

# Toward a Philosophy of Transnationalism

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Transnational studies puts nations back into the dialectical history from which they emerged. Yet to say so is not to dispense with the study of nations. On the contrary, the last several decades of rich thinking about nationalism have probably led inevitably to the “transnational turn” in the social sciences and humanities. We might say that we have worked our way down to the ground-zero of nations: their transnational production. Thus the work of the last thirty years on nationalism of all kinds has been essential. Yet it has become clear that when it operates as *the* analytical model, scholarship on nationalism can begin to reify the very narratives it critiques. In a positive turn, and with impetus from postcolonial, diaspora, feminist, and world-system studies, scholars have widened the frame: instead of focusing solely on how nations define persons and institutions, they have begun to piece together the myriad and multisided histories *within* which nations themselves have taken shape and in turn exerted their force.<sup>1</sup>

In this essay I build on this scholarship to suggest first of all that the power of transnational studies lies in its fundamentally dialectical approach, and secondly that this approach opens the way to a fresh consideration of the human or existential subject of history. In the kind of transnational studies I highlight here, the focus is less strictly on the movements of people and capital across national borders and more on the implicitly other-oriented interactions between and among nations, making them mutually shaping and mutually contingent phenomena. In this model, there certainly are nations—they are still with us clearly—but there is no *a priori*, Herderian spirit, or purely indigenous and liberatory “inside” of the nation: rather there are radically co-formed nations, arising from material and ideological forces that continuously transform the existence of both or all national sides. Because I argue that within this kind of transnational studies we can revitalize and resituate our philosophies of subjectivity, and vice versa, I use the word *dialectical* here intentionally to invoke Hegel as well as Marx—existential encounters as well as

material economies. Indeed, transnational studies curtails its dialectical import if it fails to make questions of intersubjectivity a part of its project.

I should note, too, that in my approach a dialectical philosophy is not inherently a philosophy of the double or the dyad. Although the prefix *dia* has associations with two because of its roots in the Greek word for that number, in Greek *dia* also has the ancient meanings of *across*, *through*, and *thoroughly*. It works as a preposition or prefix indicating relation across difference or separateness. Thus we regularly use the word dialogue, for instance, to refer to speech not only between two persons but also among several. Like dialogue, dialectics can comprise plural engagements, and, like dialogue, it can entail multilateral actors as well as witnesses and listeners. In my discussion below, I will work with both the intensity of oppositional *twoness* and the decentering pressures of *several-all-at-once*. In fact I suggest that these dimensions of twoness and plurality themselves unfold in dialectical relation at both the transnational and the onto-social levels.

To pursue these possibilities, and to think through the transnational and the intersubjective together, I will turn to existential phenomenology's account of the person-in-the-world and revisit the work of some of its most dialectical twentieth-century theorists—Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Frantz Fanon, and Louis Althusser. These thinkers shed powerful light on the historicity of persons, particularly the person's simultaneously determining and determined *bodily* immersion in events-in-time-and-place-together-with-and-in-struggle-with-others. Recovery of *this* dialectical dimension of history is much needed, both in general and in relation to transnational studies because, despite both Hegel's influence and the interventions of existentialist, Marxist, and deconstructionist thinkers, contemporary critical thought continues to give more attention to "the subject" than to "intersubjects" or the dynamics of subjects who act together within a material horizon. An *a priori* intersubjective matrix is often taken as a given condition in all kinds of political, economic, and cultural studies work, but in practice it is rarely thought through as an *originary* element. There is much talk of resistance and counterproduction but, with some exceptions (most often in feminist theory), in the main there is still a dearth of theory about the radical, *involuntary* interconnectedness of subjects who live in history and together shape, suffer, enjoy, and resist its forces. Likewise, talk of agency often overindividualizes the person and oversimplifies the convergence of forces that constitutes each person and event. As a result, we risk implicitly and fundamentally deactivating the dialectic of history in our social theories. Just as studies of nationalism can get caught in a vocabulary of *the nation*, so have studies of subjectivity circled (even if restlessly or rhizomatically) within the notion of *the subject*.

In thinking through the radical co-formation of nations (or other communities) together with the radical co-formation of persons, we simultaneously deepen our understanding of transnationalism as a key structure of a materially dialectical history and more precisely name the ways that intersubjectivity, or what Merleau-Ponty

called *intercorporeality*,<sup>2</sup> functions as a dialectical axis of transnationalism. I give particular attention to regional formations of such transnationalism, such as the Atlantic world, arguing that it is at the level of the regional that dialectics among nations often take their most concentrated and revealing forms. Attending to regional interrelations also allows us to drop down one level of abstraction from the global and therefore more readily incorporate attention to local economies, commodities, beliefs, and animosities that “trickle up,” so to speak, from the local via the regional to the global.

This essay can only sketch the potential for combining transnational studies with a dialectical existentialism, yet perhaps it can prompt further discussion. After an overview of the kind of transnational studies I have described, I explain at some length how the work of W. E. B. Du Bois, Fanon, Merleau-Ponty, and Althusser, taken together, offer us a richly dialectical account of subjects, and I then suggest that this dialectical intercorporeality operates in the macropolitical register of nations. Finally I turn to Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* and Olaudah Equiano’s *Interesting Narrative* and focus on the Atlantic world to argue that these transnational and intercorporeal dialectics find expression within literature. In the context of this inaugural issue of the *Journal of Transnational American Studies*, this paired reading also models one way that texts conventionally considered *either* British or American or African or Caribbean can be interpreted as all of these at once, for both their readers and their writers. Literature not only offers a micro-world of the existential dialectics of transnational history but also claims a part in that history by signaling its own production within that world and engaging readers on a materially interactive ground, initiating the entire dynamic process again. Literature as I discuss it here thus emerges as a mediating vehicle within a dialectical transnationalism.

### **Tilted Nations: Regional Transnationalism**

Goods and money flow around the globe every day and always, but people live in certain places or regions over durations, even if they seasonally migrate for work or are refugees, exiles, or part of a diasporic community.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, even utterly displaced children and adults live their experiences within and across this placedness of others within villages, cities, nations, and global regions. Transnational studies, if we distill its project, aims to think through these two facts together: the odd, uneven time-travel of world-system economies and the lived placedness of human lives—each of which resists and therein (de)forms the other. The outward pull of economy disrupts the relation to place, and the downward gravity of placedness in turn reorients and recreates “local” economies. Economic circuits may force Greeks or Pakistanis to New York City, Vietnamese to Hong Kong, Turks to Germany, Mexicans to California, Jamaicans to Buenos Aires, yet they usually do so counter to the wish to stay home, and they usually issue in the migrant’s making of a new home in this elsewhere.

This tension may generate the fundamental dialectic of human history. We

might describe it as an ongoing exchange between the demands of food and of shelter, between the labor of foraging for food and the need for a safe place to eat it. Both involve forms of human association: they entail encounters with others in the search for resources, and they require bonding with others to create a sheltered place of habitation and of protection in the event of threatening confrontations. Transnational studies can be said intentionally to track this dialectic between here and there, shelter and trade (and, if we extrapolate, culture and economy), focusing as it does on the transports and transformations that occur across the borders of nations, in the process continually (re)defining these nations as such.

In building a connection between transnational history and the history of subjects, I want especially to highlight what we might call “regional” transnational studies, which focuses on the in-between and historically sedimented modern forms of this dialectic. Regional transnational scholarship works with configurations such as the Middle East or the Pacific world, inviting us to think about the global economy in relation to particular regions and their transnational economic and discursive formations, *across borders and yet within a certain circumference*. While it follows the flow of labor and capital and the interactive dynamics and conflicts this insistent movement creates among people(s), it particularly tracks the *regional tilt* of these flows and dynamics, of nations-in-relation, and in clustered relation, as they always are in modernity, whether as allies or enemies. In some cases such scholarship may focus on the radically creole nations and identities these movements create, and in others it may emphasize the cross-border histories, conflicts, and identifications (within, say, southeast Asia or central Europe or the Mediterranean), especially through the interproduced discourses that legalize or inscribe these clustered transnational relations. This concentrated focus on regional transnational networks of culture and economy allows us to specify the mediating work of expressive forms within a particular region (producing what Yuri Lotman calls *semiospheres*), which in turn can shed light on the larger dialectical interaction of local or regional culture, and global or “external” economy.<sup>4</sup>

Thus for instance in *The Ornament of the World*, María Rosa Menocal reconstructs the cross-cultural circulation of peoples, religious practices, and literary genres within the southern Mediterranean world of Spain and northern Africa during the medieval era.<sup>5</sup> Although this is not a region of nations in the modern sense, it is a regionally oriented network that develops via the cross-border dynamics that later unfold among nations. Menocal tracks the ways that forms of love poetry, for instance, took shape by way of the geographic exiles and returns of ruling families and the accompanying cultural convergences among Jewish, Islamic, and Christian communities. Most pertinent for this discussion, Menocal reveals how politics were in effect negotiated through these literary forms exactly because they carried the voices and values of several religions and kingdoms within the region. Similarly in *Freedom’s Empire*, I trace a core “freedom story” in the genres of the novel, memoir, and history in Anglophone literature of the Atlantic world since the seventeenth

century. This story is haunted by disavowed race, gender, and class realities, and I argue that it thereby becomes one vexed instrument by which Atlantic peoples and nations negotiate their relations within an emergent global capitalism. Viewing these genres regionally rather than nationally, we see more clearly how, for instance, African-Atlantic and Anglo-Atlantic writers hailing from various nations each lay claim to an ocean-crossing, freedom story under the sign of race, writing as representatives of “a people.” These Anglophone communities (and arguably other language communities in the Atlantic world) battle not only over material access to freedom but also over discursive access to it—and the result is a dialectically generated, transnational *literary history* as well as economic history.

In other words, literary forms take shape not strictly within a single national or religious political world but rather within a horizon of historical events experienced in common and yet differentially, amid fluctuating, triangular strategic alliances among and against, for instance, French, Amerindian, African, Spanish, or maroon communities. These forms arise together dialectically, tilted toward each other like the nations and communities that spawned them. And so we best read them dialectically, as entities created by their agonistic entanglements with each other. Moreover, literary texts and traditions are engaged not only dyadically toward and against each other in pairs, or as black texts and white, but also multiply and shiftingly.

We gain further insight into these operations when we consider the intertwined formation of events and texts at the level of material, bodily existence. To develop this dimension of the theory, I now turn to Maurice Merleau-Ponty, reframing his ideas by way of the work of Du Bois, Althusser, and Fanon.

### **Tilted Subjects**

Especially in his last and posthumously published book, *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty opens the way to an unusually trenchant account of intersubjectivity, or to use his word, intercorporeality. In effect, his philosophy elaborates on the intersubjective phenomenology embedded in W. E. B. Du Bois’s well-known description in *Souls of Black Folk* of the black person’s “double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others,” which issues, he says, in “two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings . . . in one dark body.”<sup>6</sup> Du Bois implicitly names what Merleau-Ponty later explicitly theorizes (perhaps even via indirect Atlantic-world influences).<sup>7</sup> Although Merleau-Ponty never pursued the political implications of his notion of intercorporeality, we can do so by joining it with the insights of Du Bois, Fanon, and Althusser. This approach shares a project with theorists such as Étienne Balibar who are developing philosophies of transnational intersubjectivity, and it shares a spirit with the work of Wai Chee Dimock in its interest in the intimate, micrological ways that transnationalism is lived.<sup>8</sup> I especially

aim to explore how the dialectics of inside/outside and us/them also entail a volatile, triple, and collective dialectic among persons and nations.

For Merleau-Ponty, first of all, “the body . . . is not itself a thing, an interstitial matter, a connective tissue, but [rather] a *sensible for itself*.”<sup>9</sup> The body is, he says, “a being of two leaves, from one side a thing among things and otherwise what sees and touches them” (137). To be an embodied subject is to be already double, to belong already to the world of others as well as self, and to arrive at one’s own visibility and audibility together with others. It is not only that I both see and am seeable, hear and am audible, am both subject and object in the world, but I am so *for myself* as well for others. I come to *myself* from outside, as well as inside. Long before I look into a mirror (Lacanian or otherwise), or in the absence of mirrors, I move across this hinge of myself, see my feet with my eyes, register my voice with my ears, touch my arms with my hands—perceiving from the outside what I also sense from the inside, arriving at myself via an object-body that *belongs* to the realm of a material, onlooking order of others.

Thus embodiment entails what Merleau-Ponty characterizes as a “chiasmatic” structure, ever-crossing and reversing its aspects. In rhetoric, the chiasm is a grammatical structure that balances reversed syntactic elements, as in the saying, “When the going gets tough, the tough get going.” Merleau-Ponty takes this rhetorical mode as an image of a body’s dynamical relation to itself in the world: we are ourselves “reversible” insofar as we are at once sentient and sensible. As he puts it, “when one of my hands touches the other, the world of each opens upon the other because the operation is reversible at will,” and *this* is so “because they . . . are the hands of the same body” (141). Within this “circle of the touched and the touching” (143), it is neither the sameness of the one body nor the difference of the two touching parts but rather both of these together that open up a world—literally a span of time and space—within the circle of the body’s self-relation. Each body, each person is in this sense two bodies—or a kind of double helix where the opposite sides of one ribbon touch and in this loop generate a circle of time and space, a here and a now, an entry into worldness.

Or rather these two sides of the body only *almost* close into a circle, and this destabilizing almostness is both essential to and risky for the possibility of worldness—including as it issues in problematic experiences of double consciousness. For in the crossing-over movement of this chiasmatic and reversible body, there is a *lag*, a dehiscence, or slippage. As Merleau-Ponty explains, “If my left hand is touching my right hand, and I should suddenly wish to apprehend with my right hand the work of my left hand as it touches, this reflection of the body upon itself always miscarries at the last moment: the moment I feel my left hand with my right hand, I correspondingly cease touching my right hand with my left hand” (9). In other words, it is at least very difficult to experience both hands at once as both touching and touched, both pressing from within and receiving strokes from without.

At the moment when our body verges on closure of the “circle of the touched and the touching,” there is what Merleau-Ponty calls a “brief torsion” (7).

We might similarly consider the voice. I hear myself speaking—but do I hear from within or without? When I try to either separate or coordinate these two positions from which I hear, I find myself in a strange interspace, a hovering between the two parts or leaves of myself—and this twoness constitutes me as much as does any sense of sameness. I live in the shadowy both/and of myself: my viable speech and hearing, my existence, depend on it.

This slippage in the intrasubjective bodily self-relation is what Merleau-Ponty calls the *écart*. He characterizes the *écart* as the “spread” or “hiatus” that creates the “dehiscence” or noncoincidence at the heart of the meeting between a body and itself. It allows for an “incessant escaping” of myself from myself but it also provides the pivot of my existence-in-the-world, the *split* second when existence happens as I almost simultaneously speak and hear myself speak, touch and feel myself touch, move into the world by way of my difference from myself yet also in this way witness myself in the world. It is the existential condition in which “I am from the start outside myself and open to the world.”<sup>10</sup>

In identifying this pivotal yet decentering and ineffable element in the subject, Merleau-Ponty prepared the way for Jacques Derrida’s notion of the hymen, or of the “a” in *différance*.<sup>11</sup> The “deferring” in Merleau-Ponty’s *différance* is, however, the morphological “lag” and spatiotemporal “spread” across which we encounter ourselves and in turn meet others; it is not, he says, “an ontological void.” He identifies this constitutive incommensurability of aspects not just in the linguistic universe of subjects but also in time and space and as the suspensional mode of our material situatedness in these. Although this intercorporeal world is one with a founding impossibility of coincidence or totality and thus creates vulnerability, anxiety, and disavowal (yielding, in Jacques Lacan’s revision of Merleau-Ponty’s theories, an economy of misrecognition and phantasmic subjectivity<sup>12</sup>), for Merleau-Ponty this instability is also generative. It is the motor of possibility, futurity, the necessary suspension and *dialectical* connection that functions as an opening to all events and encounters.

And yet, directed by the political emphases of Du Bois and Frantz Fanon, we can see how this opening exposes one to invasive entry by others and to a *tormented* as well as *torsioned* double consciousness. Coercive or denigrating others can insinuate themselves into the *écart*, in effect colonizing the chiasm and alienating the founding self-relation, especially since we know ourselves fully *only via the medium* of that material world to which our bodies must belong if they are to live. Fanon narrates precisely this situation in *Black Skin, White Masks*, extending the contemporary phenomenological vocabulary of the bodily schema: “A slow composition of myself as a body in the middle of a spatial and temporal world—such seems to be the schema,” and it involves, he says, “a real dialectic between my body and the world.” But “in the white world the man of color encounters difficulties in

the development of his bodily schema. It is solely a negating activity.”<sup>13</sup> This situation begets what Fanon calls “a third-person consciousness,” by which the person decouples from him or herself and perceives the “I” only as him or her (110).

In this way, the chiasmatic processes of intra- and intercorporeality dovetail with the operations of what Louis Althusser named *interpellation*—that calling-out by which the self becomes a social subject, called to occupy or answer to a certain position in the social order.<sup>14</sup> I suggest that the near-perfect and even sought-after identification of self with social designation works as successfully as it does *because* the hailing intrudes into and usurps the intracorporeal self-relation. Our readiness to identify with a social role may be encouraged by our sense of chiasmatic vulnerability and our attendant desire to be “fixed in place.” Furthermore, under crippling social conditions, our necessary existential narcissism can become distorted into self-loathing or self-obsession.

And yet, I would also argue, this hailing is incomplete and the identification of subjectivity with social status is imperfect exactly because of the third-person consciousness that arises within the chiasmatic intercorporeal situation. That is, because the self looks on at itself, it can see and resist this hailing—or at least fleetingly glimpse what is happening. In this light we can expand Fanon’s notion of third-person consciousness. Fanon uses this term mainly to name an alienated bodily consciousness. Yet, at the same time, this third-person capacity of listening to and watching one’s own body enables Fanon to survey himself within a field of relations. Onto-socially, it is what enables him to write this book about racist masks and faces. His painful yet fruitful insights are generated by the intercorporeal social horizon: insofar as he can witness himself from outside among others, he can also, to again borrow Merleau-Ponty’s words, “acquire a social horizon, with the result that [his] world is expanded to the dimensions of that collective history which [his] private existence takes up and carries forward.”<sup>15</sup> Fanon’s book stands as a testimony to the incommensurate effects of a chiasmatic existence, its expansive horizon and its crippling pressures, its continual beckoning outward and its deadly collapsing of the subject into himself.

And we can extend the intercorporeal logic of this third-person consciousness one circle wider. While Fanon, like Jean-Paul Sartre and many others after them,<sup>16</sup> speaks in terms of black and white or self and other, and it is true that many relations are dyadic or oppositional (including the intracorporeal, the intercorporeal, and the macropolitical), these dualistic relations are also witnessed by others. Interrelations that unfold dialectically within oneself or with another do so because of our intracorporeal chiasmatic ontology with its loophole of openness to the world—including a circle of onlooking others, whether enemies, allies, or apparently indifferent ones. Speaking harshly to someone, being spoken to harshly by someone, obeying a cruel order, or ignoring it, embracing a long-absent loved one in the airport, offering a hand to a stranger who has tripped and fallen, weeping for joy or agony with someone at the announcement of a legal decision, these actions are

often literally witnessed. And if they are not literally witnessed by a third party, they are witnessed somatically and psychically.<sup>17</sup>

A literary example may be helpful here. Toni Morrison captures this unstable combination of dyadic and multiple intercorporeal dialectics in her novel *Sula*, particularly in the scene in which the ten-year-old girl Nel boards the train with her mother, Helene. Just after Helene has been humiliated by a white conductor for walking through a white car on her way to the colored car (he calls her gal and tells her to “git [her] butt on in there”), she suddenly “for no reason anyone could understand” smiles flirtatiously at the conductor as he brushes past her—“like a street pup,” the narrator remarks, “that wags its tail at the very doorjamb of the butcher shop he has been kicked away from only moments before.”<sup>18</sup> But the event of this encounter is not merely between Helene and the conductor. It is witnessed, and in fact viscerally experienced, by her daughter together with the other travelers in the coloreds-only car: “Nel looked away from the flash of pretty teeth to the other passengers. The two black soldiers, who had been watching the scene with what appeared to be indifference, now looked stricken. Behind Nel was the bright and blazing light of her mother’s smile; before her the midnight eyes of the soldiers. She saw the muscles of their faces tighten, a movement under the skin from blood to marble” (21–22).

Nel is at once participant in, witness to, and conduit of the onto-political relations rendered here. Her situation is more than triangular in the sense theorized by René Girard, for it is multidirectional, or multilateral, as well as reversible and intracorporeal.<sup>19</sup> When she and her mother sit down, the narrator pauses over Nel’s intracorporeal response, tracking, within a suspended moment of time, the “folds” and “fall” of her chiasmatic shock:

In the silence that preceded the train’s heave, [Nel] looked deeply at the folds of her mother’s dress. There in the fall of the heavy brown wool she held her eyes. She could not risk letting them travel upward. . . . She stared at the hem wanting to believe in its weight but knowing that custard was all it hid. If this tall, proud woman . . . who could quell a roustabout with a look, if she were really custard, then there was a chance that Nel was, too. It was on that train, shuffling toward Cincinnati, that she resolved to be on guard—always. She wanted to make certain that no man ever looked at her that way. That no midnight eyes or marbled flesh would ever accost her and turn her into jelly.<sup>20</sup>

The eyes that most concern Nel in this multiply dialectical event are not those of the conductor, although his eyes play the catalyzing role; it is those of the other blacks with whom Nel witnesses the encounter between her mother and the conductor: the soldiers, through whom, by the way, Morrison quietly gestures toward the larger

transnational theater of war in which they have been deployed and which in turn defines this scene. Further, Nel understands that their gaze has implications for her as a black girl, since the exchange between Helene and the conductor, explicitly sexualized by the white man's degrading language, is also an encounter, via Helene, between white and black men about their identities as men and their relations to women. All of this Nel witnesses with and against the soldiers, with and against her mother. While the conductor swaggers away, she watches the soldiers turn into marble and her mother turn into jelly. (In other words, she watches Helene's self-betrayal as it leads to Helene's chiasmatic collapse and the soldiers' chiasmatic hardening.) Yet, equally important, Nel in this moment calls on her "third-person consciousness" to redetermine her own future within this overdetermined world of politicized intercorporeal relations. She resolves to be "on guard" against the "accosting" of her flesh.

This complex liquefaction, reification, and remounting of intercorporeality all occurs "in the silence that preceded the train's heave." Morrison places us in a moment of suspended anticipation, at the site of an onto-political launching, simultaneously failed and renewed, within a transnational world of war and of mobilized men traveling on segregated trains controlled by white men, which nonetheless depend on rails built by black men. Thus does Morrison distill the way that chiasmatic intersubjectivity operates as a dialectical matrix of racialized transnationality.

This scene exemplifies what we could call "horizontal" or "circumferential" dialectics, in which a dyadic, intercorporeal encounter calls in the witnessing others who are themselves invested in and dialectically refashioned by this event. Moreover, this horizontal witnessing reverberates back through the intracorporeal and dual relations: the dyadic actors (Helene and the conductor), each of whom is living the intracorporeal self-relation, operate with an awareness of these others watching, who are themselves implicitly aware of this self-consciousness in the actors, who also apprehend the effects within each onlooker and among this circle of onlookers, etc., etc. And this multiple and horizontal intercorporeal dialectic occurs in time, for in the next split second, all further gestures and actions among all parties unfold in an interlooping dialectic backed by the lights, shadows, and momentum of this prior chiasmatic collective consciousness—just as those original actions had emerged out of previous horizontal, dialectical, intercorporeal moments. In this way, although we each exist singularly as separate bodies, our doubleness as seeing and visible beings, hearing and audible bodies, means that we always also exist collectively.

What emerges from this account is neither a vision of the-subject-against-the-world nor a vision of subjects-entering-together-in-loving-embrace. It is a vision of subjects "thrown" together, in a Heideggerian sense, caught-up-alongside each other, intertwined dialectically with each other by way of a materiality we never quite hold yet always inhabit, apprehending and resisting and continually forgetting this existential-dialectical condition and yet always unconsciously counting on it. In this

theoretical account not only is each of us existentially embarked, to use of one Sartre's terms,<sup>21</sup> but we are all unstably coembarked. Under these conditions, every act is a witnessed inter-act, a slightly off-kilter exchange with unpredictable outcomes, yet which is also delimited or supported "from behind" by the associates of the actor and the actor's own body and called out "from afore" by the surround of other actors or material obstacles and resources. In truth, no "subject" enters the exchange; rather, the exchange continually makes the subject—as socially encircled intersubject.

Here is a dialectical theory of intersubjectivity that accounts for the slippage of seeing and hearing among subjects while also acknowledging the recognition coiled within misrecognition, the existential co-knowing at the heart of any *méconnaissance*, the habitual movement toward others that explains the pain of being pushed away by others. This incommensurate co-origination of subjects is radically destabilizing yet also radically constitutive of collective history.

### **Tilted Transnationality**

And so, too, with nations. When we extrapolate this chiasmatic account of subjects into a chiasmatic account of nations, we have the prospect of a more fully realized theory of transnationalism. Nations do exist, but as transnations or internations; they share a "tilted" structure of orientation to other nations that is dialectical and dyadic yet also multiple and circumferential or horizontal. Nations are invested in each other, in every sense of the word, and they are invested in and attuned to each other's investments.

Lest it seem strange to move from an existential analysis of intercorporeality to this macropolitical register, we should recall that political scientists as well as ordinary observers habitually describe nations as players or aggressors, allies or enemies, dependent or independent actors. Likewise have nations been rhetorically figured as fathers or mothers demanding loyalty, or weak women in need of protection and vulnerable to seizure, domination, and violation. Embedded in these phrases are metaphors of interaction, of *relations*. A Fanonian–Merleau-Pontian account, like a Freudian, Lacanian, or Žižekian analysis of "civilization and its discontents," aims to generate a different kind of macrolanguage in order to productively reinterpret national and transnational relations.

To move the dialectical account of intercorporeal relations into a macropolitical register, then, we might begin by returning to Fanon's and Merleau-Ponty's descriptions of the body, substituting nation for person. We can rewrite Fanon's account of embodiment to note that there is "a slow composition of [the nation] in the middle of a spatial and temporal world." The "composition" of nations occurs within a co-emergent and often competitive "schema" of other nations, or what Merleau-Ponty calls a "social horizon." This horizontal and dialectical other-attuned emergence means, if we likewise rewrite Merleau-Ponty at the

macropolitical register, “that [each nation’s] world is expanded to the dimensions of that collective history which [that nation’s] private existence [or domestic political sphere] takes up and carries forward.”

As persons experience their touchability and visibility in the world, so do nations operate with an awareness of their material “availability” to others. This is the most fundamental way in which a Fanonian–Merleau-Pontian analysis leads us to redescribe the transnational orientation. That is, national actors, lawmakers, spokespersons, and media are acutely attuned to the social horizon of other coexisting, antagonistic, and onlooking nations interested in their material resources. National military budgets of course register the sense of physical invade-ability by other nations or forces, while emigration projects, immigration policies, and refugee repatriation programs seek to control the inflow and outflow of human bodies—especially, as transnational scholars have noted, the threatening inflow and intermarriage of foreign and laboring bodies from adjacent or colonized nations. Quite concretely, the intercorporeality of nations and persons intersects in the searching of such bodies at border checkpoints—entailing the invasion of a person’s private bodily spaces.

From a regional point of view, we can consider for instance the interaction of multiple nations and peoples in the Atlantic world, intensifying throughout the sixteenth century and after. The emergence of the Atlantic economy depended on global trade networks, supported and financed from behind, so to speak, by trade relations with eastern peoples among both Europeans and Africans, and developed in a forward direction, so to speak, by new forms of trade, for instance the profitable and newly global trade in furs that arose among northern Amerindians, Europeans, and Russians, or the Spanish trading in gold newly mined in South America.<sup>22</sup> Interacting with this set of developments, by the eighteenth century there emerged an intense *regional* matrix of shifting, multilateral alliances within the “Atlantic triangle” and oriented toward Atlantic crossings.

Thus, African leaders of coastal Dahomean, Oyo, and Ashanti peoples maneuvered among themselves for access to European trade, whether in guns, captive humans, or commodities. Gaining an edge in these Atlantic trades in turn allowed such coastal leaders to garner political or territorial advantage over inland communities seeking access to the coastal trades, as also happened among American Indian tribes between inland and port colonial settlers. Meanwhile the Spanish, French, Dutch, and British similarly battled among themselves to monopolize relations with coastal peoples (sometimes purposefully pitting the latter against each other), thereby also developing a competitive edge in labor-supply and profit in the Caribbean and North American colonies.

In this tightly networked economy, any loss or gain in relations between two parties would affect and be responded to by all the others. Within an existential and intercorporeal framework, we might say that all parties were inevitably coping with a collective third-person and horizontal consciousness even while each negotiated a

delicate domestic or intracorporeal self-relation. The revolutions of the later eighteenth-century Atlantic world make strikingly manifest the workings of such regional intercorporeality and horizontal consciousness.

Recent transnational histories of the Atlantic world have richly documented the interdependent political and demographic effects of the American, French, and Haitian revolutions, for instance.<sup>23</sup> They reveal how each of these “national” revolutions had not only transnational causes but also intense transnational effects: they generated psychological paradigm shifts and catalyzed significant diasporas among all classes, races, and nationalities. The revolt in Saint-Domingue (eventually Haiti) had particularly dramatic regional and existential effects, entailing as it did both a racial and a national revolution. In many more ways than I can explore here, this revolution constituted a rupture of relations within Haiti and France, as well as with other Atlantic communities and nations—including as lived within each person’s self-relation as an interpellated subject of the state, whether black, colored, or white. Most importantly, the Haitian Revolution ignited a new revolutionary spirit among enslaved peoples throughout the Americas—and by the same token created a terrified consciousness, as Anthony Maingot puts it, among the Anglo-European colonials.<sup>24</sup>

These terrified and triumphant responses traveled via newly uprooted or energized bodies, and this movement in turn prompted policies meant to contain the spread of revolution by restricting the movements of bodies. Thus, for instance, thousands of French fled Saint-Domingue with their slaves, but the slaves were sometimes not allowed to cross borders or were held in prisons at the owner’s expense, as in Louisiana, for fear that the slaves would bring a revolutionary practice to North American plantations.<sup>25</sup> And these fears were well-founded—for indeed freed persons and transported “French” slaves played key roles in a number of slave revolts between 1790 and 1820, including Charles Deslondes in Louisiana in 1811, who led one of the largest slave revolts in North American history. The spirit of Haiti also traveled to “onlookers,” so that, for instance, Denmark Vesey in Charleston, North Carolina, and Jose Antonio Aponte in Havana, Cuba, both invoked Haiti and promised support from Haitians in their uprisings.<sup>26</sup> Within the Caribbean, border patrols increased their vigilance toward travelers from other islands and did indeed arrest operatives who evidently had revolutionary intentions or orders from the French to foment unrest in British or Spanish colonies.<sup>27</sup> In this light, Edward L. Cox notes that British Caribbean authorities were forced to face the “porous nature of their safety network.”<sup>28</sup> We might say instead that they struggled pointlessly against the realities of a horizontal collective world in which bodily actions are multiply felt, witnessed, and internalized, and so have contagious effects.

The Fanonian–Merleau-Pontian model might also help to articulate another dimension of the Atlantic world that recent scholars have called attention to: the ship as a world unto itself.<sup>29</sup> We might note, for starters, that maritime and trade laws laid down specific rules about, for instance, how many bodies of which nation or origin

could work on a nation's ships, or in other words how much co-witnessing and interacting there could be among differently vested bodies. Further, we might consider closely the composition of nationalized and racialized bodies on ships together with the dialectical effects of their interactions, including when rapes and whippings were co-witnessed or colluded with, as Sandra Gunning has recently discussed.<sup>30</sup> By attending to these scenarios at this level of bodily dialectics, we begin to tell a history of transnationalism on the ground.

### **Tilted Intertextuality**

Written within these volatile, charged networks of the region, Atlantic-world literatures not only represent such bodily dialectics but also play a part in them. Reading Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* beside Olaudah Equiano's *Interesting Narrative*, in this last section I specify some of the ways that literature participates in this charged intercorporeal dimension of transnationality.

We all know the story of Defoe's novel *Robinson Crusoe*: a man goes to sea, experiences a catastrophic shipwreck, survives alone on an island for some twenty-four years, suffering continual anxiety in the face of illness, fierce storms, and the search for a stable supply of food and shelter until he finally escapes—and prospers as a rich merchant. Although in other works Defoe represents a less fanciful and more historical Atlantic world, it is telling that this tale of the singular Robinson Crusoe is the one among these texts that has become canonical. For Defoe's focus on a man "alone" on an island offers an allegory or objective correlative for the fantasy of national and individualist autonomy. In particular the story of Crusoe's survival *alone* in this turbulent Atlantic world continually elides his dependence on others, particularly enslaved others, to preserve his body and achieve his freedom and prosperity. As I will later discuss, Equiano in effect signifies on and revises Defoe's popular novel by narrating his Black Atlantic experience, recording his continually other-entangled, freedom-undoing movement from port to port and unveiling whites' dependence on Atlantic blacks.

Although readers have paid some attention to the Carib that Crusoe calls Friday, most have overlooked the subtextual and perhaps unconscious ways in which Defoe's text registers the pivotal role of slavery in Crusoe's Atlantic adventures. Slavery is after all the point of origin for the novel: immediately after recovering from his first, storm-battered sea outing, Crusoe commits to a life at sea, deciding that he will "set up for a Guinea trader." Likewise, his second more famous and catastrophic shipwreck occurs at his setting out from South America for Guinea, to buy slaves for his and others' plantations.<sup>31</sup> That is, both of Crusoe's main adventures are launched by way of the slave trade.

Tellingly, early in his sea life, Crusoe himself is taken captive by Moors—a turn of events that (perhaps signifying more than Defoe intends) hints at Crusoe's caughtness in the system of which he will aspire to be master. Crusoe finally escapes

the Moors together with a fellow slave, a young Moor named Xury, through whom Defoe prefigures the critical role that Friday will play in Crusoe's later escape from the island. Although Crusoe narrates his flight from this Moorish captivity as his own singular adventure, he acknowledges implicitly that his escape depends on Xury's skilled eyes and guidance. Throughout their sailing journey after the initial escape, Xury keeps them from danger or starvation, suggesting in one case that they wait until daylight to go ashore, which saves them from the beasts they later see there ("Xury's Advice was good" [24]), or spotting a lion on the prow before Crusoe does (since "his eyes were more about him than it seems mine were" [27]), and braving the jungle to hunt when Crusoe "did not care to" (26). The relations in this situation are not merely dyadic—Crusoe against the Moors or against nature—but rather triangular, entailing Crusoe's alliance with one Moor against other Moors and in the face of a dangerous physical world. Yet, in the end, although to win his help Crusoe had told Xury that he would "make you a great Man," one of Crusoe's first profitable transactions on arriving in "the Brasils" is to sell Xury. Crusoe happily trades away his interdependency, establishing his status as an autonomous Anglo-European via this betrayal. Thus does Defoe create an allegory of what happens in the world of Atlantic "crossings," through which intercorporeal alliances ultimately translate into material profit.

Crusoe soon hereafter once more seeks profit by way of this interdependency-also-known-as-slavery when he agrees to lead a slaving venture to Africa to buy laborers both for his own and other Anglo-Europeans' plantations. Like his very first sailing trip, this journey ends in a terrifying storm—in this case one that leaves Crusoe alone on a Caribbean island for twenty-four years before Friday joins him and gets fashioned as his loyal slave. As we will see, Friday actually functions as the transnational actor through whom Crusoe regains contact with Europeans and with his own Anglo-European identity—and in turn achieves prosperity as an Atlantic world agent.

Friday's instrumental and intercorporeal role in *Robinson Crusoe* is hidden, yet discernible as a pattern when we view the text through an existentialist transnational lens. It is first of all Friday who informs Crusoe about the presence of Europeans on the mainland, with whom Crusoe will seek out an alliance and which leads to his escape from the island. Tellingly, Friday reports his knowledge when he recollects that "we save the white Mans from drown"—a detail that itself signals the intercorporeality of the Carib-European relationship (223). It is Friday who helps Crusoe rebuild and steer the ship they will take to the mainland (for, says Crusoe, "I found he knew much better than I what kind of wood was fittest for it" [227]). It is Friday who turns out to be a "most dexterous Fellow at managing [the boat]" as he leads the launchings that lead to their successful contact with other Europeans (225). When the island is visited by Caribs preparing (as Defoe portrays them) to kill and eat their captives—another multilateral moment—it is Friday who "took his Aim so much better than I," kills the other Caribs, notably however saving the Spaniard who

becomes another ally for Crusoe (234). Finally it is Friday who makes it possible for Crusoe to manage the English pirates whose ship they commandeer to leave the island. Friday is indeed a pivotal agent in Crusoe's relations with all of these others.

Although Crusoe announces that Friday, Friday's father, and the Spaniard "all owed their lives to me" (241), his tale thus reveals otherwise. Even Crusoe's Protestantism—that is, his central identity and his narrative's *telos*—arrives at fruition via his dialogues with Friday. As he begins to "instruct [Friday] in the Knowledge of the true God," he often finds himself "strangely surpriz'd" by and unable to answer Friday's questions (216, 218). He discovers that "in laying Things open to him, I really inform'd and instructed my self in many Things, that either I did not know or had not fully consider'd before; but which occur'd naturally to my Mind, upon my searching into them, for the information of this poor Savage; and I had more Affection in my Enquiry after Things" (220). The implication is that the Englishman's modern social and religious identity—his perception of himself—arises in part through the vision and questions of the Carib—just as his material reconnection to Europeans and finally his (Anglo-European) liberty is achieved by the Carib's knowledge and labor. Atlantic blacks after all enable white relationality, bodily survival, and freedom, as well as their racial self-fashioning.

Yet, right down to the level of syntax, Defoe's text elides this fact, thus developing an early practice of what Toni Morrison calls "Africanism," in which white identity takes shape by way of the muffled, instrumental presence of blacks.<sup>32</sup> Defoe contorts the very grammar of his prose in an effort to keep Crusoe's authorial "I" in the subject position and exclude the intercorporeal necessity of Friday's agency, as for instance when Crusoe reports that, to keep the boat safe during the rainy season, "I had stow'd our new Vessel as secure as we could."<sup>33</sup> Seen existentially and chiasmatically, Crusoe labors discursively to disentangle himself from his cross-racial and intercorporeal embeddedness in the perilous Atlantic world, but the intertwining of "I" and "we" in this world finds expression nonetheless. These syntactic shifts testify to the larger ways in which Friday is the effaced bodily other through whom Crusoe establishes himself as Anglo-Protestant governor.<sup>34</sup>

Olaudah Equiano undoes this effacement. In his story of captivity and freedom on the Atlantic, Equiano makes clear that the material Atlantic world of colonization and trade, including in bodies, is a world that Africans and Caribs inhabit together with Spanish and British, if from radically different positions. Critics have discussed the ways that Equiano writes his story self-consciously within British narrative conventions of autobiography, ethnography, and the religious conversion story, and they have also debated which narrative tradition Equiano's text "belongs to."<sup>35</sup> Yet as I argue in *Freedom's Empire*, Equiano is fully aware that his position is a transnational one in which he mediates among a network of racialized national players and traditions—all within an Atlantic theater of battles, betrayals, profiteering, and rape, as well as of solidarity, ethical agency, and generosity.

First of all, Equiano establishes the complex ways in which he is called out in

this Atlantic world within a troubled, transnational circle of subjects. Similar to Crusoe, this hailing begins when he arrives on a Guinea ship, yet under different circumstances:

The first object which saluted my eyes when I arrived on the coast, was the sea, and a slave ship. . . . These filled me with astonishment, which was soon converted into terror, when I was carried on board. I was immediately handled, and tossed up to see if I were sound, by the crew. . . . Their complexions, too, differ[ed] so much from ours. . . . [I]f ten thousand worlds had been my own, I would have freely parted with them all to have exchanged my condition with that of the meanest slave in my own country. When I looked round the ship too, and saw a large furnace of copper boiling, and a multitude of black people of every description chained together, everyone of their countenances expressing dejection and sorrow, I no longer doubted of my fate; and, quite overpowered with horror and anguish, I fell motionless on the deck and fainted.<sup>36</sup>

In a nice choice of words, Equiano considers his eyes to be “saluted” by the ship and accordingly remarks that his body is “handled” by its crew. Amidst this process of visual and visceral interpellation he looks “round the ship” and sees others, both different from and similar to himself. He enters a transnational social horizon in which bodily conditions are differentiated by color, and he is aligned with the black people who are chained. As his body is taken captive by white others, his chiasmatic relation to himself collapses—and he faints. Indeed the young Equiano is experiencing, as Fanon describes the human’s existential emergence, “A slow composition of [him]self as a body in the middle of a spatial and temporal world,” and it involves “a real dialectic between [his] body and the world”; but as Equiano’s story makes starkly clear, “in the white world the man of color encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema. It is solely a negating activity.” It collapses him.

Yet Equiano also already registers here the “third-person consciousness” and the shared “social horizon” through which he will look on at his own situation and gain some leveraging perspective on it—a perspective by which, in Merleau-Ponty’s words, his world “is expanded to the dimensions of that collective history which [his] private existence takes up and carries forward.” It is from this perspective that he writes this autobiography, or what Mary Louise Pratt would call an auto-ethnography,<sup>37</sup> which, tellingly, he signs with two names—his African name, Olaudah Equiano, and his Anglo-European name, Gustavus Vassa.

Indeed, exactly in the face of many subsequent negations of his presence and labor, Equiano structures his autobiography by way of relations—to good owners

and bad, to whites and blacks, to free blacks and enslaved blacks, and finally to the variant laws about blacks' rights in different parts of the Atlantic world. In particular, although Tanya Caldwell has argued that Equiano avoids association with other blacks on the Atlantic, describing him as a "lonely wanderer . . . like Crusoe,"<sup>38</sup> in fact Equiano repeatedly highlights his affiliations with blacks, recording their shared experiences of being "villainously trepanned and held in bondage."<sup>39</sup> He tells a number of stories of his visits with black friends, stressing the circumstances under which he and his black associates are physically abused, defrauded of money, or taken captive even after they are free.<sup>40</sup> Using the first-person plural, he reports that he has "experienced many instances of ill usage, and have seen many injuries done to other Negroes in our dealings with whites. And amidst our recreations, when we have been dancing and merrymaking, they, without cause, have molested and insulted us" (85, emphasis added). While Defoe fashions his liberation as a singular individual act of heroism, Equiano highlights the affiliation and cooperation among blacks (as well as with humane whites), in this way too fashioning himself as participating in a collective and intercorporeal history. It is in this transnational context of bodily entanglement and uncertainty, not to say entrapment, that we should also assess Equiano's political comments regarding Africa, his strategic invocations of "free England," and his own merchant activities on the Atlantic as a (precariously) free seaman.<sup>41</sup>

Similarly, while Crusoe works to recreate the Caribbean island in the image of an enclosed, appropriately stratified, and tightly governed England, Equiano cannot help but register the relentlessly boundary-violating and fluctuating intercorporeality of the transatlantic world. In both texts, the sea operates symbolically as well as materially as a figure for the dangers and obstacles of this world. In Defoe's text, it appears as a singular threat to existential stability that is overcome and, through colonization of an island, tamed, mastered, and made profitable. For Equiano, however, the sea is a continual threat and in that sense an objective correlative for his psychic and bodily state of "constant alarm," especially in the turbulent surf of the West Indies.<sup>42</sup>

In other words, for Equiano the sea represents the perpetual "storming" of others from which he has no prospect of complete freedom. For instance, bookended on either side by stories of himself and other blacks being kidnapped or defrauded, and prefaced by his dialogue with his master about his wish to buy his freedom, Equiano explains, "While I thus went on, filled with the thoughts of freedom, and resisting oppression as well as I was able, my life hung daily in suspense, particularly in the surfs I have formerly mentioned, as I could not swim. These are extremely violent in the West Indies, and I was ever exposed to their howling rage and devouring fury in all the islands."<sup>43</sup> In the pivot of the phrase "my life hung daily in suspense," Equiano signals his position: his self-relation is unnaturally distended across the spread of the *écart* by way of the negating physical conditions of his social existence. Repeatedly, his account of the sea figures forth the

self-collapsing violence of these conditions, as suggested in his description of how “a surf struck us,” or storms “maimed” or “bruised” the sailors, or the churning waves “tossed” his boat (just as, in his initial arrival into this world, the white slavers had “tossed” him) so that he “was very near being drowned” (88). Equiano in effect takes the sea-induced swoon, which was becoming a highly staged tableau moment within Anglo-Atlantic novels,<sup>44</sup> and recasts it as a series of everyday, ongoing ontological crises for the African-Atlantic person. The materiality of the sea thus converges with—and partly constitutes—the existential negativity of his social conditions and therein embodies the threat of chiasmatic undoing that Equiano and all other “negroes” face.

In this light, Equiano’s account of one especially unhinging shipwreck experience takes on special importance as a revisionist parable of the dysfunctional intercorporeality of racialized bodies on the Atlantic. During one of Equiano’s night deck-watches, he spies a massive crop of rocks toward which the vessel is being carried by the current. He goes below three times to alert the captain, but the captain first dismisses the threat, then the second time promises to follow Equiano to the deck but does not, and finally leaves his cabin only on Equiano’s third warning, when it is too late to avoid the rocks. Thus with a dramatic “heave of the swells . . . the vessel struck” and “the sloop was pierced and transfixed among the rocks.”<sup>45</sup> Two elements of what follows are key.

First, Equiano experiences another undoing, a fainting induced by his acute sense of relations to others. As they consider boarding one of the lifeboats to escape the ship, the captain “ordered the hatches to be nailed down on the slaves in the hold, where there were about twenty in all,” explaining that there would be no room for them in the small boat. Equiano feels “God would punish me for these people’s blood,” and he recalls that this thought “quite overpowered me, and I fainted” (113). If we again understand such fainting as a moment of chiasmatic negation and collapse, this scene dramatizes Equiano’s self-relation as it operates in tandem with his relation to others, for whose very blood he feels responsible. Exactly because he feels his entangled complicity with the slave trade, when he awakens and witnesses the captain’s orders being executed, he is jolted into dissenting action; he angrily tells the captain that “he deserved drowning for not knowing how to navigate the vessel” and then persuades him that they should not nail down the hatches and attempt to flee but should instead huddle on the dry part of the ship until daylight, which they successfully do (113). Equiano’s “awakening” is a recovery of himself, a setting back in motion of his agential relation to himself and others, reigniting the multilateral circuits of existential intercorporeality—and in that same motion awakening his readers to the *whole* drama of the Atlantic world. This story has its import in counterpoint to Crusoe’s awakening into slave-trading and into a legacy of Anglo-Atlantic narrative that veils exactly this African-Atlantic (self-)presence.

Furthermore, this black Atlantic intersubjectivity entails a collective labor that is also necessary for the survival of all. For it is the initiative of Equiano and other

blacks on the ship that saves both whites and blacks from drowning. The next day while other crew members get drunk (ignoring his warnings “as if not possessed of the least spark of reason”—a nice reversal of the lack attributed by whites to blacks), Equiano leads five arduous journeys carrying men and supplies between the ship and the Bahaman island they see five miles off, and he emphasizes that “there were only four people who would work with me at the oars, and they consisted of three black men and a Creole sailor. . . . we had no others to assist us” (114). Thus do we have a miniature of the suppressed Atlantic story in which feckless whites survive shipwreck and finally achieve freedom from island captivity by way of the foresight, skill, and labor of creoles and blacks.

Equiano recreates both the chiasmatic trauma and the material intercorporeality of a transnational Atlantic economy as the basis for his reworking of its discursive economy, in turn renewing the material relations between himself and his people and himself and his readers. Writing within and yet against an English-language narrative tradition, and in the process reconstituting that tradition for future readers, Equiano the author thus fashions the material relations of the transatlantic world in a horizontal and dialectical mode. His inclusive story of bodily interdependence is by the same token also a more complete transnational one. It stands in contrast to Defoe’s Atlantic world, which is mainly an expanded British world where the Spanish, the pirates, and the blacks serve bit parts in relation to a singular British protagonist. As between Equiano the person and his negating white associates, so between Equiano the author and Defoe the author: Equiano establishes an intertextually intersubjective world that is reversible and intertwined, and he calls out to his readers to recognize it as such.

### **Tilted Commitments**

Since ultimately it is the bodies that move and that matter, a fully realized field of transnational studies ought to include an existential, dialectical level of analysis. As part of our thinking about transnationalism, it makes sense for us to describe those relations that cripple, sustain, propel, and define bodies as they continually reorient toward each other within and across national borders, and so create nations in the process. A Fanonian–Merleau-Pontian vocabulary affords us such descriptive power. Thinking intercorporeally about transnationalism, we necessarily grapple with the commitments that our bodies solicit—nationally and transnationally, singularly and collectively, and all of these at once.

## Notes

I am grateful to Professors Walter Göbel and Saskia Schabio of the University of Stuttgart for the conference that prompted this essay's combination of ideas. A version of this essay will appear in their collection *Transnational Idea(l)s*, and I thank Professors Göbel and Schabio for permission to publish this version in *JTAS*.

<sup>1</sup> Transnational studies has flourished in recent years so it is impossible to provide a complete bibliography. Recent monographs in literary and cultural studies that are particularly suggestive methodologically, and in rather different ways, include Wai Chee Dimock, *Through Other Continents: American Literature Across Deep Time* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006); Ioanna Laliotou, *Transatlantic Subjects: Acts of Migration and Cultures of Transnationalism Between Greece and America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); and Jahan Ramazani, *The Hybrid Muse: Postcolonial Poetry in English* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001). Also see the following collections of essays, which include historical, cultural, postcolonial, and feminist scholarship: Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan, eds., *Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994); Michael Peter Smith and Luis Eduardo Guarnizo, eds., *Transnationalism from Below* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1998); Alison Blunt and Cheryl McEwan, eds., *Postcolonial Geographies: Continuum Studies in Geography Education* (New York: Continuum, 2002); Sonita Sarker and Esha Niyogi De, eds., *Trans-status Subjects: Gender in the Globalization of South and Southeast Asia* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002); and Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih, eds., *Minor Transnationalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005). Also see several excellent books published in Routledge's recent series, "Routledge Research in Transnationalism." A number of journals have published special issues on transnationalism: see the issue on "Transnational Perspectives on United States History," *Journal of American History* 86, no. 3 (1999); and an issue on "Hemispheric American Literary History," *American Literary History* 18, no. 3 (2006). For an overview of the possibilities of transnational studies in relation to U.S. literature, see Shelley Fisher Fishkin, "Crossroads of Cultures: The Transnational Turn in American Studies," *American Quarterly* 57, no. 1 (2005): 17–57.

<sup>2</sup> See Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "The Philosopher and His Shadow," in *Signs*, trans. Richard C. McCleary (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 166. For the fullest developments of the concept, see also Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (New York: Humanities Press, 1962); and Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968).

<sup>3</sup> This short initial discussion of regional transnationalism draws from the conclusion of my book, *Freedom's Empire: Race and the Rise of the Novel in Atlantic Modernity, 1640–1940* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 451–52.

<sup>4</sup> Yuri M. Lotman, *Universe of the Mind: A Semiotic Theory of Culture*, trans. Ann Shukman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 2–3. The dialectical approach I discuss in this paragraph might also be applied to expressive forms as they structure global oppositions

between East and West, global North and South, or communist and capitalist, but that is not my focus here.

<sup>5</sup> María Rosa Menocal, *The Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews, and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain* (New York: Little, Brown, 2002).

<sup>6</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Signet, 1995), 45.

<sup>7</sup> For a suggestive discussion of the codevelopment of political existentialist thought by African-Atlantic and Euro-Atlantic intellectuals, see Aldon Lynn Nielsen, “The Future of an Allusion: The Color of Modernity,” in *Geomodernisms: Race, Modernism, Modernity*, ed. Laura Doyle and Laura Winkiel (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), especially pages 26–30. Nielsen does not discuss Merleau-Ponty but he makes clear that existentialism was a transatlantic and cross-racial project. I believe we need a new history of existential phenomenology along these lines, as I suggest in my introduction to *Bodies of Resistance: New Phenomenologies of Politics, Agency, and Culture* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2001). Also, for a different yet useful and thoughtful development of the radical political implications of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology, see Kerry H. Whiteside, *Merleau-Ponty and the Foundation of an Existential Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988).

<sup>8</sup> See, for instance, Étienne Balibar, *Politics and the Other Scene*, trans. Christine Jones, James Swenson, and Chris Turner (London: Verso, 2002); and Balibar, *We, the People of Europe? Reflections on Transnational Citizenship*, trans. James Swenson (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004). I admire Balibar’s account of the interiority and ideality of borders within the subject, but I am more interested in the dialectical operations by which these ambiguous identities unfold and operate. As I would see it, Dimock’s study *Through Other Continents* (cited above) offers a wonderfully wide “horizon” within which to consider the existential dialectics I discuss here.

<sup>9</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Visible and the Invisible*, 135.

<sup>10</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 456.

<sup>11</sup> For Derrida’s discussion of the hymen, see Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981); and for his first articulation of *différance*, see Derrida, “Differance,” in *Speech and Phenomena, and Other Essays on Husserl’s Theory of Signs*, trans. David B. Allison (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 129–60.

<sup>12</sup> Lacan studied Merleau-Ponty’s account of vision and eventually took it in a psychoanalytic direction. For an exploration of their points of intersection and divergence, see Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger, “Matrixial Gaze and Screen: Other than Phallic and Beyond the Late Lacan,” in Doyle, *Bodies of Resistance*, 103–43.

<sup>13</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 110.

<sup>14</sup> Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1971), 162–64.

<sup>15</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 433.

<sup>16</sup> See Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (London: Methuen, 1957), Part Three, especially 221–61.

<sup>17</sup> One could note here that the panopticon is the architectural heightening of an innate intracorporeal morphology that is always imbricated with an intercorporeality.

<sup>18</sup> Toni Morrison, *Sula* (New York: Plume, 1973), 21.

<sup>19</sup> See René Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965), 1–51.

<sup>20</sup> Morrison, *Sula*, 22.

<sup>21</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, “For Whom Does One Write?” in “*What Is Literature?*” and *Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 77.

<sup>22</sup> On the fur trade as well as early insight into the “world-systems” theorized by Immanuel Wallerstein, see Francis Jennings, *The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism, and the Cant of Conquest* (New York: Norton, 1976), 85–97.

<sup>23</sup> See, for instance, Eliga H. Gould and Peter S. Onuf, eds., *Empire and Nation: The American Revolution in the Atlantic World* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005); Thomas Bender, ed., *Rethinking American History in a Global Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Robin Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery, 1776–1848* (New York: Verso, 1988); David Patrick Geggus, ed., *The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World* (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 2001); Christopher L. Miller, *The French Atlantic Triangle: Literature and Culture of the Slave Trade* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008); and Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Buford Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon, 2000).

<sup>24</sup> Anthony P. Maingot, “Haiti and the Terrified Consciousness of the Caribbean,” in *Ethnicity in the Caribbean: Essays in Honor of Harry Hoetink*, ed. Gert Oostindie (London: Macmillan, 1996), 53–80. Also see Blackburn, *Overthrow of Colonial Slavery*, where he remarks that “the overturn in St. Domingue and the consolidation of black power in Haiti had a terrible message for the slave order throughout the Americas. Black rebels in Cuba in 1812, in the United States in 1820, in Jamaica and Brazil in the 1920’s, found inspiration in Haiti” (257).

<sup>25</sup> See Susan Branson and Leslie Patrick, “Étrangers dans un pays étrange: Saint-Domingan Refugees of Color in Philadelphia,” in Geggus, *Impact of the Haitian Revolution*, 199; and Paul Lachance, “Repercussions of the Haitian Revolution in Louisiana,” in Geggus, *Impact of the Haitian Revolution*, 212.

<sup>26</sup> Geggus, *Impact of the Haitian Revolution*, xii–xiii.

<sup>27</sup> See Aline Helg, “A Fragmented Majority: Free ‘Of All Colors,’ Indians, and Slaves in Caribbean Colombia during the Haitian Revolution,” in Geggus, *Impact of the Haitian Revolution*, 157–75.

<sup>28</sup> Edward L. Cox, “The British Caribbean in the Age of Revolution,” in Gould and Onuf, *Empire and Nation*, 279.

<sup>29</sup> Much of the focus on multiracial and transnational ship life was sparked by two books: Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); and W. Jeffrey Bolster, *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997). For more attention to gender and sexuality in relation to the Atlantic world and the ship, also see the essays in Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods, eds., *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2007).

<sup>30</sup> In a paper presented at the 2008 American Studies Association, Gunning sensitively explored a shifting set of alliances and stratifications among crew, captains, enslaved, free, women, and men, all choreographed across the spatial politics of fore and aft, above deck and below. Sandra Gunning, “Maharani’s Misery: Gender, Rape, and Silence at the Intersection of Nineteenth-Century Asian and African Diasporas” (paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Studies Association, Albuquerque, NM, October 16–19, 2008).

<sup>31</sup> Daniel Defoe, *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York, Mariner* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 18.

<sup>32</sup> Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (New York: Random House, 1992), 6–9.

<sup>33</sup> Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, 229, emphasis added.

<sup>34</sup> In this light, we may finally make better sense of the haunting figure of the “lone footprint” that first terrifies Crusoe and has since consternated critics (why a single foot mark rather than a row of paired footprints?): that is, this singular first mark of a Carib on “Crusoe’s” island embodies the text’s half-erasure of the Carib’s presence and agency. Exactly because Crusoe depends so utterly on this presence, he represses it. Thus is chiasmatic intercorporeality submerged within Defoe’s text.

<sup>35</sup> For discussions of Equiano’s manipulation of English-language narrative conventions, see Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Samantha Manchester Earley, “Writing from the Center or the Margins? Olaudah Equiano’s Writing Life Reassessed,” *African Studies Review* 46, no. 3 (2003): 1–16; Douglas Anderson, “Division Below the Surface: Olaudah Equiano’s *Interesting Narrative*,” *Studies in Romanticism* 43 (2004): 439–60; Ross J. Pudaloff, “No Change without Purchase: Olaudah Equiano and the Economies of Self and Market,” *Early American Literature* 40, no. 3 (2005): 499–527; Frank Kelleter, “Ethnic Self-Dramatization and Technologies of Travel in *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself* (1789),” *Early American Literature* 39, no. 1 (2004): 67–

84; and Terry S. Bozeman, "Interstices, Hybridity, and Identity: Olaudah Equiano and the Discourse on the African Slave Trade," *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 36, no. 2 (2003): 61–70. For research on Equiano's use of ethnographic literary practices, see especially Geraldine Murphy, "Olaudah Equiano, Accidental Tourist," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 27, no. 4 (1994): 551–68; and also S. E. Ogude, "Facts into Fiction: Equiano's Narrative Reconsidered," *Research in African Literature* 13, no. 1 (1982): 31–43; Peter Kitson, "'Bales of Living Anguish': Representations of Race and the Slave in Romantic Writing," *ELH* 67, no. 2 (2000): 515–37; and Angelo Costanzo, *Surprising Narrative: Olaudah Equiano and the Beginnings of Black Autobiography* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1987). As I note in *Freedom's Empire*, critics have likewise placed Equiano's text within U.S., West African, and British expressive traditions, and more recently they have debated about Equiano's birthplace. On the latter topic, Ogude was among the first to suggest that Equiano fictionalized the account of his birth in Benin, and Vincent Carretta has suggested that he was born in North Carolina, although he confirms the factuality of Equiano's account of his adult life. See Vincent Carretta, *Equiano, the African: Biography of a Self-Made Man* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2005), xvi–xvii. For refutation of Carretta's claim, see John Bugg, "The Other Interesting Narrative: Olaudah Equiano's Public Book Tour," *PMLA* 121, no. 5 (2006): 1424–42. To my mind, Equiano's exact origins are less important than his migratory and multiple Atlantic position.

<sup>36</sup> Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 27.

<sup>37</sup> Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 7.

<sup>38</sup> Tanya Caldwell, "'Talking Too Much English': Languages of Economy and Politics in Equiano's *Interesting Narrative*," *Early American Literature* 34 (1999): 263–82.

<sup>39</sup> Equiano, *Interesting Narrative*, 89.

<sup>40</sup> For further examples, see *ibid.*, 86, 96–97, 121, 123, 126.

<sup>41</sup> I have addressed these concerns at length in chapter seven of Doyle, *Freedom's Empire*, 183–211. For the purposes of this essay I will note that some recent critics have emphasized the fact that Equiano becomes a "merchant" and does accrue some capital, including by way of the slave trade. But it is important to keep in mind that he remains a waged worker and laborer on ships, not a merchant along for the ride, and that he accrues goods or money on the side. Similarly, he works for slave traders and owners but never buys slaves for himself, as Caldwell implies when she says he becomes a slave trader. See Caldwell, "'Talking Too Much English,'" 271. He also implies that the sea life is risky for him but he depends on it for his livelihood: he has little choice but to work aboard slave ships. For the most critical account of Equiano, slavery, and Africa, see Marion Rust, "The Subaltern as Imperialist: Speaking of Olaudah Equiano," in *Passing and the Fictions of Identity*, ed. Elaine K. Ginsberg (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 21–36; and for more complicating analyses of his involvement in the Atlantic economy, see Michael Wiley, "Consuming Africa: Geography and Identity in Olaudah Equiano's *Interesting Narrative*," *Studies in Romanticism* 44 (2005): 165–79; Bozeman, "Interstices, Hybridity, and Identity"; Anderson, "Division Below the Surface"; and

especially Pudaloff, “No Change without Purchase.” See *Freedom’s Empire* for a fuller citation of sources on Equiano and trade.

<sup>42</sup> For a related but more general discussion of the sea as the setting for Equiano’s crises, see Janelle Collins, “Passage to Slavery, Passage to Freedom: Olaudah Equiano and the Sea,” *NOVEL* 39, no. 1 (2005): 209–23. William Boelhower gives passing rhetorical attention to the “politically turbulent and storm-swept waters of the Atlantic” as the “field of struggles” through which Equiano moves. See Boelhower, “‘I’ll Teach You How to Flow’: On Figuring Out Atlantic Studies,” *Atlantic Studies* 1, no. 1 (2004): 39, 32.

<sup>43</sup> Equiano, *Interesting Narrative*, 88.

<sup>44</sup> For my discussion of this trope in novels and memoirs from the seventeenth to twentieth centuries, see Doyle, *Freedom’s Empire*, 6–11. I understand it as an expression of the existential and identity crisis experienced by the many Atlantic subjects who, in crossing over, are at once deracinated and re-racialized, undone and remade.

<sup>45</sup> Equiano, *Interesting Narrative*, 113.

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