule of the game. And yet, from its place of banishment, the abject does not cease challenging its master" (2). See also Reid-Pharr, *Black* 188n7.

tural sense" (251); "*Blackness* […] refers to an individual who is by definition always already void of relationality" (18). In conceptualizing the enslaved as structurally non-relational—as "human bodies turned into sentient flesh" (16) outside the social relations of "civic society" (15)—Afro-pessimism follows the parameters of Patterson's theorization of slavery *as* social death.

According to Patterson, the "constituent elements of slavery" are firstly, "naked force" (*Slavery and Social Death* 3) or "the master's capacity wantonly to destroy his slave" (5); secondly, "genealogical isolat[ion]" or "natal alienation," which can be described as "the loss of ties of birth in both ascending and descending generations" (7), as well as, thirdly, "dishonor [as] a generalized condition" (11), precisely because of the first two elements: "The slave could have no honor because he had no power and no independent social existence, hence no public worth" (10). This resonates with Wilderson's work:

> [T]he Slave is not a laborer but an anti-Human, a position against which Humanity establishes, maintains, and renews its coherence, its corporeal integrity; […] the Slave is, to borrow from Patterson, generally dishonored, perpetually open to gratuitous violence, and void of kinship structure, that is, having no relations that need be recognized, a being outside of relationality […]. (*Red* 11)

Wilderson's approach is also indebted to the work of Saidiya Hartman, particularly her insistence on the "accumulation and fungibility" (Wilderson, *Red* 14) of the enslaved as a commodity in lieu of their "exploitation and alienation" (14), as well as to Hortense Spillers's concept of "flesh":

> I would make a distinction […] between "body" and "flesh" and impose that distinction as the central one between captive and liberated subject-positions. In that sense, before the "body" there is the "flesh," that zero degree of social conceptualization that does not escape concealment under the brush of discourse or the reflexes of iconography. […] If we think of the "flesh" as a primary narrative, then we mean its seared, divided, ripped-apartness, riveted to the ship's whole, fallen, or "escaped" overboard. ("Mama's Baby" 206)

Where Spillers draws a distinction between "body" and "flesh" is precisely where I locate the distinction between ABJECT and OBJECT positions in discourse. Sabine Broeck corroborates the distinction between these positions when she notes:

> To come into being, the European subject needed its underside, as it were: the crucially integral but invisible part of the human has been his/her *abject,* created in the European mind by way of racialized commodification: the African enslaved, an un-humaned species tied by property rights to the emerging subject so tightly that they could—structurally speaking—never occupy the position of the dialectical Hegelian object as other, has thus remained therefore outside the dynamics of the human. (“Legacies” 118)

The distinction between SUBJECT and OBJECT and ABJECT may also sharpen an understanding of the ways in which white abolitionist discourse is implicated in the conceptualization of the relationship between the free and the unfree, as well as the latter’s positioning as object and potential subject—or as “flesh,” “abject,” as “socially dead.” It seems as if Crèvecœur’s “Letter IX”—by staging the dying of a slave figure—performs an instance of slavery as social death; the spectacle of physical dying may be read as an allegorical enactment of the social death of the enslaved, and while the letter may be seen to simply expose and thus critique the cruel killing of the slave, this exposure may in fact also be considered to be complicit in the slave’s abjection. In spite of his lamentations, Crèvecœur’s farmer turns away from the scene to move on to the plantation to which he is invited. There, he will likely enjoy food served by a slave—the dividing line between the free and the unfree remains intact.

This episode brings into view and negotiates questions of what constitutes the sphere of the human; it straddles a line between “the world of Blacks and the world of Humans” (Wilderson, *Red* 15). The demarcation line between these worlds is that between unfreedom and freedom. Hartman has shown how white abolitionists—by feeling empathy for the suffering of the enslaved—made the suffering of the enslaved their own (*Scenes* 19) and positioned the enslaved in ambivalent ways between a position of subject or object and abject. Hartman asks, does “the white witness of the spectacle of suffering […] not reinforce the ‘thingly’ quality of the captive by reducing the body to evidence in the very effort to establish the humanity of the enslaved?” (19). Abolitionist evocations and enactments of suffering and spectacular violence such as Crèvecœur’s may thus compound power differentials and the “thingification” of the enslaved (Césaire 21).[20]

[20] For a study of representations of “spectacular violence” in British Romanticism, see Haywood.

What is at stake in these texts are the ways in which white abolitionists construe and envision whether "Black being" can potentially establish ties to "Human life" (Wilderson, *Red* 57) which slavery severs.[21] While all white protagonists of abolitionist discourse are already subjects in this world, they take part in the negotiation of whether the unfree can potentially claim access to or participation in it or will remain positioned outside of it, retaining "no relations that need be recognized, […] being outside of relationality" (11). The discourse of abolition is thus deeply entrenched in positing the boundary between the free and the unfree, as well as in processes which negotiate and question this very boundary.

This dichotomy overlaps with the gradual emergence of the category of 'race' in an early modern and Enlightenment framework: while slavery was not completely synchronized with the first recorded arrivals of Africans in North America in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries,[22] freedom was increasingly being rendered white, unfreedom and concomitant social death marked as Black.[23] Scholarship on the emergence of the category of 'race' is

[21] See also Walcott, who suggests that "the Black body is the template of […] the abjection by which the Human was produced" (100–01). The dynamic to which Walcott points, as well as Wilderson's differentiation between "the world of Blacks and the world of Humans" (*Red* 15), may be compared to the dualism of "humanitas" and "anthropos" as foregrounded in the paradigm of decolonial theory: "humanitas is defined through the epistemic privilege of hegemonic knowledge, anthropos was stated as the difference—more specifically, the epistemic colonial difference. In other words, the idea was that humans and humanity were all 'human beings' minus the anthropos" (Mignolo, *Darker* 85). Mignolo's conceptualization of those belonging to "anthropos" is more inclusive than Wilderson's "world of Blacks," as its representatives are endowed with the choice of crossing over to the sphere of "humanitas" (93) and "engaging in epistemic disobedience and delinking from the magic of the Western idea of modernity, ideals of humanity" (120). See also Wynter; Osami; Sakai; Dietze "Decolonizing."

[22] Hartman (*Lose* 130) notes the years 1526 (South Carolina) and 1619 (Jamestown).

[23] See Patterson, who along with Winthrop D. Jordan notes that the focus of a "we-they" distinction was at first religious, later racial; before the focus changed, "there was really a fusion of race, religion, and nationality in a generalized conception of 'us'—white, English, free—and 'them'—black, heathen, slave" (7). Carretta and Gould speak of the "instability of the meaning of 'race' as late as in the eighteenth century" (5). In contrast, Horne assumes that concepts of 'race' had clearly been established by the late seventeenth century, arguing that "in the aftermath of

of course vast. Hartman laconically and cogently reminds scholars to place the central focus on questions of racialization as a legacy of the Atlantic slave trade: “For Europeans, race established a hierarchy of human life, determined which persons were expendable, and selected the bodies that could be transformed into commodities” (*Lose* 6). One way of distinguishing the SUBJECT and OBJECT paradigms from the ABJECT paradigm would be, in Hartman’s words, to differentiate between an examination of ‘race’ as “the language of solidarity” and a consideration of ‘race’ as “a death sentence” (6).[24]

To sum up: all the scholarship on freedom, enslavement, and blackness in general and on abolition in the eighteenth century in particular deals with the structural positioning of the unfree. While the SUBJECT and OBJECT paradigms consider processes of assigning the unfree subject and object positions, the ABJECT paradigm reconfigures assumptions about a subject-and-object dichotomy to consider a third, abject position outside of this dichotomy. The former paradigms place scholarly focus on acts of resistance to enslavement and self-empowerment as expressed and articulated, for instance, in Black writing; the latter requires attention to commodification. While the SUBJECT and the OBJECT paradigms presuppose a logic of recognition and the potential for conflict, and while they focus on Black agency and perhaps even envision the possibility of renouncing the defining parameters of ‘race’ and racism,[25] Afro-pessimist scholarship, in contrast, suspends the assumption of such relationality and possibility. Its representatives dismiss the assumption of a capacity for conflict on the part of the enslaved, and shift their focus instead to the abject positioning of the enslaved beyond any chance of potential resistance or visions of post-racial societies. They reject “the assumptive logic

Bacon’s Rebellion [in 1676], elites accelerated the deployment of ‘race’ and religion to sanctify rule through ‘whiteness’” (243–44).

24 Fred Moten, in the latter vein, remarks: “The cultural and political discourse on black pathology has been so pervasive that it could be said to constitute the background against which all representations of blacks, blackness, or (the color) black take place” (177).

25 One example of such a position is provided by Gilroy (*Against Race*), who has controversially called for a “renunciation of ‘race’” (12) and the recollection of a sense of shared humanity: “Black and white are bonded together by the mechanisms of ‘race’ that estrange them from each other and amputate their common humanity” (15).

of Humanism" (Wilderson, *Red* 57). From the perspective of Wilderson, for instance, African American Studies at present largely operate in the SUBJECT and the OBJECT paradigms, which he subsumes in a generalizing way under the rubric of a "multicultural paradigm." In his view, this paradigm does not pay sufficient attention to the equation of blackness with social death as an ongoing legacy of enslavement:

> African American studies writ large […] are currently entangled in a multicultural paradigm that takes an interest in an insufficiently critical comparative analysis—that is, a comparative analysis in pursuit of a coalition politics (if not in practice then at least as a theorizing metaphor) which, by its very nature, crowds out and forecloses the Slave's grammar of suffering. (*Red* 57)

Black Studies scholars, then, have insisted to varying degrees on examining the relational logic of freedom versus unfreedom and its concomitant processes of racialization. An emphasis on examinations of 'race' as a category of social structuration has served to name "the different permutations of morality that continue to shape social formations according to freedom's relationship to unfreedom" (Roderick Ferguson 196). Reading "Africanist presence[s]"—as Toni Morrison has called them (*Playing* 5)—within the larger framework of hegemonic discourses entails a reversal of perspectives and thus allows an analysis of ways in which dominance is produced. Morrison's call for scholars "to avert the critical gaze from the racial object to the racial subject; from the described and imagined to the describers and imaginers; from the serving to the served" (90) has had far-reaching repercussions. Numerous studies generally subsumed under the moniker of "Critical Whiteness Studies" may be considered responses to Morrison's call for a reversal of perspectives.[26] Her urgent plea for a reconsideration of the functions that the structural positioning of the enslaved has served in white discourses on freedom and notions of humanity has also impacted historiographical assessments of slavery in the context of Enlightenment. For decades, eminent enslavement historians focused attention on the "*supreme paradox* that Western culture has long combined extraordinary coercion and

[26] See, for instance, Frankenberg; Ignatiev and Garvey; R. Dyer; Delgado and Stefanic; Fine et al.; Mike Hill; Ware and Back; Garner. For a precursor position, see M. Frye. For two select summary critiques, see Wiegman; and Ahmed, "Declarations."

violence with a celebration of individual freedom" (D. Davis, "Re-Examining" 254, emphasis mine).[27] In a North American context, this translated into the formula of "The American Paradox" (E. Morgan). As Charles Mills points out, this paradox—the supposed contradiction between freedom and slavery—was reconciled in Enlightenment and Western Modernity through what he calls the "Racial Contract" (63).[28] Morrison, in *Playing in the Dark*, and others in her wake have deconstructed this "supreme paradox" and argued instead for reframing and reconfiguring the relation between freedom and enslavement. The Enlightenment, in consequence, emerges no longer as a project faced with the supposedly (unresolved) contradiction of its ideals/ "freedom" on the one hand and its social realities/"slavery" on the other. What comes into view instead is a two-sided, racialized logic, according to which slavery becomes constitutive for notions of freedom in Enlightenment and Western Modernity.[29] This study considers the poetics of abolition as a spe-

[27] D. Davis refers to the "Problem of Slavery" with regard to what he calls a "tension" between "the ideal and real" in Western culture—between the ideal that "no slaveholding should exist in a purely natural, i.e. sinless world" and the reality that it did. According to Davis, this assumed tension inherent in the problem of slavery rests on a "fundamental contradiction": "The basic concept of the slave was modeled on the domesticated animal; yet the slave's master wanted and needed human capacities and abilities, which were also expressed in the slave's resistance" (D. Davis, "Re-Examining" 253).

[28] "[T]he golden age of contract theory (1650–1800) overlapped with the growth of a European capitalism whose development was stimulated by the voyages of exploration that increasingly gave the contract a racial subtext. The evolution of the modern version of the contract, characterized by an antipatriarchalist Enlightenment liberalism, with its proclamations of the equal rights, autonomy, and freedom of all men, thus took place simultaneously with the massacre, expropriation, and subjection to hereditary slavery of men at least apparently human. This contradiction needs to be reconciled; it is reconciled through the Racial Contract, which essentially denies their personhood and restricts the terms of their social contract to whites" (Mills, *Racial Contract* 63–64).
For contributions that read Enlightenment philosophy through the lens of 'race' and racism, see, among others, Goldberg; Eze; Bernasconi, *Race*; Montag; Broeck, "When Light"; and Nussbaum, *Limits*.

[29] Recent contributions in a postcolonial framework include Carey and Festa; Stam and Shohat 1–25. In the framework of decolonial theory, the constitutive logic of modernity has also been addressed, for instance, by Walter Mignolo, who con-

cific discursive stage on which the negotiation of this logic was acted out. With its emphasis on how early white abolitionists questioned and, as I will show, reified hegemonic assumptions of who was considered human, who could be free, and who could be considered equal, it is indebted to Morrison's agenda.

White Abolition

Studies on abolition in general and abolitionist writing more specifically constitute a wide field, and mapping this scholarship broadly shows a spatiotemporal distribution of attention to abolition along national lines. Studies of the early discourse of abolition which led up to the *de jure* abolition of the slave trade focus primarily on Britain, while those examining abolitionist discourse that paved the way for the *de jure* abolition of slavery (in the British colonies in 1833, in the US in 1865) tend to center on the United States. A recent example representative of the scholarly narrative of the unequal spatiotemporal distribution of attention to abolitionist discourse is George Boulukos's discussion of the traveling trope of the "grateful slave," which he places in the "emerging transatlantic culture of eighteenth-century Britain" (*Grateful Slave* 4). He then claims that the trope impacted US culture belatedly in the nineteenth century, positing that "the ongoing cultural power of the 'grateful slave' trope can be gauged by the influence of such fictions on nineteenth-century US culture, for instance on key sections of [Harriet Beecher Stowe's] *Uncle Tom's Cabin*" (4). Laying out such a chronotopic trajectory implies that this trope of sentimental abolitionist writing originated in Britain, then traveled to the British North American colonies and merely resonated there.[30]

siders "coloniality" as the *Darker Side of Western Modernity*. See also his "Darker Side of the Enlightenment" and Broeck, "Enslavement."

30 For an example of a scholarly position which has put emphasis on abolition in the US as a phenomenon that took off in the 1830s, see, for instance, Ruchames: "It was during those years [during the 1830s and early 1840s] that the Abolitionist movement made its greatest contribution to American life and faced its most difficult tasks: to awaken public opinion to the horror of slavery and to stimulate it to take action against the evil. It was during those formative years that the leadership and philosophy of the movement crystallized" (11).

This unequal distribution of scholarly attention can be explained in light of the attention paid to abolitionist activities on each side of the Atlantic, as the scholarly discourse has been shaped by the volume and availability of historical sources that appeared in both places and periods. The shift in scholarly focus also corresponds to differences in the usage of the term "abolition." In a study highlighting the fundamental significance of the Quakers for early abolition, Brycchan Carey notes accordingly: "In [Britain], an abolitionist was primarily a person working to outlaw the British Atlantic slave trade between 1787 and 1807. In the United States, abolitionism is more usually associated with the campaign to end slavery from the 1830s to the 1860s" (*From Peace to Freedom* 15–16).[31] For the British, abolition of the slave trade in 1807 represented the culmination of abolitionist efforts, since slavery had already been declared unsupported by common law in Britain (though not in the British colonies),[32] and subsequent abolitionist texts necessarily addressed Britain's involvement in the trade. After 1807, as Christopher L. Brown maintains, certain members of the British public could pride themselves on being morally on the right side of the divide—possessing the

31 Taking the example of publications of abolitionist poetry, Marcus Wood notes: "In both Britain and America the bulk of publications appeared over a period of two decades: in Britain it was 1788–1808 and in America the early 1830s until the mid-1850s" (*Poetry* xxiv). Boulukos considers the 1780s and 1790s the nodal point of British abolition, as this period marked "the height of the abolition debate" (*Grateful Slave* 3); Swaminathan notes more specifically that slave-trade debates in Britain were concentrated in the years 1788–1792 (6). The year 1787 marks the founding, in Britain, of the *Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade* (coinciding with the year in which the United States drafted its Constitution). From then on, anti-slavery campaigns rapidly gathered momentum in Britain; as Haywood remarks, it was around that time that the abolitionist movement "embarked on a massive propaganda campaign" (14), which aided in eventuating the abolition of the slave trade in Britain in 1807. The importation or exportation of enslaved persons was almost simultaneously—by 1 January 1808—prohibited in the US, and yet, this did not effect a legal stop to trade within the country or the overall apparatus of enslavement. During this era, the agenda was also set for the divergent paths that abolition later took in Britain and the United States.

32 The judge of the Somerset case, Lord Mansfield, had decreed in 1772 that any enslaved person in Britain was to be set free. For a more detailed discussion of the Somerset case, see McBride 26.

"moral capital" that the abolition of the slave trade afforded them (27).[33] Later on, the 'need' to write about British abolition no longer seemed as pressing.

In the US, the abolition of the trade in enslaved Africans did not have the same impact because it did not seriously affect the practice of slavery there. Unlike their British counterparts, Americans continued to enslave people even after the trade was abolished. While opponents of slavery in the US saw the *de jure* cessation of the international slave trade as a "huge victory" which resulted in a "broader 'cooling' of the anti-slavery movement" (McBride 63), US abolitionism only gained momentum in the 1830s, resulting in more primary sources and thus more scholarly interest. In his noteworthy study titled *Antislavery Sentiments in American Literature Prior to 1865*, first published in 1929, Lorenzo Dow Turner argues that the 1831 launch of William Lloyd Garrison's abolitionist newspaper the *Liberator* marked the beginning of "militant abolitionism" (47), while the "passage of the Fugitive Slave Act on September 18, 1850, and the subsequent attempts to enforce it revealed slavery in one of its worst forms and called forth most of the anti-slavery production of the period," ushering in a "second stage of militant abolitionism" (70) that has attracted strong scholarly interest up until today.[34]

This spatiotemporal distribution of scholarly attention—which emphasizes a correlation between early abolition prior to 1807 with British efforts to abolish the slave trade, and later abolition with efforts in the US to abolish slavery in the decades prior to 1865—was already questioned in Turner's aforementioned study. Before I continue discussing the periodization of abolitionist scholarship more broadly, it is important to pause for a moment and make some further remarks on Turner's important monograph, *Antislavery*

[33] In *Moral Capital*, Brown demonstrates that abolition served as a compensatory marker of moral worth in Britain in the aftermath of the British colonies winning their independence and maintains that Britain externalized slavery as a North American problem after the British abolition of the slave trade in 1807. Beyond the discussion of abolition as British moral capital vis-à-vis the US, his notion of moral capital is also suited for conceptualizing the dynamic in debates on slavery and the slave trade within the US

[34] See also McBride, providing as a "cogent example of the kind of horror caused by the Fugitive Slave Act" the case of Margaret Garner, on whose story Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* is based (65).

Sentiments in American Literature Prior to 1865.[35] As the title already indicates, Turner's focus is decidedly national, and it is within the parameters of American literature that Turner shifts attention to the period prior to 1808, when the US Act to Prohibit the Importation of Slaves came into effect. This early period covers the first of five chapters. Turner wrote his study as a dissertation under the direction of Percy H. Boynton, author of *A History of American Literature* (1919), which Boynton calls an "American intellectual history" (iii). Boynton's volume aims to induce students to in-depth readings of "the American literature which illuminates the past of the country" (iii)—literature is here seen to mirror and indicate history.

As a student of Boynton's, Turner reenacted this approach in his study ten years later. In the "Introduction," Turner writes: "The purpose of this study has been to discover the extent to which anti-slavery sentiment found expression in American literature prior to 1865, to trace the growth of this sentiment, to ascertain its nature, and to indicate the extent to which it was influenced by the spirit of the time in which it appeared" (1). Turner's words assume that literature preserved anti-slavery sentiments and stored them in a container-like fashion, to be revealed in a study of literature. It is also a teleological approach that leads up to emancipation in 1865: Turner speaks of a "development of the anti-slavery movement, which had a continuous growth up to the end of the Civil War" (1). The merits of Turner's study lie in its assembly of a broad range of anti-slavery texts and its presentation of detailed readings of select passages of them. His study is particularly relevant for the historicization of analyses of abolitionist literature(s) as it provides an example of a representational model that sees literature as an indexical sign for history. Turner sees literature as secondary to history; as it is made by history it is therefore an expression of it. Unlike Turner, we today are less interested in how history makes literature than in examining what literature enables and what possibilities it provides—in other words, in the dynamics it unfolds, not least in generating history. Accordingly, this study examines "literature" in contrasting ways. Unlike Turner, it considers "literature" as a condition of possibility, and it considers modes of literary discourse—or rather, patterns of a poetics of abolition—as pre-conditions for abolition as a historical discourse. In this sense, history becomes an expression of poetic forms and functions.

[35] Turner's remarkable book was originally published in 1929 when he held a professorship of English at Fisk University. It was reissued in 1966.

To return to periodization: as mentioned above, the unequal distribution of scholarly attention to abolition reflects decidedly national foci in abolitionist scholarship. Turner's book, for instance, endorses such a strict national focus when he posits that "there was no considerable opposition to slavery on sentimental grounds until between 1770 and 1800, when the sentimentalism of European writers had begun to influence American authors" (2). Such a statement is based on assumptions that posit notions of exceptional American authorship and US abolitionist history as *a priori* facts. More recent studies on abolition have attempted to dissolve such assumptions without completely turning away from national foci of analysis. An example that takes into consideration the transatlantic circulation of the discourse of abolition while retaining a focus on Britain is B. Carey's abovementioned *From Peace to Freedom*; it investigates foundational antislavery Quaker rhetoric until the early 1760s not only in Britain, but also in colonial places such as Barbados, New Jersey, and, centrally, Pennsylvania. The study focalizes abolition through a British perspective, and it retains a center-and-periphery model that posits London as the "metropolis" while, at the same time, it validates the colonial "periphery" as a "driving force" (5).[36] While the general significance of the so-called "transnational turn" in English and American Studies should be clearly recognized,[37] B. Carey's example goes to show that studies which consider specific local and historical articulations of a discourse such as early abolition are by necessity transnational—or, from a US perspective, pre-national.

The example of Boulukos's discussion of the traveling trope of the "grateful slave," which he locates in the "emerging transatlantic culture of eighteenth-century Britain" (*Grateful Slave* 4), warrants further exploration in this context. While it is necessary to consider the ways in which abolitionist discourse emanating from Britain circulated in the transatlantic sphere, it is no less useful to examine how the poetics of abolition around 1800 was also shaped by writing that came out of and staged on-site episodes of enslavement in what would become the United States. This trope was also shaped by Crèvecœur's writing on slavery, for instance. Thus, against the backdrop of a desideratum of studies which examine how transatlantic abolitionist discourse

[36] For further studies on abolition taking a decidedly transatlantic approach, see Levecq; Bhattacharya; Ahern.

[37] For a contextualization of the debates proclaiming a "transnational turn," see the volumes by Jay; Fluck, Pease, and Rowe; Hebel.

played out in a North American sphere prior to 1808, this study proposes a "Cis-Atlantic" focus (Armitage) on North American permutations and particularities of the poetics of abolition that span a time frame from roughly the mid-eighteenth through the early nineteenth century, without seeking to claim an exceptional North American poetics of abolition.[38] Crèvecœur's

[38] "We are all Atlanticists now," posited historian David Armitage a number of years ago (11), referring to the growing interest among historians, sociologists, economists, and literary studies scholars in the Atlantic world and the people, goods, and ideas that circulated in it. For an overview of the field of Atlantic history, also see Bailyn; Greene and Morgan.

Armitage defines three approaches to Atlantic history, which he calls Cis-Atlantic, Trans-Atlantic, and Circum-Atlantic. Cis-Atlantic history "studies particular places as unique locations within an Atlantic world and seeks to define that uniqueness as the result of the interaction between local particularity and a wider web of connections (and comparisons)" (21). Trans-Atlantic history is "the history of the Atlantic world told through comparisons" (18). Circum-Atlantic history is "the history of the people who crossed the Atlantic, who lived on its shores and who participated in the communities it made possible" (16).

"The Atlantic was a European invention," Armitage writes, "the product of successive waves of navigation, exploration, settlement, administration, and imagination" (12). The Atlantic was thus constituted in the economic, political, and cultural interest of those Europeans who had been navigating, exploring, administering, imagining, and inventing it since the early modern period. This perspective points to the power structures at play in the invention of the Atlantic, with European colonialism and enslavement as constitutive factors in the process of the emergence of the modern world. I am stating the obvious when I point out that recent scholarship on Atlantic history has participated in constituting the Atlantic as an object of study from particular vantage points.

While Armitage points to a scholarly focus on European investments in the Atlantic, scholarship in the wake of Paul Gilroy's study *Black Atlantic* (1993) has paid particular attention to the perspectives on and contributions to Atlantic history and culture made by people of African origin. In what may be called Black Atlantic Studies, the complex nexus of slavery features as the primary referent for examining the transnational formation of the Atlantic; "racial slavery was integral to western civilization" (Gilroy, *Black Atlantic* x).

Scholars of Atlantic slave trade history have noted a post-emancipation bias in Gilroy's work on the Black Atlantic, arguing that he privileges the post-emancipation era and pays little attention to the period of the Atlantic slave trade. See Araujo 3.

Letters, which were first published in London but construed from the onset as specifically American, are useful to indicate the value of such a Cis-Atlantic focus. The significance that was subsequently ascribed to them in the formation of a literary canon considered exceptionally North American attests, again, to the ongoing relevance of decidedly national foci in institutionalized, disciplinary practices of literary place making.[39] But, given the ways in which Crèvecœur's "Letter IX" attributes regional manifestations of the global problem of slavery to the specific space of the colonial North American South, the text complicates readings in a (proto-)national framework. Reading abolitionist writing within national parameters seems too narrow and at the same time too broad: it seems too narrow because it does not account for the transatlantic scope of the abolitionist debate in which it intervenes—like any other regional or national instantiation of abolition, it could be read with an emphasis on its resonances in the transregional and transnational discursive space of abolition. And it seems too broad because such a reading would not account for the ways in which Crèvecœur's text locates slavery in Charleston, South Carolina, and thus manifests a specific local articulation of abolition from the perspective of a writer from a northern British colony in North America. The poetics of early abolition therefore lends itself to a reading with a Cis-Atlantic focus, as this allows scholars to examine "particular places as unique locations within an Atlantic world and seeks to define that uniqueness as the result of the interaction between local particularity and a wider web of connections (and comparisons)" (Armitage 21).

The claim that there might be no genuine North American literature to speak of—both in colonial and national times—until the mid-nineteenth-century literature of the "American Renaissance" (Matthiessen) has not only been

See also Glissant's *Poetics of Relation* for his conceptualization of enslaved Africans' perception of the ocean floor as an abyss during the Middle Passage (6).

39 The *Letters* established Crèvecœur as one of the first notable North American authors, shaping European and American perceptions of "What is an American," the question famously addressed in "Letter III." This chapter in particular has thus been considered a decisive contribution to the establishment of a national American literature. The whole collection has "become instantiated as the ur-text of American exceptionalism" (G. Rice 116; see also D. Moore xxixn20). Tennenhouse (3) takes issue with using "What is an American?" as the delineation of an exceptional new national culture and literature.

made in the framework of the paradigm of transnational literary studies. It is a claim that has important implications, since denying an early US American exceptionalism in terms of literature requires more attention to contemporary British literature: “during the period from 1750–1850 American authors and readers were more interested in producing and consuming English literature” (Tennenhouse 1). A Cis-Atlantic focus on North America thus necessitates according significance to the scholarship on writing produced in eighteenth-century Britain. The sentimental mode of writing gains particular relevance with respect to writing on slavery in this context; as Ellis and others have shown, “sentimentalist writers had a significant role in the formation of the moral conscience of the abolitionist movement” (Ellis 86).[40] While scholarship on the discourse of sentimentalism abounds for both the British and North American frameworks, an unequal spatiotemporal distribution of foci may be noted here as well. Most scholarship on eighteenth-century sentimental discourse refers to Britain.[41] Studies on sentimental discourse in the North American sphere, in contrast, largely consider the late eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century setting of US nation building coded in gendered and racialized ways.[42] Samuels cogently summarizes this logic by arguing:[43] “in nineteenth-century America sentimentality appears as a national

[40] Turner’s claim that “there was no considerable opposition to slavery on sentimental grounds until between 1770 and 1800, when the sentimentalism of European writers had begun to influence American authors” (2) resonates here, except that Turner’s assumes there is a distinct “American literature” to speak of.

[41] See Ellis; Wood, *Slavery*; B. Carey, *British Abolitionism*.

[42] For analyses of North American sentimental literature mainly addressing the nineteenth century, see, for instance, Tompkins; Sánchez-Eppler; Samuels; Burnham; Burgett, *Sentimental Bodies*; Ellison; Chapman and Hendler; Hendler; and Nathans. Recent studies that address sentimental political discourse in eighteenth-century North America include those by Eustace and Knott.

[43] Samuel examines the gendered and racialized coding of this national project, correlating the “nineteenth-century American project of sentimentality” with the ideology of the “separate spheres” (3–4). The conceptualization of nineteenth-century sentimental writing as a project of white women is succinctly expressed in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s acerbic objection to the “damn’d mob of scribbling women” in an 1854 letter (qtd. in Stowe XIII). See also Baym 124.

project" (3). Once again, such an assumptive logic aids in reproducing the compartmentalization of writing into national entities.[44]

Several instances of the poetics of early transatlantic abolition engage the problem of slavery through specific sentimental conventions which point beyond reason-based engagements with slavery, considering it a problem not to be decried merely in a rational mode, in detached moral-philosophical, religious, or economic lines of argument. This does not mean, however, that we can assume sentimentalist writers sought to prompt a distinction between reason and sentiments, or that sentimentalist discourse was aimed at highlighting this distinction; we may in fact assume that texts written in a sentimental mode anticipate feelings on a rational basis, using sentimentalism as a strategy in the poetic production of meaning. A whole body of scholarly work has emerged in the context of what has been proclaimed an *Affective Turn* (Clough and Halley) in recent years.[45] Considering the historical role and cultural politics of emotions, an attention to the "role of feelings in public life" (Cvetkovitch, "Public" 459) alludes, for instance, to the ways in which Crèvecœur's episode performs a particular kind of "epistemo-affective work" (Berlant, "Thinking" 7). What is noteworthy with respect to the rendering of the scene is the narrator's alarmed sense of witnessing: emotionalization becomes a significant strategy of the text. As an instance of the North American poetics of early abolition, it creates an "affective communit[y]" (Gandhi) of white onlookers.[46] Rather than orchestrating the emotional state of the slave

[44] Such arguments also abet claims that there was no noteworthy US national literature to speak of prior to, for instance, William Hill Brown's *Power of Sympathy* (1789), which M. Warner considers the "first American novel" (175).

[45] See, for instance, Eng and Kazanjian; Clough and Halley; Gregg and Seighworth; Ahmed, *Cultural Politics*; and the work of scholars loosely grouped under the heading of the "Public Feelings group." More recent contributors include the "Feel Tank Chicago," among them Berlant, "Critical Inquiry," "Thinking"; Cvetkovitch, "Public Feeling," "Depression"; and Staiger, Cvetkovitch, and Reynolds.
The "affective turn" and its concomitant focus on how feelings relate bodies to discourses—particularly with reference to theories of performativity in gender and queer theory—may be considered a response to constructivist assumptions associated with the "linguistic turn" and the "poststructuralist turn." See, for instance, Bjerg and Staunæs 142.

[46] Leela Gandhi's study *Affective Communities* (2005) examines late-nineteenth century cross-cultural and cross-racial alliances in the service of anti-colonial agitation throughout the British Empire.

figure, Crèvecœur orchestrates his narrator's own emotional disturbance and thus taps an emotional responsiveness on the part of his audiences. By describing the scene in a mode of horror, the narrator makes use of both established literary conventions and surpasses fact-based modes of textual instances of abolitionist writing. Crèvecœur stages a scene of emotional excess that is articulated as empathy. Hartman, Ellis, and other scholars of empathy have stressed the ambivalence of this feeling:

> [T]he sentimentalist approach, while advertising the suffering occasioned by slavery, fails or refuses to move beyond the depiction of its theme to a critique of that theme's subject, slavery proper. Sentimentalist writers found it difficult to cross certain limits in their portrayal of the victims of social and economic change without endangering the entire system of values by which their world was ordered, and this they were disinclined to do. Whenever these limits were approached, benevolent emotions were channeled into safer images of suffering and exploitation […] which offered secure and unproblematic ground for testing and developing new attitudes. (Ellis 86)

The function of Crèvecœur's scene may thus be to raise awareness of the conditions of enslavement and to develop a moral stance against them. However, the portrayal or spectacle of the slave's suffering does not disturb the hierarchical looking relations which organize this empathetic gaze and position its observers (narrator and narratees) at a distance, enabling their empathetic and benevolent gaze in the first place. Jonathan Boyarin refers to such a dynamic as "the hegemony of empathy" (86). Hartman has shown "the difficulty and slipperiness of empathy" (*Scenes* 18). According to this, a white viewer who inhabits a hegemonic subject position—by "making the slave's suffering his own [and] exploiting the vulnerability of the captive body"—"confirms the expectations and desires definitive of the relations of chattel slavery" (19). Empathy presupposes the empathizer's obliteration of his distance to the slave in the name of a "shared humanity," demanding an "obliteration of otherness" (Boyarin 86); however, as Hartman notes, the suffering for the slave also involves a "violence of identification" which bypasses and occludes "the other" as "empathy fails to expand the space of the other but merely places the self in its stead" (*Scenes* 20).[47] In other words, white abo-

[47] See Hartman, *Scenes* 18–20, 209n5, 6, which refers to Boyarin 86; see also Dietze, *Weiße Frauen* 83.

litionist empathy is a self-directed feeling. This has repercussions for the present study: it calls for a consideration of the effects of what Benjamin Franklin called the "pleasures of beneficence" ("Address" 384)—pleasures on the part of white abolitionists at the expense of the enslaved.

As outlined above, the spatiotemporal framework of studies of abolition in the US has largely encompassed the nineteenth century, and their focus has predominantly lain on the ways in which abolition came to fruition from the 1830s leading up to 1865. North American articulations of abolition which predate this time frame, particularly those prior to 1808, remain understudied. Answering this desideratum, this study brings early abolition in the US around 1800 into view—it recovers a body of abolitionist texts which constitute a poetics of abolition predating the height of US abolition, and it thus engages the poetic formation of a potentially distinctive North-American abolitionist discourse prior to 1808.

Five crucial points deserve consideration. Any discussion of the poetics of abolition in the US must address material from the eighteenth century, and should take a Cis-Atlantic perspective into account for the ways in which this poetics of the early US republic and the colonies that preceded its establishment is situated within its broader Atlantic context. In order to examine the complex motivations and poetic investments of white abolitionists, the poetics of early abolition must be considered against the backdrop of a larger framework of Enlightenment discourse. A study of the poetics of abolition also has to look at the ways white male abolitionists characterized themselves as abolitionists, how they disassociated and "disidentified" themselves from enslavement.[48] At the same time, it must address how their denouncement of unfreedom reified notions about "race," and time and again perpetuated constellations of (proto-)racist knowledge and power. By examining how white male protagonists of abolition like Crèvecœur and Wesley formalized the discourse of abolition, it becomes possible to understand how they decried,

[48] This study is thus informed by Muñoz's notion of "disidentification," which offers a critical perspective on the ways in which the emergence of "disidentificatory identity performances […] is predicated on their ability to disidentify with the mass public and instead, through this disidentification, contribute to the function of a counterpublic sphere" (*Disidentifications* 7). At the same time, I expressly wish to state that I do not assume an analogy between white eighteenth-century abolitionists and the "'minoritarian subjects' or 'people of color/queers of color'" who perform the politics of disidentification which Muñoz analyzes (7).

among other aspects, "the hypocrisies inherent in white humanist sentimentality" (Stam and Shohat 24), even as they potentially performed and eventuated hypocrisies of empathy themselves. An analysis of the poetics of abolition should thus seek to reach beyond explanations which narrowly consider how white abolitionist subjects "either" aligned themselves with "or" turned against broader hegemonic discourses. Reading the poetics of white abolitionist "dissenters" calls for an analysis of the power dynamics at play in the discursive positioning of the free and the enslaved in the formalized framework of the poetics of abolition.[49] Examining the ways in which abolitionists crafted the relationship between their own speaking positions and the positions of those whose enslavement they denounced is closely connected to a consideration of how they related to the broader discursive constellations in which they intervened. A model is needed to illuminate all these connections and contexts—to understand the complex, ambivalent and contradictory ways in which the formalized processes of discursive positioning took place, as well as the ways in which they served white abolitionists.

3 Research Questions—Methodology

Two sets of questions can be derived from this set of needs: the first pertains to functional questions about the poetics of early abolition, the second to its formal aspects, even though formal and functional dimensions cannot be separated here. The distinction merely serves heuristic purposes. First: what does a model of positioning the enslaved look like in a "white" body of texts of late eighteenth-century US abolition in analogy to the Black Studies paradigms outlined above—the SUBJECT or OBJECT and the ABJECT paradigms? Second: how did the discursive positioning of the enslaved become formalized in the patterns of a poetics of abolition? In order to elaborate on these questions, it is necessary to consider how the concepts of "discourse" and

[49] What informed the motivations of white abolitionist "disidentifications" from the hypocrisies of Enlightenment was an acceptance of the parameters of that discursive order which abolitionist protagonists critique. In Foucault's sense, their critique of enslavement as a constitutive flip side of the Enlightenment project is articulated in their "desubjugation" from it; but processes of desubjugation imply a dependency on the very discourses that make them intelligible as subjects in the first place ("What is Critique?" 194).

"poetics" are intertwined: in other words, how the poetic formalization of abolitionist discourse can be conceptualized.

Abolition as Discourse

For Michel Foucault, a discourse can be understood as "a regulated practice that accounts for a certain number of statements"; it points to a phenomenon of "things actually said" (*Archaeology* 80, 127).[50] A discourse is based on utterances and made up of discursive "events" that are formalized in spoken or written form:

> [The domain of discourse] is constituted by the set of all effective statements (whether spoken or written) in their dispersion as events and in the immediacy that is proper to each. [...] Discourse [...] is the always-finite and temporally limited ensemble of those statements alone which were formulated. [...] The description of discourse asks [the] question: How is it that this statement appeared, rather than some other one in its place? ("On the Archaeology" 400)[51]

Beyond a consideration of abolition as discourse, which can account for the "things actually said" about it, we should also note that there are dimensions of abolition that point beyond its discursive manifestation. Abolition as well as slavery are more than discourses—systems of the said and sayable—of opinions and formulated statements. They are systems that regulate geographical spaces, bodies, instruments, capital, and so on. Applying Foucault's ideas, the constellations that constitute the enslavement regime and its cri-

[50] Foucault addressed racism in his 1976 lectures at the Collège de France as the unequal biopolitical distribution of life and death (*Society* 239–64). As Ann Laura Stoler (55–94) and Robin Blackburn (*Making* 13) have critically noted, Foucault did not attend "sufficiently to the colonial state as a source of racism," arguing that "the slaveowner, even prior to the colonial state, actually claimed most of [racism's] regulatory powers" (Blackburn, *Making* 26n15). In spite of such criticism, Foucault's theorizing and its concomitant terminology has fundamentally shaped scholarship on slavery and racism; see Hartman, *Lose* 129. It remains essential for my analyses of the dynamics at play in the poetics of early abolition.

[51] On Foucault's concept of discourse, see Dreyfus and Rabinow; Oksala.

tique can also be conceptualized as an "apparatus" (in French, *dispositif*). In an interview from 1977, Foucault notes:

> What I'm trying to pick out with this term is, firstly, a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions—in short, *the said* as much as *the unsaid*. [...] The apparatus itself is the system of relations that can be established between these elements. Secondly, what I am trying to identify in this apparatus is precisely the nature of the connection that can exist between these heterogeneous elements. [...] In short, between these elements, whether *discursive* or *non-discursive*, there is a sort of interplay of shifts of position and modifications of function which can also vary very widely. Thirdly, I understand by the term "apparatus" a sort of–shall we say–formation which has as its major function at a given historical moment that of responding to an urgent need. The apparatus thus has a dominant strategic function. This may have been, for example, the assimilation of a floating population found to be burdensome for an essentially mercantilist economy. (*Power/Knowledge* 194–95, emphases mine)

Giorgio Agamben, who provides a slightly different translation of passages of this interview, summarizes three crucial points of Foucault's concept of the apparatus:

> a. It [the apparatus] is a heterogeneous set that includes virtually anything, linguistic and nonlinguistic, under the same heading: discourses, institutions, buildings, laws, police measures, philosophical propositions, and so on. The apparatus itself is the network that is established between these elements.
> b. The apparatus always has a concrete strategic function and is always located in a power relation.
> c. As such, it appears at the intersection of power relations and relations of knowledge. (2–3)

Transferring this notion to enslavement, it can be considered an apparatus which extends beyond discourse to include non-discursive elements at a given historical moment. In the sense that abolition questioned and challenged the apparatus of enslavement, abolition can be considered part of this apparatus. Like slavery, abolition is not solely discursive and cannot merely be located in discourse: it also includes non-discursive elements. However, the apparatus of enslavement was largely contested using discursive means, and—without losing sight of the fact that the enslavement regime went far

beyond "the said"—this realization draws analytical attention to abolition *as* discourse and as a discursive element of a larger framework of the apparatus of enslavement.[52]

McBride has shown the epistemic value of construing abolition as a discourse: "Recasting the abolition debate in terms of a discourse usefully places central significance on the issues of language, rhetorical strategy, audience, and the status and/or production of the 'truth' about slavery. […] This, in turn, provides a fertile ground on which further and ultimately more probing work in this area is possible" (1). I take up McBride's cue here to argue that the recasting of abolition as discourse necessitates inquiry into the specific ways in which white abolitionists assigned the enslaved structural positions of subject and object in discourse, or addressed the abjection of the enslaved from discourse.[53] Foucault's essay "What is Enlightenment?" offers fruitful insights for developing a relational model that takes into account the ways in which abolitionist protagonists positioned and related to the unfree. In this essay, Foucault calls for a study or "critique of what we are saying, thinking, and doing, through a historical ontology of ourselves" (45). He introduces "three broad areas" to be analyzed: "relations of control over things, relations of actions upon others, relations with oneself. […] [W]e have three axes whose specificity and whose interconnections have to be analyzed: the axis of knowledge, the axis of power, the axis of ethics" (48). These three areas correspond to three different axes of relationality which may serve as points of departure for the present analysis. In reverse order, they indicate the following relations:

(a) "axis of ethics"—"relations with oneself"—(relation between) self and self,

(b) "axis of power"—"relations of actions upon others"—self and other,

(c) "axis of knowledge"—"relations of control over things"—self and things (48).

[52] We may argue with Foucault that abolition is a discourse resistant to the apparatus of enslavement. It occupies points of resistance in a field of power: "Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power" (*History* 95).

[53] Wilderson has noted that "[p]oststructuralism makes the case that language […] and more broadly discourse (Foucault) are the modalities which […] position the subject structurally (*Red* 31).

When Foucault calls for an inquiry into the "historically unique forms in which the generalities of our relations to things, to others, to ourselves, have been problematized" (50), I take it that the first person plural pronoun refers to the position of the "self" implied in the three axes above. I take this to refer to a critical assessment of the establishment of what may, predictably, be considered white, hegemonic "Enlightenment" subjectivities as derived from the legacy of Enlightenment and Enlightenment's concomitant legacy of enslavement. I propose that Foucault's conceptualization may be used to shift the analytical focus to the subject position inhabited by early white abolitionists in their particular time and place. I consider the position of these abolitionists a valuable site for inquiry into the ways in which they problematized the generalities of the axes Foucault conceptualizes. Linking Foucault's interest in the axes of relationality with abolitionist discourse may help to reveal how abolitionists around 1800, as "Enlightenment" subjects, related in ambivalent ways to hegemonic constellations of power and knowledge.

Poetic Forms and Functions

The "manifest" functions of the poetics of abolition encompass the purposeful "enscandalization" of the enslavement regime slavery, as I call it,[54] the dedicated demonstration of why its abolition was feasible, and the creation of a climate conductive to the abolition of the apparatus of slavery, among others. But apart from these intended purposes and explicit aims geared toward the end of abolishing slavery and the slave trade, the poetics of abolition potentially served more "latent" functions as well—effects not necessarily intended by the protagonists of abolition. Sociologist Robert Merton expands on the concepts of "manifest" and "latent" functions as follows:

> This is the rationale for the distinction between manifest functions and latent functions; the first referring to those objective consequences for a specified unit (person, subgroup, social or cultural system) which contribute to its adjustment or adaptation and were so intended; the second referring to unintended and unrecognized consequences of the same order. (117)

[54] The poetics of abolition sought to "enscandalize" slavery, in other words, it sought to make people see slavery as a scandal.

In other words, what was negotiated alongside, beyond, or even despite willful attempts to do the putatively good deed of abolishing the enslavement regime? The poetics of early abolition took part in shaping the eighteenth-century public sphere by encouraging particular views on such supposedly universal concepts as freedom and humanity and the virulent signifier 'race.' The genuine desire of white abolitionists to end the enslavement of Black persons may have been accompanied (and thus perhaps undermined) by the unintended effect of strengthening their very own speaking positions: the empowerment of white subject positions came at the expense of the enslaved. This study is particularly interested in the latent functions of establishing or denying particular speaking positions. These functions can be identified in the discursive acts in which abolitionists triadically assign the enslaved subject positions as "selves," object positions as "others," and abject positions as "things," while they assume subject positions for themselves. This differentiation among three poetic functions is heuristic; it corresponds, structurally, to the mapping of the paradigms in Black Studies scholarship as delineated above, and it corresponds to the three axes of "ethics," "power," and "knowledge." I refer to these poetic functions as follows:

(A) "Subjection": the free assume that the enslaved exist on an "axis of ethics" where they encounter and recognize each other as equal subjects; they consider faculties and inalienable properties, such as humanity and freedom, to derive from within each subject. "Subjection" in the sense used here indicates a relationship between the free and the unfree which is characterized by the abolitionists' perception of the unfree as being subjects like themselves: 'If your humanity is injured, so is mine, since we share it.' This function answers the question: "How are we [free, white abolitionists] constituted as moral subjects of our own actions?" (Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?" 49). Wesley's anecdote of the conversation between the slave and slave trader in Liverpool serves such a function of placing the slave character in a position of subject.

(B) "Objection": the free consider the enslaved as objects in relation to their own position; the latter are envisioned as a "you" who exist in relation to the free on an "axis of power." This function can be correlated with Foucault's question: "How are we constituted as subjects who exercise or submit to power relations?" (49). Wesley's polemical question to slave-ship captains is an excellent example: "When you saw the flowing eyes, the heaving breasts, the bleeding sides and tortured limbs of your fellow-creatures, was you a stone, or a brute?" (52). Foucault assumes that both positions implicated in