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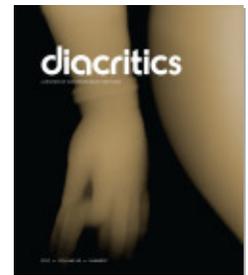
Hegel, Liberia

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# HEGEL, LIBERIA

A REVIEW OF

**SUSAN BUCK-MORSS**. *HEGEL, HAITI, AND UNIVERSAL HISTORY* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009).

DAVID KAZANJIAN

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— Samson Ceasar, letter to Henry R. Westfall, June 2, 1834

Starting from the Subject as though this were a permanent ground, [the speculative sentence] finds that, since the Predicate is really the Substance, the Subject has passed over in to the Predicate, and, by this very fact, has been upheaved.

— G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 1807

In the first part of *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History*, Susan Buck-Morss makes a powerful case for the debt Hegel's theoretical formulations on speculative knowledge owe to the Haitian Revolution.<sup>1</sup> By carefully recovering a long-neglected intellectual history, she shows how “the idea for the dialectic of lordship and bondage came to Hegel in Jena in the years 1803–5 from reading the press” (49), especially the German-language paper *Minerva*, which extensively covered events in Haiti between 1804 and 1805. Buck-Morss then asks a consequential question: “Why is it of more than arcane interest to retrieve from oblivion this fragment of history, the truth of which has managed to slip away from us? There are many possible answers . . .” (74). I interrupt this quotation mid-sentence because it brings us to the threshold of a decision anyone who is involved in archival research must make, and does make, though not always with Buck-Morss's salutary acknowledgment of the question itself. There are indeed “many possible answers” to the question of what to do with our recovered archives, and though Buck-Morss will offer and elaborate one quite specific answer in the rest of her book—an answer I will be substantially critical of in what follows—she nonetheless precisely marks this moment of decision as a moment of possibility.

In this essay I suggest that an under-examined archive from the black Atlantic opens up a possibility that Buck-Morss does not consider: that the most seemingly quotidian and apparently concrete historical moments can offer deeply theoretical and profoundly speculative reflections on freedom. The archive of letters written by black American settler-colonists in colonial Liberia to their family, friends, and former masters during the early to mid-nineteenth century looks, by all accounts, like an empirical record of everyday life. These letters are saturated with greetings and goodbyes, news of births and (much more often) of deaths, requests for food and supplies, and descriptions of daily events. Consequently, they tempt us to read them according to protocols that are common in new social history and social theory, in which such documents offer the raw material for historical recovery and theoretical reconstruction. However, such protocols foreclose the possibility of reading these letters as theoretical treatises in their own right, in the root sense of the word “theoretical,” the sense of contemplation or speculation, as in “beholding a spectacle.”<sup>2</sup> Even further, such protocols foreclose the possibility of reading these letters *alongside*—rather than as a source or example of—the texts that are traditionally recognized as the period's most important works of philosophy and political theory.

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These Liberian letters can be read to encounter, interrupt, and improvise, appositionally, the speculative knowledge Hegel himself also theorized.

Taking inspiration from the encounter Buck-Morss stages between Hegel and Haiti, in which she argues that Hegel derives an overly abstract theory of freedom from the “raw” and “concrete” reality of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Haitian freedom struggles, I stage a more appositional encounter between Hegel and Liberia. In letters to their former masters, I contend, ex-slaves who had been freed from servitude in the United States on the condition that they be deported to Liberia speculate about the very meaning of freedom. Although not directly related to Hegel through the kind of coordinated intellectual history Buck-Morss establishes—“Hegel *and* Haiti”<sup>3</sup>—these Liberian letters can be read to encounter, interrupt, and improvise, appositionally, the speculative knowledge Hegel himself also

theorized in the early nineteenth century: “Hegel, Liberia.” Such a reading can only materialize, however, if we resist the temptation to reduce these letters to the descriptive, even when such a reduction takes the form (as it does for Buck-Morss) of a celebration of the so-called raw and concrete over and against the putatively abstract.

#### >> HEGEL AND HAITI

Returning to the quotation from *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History* that I interrupted mid-sentence, consider Buck-Morss’s answer to her own question: “There are many possible answers, but one is surely the potential for rescuing the idea of universal human history from the uses to which white domination has put it” (74). Crucially, her “rescue” of “the idea of universal human history” involves “juxtaposing” what she calls “Hegel’s moment of clarity of thought” to what she calls “realities,” “moments of clarity in action,” and “the concrete meaning of freedom” supplied by Afro-diasporic histories like the Haitian Revolution (75). The latter, she insists, are more “actual,” “real,” “historical,” “visible,” “realized,” and—her strongest claim—“universal” than Hegel’s speculative thought; as Buck-Morss puts it, “The actual and successful revolution of Caribbean slaves against their masters is the moment when the dialectical logic of recognition becomes visible as the thematics of world history, the story of the universal realization of freedom. . . . Theory and reality converged at this historical moment. Or, to put it in Hegelian language, the rational—freedom—became real” (59–60). By contrast, she claims, Hegel suppresses the actual in his zeal for philosophy, whose universality in turn rings as hollow as an empty shell. Writes Buck-Morss in part two of *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History*:

Hegel achieved glimpses of a global perspective, viewing the uprising of the slaves of Saint-Dominique as a manifestation of universal freedom, the realization of which he saw as the very structure and meaning of history. Once Hegel had grasped this meaning, however, he demonstrated little patience with the mere matter of empirical history, dismissing it as “lazy existence” (*faule Existenz*). Concept took precedence over content, and attention to histori-

cal facts was overwhelmed by Hegel's enthusiasm for the philosophical system itself. (115)

Buck-Morss goes on to say that Hegel's "enthusiasm" for this "system" and his dismissal of the empirical lead directly—without delay, without intermediate steps, without any of the many possibilities she allows the work of recovering and interpreting lost or forgotten archives—to the Eurocentric racism Hegel famously serves up in his *Philosophy of History*. Thus, whereas there are "many possible answers" to the question of what to do with the archives contemporary historians recover from and for Atlantic history, there is only one possible answer to the question of what Hegel's speculative philosophy means:

While few today would define themselves as Hegelian, his assumptions are still widely shared. Violent political action determines what matters in the collective history of humanity. The idea of progress justifies the imposition of democracy on others as a military project. The division of humanity into advanced, civilized peoples and those who are backward and barbaric has not been abandoned. The purportedly secular schema of universal history as one path, forged by the developed (Christian) nations, which the whole world is destined to follow, is still ingrained in Western political discourse. Cultural racism has not been overcome. (118)

This is Hegel's inalterable route. We can take another, Buck-Morss explains, by opting for *Haiti's Hegel* and its revolutionary facticity over and against *Hegel's Haiti* and its abstract, philosophical universality. Buck-Morss's sharp juxtaposition between Hegel's "thought" and Haiti's "action" thus makes speculative thinking the impoverished purview of the great philosopher and Haiti's archived actions at once more rich and more clear, more real and more actual than such thinking.

This juxtaposition is repeatedly reinforced in *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History* by a figure for Haitian action that we have already encountered, and that has become a commonplace in contemporary social theory: the "concrete." Consider these passages scattered throughout the text: "Universal history refers more to method than content. It is an orientation, a philosophical reflection grounded in *concrete* material" (x); "Hegel's philosophical system may climb to abstract levels (a student who heard his early lectures at Jena claimed he 'could make absolutely nothing of them, had no idea what was being discussed, ducks or geese'), but his texts are full of the kind of historically *concrete* detail that theorists with a materialist bent like myself find particularly appealing" (6); "the truly productive, 'universal' experience of reading Hegel is not through a summary of the total and totalizing system, but through the liberation that one's own imagination can achieve by encountering dialectical thinking in its most *concrete* exemplification" (16); "What if every time that the consciousness of individuals surpassed the confines of present constellations of power in perceiving the *concrete* meaning of freedom, this were valued as a moment, however transitory, of the realization of absolute spirit?" (75; all emphases added). "Concrete" has many synonyms in *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History*: "everyday experience" (7), "practice" (12), "historical context" (34), "facts" (40), "real slaves revolting successfully against real masters" (50), "historical realities" (52), "historical events" (55), "literal reference" (56), "the actual and successful revolution of Caribbean slaves against their masters" (59), "revolutionary radicalism" (67) "lived ex-

perience” (103). But there is a curious paradox in the fact that, for Buck-Morss, such apparently empirical terms need to be supplemented by a figure like the “concrete.” Buck-Morss draws on the work of Pierre-Franklin Tavares and Jacques D’Hondt to suggest that Hegel’s involvement with Freemasonry led him to suppress all references to the “concrete” in an effort to dissimulate his participation in a secret society with revolutionary ideals (17). “Freemasonry is a part of our story at every turn,” Buck-Morss writes in reference to D’Hondt’s work (62); I want to suggest that a certain, unacknowledged masonry figures in Buck-Morss’s own text.

In *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History*, Haitian action promises to save history from mere thought, to teach us, in effect, a freedom set in stone. But what does it mean to set freedom in stone? “Concrete” derives in part from the Latin adjective *concretus*, meaning “compact,” and the Latin infinitive *concrecere*, meaning “to grow together,” “to harden,”

“to thicken,” “to condense,” “to curdle,” “to stiffen,” “to congeal.” In the hands of seventeenth-, eighteenth-, and nineteenth-century logicians and grammarians, the English term “concrete” often referred to a word directly denoting a quality, as opposed to a word abstractly denoting the idea of a quality; the *Oxford English Dictionary* gives the example of “white,” a concrete term, as opposed to “whiteness,” an abstract term. However, during this pe-

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riod “concrete” was increasingly used more generally to mean “things” as opposed to “qualities,” “states,” or “actions,” such that the active quality of the term following from its Latin origins—the sense in which it marked a *process* by which disparate and fluid elements come together—was deemphasized in favor of an emphasis on the result of such a process, the “solid” outcome. This led logicians and grammarians eventually to abandon the term “concrete” altogether as, paradoxically, too general and abstract. The modern English use of the term to refer to a construction material carries with it this tension between a process of coming together and a resultant solid material: concrete is produced by a chemical admixture in which fine and coarse aggregates like sand or gravel combine with, among various other elements, water and the binding agent cement, itself a mixture of various oxides. When Buck-Morss uses the figure “concrete” to mean irreducibly real and potentially universal “things,” “events,” or “facts,” she occludes the question of how any given “concrete” element has “grown together.” That is, when she privileges Haitian “reality” over Hegelian “abstraction” she sets Haitian freedom in stone without accounting for the *accretion* or *concrecence*—which is to say the processes of combination or the agents of agglutination—of that very freedom.<sup>4</sup>

At times in *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History*, Buck-Morss does reject “strict, positivist empiricism . . . because facts without concepts are meaningless” (110), and claims “that facts are important not as data with fixed meanings, but as connective pathways

that can continue to surprise us. Facts should inspire imagination rather than tying it down” (13–14). In this sense, such facts are like the sand or gravel of concrete: apparently dispersed and disorganized elements that can take many potential forms once they are connected or combined with imagination; which is to say, these forms are like the “porous”—a term Buck-Morss also frequently invokes—channels and pockets within set concrete.<sup>5</sup> So to rescue universal history, to concretize dialectical thinking, to set freedom in stone, she admits, we need concepts like imagination added to the mix, especially if we are “to reimagine universal history out of bounds of exclusionary conceptual frames” (110). As *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History* unfolds, Buck-Morss gives an increasingly specific prescription for how to mix “concepts” with “facts”—how, that is “to reimagine universal history,” to set freedom in stone.

This prescription is most evident in two crucial passages late in her text. Consider the first passage:

It is in the discontinuities of history that people whose culture has been strained to the breaking point give expression to a humanity that goes beyond cultural limits. And it is in our empathic identification with this raw, free, and vulnerable state, that we have a chance of understanding what they say. Common humanity exists in spite of culture and its differences. A person’s nonidentity with the collective allows for subterranean solidarities that have a chance of appealing to universal, moral sentiment, the source today of enthusiasm and hope. (133)

And then, consider the second passage:

The politics of scholarship I am suggesting is neutrality, but not of the nonpartisan, “truth is in the middle” sort; rather, it is a *radical* neutrality that insists on the *porosity* of the space between enemy sides, a space contested and precarious, to be sure, but free enough for the idea of humanity to remain in view. Between uniformity and indeterminacy of historical meaning, there is a dialectical encounter with the past. In extending the boundaries of our moral imagination, we need to see a historical space before we can explore it. (150)

Here, the real historical event is not the self-evident and irreducible actualization of freedom—not “real slaves revolting successfully against real masters” as such—as it had seemed earlier in *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History*, but rather the raw material of freedom, its sand or gravel. How does this raw material become concrete? These passages are so saturated in the figurative that they provide both some of the most fecund and some of the most inscrutable occasions of Buck-Morss’s text. We might say that the historian *mixes* “universal, moral sentiment” and “the idea of humanity,” prepared formally and in advance, with Haiti’s “raw, free, and vulnerable state.” Or perhaps we ought to say that in certain, special instances the historical actors themselves *distill* (“give expression to”) “universal, moral sentiment” and “the idea of humanity” out of the “raw, free, and vulnerable state” in which they are engulfed, and that the historian’s theoretical work consists in a certain “empathic identification with,” which is also a certain “see[ing],” of that distillation.

Either way, and granting the potentially productive equivocations of these formu-

lations, Buck-Morss's final admixture or distillation is strikingly Hegelian in a certain sense: the raw, free, and vulnerable facts have combined with the formal and secure concepts "universal, moral sentiment" and "the idea of humanity" to generate the promise of freedom's future. Has Haiti—which in the first part of *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History* was so clearly juxtaposed to Hegel, like content to form, like the actual to the abstract—become Hegel's Haiti once again? Has the opposition between Hegel and Haiti been overcome, the space between them filled dialectically, forming a solid mass in the form of a secure telos? No doubt there are still differences between Hegel and Haiti, small voids and gaps that will allow Buck-Morss's admixture to maintain its "porosity," to remain susceptible to splitting or cracking, and thus to allow for the kind of sharp distinctions between Hegel and Haiti that Buck-Morss insists upon throughout *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History*. But these differences become increasingly difficult to discern. I want to suggest that we would have to work hard indeed rigorously to distinguish this radically neutral admixture of universal, moral sentiment with the raw and free vulnerability of Haitian facticity from the very Hegelianism Buck-Morss decries.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, there is one more, crucial ingredient to *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History's* admixture, an ingredient that also resembles a certain Hegelianism, an ingredient that brings Buck-Morss's fortified distinction between Hegel and Haiti well beyond the point of collapse. Strikingly, and with the quick work of a couple of paragraphs, she points out that freedom ultimately failed to set in Haiti when it became "unambiguously ethno-national"; that is—and these are my words—when it got too black. Soon after the revolution—and these are Buck-Morss's words—Haiti gave up on the requisite "common humanity" in favor of "black dignity and black power," which allowed "the contribution to the cause of universal humanity that emerged in this event to slip from view" (146–47). As with Hegel's infamous *Philosophy of History*, a too-visible, too-vigorous, too-particularized blackness here names the limit of, and the condition of impossibility for, universal freedom.<sup>6</sup> Sibylle Fischer offers a powerful counterpoint to Buck-Morss's argument here, by attending to the political performativity of the claim to blackness in the Haitian Constitution of 1805:

Disrupting any biologicistic or racist expectations, they make "black" a mere implication of being Haitian and thus a political rather than a biological category. . . . The very act of calling all Haitians black, regardless of their phenotype, would for a long time be recognized as a radical break from the entrenched practice of distinguishing, at the very least, between mulattoes, blacks, and whites. It is a form of violent rupture that is not consummated in the singular act of destruction. Instead, in the repetition of speech, the memory of a struggle remains alive, as well as a hope for a different future.

Through the act of renaming, the constitution of 1805 thus performs one of the most troubling paradoxes of modern universalist politics—the paradox that the universal is typically derived through a generalization of one of the particulars. Calling all Haitians, regardless of skin color, black is a gesture like calling all people, regardless of their sex, women: it both asserts egalitarian and universalist institutions and puts them to a test by using the previously subordinated term of the opposition as the universal term.<sup>7</sup>

The political performativity of the paradox Fischer foregrounds is less resolutely dialectical than either the Hegelianism Buck-Morss criticizes or the universalism she herself proffers as a desirable alternative to the “unambiguously ethno-national.” Repetition with a difference, ongoing struggle over the terms of life, and the invocation of an open-ended, future anteriority characterize Fischer’s interpretation of political blackness.

By the end of *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History*, Hegel emerges as a thinker of a salutary but too-abstract concept of universal history that the historian ought to find fully realized, or concretized, in historical events understood as empirical realizations of the too-abstract concept. For Buck-Morss, it is the *finding* of that realization that is the task of a universal historian. That is, the historian identifies raw if vulnerable acts of freedom, determines whether those acts have been properly mixed with the concepts of “universal, moral sentiment” or “the idea of humanity,” and then evaluates the extent to which that admixture has set freedom in stone—without, as it were, becoming too colored. Thus, historical events are understood as irreducibly real and actual, raw and potent. They are natural resources that, when properly universalized, can overcome overly particularized cultural collectives, be they French-colonial or black “ethno-nationalist.”

How can we not hear the rumblings of January 12, 2010 in all this talk of bringing “universal moral sentiment” to the raw vulnerability of the Haitian concrete? I am hesitant to link my reading of *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History* too closely to the overwhelming brutality and complexity of that catastrophic day and all the days since that day, a brutality Buck-Morss herself has spoken of eloquently in many public forums. And yet, that day and all the days since that day are also deeply connected to the now-too-often-ignored days and months and years that led up to January 12, days and months and years that helped to create the earthquake itself by establishing both the conditions that would be so violently shaken

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and the possibilities for which so many Haitians are struggling today. And so, in an act of Benjaminian presentism, which is also to say an act of Benjaminian historical materialism, in which one thinks the past in light of a current moment of danger, imagine with me what it would mean to approach the earthquake in Haiti as *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History* urges us to approach the Haitian Revolution. Imagine the event of January 12 as a raw and vulnerable event, an instance of concrete facticity to which the critic must add, or in which the critic must find, “universal moral sentiment” and “the idea of humanity” in order for any free future to be culled from it. Imagine also this critic insisting that “universal moral sentiment” and “the idea of humanity” must reject something called “black dignity and black power,” as well as something called “unambiguous ethno-nationalism,” as threats to the universal. How far would we then be from the over-familiar picture we have come to face, in which Haitians themselves are to be fed and housed but contained and controlled, as subjects at once vulnerable and raw, lest they

intrude upon the grand plans for a new Haiti being drawn up by international agencies that unabashedly assume the position of “universal moral sentiment”?<sup>8</sup>

In the face of our current moment of danger, Buck-Morss’s “universal” risks taking the shape of international organizations like the Interim Haiti Reconstruction Commission. In turn, that “universal” risks setting itself against organizations like UNNOH (l’Union nationale des normaliens d’Haïti), the Haitian teachers’ union, which on March 24, 2010 called for universal, free education in Haiti conducted “in Creole, the language spoken by all Haitians,” as well as an international forum that could “offer analysis and criticism of the plan of reconstruction worked out by the Haitian government and the international community without the participation of the Haitian people, and could offer a new proposal.”<sup>9</sup> Are the invocation of Creole and the challenge to international reconstruction agencies insufficiently “universal”? When UNNOH held a funeral march for Jean Filbert Louis—a math teacher who was reportedly shot by police at a demonstration on October 8, 2010—and the marchers reportedly confronted French and Brazilian U.N. troops with the chant, “Down with Minustah [the U.N. Stabilization Mission in Haiti]! Down with the occupation! The land of Dessalines does not belong to them! They must leave!” we must ask whether Haitians were betraying the universal or restaging its paradoxical future. Thought in this context, Buck-Morss’s “universal moral sentiment” starts to sound like something Louis Althusser once called “the international of decent feelings,” a global grand plan whose universal morality ends up functioning as an alibi for local disenfranchisement and capital expansion.<sup>10</sup> The acts and unanticipated, improvised consequences of groups like UNNOH, as speculative and ethno-national as they might seem from the perspective of “universal moral sentiment,” ought not, I think, be dismissed in the name of anything we could confidently call concrete freedom.

What if we returned, then, to the moment of possibility and decision Buck-Morss so effectively offered us in the wake of her singular efforts to recover Haiti from the intellectual history of Hegel: recalling the passage from *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History* with which I began, “why is it of more than arcane interest to retrieve from oblivion this fragment of history, the truth of which has managed to slip away from us? There are many possible answers” (74). What if one *other* answer were this: fragments of history, like the Haitian fragments Buck-Morss culls from surprisingly transatlantic texts like the German-language journal *Minerva* Hegel was fond of reading, are not simply the vulnerable, empirical bearers of raw, real, and actual struggles for universal freedom from which philosophers like Hegel cull bad speculative abstractions and in which we, as historians or critics, can see a good and secure universal humanity that need not slip into particularisms like “black power and black dignity.” Nor, as David Scott has argued, are such fragments solely populated by recognizably revolutionary heroes setting out to seize the state or even to reform political structures, until they tragically fail to live up to their heroic promise to redeem the universal and, consequently, bring about our disillusioned renunciations.<sup>11</sup> Rather, what would it mean to read such fragments as speculative encounters with freedom in their own right? What if, in and through all their apparently descriptive detail, such fragments could be said to theorize? How would we read for

such speculation, such theoretical work in and through what we are so adept at finding and knowing as the empirical, the raw, the concrete? And how might such a reading lead us to *re-read* Hegel's own speculative thinking, as well as Buck-Morss's apparently secure distinction between the actual or "concrete" and the abstract?

In what follows, I would like to show how largely forgotten fragments from another part of the black Atlantic—letters from black settler-colonists in colonial Liberia—can be read as speculative encounters with freedom. By shifting from Haiti to Liberia, I do not mean to suggest an interchangeability of countries and continents within a homogeneous Black Atlantic. Rather, I hope to interrupt the recent tendency (especially prominent in my primary field of American Studies) to privilege nineteenth-century Haiti because of its recognizably revolutionary history of slave revolt, with a less-heralded nineteenth-century history of less recognizably heroic Jubilee. I would like to show how epistolary fragments from Liberia—rather than functioning as raw, concrete sources for Hegel's own, impoverished speculative knowledge—collide, appositionally, with Hegel's texts, sparking unorthodox understandings of putatively Hegelian concepts: speculation, bondage, lordship, and freedom. Although such a reading does not *refute* the historicist methods Buck-Morss uses so effectively, it nonetheless requires us to leave their comforts aside. I hope to show how this other reading practice can both supplement and function as a productive *agon* for those more familiar historicisms.

Although such a reading does not refute the historicist methods Buck-Morss uses so effectively, it nonetheless requires us to leave their comforts aside.

>> "WHEN THEY COME HERE THEY FEEL SO FREE"

On January 1, 1834, Samson Ceasar arrived in Monrovia, Liberia, from Norfolk, Virginia after a voyage of fifty-six days on the ship *Jupiter*.<sup>12</sup> Formerly enslaved in what is now West Virginia, Ceasar was freed by his master, Henry F. Westfall, on the condition that he leave the United States for Liberia. On June 2, in one of the many letters he sent from the Liberian capital to his former master, Ceasar wrote:

I must Say that I am afraid that our Country never will improve as it ort untill the people in the united States keep their Slaves that they have raised as dum as horses at home and Send those here who will be A help to improve the Country[.] [A]s for Virginia as far as my knowl-  
edg extends I think She has Sent out the most Stupid Set of people in the place[.] [W]hile  
they have them their the cow hide is hardly ever off of their backs and when they come here  
they feel So free that they walk about from morning till evening with out doing one Stroke  
of work[.] [B]y those means they becom to Sufer[.] [P]eople in the United States ort to have  
more regard for Liberia than to Send Such people here[.]<sup>13</sup>

Cesar seems to be offering an extremely unforgiving account of his fellow, formerly enslaved immigrants in the name of an injunction to work harder. From this perspective, he appears to us either as an aspiring colonial elite, an inheritor and advocate of a general Puritan work ethic, or an avatar of some future Liberian “talented tenth.” As a result, he seemingly fails to embody either the spirit of Haiti’s revolutionaries or the universality of Buck-Morss’s “moral sentiment.”

If we read further, however, we notice that Cesar also criticizes “a grate many from North Carlina who are dregs in the place,” and that he celebrates “the most enterprising men that we have here[, who are] from Baltimo[re] and Charle[s]ton.” Reading these passages historically, we might argue that Cesar is positing a distinction between black settlers from rural and urban areas in the United States, and that he is quickly comprehending, albeit in judgmental terms, a key economic feature of Liberia’s first few years as a colony: that free and formerly enslaved rural blacks who immigrated with agricultural skills fared much less well in an unfamiliar climate on unfamiliar soil than those who came from urban areas like Baltimore and Charleston with merchant or trade skills.<sup>14</sup> As one of those quotidian subjects whom new social history has long culled from documents like letters and ship manifests, Cesar here appears to us as an active historical agent who is consciously aware of his society even as he attempts to intervene in it politically. From this perspective, Cesar’s letter offers a description of the material—we might even say concrete—conditions faced by black settlers in Liberia. We, in turn, could draw on this description to theorize about the social consequences of those conditions. We might conclude, for instance, that the formerly enslaved settlers lacked a sufficiently developed set of economic or political skills to actualize their desire for freedom. Or we might argue that overly particularized identities—“formerly enslaved,” or “American,” or “African-American”—led some settlers into conflict both with native West Africans, whose land they were appropriating, and with other, more universally minded settlers who more fully understood how to establish a modern nation-state of formally free citizen-subjects.<sup>15</sup>

None of these interpretations would be unreasonable, and some might be empirically correct. However, they all require that we set Cesar’s letter in stone—that we read it as a mere description of “concrete” reality from which we, in turn, can theorize. But what if we read Cesar’s letter as doing theoretical work of its own? How would such a reading proceed? We might begin by noticing that Cesar writes with great concern for the equivocal relationship between slavery and freedom—a relationship that the Liberia project was meant to make utterly clear—as well as with deep care for thinking through the potent joy and the potential suffering of those living that equivocation. When he claims that, “while they have them their the cow hide is hardly ever off of their backs,” he decries the brutality of the slavemaster’s treatment of the enslaved in the United States. When he continues with the words, “and when they come here they feal So free that they walk about from morning till evening with out doing one Stroke of work,” he depicts a certain quotidian texture of Jubilee, a kind of speculative living on the streets of Monrovia, in which “feal[ing] So free” has an open-ended set of potential meanings ranging,

for instance, from the refusal to work, to ecstatic celebration, to experimentation with mobility, to the reclamation of the rhythms of time itself. By linking these two utterances with a coordinating conjunction—“while they have them their the cow hide is hardly ever off of their backs *and* when they come here they feal So free”—Ceasar acknowledges that slavery and freedom, the “cow hide” and “feal[ing] So free,” are intimates of a sort: that they are recursively and differentially related to each other. Consequently, when he offers the stunning conclusion “by those means they becom to Sufer;” he amplifies an echo of the unfreedom of the “cow hide” in the midst of the new colony’s feeling of freedom. Indeed, the phrase “one Stroke of work” itself echoes the action of the cowhide when it strokes the enslaved. Having left behind the brutal rituals of embodied suffering under slavery, many immigrants to Liberia apparently improvised (“by those means”) with a freedom that exceeded any secure notion of being free (“So free”). Consequently, they “become to suffer” anew: which is not to say simply that suffering falls upon them from the outside, as it would upon a passive subject, but rather that they come to or arrive at sufferance, that they betake of sufferance, even that sufferance comes to suit them, without however it having been an aim or a desire or a goal. In Ceasar’s representation of rural Virginian and North Carolinian immigrants becoming to suffer for feeling so free, then, we can detect an unstable boundary and an equivocal relationship between unfreedom and freedom, between the cowhide under chattel slavery in the United States and the feeling of freedom under the colonial conditions of Liberia—an equivocation upon which he sets out to speculate over the course of a two-year correspondence with his former master, Henry F. Westfall.

Indeed, what better figure for this equivocal relationship is there than Ceasar’s letters themselves, six of which are known to have survived. All were written between 1834 and 1836, and all but one were written to Westfall, whom he sometimes addresses as “Dear Sir” and other times as “Dear Friend,” and who apparently rarely replied; as Ceasar complained in a letter from March 5, 1835: “I want to in form you that I hav received but two letters from you since I landed I hav written as many as a dozen to you you have no excuse for not writing.” Ceasar’s epistolary effort to write of Liberia to the very enslaver who emancipated and deported him stages a thinking of freedom that is risky as well as insistently and unevenly recursive. That is, firstly, the letters themselves circulate—without any guarantee of arrival or response—between Liberia and the United States; and secondly, in those letters Ceasar writes repeatedly of the equivocal relationship between freedom and unfreedom, as we saw in the June 2 letter, which cycles from slavery, to “fealing So free,” to renewed sufferance. This thinking of freedom is rarely teleological, either in the sense of a linear development or a strict dialectic. That is, Ceasar does not simply represent Liberian freedom as underdeveloped, as a mere threshold to be crossed once proper work habits and governmental systems are established, although he does at times make these very claims in qualified terms. He writes, for instance, “that all that is wanting [in Liberia] is industry and good management and then we Shall be independent and can enjoy the comforts of life,” although he himself practices a missionary life that eschews economic industry and worldly comfort: “the world has not got my hart yet and

I hope by help of god that it never will get the advantage of me for there is nothing in it worthy of our affection” (June 2, 1834). Alongside this occasional and qualified, developmentalist accounts of Liberian freedom, Ceasar also poses a more complex problem related to freedom: the settler-colonists (including, as we will see, even himself) who “becom to Sufer” in fact feel freedom too deeply rather than not enough: “they feal *So* free.” He thus suggests that black Americans who went to Liberia in its first few decades lived lives on the brink, on the edge, at the margin, or on the very verge of a life at once known and unknown, at once too close to slavery and too free. On the brink, Ceasar suggests to us, these settler-colonists improvised with freedom at great risk. But how, exactly, did they improvise?<sup>16</sup>

Ceasar repeatedly invokes this sense of living improvisationally when he reflects on the relationship between his enslaved life in the United States and his emancipated life in Liberia. In the first paragraph of the earliest of his extant letters, written on February 7, 1834 to a Mr. David S. Haselden, Ceasar takes stock of his recent arrival in Monrovia after his fifty-six-day voyage during which he “was very Sick”:

I hav Seen Agreate manys things Since I left home that I never would of Seen in Buchannon it urengs to mind the words of Solomon that the eye is not satisfide with Seeing nor the eare with hearing I must Say that I am as well pleased as I expeced to be in Liberia we hav most all had the fever and hav lost four of our number one woman about Seventy five two Children under twelve all So the Rev Mr Rigt one of our misenarys lost his wife and we may Say she is aloss to africa

In this passage, Ceasar wonders at the world outside Buchannon—the town in Lewis County, Virginia, where he lived while enslaved—with both satisfaction and regret.<sup>17</sup> As his sentences flow seamlessly from “I am as well pleased as I expeced to be in Liberia” to “we hav most all had the fever and hav lost four of our number,” he links pleasure and loss in a kind of ongoing encounter. That encounter intensifies when he concludes this letter with an imagined return to the very slavery he left behind in Buchannon: “giv my respects to all inqueiring friends if god Spares me I want to come to america in afew years write to me as often as possble by So doing you will oblige your friend.” Faced with “Agregate many things” he had neither seen nor heard before, including a certain pleasure as well as no small amount of death, Ceasar delimits his formally free life in Liberia by imagining a return to the land of his enslavement. What kind of imagined delimitation is this?

Ceasar’s reference to “the words of Solomon,” which come from Ecclesiastes 1:8, is telling here. Dating from the third century BCE, Ecclesiastes depicts “the son of David, king in Jerusalem” (widely accepted to be Solomon) as a preacher or, perhaps, a teacher who speculates about the meaning of life as well as the possibilities for leading a good life.<sup>18</sup> Initially, Ecclesiastes seems to decry the repetitive meaninglessness of life on earth, leading many to read this book as a dismissal of earthly life in favor of the spiritual. The first words of the book in the King James Version read: “The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities;

all is vanity. What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun? One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever” (Eccl. 1:1-4). However, the book later contemplates a pleasure-seeking life in the face of such meaninglessness, leading some to see in Ecclesiastes an Epicurean celebration of the carnal.<sup>19</sup> Centuries of Jewish and Christian scholarly debates over how to read this book equivocate between these two readings.<sup>20</sup>

The full verse of Ecclesiastes 1:8 embodies this equivocation. It reads as follows (again in the King James Version): “All things are full of labour; man cannot utter it: the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.” Other translations of the verse shade the meaning differently. For instance, the Darby English Bible (1890) reads “All things are full of toil; none can express it. The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing”; the Basic Bible in English (1949) translation reads, “All things are full of weariness; man may not give their story: the eye has never enough of its seeing, or the ear of its hearing”; and the New International Version (1978) reads, “All things are wearisome, more than one can say. The eye never has enough of seeing, nor the ear its fill of hearing.” Does the verse suggest that no matter how much “man” sees or hears—and even though “all things are full of labour,” “toil,” or “weariness”—“man” still seeks the new? Or does it rather imply that such seeking is impossible for “man” to “utter” given his experience with the relentless limit of “labour,” “toil,” or “weariness”?

Caesar’s use of the passage elaborates this equivocation. On the one hand, he seems to stress a certain desire for the new by citing just the part of the verse that invokes the wonders of the world (“the eye is not satisfide with Seeing nor the eare with hearing”) and by introducing that citation with an appreciation of his “pleasure” in experiencing “A great manys things” outside Buchannon. Yet by immediately moving to an account of those who have succumbed to “the fever,” as so many settlers did in Liberia, he seems acutely aware of the very incessant passing away of generation after generation from which Ecclesiastes itself apparently deduces the vanity of life on earth.<sup>21</sup> His concluding desire to return to the United States, in turn, would seem to delimit both the potency of the unknown world outside Buchannon and the formal freedoms of emancipation in Liberia in favor of the worldly familiarity of family and friends.

Throughout his six letters, Ceasar repeatedly couples this sense of wonder at the wider world both with melancholy remembrances of all he has left or lost and with imaginative returns to the United States. In an April 1, 1834 letter to Westfall, he writes,

Give my love to your wife and motherlaw tell them to pray for me I often think of you all giv my love to Simon and Harison and to Bety tell them that I want them to have good education and good Religion Against<sup>22</sup> I come to America Giv my lov to your Father and Step mother tell them I often think of them Tell them to pray for me Giv my love to the Boys and tell them if they ever want to see any thing to leave Buchannon giv my love to all the Children to Philip Reger with all his family and to Mr. Haselden and Goff and all inquireing friends

With the phrase “Against I come to America,” Ceasar at once invokes and negates the possibility of his return. Indeed, this letter itself—which is full of advice and salutations

to missed family and friends—functions prosthetically, virtually delivering him to Buchannon and then negating that return by dismissing Buchannon as utterly devoid of “any thing” worth seeing. Ceasar’s June 2, 1834 letter to Westfall echoes this double gesture, expressing both his satisfaction with the world outside Buchannon and a certain longing for fond conversations with his master: “There is not much Sickness in Liberia at this time god Still preserves our lives time would fail with me to tell all that I have Seen and heard Since I left Buchannon I often think about you the thousands of miles apart we have had Seet intercourse together on Buchannon and I feal in hopes if god Spares us we will See each other in the flesh.” A few lines later he continues, “I want to get all the learning that I can for with out it we can do but little both in temperl and Spirituel matters your assistance to me will never be forgotten by me while I move on the globe as it respects my religious enjoyments I think I enjoy my Self as well as I ever have Since god Spoke peace to my Soul the more I See of the world the more I feal like Serving god.” In these passages, Ceasar both delimits and celebrates his movement from servitude to his new life, effectively recasting that movement as ongoing and recursive rather than teleological or linear. Consequently, although as we have seen Ceasar criticizes “the most Stupid Set of people” who have arrived in Liberia from Virginia—those “who feal So free that they walk about from morning till evening with out doing one Stroke of work” and who “by those means . . . becom to Sufer”—he himself risks sufferance through his

own mobile, improvised life as well as his imaginative, prosthetic returns. Certainly, he distinguishes between the “the most Stupid Set of people’s” refusal to work and his own labor of “Serving god.” And yet, because his own freedom-seeking movements “on the globe” lead him repeatedly

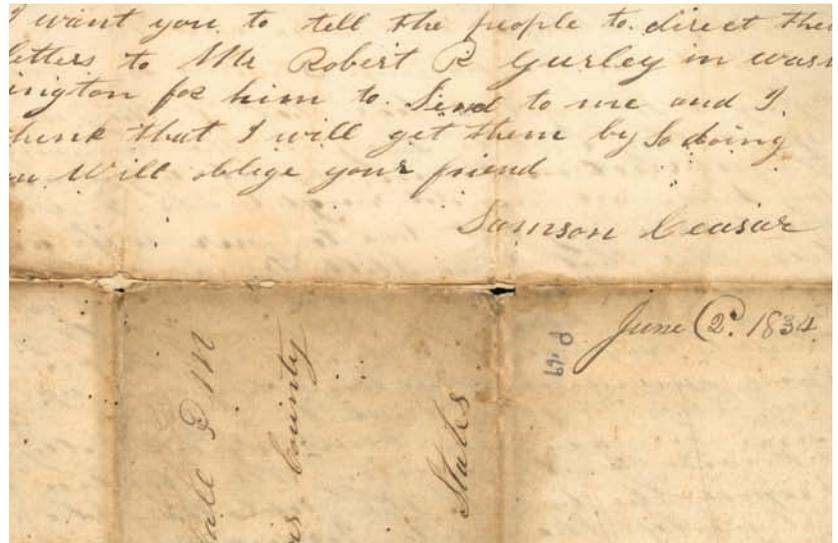
Sufferance haunts both kinds of mobility, making “work”—be it spiritual or earthly—seem a flimsy defense indeed.

to imagine a return to the land of his servitude, those movements cannot be rigorously separated from the movements of the immigrants who “feal So free that they walk about from morning til evening.” Sufferance haunts both kinds of mobility, making “work”—be it spiritual or earthly—seem a flimsy defense indeed.

Ceasar’s letters thus repeatedly invoke a recursive relationship between freedom and unfreedom. I have suggested that this recursivity delimits the formal freedom of emancipation in Liberia, and that it equivocates between a desire for the new (“Agreate many things,” “all that I have Seen and heard Since I left Buchannon,” “the eye is not satisfide with Seeing nor the eare with hearing,” “while I move on the globe,” “the more I See of the world the more I feal like Serving god”) and a longing for a past at once alive and dead (“Buchannon,” “America,” “the United States,” “Give my love to,” “the fever,” “aloss to africa,” “if god Spares us we will See each other in the flesh”). Consequently, Ceasar’s improvised freedom is not simply a telos toward which a willful subject directly or dialectically moves, nor is it simply a form that an individual acquires as property or right, nor is it the guaranteed outcome of proper behavior. Rather, this freedom is an ongoing, vertiginous encounter with the unknown that also continually risks a return to servi-

tude. Ceasar both reflects upon and enacts that risk by repeatedly returning—prosthethically, imaginatively—to the land of his servitude. His epistolary reflections speculate on freedom as itself a risky but irreducible component of any life we might call materially or concretely free.

One reads this speculative encounter with freedom in the very form of Ceasar’s letters. His neat, cursive words flow into even, straight lines of text that are precisely justified to both edges of the paper. Yet this careful crowding of words on a page is coupled with a strikingly breathless pace, for Ceasar almost never uses punctuation. In fact, at the beginning of this section I interpolated four periods into a passage from Ceasar’s June 2, 1834 letter to help organize my own interpretation and to aid the contemporary reader’s comprehension, but that interpolation also suppresses the temporality of Ceasar’s handwriting. If punctuation distinguishes sentence from sentence, main clauses from subordinate ones, and subjects from predicates, shaping language into narrative by providing the temporality of beginnings and ends, pauses and continuations, then Ceasar’s ceaseless, unpunctuated sentences offer a figure for, which is also to say a certain practice of, his ongoing, vertiginous, risky encounter with freedom. His sentences materially and rhetorically enact the very recursive freedom his letter speculates upon.



Samson Ceasar to Henry F. Westfall, June 2, 1834. Samson Ceasar, Letters to David S. Haselden and Henry F. Westfall, 1834–1835, Accession no. 10595, University of Virginia Library.

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This enactment strays far indeed from the materiality Buck-Morss calls “concrete.” Consequently, it also offers us a different lens on the Hegel whom Buck-Morss criticizes for privileging the abstract over the actual. She focuses her criticism of Hegel on the brief but perhaps most famous part of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the nine-page section entitled “Independence and Dependence of Self-Consciousness: Lordship and Bondage.”<sup>23</sup> For Buck-Morss, as for many others, the stakes of this section are clear: although Hegel never mentions what Buck-Morss calls “real slaves” (50), he does portray what he calls a “life-and-death struggle” (114) for recognition between two unequal moments, aspects, or shapes of self-consciousness: the lord and the bondsman. In the *Phenomenology*, the bondsman emerges from this struggle with a certain “freedom of self-consciousness” (119–38), whereas the lord remains locked in a futile dependence on the recognition of the bondsman. Of the lord, Hegel writes,

the object in which the lord has achieved his lordship has in reality turned out to be something quite different from an independent consciousness. What now really confronts him is not an independent consciousness, but a dependent one. He is, therefore, not certain of *being-for-self* as the truth of himself. On the contrary, his truth is in reality the unessential consciousness and its unessential action. (116–17)

Of the bondsman, Hegel writes that “through work, however, the bondsman becomes conscious of what he truly is. . . . Through this rediscovery of himself by himself, the bondsman realized that it is precisely in his work wherein he seemed to have only an alienated existence that he acquires a mind of his own” (118–19). The bondsman’s “freedom of self-consciousness,” it is important to remember, is neither simply having a mind of one’s own nor can it be called self-will: “Self-will is the freedom which entrenches itself in some particularity and is still in bondage” (121). Rather, it is a kind of independence that Hegel associates with Stoicism and mere “freedom in thought [that] has only *pure thought* as its truth, a truth lacking the fullness of life” (122). However, unlike the lord, this bondsman’s independence remains open to “the otherness within itself” (121) and thus is capable of encountering “the living reality of freedom itself” (122). For Buck-Morss, this is an abstract depiction of a concrete history about which Hegel learned from Haiti: “real slaves revolting successfully against real masters” (50).

Many readers of Hegel have questioned the fruitfulness of reading what Hegel calls moments, aspects, or shapes—the lord and the bondsman—as historical individuals.<sup>24</sup> Certainly, however, the intellectual history Buck-Morss so carefully outlines in the first part of *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History* gives ample reason to read this brief section of the *Phenomenology* as, at least in part, an allegory of chattel slavery and its overthrow. Yet, such a reading of the *Phenomenology* also relies on a sharp and static binary between the actual (“real slaves”) and the abstract (Hegel), in which the former becomes the privileged and essentialized source for the impoverished latter. Additionally, such a reading diverts our attention from other aspects of the *Phenomenology* in particular, and other aspects of the nineteenth-century struggle over the meaning of freedom in general: a struggle, I want to argue, to which Afro-diasporic subjects like Samson Caesar contributed not only “actual,” “raw,” “vulnerable,” and “concrete” events, but also theoretical work and speculative reflection.

By contrast and from the perspective of Caesar’s epistolary reflections on freedom as a recursive, ongoing, vertiginous encounter—reflections that are themselves enacted by his ceaseless sentences—consider an often overlooked aspect of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Throughout this text, Hegel distinguishes the speculative thinking he advocates from other, nonspeculative modes of thinking—such as abstraction, formalism, or empiricism—by comparing the way each constructs and interprets the syntax and grammar of a sentence.<sup>25</sup> For instance, early in the preface he writes:

In such propositions [of non-speculative thinking] the True is only posited *immediately* as Subject, but is not presented as the movement of reflecting itself into itself. . . . The Subject is assumed as a fixed point to which, as their support, the predicates are affixed by a move-

ment belonging to the knower of this Subject, and which is not regarded as belonging to the fixed point itself; yet it is only through this movement that the content could be represented as Subject. (12–13)

This passage suggests that nonspeculative thinking proceeds mechanically and teleologically, from subject to predicate, where the subject is a fixed and abstract ground whose content or meaning is defined or revealed as what is given in the predicate, and where the predicate can be replaced by other, competing predicates to make other, formally identical but substantively different propositions. Kant was an exemplary practitioner of this kind of formalist thinking, Hegel argues, and Kant's followers have exacerbated the worst of his nonspeculative tendencies:

This formalism, of which we have already spoken generally and whose style we wish here to describe in more detail, imagines that it has comprehended and expressed the nature and life of a form when it has endowed it with some determination of the schema as a predicate. The predicate may be subjectivity or objectivity, or, say, magnetism, electricity, etc., contraction or expansion, east or west, and the like. Such predicates can be multiplied to infinity, since in this way each determination or form can again be used as a form or moment in the case of an other, and each can gratefully perform the same service for an other. In this sort of circle of reciprocity one never learns what the thing itself is, nor what the one or the other is. (29)

The problem with letting “detail” stand as the determinate elaboration of a stable form, Hegel here suggests, can be thought of as a problem of the nonspeculative sentence: a problem, that is, of allowing a fundamentally stable, putatively universal Subject to be filled by an infinite variety of particularities or predicates. This Subject is problematic because it stands as an unquestionable form that merely awaits a full or more perfectly detailed elaboration. As Gillian Rose describes the nonspeculative, propositional form of which Hegel was critical, “The grammatical subject is considered a fixed bearer of variable accidents, the grammatical predicates, which yield the content of the proposition.”<sup>26</sup> From this perspective, the proposition “humanity’s universality is revealed in the Haitian revolution,” which we could attribute to Buck-Morss, is a nonspeculative proposition; it treats the subject “human universality” as a stable, abstract ground to be fleshed out by or distilled from the predicate’s ever-changeable particularity. At one moment, the predicate can be properly exemplary of “human universality”; at another moment, it can be too “unambiguously ethno-national,” and thus readily—or, to use Hegel’s somewhat sarcastic term, “gratefully”—replaceable by another, particular predicate.

To this Hegel opposes the speculative proposition, which understands the subject and predicate reflexively, as if they mirrored each other (the term “speculation” itself coming from the Latin *speculum*, meaning “mirror” or “image”). Mirroring here can be taken not in the sense of copying or mimicking, but rather in the sense of an active relation that reveals both differences and surprising if fleeting unities. Consider this passage distinguishing non-speculative thinking from speculative thinking, again by using the sentence as a figure for thinking itself:

This Subject [of non-speculative thinking] constitutes the basis to which the content is attached, and upon which the movement runs back and forth. Speculative (*begreifendes*) thinking behaves in a different way. Since the Notion is the object's own self, which presents itself as the *coming-to-be of the object*, it is not a passive Subject inertly supporting the Accidents [of a predicate]; it is, on the contrary, the self-moving Notion which takes its determinations back into itself. In this movement the passive Subject itself perishes; it enters into the differences and the content, and constitutes the determinateness, i.e. the differentiated content and its movement, instead of remaining inertly over against it. The solid ground which argumentation has in the passive Subject is therefore shaken, and only this movement itself becomes the object. The Subject that fills its content ceases to go beyond it, and cannot have any further Predicates or accidental properties. Conversely, the dispersion of content is thereby bound together under the self; it is not the universal which, free from the Subject, could belong to several others. Thus the content is, in fact, no longer a Predicate of the Subject, but is the Substance, the essence and the Notion of what is under discussion. . . . [T]hat which has the form of a Predicate in a proposition is the Substance itself. It suffers, as we might put it, a counter-thrust. Starting from the Subject as though this were a permanent ground, it finds that, since the Predicate is really the Substance, the Subject has passed over into the Predicate, and, by this very fact, has been upheaved. (37; trans. modified)

I follow Jean-Luc Nancy in translating the famous or infamous last word of this passage, *aufgehoben*, as “upheaved” rather than the more traditional “sublated” in order to emphasize the way in which speculation here seems to name thought that in Nancy's words “wrests itself away from every given”—a translation that Michelle M. Wright also discusses, though to different ends, in *Becoming Black*.<sup>27</sup> From a nonspeculative perspective, then, the subject of a sentence promises or poses as a passive universal to be stipulated—or fleshed out, as it were—by the particularities of the predicate. By contrast, from a speculative perspective the promise and posture of the subject of a sentence is continually “shaken” or “upheaved” by a “movement” so forceful that the formal, grammatical distinction between the subject and the predicate breaks down—“the Subject has passed over into the Predicate”—allowing for reconfigurations of the very meaning of any given subject as well as any given predicate.

Just as Ceasar's ceaseless, unpunctuated sentences can be read as a figure for his reflections on the Liberian settler-colonists' recursive, ongoing, vertiginous, and risky encounters with freedom, so too can we take Hegel's account of the grammatical sentence as a figure for what he calls “speculative thinking” itself (*das begreifende Denken* or *das spekulative Denken*). It should be emphasized that Hegel distinguishes this speculative thinking from the everyday sense in which “speculation” was used in the nineteenth century, as well as from the more disparaging way Kant used the term. As he puts it in a passage from *The Encyclopaedia Logic* (1830), which explicitly returns us to the question of the “concrete”:

The term “speculation” tends to be used in ordinary life in a very vague, and at the same time, secondary sense—as, for instance, when people talk about a matrimonial or commercial

speculation. All that it is taken to mean here is that, on the one hand, what is immediately present must be transcended and, on the other, that whatever the content of these speculations may be, although it is initially only something subjective, it ought not to remain so, but is to be realized or translated into objectivity . . . very often those who rank themselves among the more cultivated also speak of “speculation” in the express sense of something *merely* subjective. . . . Against these views, what must be said is that, with respect to its true significance, the speculative is, neither provisionally nor in the end either, something *merely* subjective; instead, it expressly contains the very antitheses at which the understanding stops short (including therefore that of the subjective and objective, too), sublated [upheaved] within itself; and precisely for this reason it proves to be *concrete* and a totality.<sup>28</sup>

So speculative thinking is neither empirical thinking, subjective thinking, materialist thinking, abstract thinking, intuitive thinking, nor formal logic. To the extent that it “transcends” those modes of thinking, it does so neither in the interest of offering a universal formula for thinking nor of positing final definitions or absolutely unified concepts. Rather, speculation in this passage is the comprehension or beholding of the ongoing, dynamic relationship between unities and distinctions. As Hegel puts it, again in *The Encyclopaedia Logic*: “the subjective and the objective are not only identical but also distinct.”<sup>29</sup> The speculative is “concrete and a totality,” then, not in the sense of a fact or event that either speaks for itself or that needs to be combined with an abstract concept. The speculative instead apprehends the conceptual in a fact or event, as well as the facticity and eventfulness in a concept. It thus apprehends a dynamic process rather than a formally universal subject and a particular, determinate object. Its concrecence could be understood as the apprehension of both *concretus* (compact) and *concrecere* (to grow together, to congeal): the ongoing encounter between “the aspect of unity” and that of the “distinct.”

Indeed, elsewhere in *Phenomenology*, as well as in *Science of Logic* (1831), Hegel describes the speculative sentence or proposition as a flexible or fungible mode of thought, one in which the subject and predicate of a sentence are related to one another plastically: “only a philosophical exposition that rigidly excludes the usual way of relating the parts of a proposition could achieve the goal of plasticity” (39).<sup>30</sup> This passage suggests that the rigid exclusion of the usual paradoxically frees one from schematic thought, creating the possibility not of a determinate future, but rather of the future’s indeterminacy. As Catherine Malabou argues, “The dialectical process is ‘plastic’ because, as it unfolds, it makes links between the opposing moments of total immobility (the ‘fixed’) and vacuity (‘dissolution’), and then links both in the vitality of the whole, a whole which, reconciling these two extremes, is itself the union of *resistance* (*Widerstand*) and fluidity (*Flüssigkeit*). The process of plasticity is dialectical because the operations which constitute it, the seizure of form and the annihilation of all form, emergence and explosion, are contradictory.”<sup>31</sup> The concrecence to which Hegel refers in the passage I quoted above from *The Encyclopaedia Logic*—*concretus* and *concrecere* at once—is in a sense, then, a plasticity. For as Malabou explains, “the adjective ‘plastic,’ while certainly in opposition

to 'rigid,' 'fixed' and 'ossified,' is not to be confused with 'polymorphous.' Things that are plastic preserve their shape, as does the marble in a statue: once given a configuration, it is unable to recover its initial form. 'Plastic,' thus, designates those things that lend themselves to being formed while *resisting* deformation."<sup>32</sup> On this reading of Hegel's plastic proposition, speculative thinking can be said to *become* or to *concesce*—but in a risky, potentially explosive way—more than to *arrive* or to *set*. Its movement is less a movement through difference and contradiction to fixed unity and resolution, than it is a movement whose unities and resolutions are themselves irreducibly volatile.

Judith Butler attends most closely to the unusual way Hegel exemplifies speculative thinking by means of the figure of the sentence. As others have argued, Butler explains that "when Hegel states, 'Substance is Subject,' the 'is' carries the burden of 'becomes,' where becoming is not a unilinear but a cyclical process," and thus "to read the sentence right would mean to read it cyclically, or to bring to bear the variety of partial meanings it permits on any given reading. Hence, it is not just that substance is being clarified, or that the subject is being defined, but the very meaning of the copula is itself being expressed as a locus of movement and plurivocity."<sup>33</sup> Yet she pushes us even further, proposing that Hegel's reflections on the sentence, as well as his own rhetorical style, are not merely *examples* of, but rather *enactments* of speculative thinking:

Hegel's sentences *enact* the meanings that they convey; indeed, they show that what "is" only is to the extent that it is *enacted*. Hegelian sentences are read with difficulty, for their meaning is not immediately given or known; they call to be reread, read with different intonations and grammatical emphases. Like a line of poetry that stops us and forces us to consider that the way in which it is said is essential to *what* it is saying, Hegel's sentences rhetorically call attention to themselves.<sup>34</sup>

The rhetorical here does not describe the ontological so much as it continually assembles and disassembles it. This suggests that speculative thought does not so much demand a schematic propositional formula—a reproducible model of the Hegelian sentence—as it cultivates an attention to the propositional performance of thinking, in which the recursive or the reflexive functions as an opening to the accidental, the surprising, the unprecedented, and the ungiven. Speculative thinking, understood according to the figure of the sentence *and* enacted by rhetorical form itself, thus draws one away from the formal, the static, and the abstract, and toward the recursive, the reflexive, the cyclical, and the open.

Cesar's sentences function speculatively in this sense. They are "read with difficulty" and they "call to be reread." They stop and force us to consider how the way in which they say is essential to what they say. They perform a recursivity that opens upon the ungiven. And they prompt us to read both Hegel and the nineteenth-century Afro-diaspora differently than Buck-Morss does. I am suggesting here neither that Cesar is "Hegelian," nor that Hegel's speculative thinking is a philosophical version of Cesar's "real," empirical experience. Rather, Cesar's own speculative thinking between 1834 and 1836 encounters, interrupts, and elaborates our understanding of the texts Hegel

published between 1807 and 1831. In effect, just a few years after the appearance of most of Hegel's major works, Ceasar's letters invite us to reread Hegel appositionally, which is to say that they work appositionally to reveal Hegel's appositionality. These letters offer an epistolary encounter with freedom that conforms neither to the abstract sense of a universal bondsman's struggle with a universal master, nor to the formal sense of the schematic development of a universal self, nor to the empirical sense of a particular slave's encounter with a particular master to which we as critics bring concepts like "universal history" or "moral sentiment." Rather, the letters' ceaseless, forward flow is coupled with recursive movements to and through slavery, allowing them to theorize a feeling So free that it becomes to Sufer even as it moves on the globe. As such, these letters speculate upon—which is to say they theorize and enact—the concrescence of an ungiven self.

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>> "TELL LYDIA"

In his letter of April 1, 1834 to Westfall, Ceasar offers yet another qualification of his wonder at life outside Buchannon, this time by staging a particularly intimate return of sorts to the United States. Writing of someone connected to the Westfall family named Lydia, Ceasar jokes about sending her a gift, and then seriously commits to returning to the United States himself:

Tell Lydia that their was A vessel from Jermany landed here About ten days Ago and I never saw better looking men in my life than some of them ware if She wants a Jerman and will write to me I will try to send hur one for I think they will suit hur Tell hur Above all things to get religion so that she may Save hur sole May the Lord bless you all and save you is my pray for Christ's Sak I must come to A close I ever will feal bound to thank you for your attention to me in America I expect to return in two or three years if God Sparse me write to me as soon and as often as you can Excuse bad writing my pen is bad fare well

Ceasar restages this scene two months later in his June 2, 1834 letter, in which he imagines personally bringing a German man back to America for Lydia: "tell Lydia that I expect She has all the learning She can get unless She goes to Germany if She is not mared yet tell her to write to me and I will try and bring A German with me when I come to the United States." To return to the passage from *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History* with which I began this essay, "why is it of more than arcane interest to retrieve from oblivion this fragment of history?" (74).

There was an active trade in textiles and other goods between Germany and Liberia in the early nineteenth-century, so it is not surprising that Ceasar would have noticed the arrival of a German vessel at Monrovia in 1834.<sup>35</sup> Yet it is difficult to know exactly who this Lydia was, or why Ceasar would have attributed to her, even jokingly, a desire for

German men. Westfall does not seem to have had a daughter named Lydia, and I have not found any evidence that Westfall enslaved someone named Lydia. There was, however, a Lydia Wilson from Lewis County, (West) Virginia—the county in which Buchannon was located—who was born in 1820, married to and widowed from Solomon P. Smith around 1837, and remarried in 1851 to John H. Westfall, a distant relative of Henry F. Westfall.<sup>36</sup> Single and the right age in the early 1830s for Ceasar to joke about fixing her up and marrying her off, and apparently known well enough by the extended Westfall clan to marry John H. Westfall, Lydia Wilson may well be the Lydia of whom Ceasar writes. Given that the Westfalls were of Dutch-German ancestry, perhaps Ceasar's association of Lydia with German men shows us how deeply knowledgeable he was about, and how attached he remained to, the extended family and friends of his former master.

While these empirical concerns exemplify what Buck-Morss calls the “realities” of Afro-diasporic history, they are so apparently quotidian and subjective that they fail to embody what she calls the “universal” aspect of “the concrete meaning of freedom.” However, Ceasar's knowledge of and attachment to his formerly enslaved life take a speculative form in his references to Lydia, a form through which freedom concretes, and thus a form to which we should also attend. Though he says that he feels ever bound to thank his master for his attention in America—an attention that culminated in an abrupt emancipation, deportation, and severance of a bond Ceasar's epistolary efforts seek to renew—Ceasar nonetheless twice issues a directive, in the form of a command, to Westfall: “Tell Lydia. . . .” As such, he at once reiterates, reverses, and recasts the relationship between himself, as former bondsman, and Westfall, as former lord. This directive proposes an appropriation of Westfall's very voice, demanding that Westfall speak for Ceasar to Lydia, that Westfall represent and perform—indeed, that Westfall temporarily embody—Ceasar's interest in Lydia as well as his knowledge of Liberia, Germany, and Westfall's own family and friends.

Ceasar's insistent appropriation of Westfall exemplifies *and* enacts the appositional relationship between Hegel and Liberia that I have posed here. That is, Ceasar does not only write of Lydia to Westfall. Nor does he only communicate concrete details about Liberia and Germany to his former master. Nor does he only celebrate Liberian freedom. Nor does he only long for America. But also and rather, by directing Westfall to perform a particular instance of colonial Liberia's equivocal freedom, he improperly appropriates and recasts a speculative thinking that we can no longer properly think of as simply Hegel's thought. From the perspective of Ceasar's speculations, we might even rewrite my titular “Hegel, Liberia” as “Liberia, Jermamy, Germany,” where the improper equivocation between “Jermamy” in Ceasar's April 1, 1834 letter and “Germany” in his June 2, 1834 letter marks the letters' efforts to improvise freedom. All of which leaves us with a challenge: to learn to read archives like Ceasar's letters not simply as descriptions of the actual or confirmations of the ideal, but also and rather as speculative encounters with freedom's ongoing, equivocal improvisation.

# EXCHANGE

## SUSAN BUCK-MORSS

I have been asked by *diacritics* to respond to David Kazanjian's essay "Hegel, Liberia," and I am happy to do so. While Professor Kazanjian's article touches on a wide variety of subjects, his taking-off point is my book, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History*. I will focus my comments on his engagement with that text, and concentrate on two points.

The first is his extended commentary on the word "concrete" which I use as a theoretical term, but which is taken literally by Kazanjian in a way that allows him to launch a thoroughly enjoyable riff on the implications of various meanings of the word. It was a pleasure to read. My response is flat footed in comparison. The double meaning of the term "concrete" in English, on which he plays with such virtuosity, does not translate into German, where the building material, concrete, is the word *Beton* (pronounced the same as the corresponding French word, *béton*). I use the adjective "concrete" (in German, *konkret*) in the philosophically established sense, referring to that which is materially existing, and precisely for that reason transient (in no way "set in stone"). The word is commonplace in the discourse of Theodor Adorno, whose works on Kant, Hegel, Husserl, and Heidegger have been central to my philosophical education. Hence, I used the English word without the wealth of associations that Kazanjian is able to disclose.

The second issue concerns my critical stance towards Haiti's evolution as a nationalist state. On this point, I accept that my account of the history is too condensed and too dispersed within the text to avoid the criticism that Kazanjian levies. As others have also emphasized, Dessalines's conception of Haiti as a Black Empire was in no way racially exclusionary. My account does not deny this fact, while admittedly, not emphasizing it, including only a mention in each case.<sup>37</sup> I now consider my cursory treatment of Jean-Jacques Dessalines a weakness in the text, and potentially misleading. But Dessalines was assassinated by rival factions in 1806, and the leaders who followed complicate the story. After four years of struggle in the young republic, Henri Christophe established a kingdom in the north, and his rival, Alexandre Pétion, kept his power as president of the republic in the south. Neither leader is beyond criticism. One (or both) of these successors may have been involved in the assassination plot against Dessalines. Pétion

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suspended the legislature in 1818 in order to consolidate his power. Christophe, who exercised rule without republican checks, created a Haitian nobility as one of his first royal acts. His European model was the enlightened, but absolute monarchy in the style of Frederick the Great (whose summer palace, Sanssouci, he emulated as part of a massive building project).

Both leaders were strong voices in the international public sphere against slavery and the slave trade. Henri Christophe was in correspondence with the British abolitionist, Thomas Clarkson, who engaged Christophe in a discussion with the Tsar of Russia on the issue, earning from the latter admiration and respect. Pétion has been rightly praised for continuing to grant citizenship to any escaped slaves that set foot on Haitian soil, and for supporting Simon Bolivar's struggle for independence in South America—but Bolivar, in turn, has been accused of using the issue of slave liberation opportunistically to provide himself with an army, while in no way wishing the plantation system of labor to be substantially altered. Henri Christophe administered enforced *corvée* plantation labor in lieu of taxes (importing new Africans, as free, but mandatory laborers to construct his massive public buildings). In short, relative to European leaders, they were progressive on the issue of slavery, but it would be a mistake to paint them as beyond reproach.

It was David Nicholls's book, *From Dessalines to Duvalier*, that I relied on for the post-independence history of Haiti. His thoroughly researched history is a corrective to narratives that would too quickly idealize Haiti as always standing on the good side in historical events. But Nicholls's book dates from a time when Western historiography was less sensitive to its own prejudices, and so, to seek more information, I went yet again to the Cornell University Library, without which my book could not have been written. Earlier I had found there an original copy of Marcus Rainsford's 1805 book, *An Historical Account of the Black Empire of Hayti*, as well as a microfilm copy of the crucial journal *Minerva* that reported on Haiti and was read by Hegel. This time I discovered in the Rare Book and Manuscript Collections a document published at Cap-Henry in 1816, which I cite in the second essay of my book. It is called: *Réflexions sur une Lettre de Mazères, ex-Colon français, adressée à M. J. C. L. Sismonde de Sismondi, sur les Noirs et les Blancs*, written by Pompée Valentin, the Baron de Vastey, who served as secretary to King Henri Christophe, and tutored the king's son. This man, well educated by European standards, was charged with the task of representing the Kingdom of Haiti to Europeans (but also Haitians) within a European context. Striking (and disappointing) in this document is de Vastey's repeated attempt to define Haiti in European terms, including binaries of exclusion with the roles reversed (which, as Feuerbach pointed out long ago, leaves the logic in place): "Our Haitian painters depict the Deity and angels black, while they represent the devil as white" (143). De Vastey was inclusive in his rhetoric ("the cause that I defend is the entirety of humanity. Whites, yellows and blacks, we are all brothers" [146]), but his point of pride was that blacks were capable of founding "a civilized nation according to European standards" (147) which, as I note critically, included a militarized state and a proletarianized, landless, labor force. Nicholls writes that Haitians saw themselves as "a symbol of black dignity and black power" in terms that were "unambiguously ethno-

national” (146), reminding us that universal values do not sit easily with nationalist identities, and leading me to conclude, with Sibylle Fischer, “that the conceptual locus of the idea of radical antislavery is not the nation-state” (147).

Kazanjian packs a lot into a short article, and there is much concerning his own research in Liberian letters from returned black Americans to family, friends, and former masters that I found fascinating. Puzzling, however, is his inference that I was allowing Haitians a historical role as actors, while reserving for Hegel the role of theorist, a criticism that misses the point of my argument, as I am sure he is aware. What Hegel was possibly thinking is far less important to me than exposing the *impossibility* of linking Hegel to Haiti, due to the arbitrary exclusions determined by the bounded academic disciplines in which we work. One might question whether Kazanjian’s own approach, to gloss Samson Ceasar’s letter as “doing theoretical work on its own” is not, rather, opportunistic, granting to himself the task of interpreting the theoretical implications of Ceasar’s words. We today cannot judge the validity of this attempt, and Ceasar himself has no chance to respond. This is precisely what I meant in writing: “It is no use deflecting *our* struggle for hegemony onto the past, playing it out on the backs of historical actors long ago silenced by death. They cannot talk back when we proclaim them heroes or villains in our particular narrative of the past” (139).

## DAVID KAZANJIAN

I welcome this opportunity to respond to Susan Buck-Morss’s comments on my essay, “Hegel, Liberia.” I suspect my comments stem from some productive differences between our relationships to the various disciplines in which we have resided, and thus I offer them in the spirit of Buck-Morss’s own powerful challenge to the academic boundaries that kept Hegel safely apart from Haiti.

I appreciate Buck-Morss’s alternative genealogy of “concrete,” which invokes a vast philosophical terrain—marked significantly by Adorno, as she notes—that we do not have the space to cover rigorously here.<sup>38</sup> It might be worth responding with a narrower point about translation, however. As Buck-Morss claims, the meaning of the English term “concrete” as a building material “does not translate into German” when the German term is *konkret* since *Beton* is the German term for the building material. However, that meaning of “concrete” as a building material does translate into English when the German term *konkret* (or *Konkretum*) is rendered in English, as it is throughout *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History*. The figurative persistence of “concrete” as a building material in Buck-Morss’s text is a feature of what Jacques Derrida has called dissemination, which exceeds the strict confines of literal translation as well as the intention of the individual author, translator, or critic. Though often dismissed as subjective semantics or superficial artifice—Buck-Morss writes of my account of “concrete” as a “virtuosity” in these senses, I believe—the work of dissemination names a production of meaning that

troubles both the individuation of thought and the strict distinction between the literal and the artificial, an individuation and a distinction that are at least as old as Socrates's dismissal of rhetoric as mere "flattery," "the occupation of a shrewd and enterprising spirit," in Plato's *Gorgias* (463 a–b).<sup>39</sup> All of which is to say that the use of the English term "concrete" throughout *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History* cannot be philosophically protected from its dissemination. As I mentioned in my essay, the frequent appearance in *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History* of the English word "porous" to describe the theoretical status of "concrete" material conditions is, I think, a mark of the necessary failure of any such prophylactic enterprise.

More significantly, Buck-Morss's shift from the historical to the philosophical on this point—in claiming that what she calls the concrete in Haiti's history is definitively delimited by what Adorno calls the concrete in his philosophical enterprise—is, from my perspective, less seamless than it appears. Such disciplinary shifts signal epistemological interruptions as much as continuities, and in the interruption we can find room for the philosophically indefinite and the historically equivocal, room that calls not so much for virtuosity as for ongoing interpretation. Indeed, I was hoping to show how "concrete" (in English) has come to do more conceptual work on and through our thinking about the relative speculative and historical dimensions of quotidian archives than we might in fact intend. Just as Buck-Morss suggests that "what Hegel was possibly thinking is far less important" to her than the structural limitations that academic disciplines impose upon our reading of Hegel, so too is what she was possibly thinking less important to me than the way *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History* partakes in a discourse of the "concrete" (in English) that is pervasive in social theory and that often serves as an alibi for failing to read the speculative dimension of, as Buck-Morss puts it, "that which is materially existing, and precisely for that reason transient (in no way 'set in stone')." I would argue that the "transient"—for instance, a letter written by Samson Ceasar, or a rebuke in such a letter to a master who has failed to respond to his former slave in writing, or a light-hearted reference in such a letter to a woman named Lydia—is *indeed* set in stone when it is understood as merely "materially existing" rather than as also reflecting on materiality as such, or even speculating on the material potential of freedom. In other words, what I called "a freedom set in stone" is a conception of freedom that derives from the unquestioned distinction between the materialist and the idealist; by contrast, I tried to trace a speculative encounter with freedom that defies that distinction, or at least attends to its failure to hold. All that said, let us not lose track of Buck-Morss's crucial point that the concept-metaphor *konkret* in German, when elaborated through Adorno among others, can itself interrupt the sense in which "concrete" (in English) has come to mean something like pure action or irreducible fact, as it can interrupt the putative distinctions between the figurative and the literal, the ideal and material, the philosophical and the historical, thereby opening for us a reflection on the limits of certain historicisms when it comes to interpreting freedom struggles.

Buck-Morss's elaboration of her account of "Haiti's evolution as a nationalist state" is extremely important, and I especially appreciate her point that "it would be a mistake

to paint them [Haiti's post-revolutionary leaders] as beyond reproach" or to "too quickly idealize Haiti as always standing on the good side in historical events." I would like to add to this account that such idealized portrayals typically overemphasize the importance of leaders as historical actors (a point I take to be central to Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire*). It is thus not adequate to think of Haiti's history—or, indeed, the history of the broader Black Atlantic or Afro-diaspora—as a story about men whose proper names the very discipline of history has overvalued; Buck-Morss mentions some of them in her gloss on Haiti's history—Dessalines, Christophe, Pétion—and we should of course add Hegel. Rather, as Jeremy Glick has argued (reflecting on Marx's own reworking of the proper name in the *Eighteenth Brumaire*), we ought to push scholarship to situate and theorize proper names in the contexts of the unnamed masses to which they are tied or from which they are detached, and the global landscapes in which they move.<sup>40</sup> I had hoped that my account of Samson Ceasar's letters—which was not, it is important to note, an account of Samson Ceasar the "great man" or even Samson Ceasar the historical actor—offered a very modest effort to shift the focus from such "great men" to *texts* written by people whom Buck-Morss describes as those who "cannot talk back," texts that call upon us to read them, ongoingly, precisely because they continue to signify within complexly global and unheralded mass contexts. There is of course a name for such people, a name we have been given in carefully elaborated terms from South Asian historians and, later, Latin American and postcolonial studies: subaltern.

In the end, then, I both disagree and agree with the last sentence of Buck-Morss's comments, in which she quotes a passage from *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History*, and which I will requote again here: "It is no use deflecting *our* struggle for hegemony onto the past, playing it out on the backs of historical actors long ago silenced by death. They cannot talk back when we proclaim them heroes or villains in our particular narrative of the past" (139). Unlike Buck-Morss, I am more inclined to think, with Benjamin, that we cannot *but* deflect contemporary struggles onto the past, and that such a deflection is not so much a cause for definitive injunctions or melancholic laments—"the nature of this sadness becomes clearer if we ask: With whom does historicism actually sympathize? The answer is inevitable: with the victor"—as it is the condition of possibility for an ongoing and heterodox historical materialism that "wishes to hold fast that image of the past which unexpectedly appears to the historical subject in a moment of danger."<sup>41</sup> In turn, I agree with Buck-Morss that proclaiming historical actors either as "heroes or villains in our particular narrative of the past" will stand in the way of such a Benjaminian historical materialism. That is why I sought to write a very small piece of what can be thought of as an endless and open-ended history of an often forgotten corner of the Afro-diasporic world from the perspective of a seemingly quotidian archive left not by "great men," but by those who "cannot talk back when we proclaim them heroes or villains" and so should rather be read without the usual historicist or philosophical limits, those who left us speculative reflections as or in concrete histories, those whose texts remind us of the ongoing concrescence of freedom.

# Notes

## HEGEL, LIBERIA

I would like to thank Laurent Dubreuil, the editorial board of *diacritics*, and the anonymous reviewers of an earlier draft of this essay for their helpful and encouraging suggestions for revision. Thanks also to Diane Brown for help during the final stages of publication, including excellent copyediting. This essay has also benefited from comments by, and discussions with, Josie Saldaña, Emanuela Bianchi, David L. Eng, Amy Huber, Gayle Salamon, Ivy Wilson, Dana Luciano, Dillon Vrana, Judith Butler, Annika Thiem, the wonderful Penn graduate students in my 2008 Afro-Diaspora seminar and my 2009 Afro-Diaspora directed reading, and audiences at the following venues: the “New Approaches to Imperialism and Capitalism in U.S. History” symposium at Harvard University, especially Walter Johnson and Emily Conroy-Krutz; the Center for the Humanities and the Eighteenth-Century Working Group at the CUNY Graduate Center; the Re-theorizing Workshop at the University of Pennsylvania; the Futures of American Studies Institute at Dartmouth College; the “Unauthorized States” conference at Notre Dame; the English Department at the University of Illinois, Chicago, especially Madhu Dubey; the American Studies Colloquium at the University of Washington; and the Department of Women’s Studies at the University of Arizona, especially Miranda Joseph and Laura Briggs.

1 Page number references to *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History* will be given parenthetically in the body of this essay.

2 The Greek root of the English word “theory,” *theōria*, signifies a looking at, viewing, contemplation, or speculation.

3 The first part of *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History* largely reproduces Buck-Morss’s influential essay, “Hegel and Haiti,” originally published in *Critical Inquiry*.

4 The thematic of conrescence is most famously elaborated by Alfred North Whitehead, who himself draws on Hegel, in *Process and Reality*. On the Hegel-Whitehead connection, see Lucas, *Hegel and Whitehead*, particularly essays by Errol E. Harris and George L. Kline. Thanks to Judith Butler for bringing my attention to this thematic.

5 These terms can be found on the following pages in *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History*: 89, 101, 111, 112, 114, 129, 149, 150.

6 For example, see Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, 128–29. Many critics have challenged Hegel’s racism. See, to give just a few examples: Tibebu, *Hegel and the Third World*; Dudley, *Hegel and History*, especially articles by Andrew Buchwalter and Sūrya Parekh; Camara, “The Falsity of Hegel’s Theses on Africa”; Gates, *Figures in Black*; Gilman, “The Figure of the Black in the Thought of Hegel and Nietzsche”; Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*; Wright, *Becoming Black*. Such challenges themselves follow up on earlier, anticolonial and antiracist efforts to revise Hegel by, for example, Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks* and Du Bois in *The Souls of Black Folk*. For a powerful account of the relationship between Hegel and Du Bois, see Zamir, *Dark Voices*.

7 Fischer, *Modernity Disavowed*, 233. By reading this paradox as politically productive—and by activating the analogy between race and gender—Fischer echoes Scott’s argument in *Only Paradoxes to Offer*.

8 For a recent, popular effort to narrate the earthquake and the role of the United Nations in reconstruction along these lines, see Farmer, *Haiti after the Earthquake*.

9 The full text of the UNNOH resolution is in the possession of the author.

10 Althusser, “The International of Decent Feelings.”

11 Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity*.

12 The next four paragraphs include revised material first published in Kazanjian, “When They Come Here They Feel So Free,” 333–36.

13 Ceasar to Westfall, June 2, 1834, 10595, University of Virginia Library. For Ceasar’s letters, see the Electronic Text Center at the University of Virginia Library: <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/subjects/liberia/samson.html>.

14 For an excellent account of this distinction between black settlers with agricultural skills and those with merchant or trade skills, which draws extensively on the Liberian letters, see Clegg, *The Price of Liberty*, 77–94, 198–200. For an account of the limitations of Clegg’s new social history approach to the study of the Liberian letters, see my “The Speculative Freedom of Colonial Liberia.”

15 For an extended account of black settler-colonial discourse on native West Africans, see my “Unauthorized Life: The States of Colonial Liberia,” forthcoming in *Unauthorized States*, edited by Dana Luciano and Ivy Wilson.

16 For an account of improvisation that informs my work here, see Moten, “Knowledge of Freedom,” 275. I discuss Moten’s stunning essay in some detail in “Speculative Freedom.”

17 The place Ceasar calls Buchannon in Lewis County, Virginia, would eventually become part of West Virginia when the latter split from Virginia in 1862 and joined the Union as a state in 1863, and its counties would be changed numerous times over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The town, now spelled Buckhannon, is today in Upshur County, West Virginia.

18 The word “Ecclesiastes” comes from a Greek attempt to translate the Hebrew word for the author of this book, “Qoheleth,” which means someone who gathers people in an assembly for instruction. It is often translated in the Christian tradition as “the preacher.”

19 For instance, see these verses: “All things come alike to all: there is one event to the righteous, and to the wicked; to the good and to the clean, and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not: as is the good, so is the sinner; and he that sweareth, as he that feareth an oath. . . . For to him that is joined to all the living there is hope: for a living dog is better than a dead lion. For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in any thing that is done under the sun. Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works” (Eccl. 9:2, 4–7).

20 For only a few, recent examples of a voluminous body of scholarship, see Bartholomew, *Reading Ecclesiastes*; Barton, *Reading the Old Testament*; Christianson, *A Time to Tell*; Fox, *A Time to Tear Down and a Time to Build Up and Ecclesiastes*; Murphy and Huwiler, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*; Ingram, *Ambiguity in Ecclesiastes*; Mills, *Reading Ecclesiastes*; Salyer, *Vain Rhetoric*; Schoors, *Qoheleth in the Context of Wisdom*.

21 Estimates suggest that between 20 and 40 percent of settler-colonists in Liberia died soon after their arrival, usually from malaria. See McDaniel, *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot*.

22 A word may be scratched out in the manuscript at this crucial point, but it is a very small mark and is difficult to decipher; therefore, I have reproduced and read the passage without this mark.

23 Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, 111–19. Subsequent page numbers to this text will be given parenthetically.

24 Most recently, Jameson in *The Hegel Variations*.

25 The distinction between the speculative or theoretical and the practical has a long history in Western philosophy, a history to which I will not be able to do justice in the limited scope of this essay. For one particularly succinct account of this distinction from the Middle Ages, see Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Ia IIae q. 94 art. 4: "Whether the natural law is the same in all men?" Most immediately, however, Hegel's account of speculative knowledge is a direct response to Kant's own distinction between speculative and practical reason. In *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant shows how what he called speculative reason can raise, but not adequately address, the problem of freedom. In *Critique of Practical Reason*, in turn, Kant shows how practical reason, in the wake of speculative reason, can address that problem by establishing a secure foundation for moral choices. See, for instance, "Preface to the Second Edition," in *Critique of Pure Reason*, especially 20–29; and the chapter, "On the Primacy of Pure Practical Reason in Its Linkage with Speculative Reason," in *Critique of Practical Reason*, 152–57. It does seem to me that Hegel's notion of the speculative departs so markedly from the traditional distinction between the speculative and the practical that it effectively displaces of the distinction itself. What is more, I hope to suggest in this essay that the notion of the speculative, when read from the perspective of Ceasar, can no longer be contained within the traditional distinction.

26 Rose, *Hegel Contra Sociology*, 48.

27 Nancy, *Hegel*, 63. Wright, *Becoming Black*, 8–10. See also Nancy, *The Speculative Remark*.

28 Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia Logic*, 131–32. I have italicized "concrete" in this passage; all other emphasis in the original.

29 Ibid., 132.

30 See also Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 40.

31 Malabou, *The Future of Hegel*, 12. As Derrida, following Malabou, has emphasized, "This giving and receiving, this giving to oneself to receive, which is the

very process of plasticity, the very movement of being as becoming-plastic, this would be the speculative and reflexive power of the Hegelian concept." Derrida, "A Time for Farewells," xvi.

32 Malabou, *The Future of Hegel*, 8–9.

33 Butler, *Subjects of Desire*, 18.

34 Ibid.

35 Sundstrom, *The Exchange Economy of Pre-colonial Tropical Africa*, 157.

36 Henry Fry Westfall and John H. Westfall seem to have had a common great-great grandfather, Johannes Westfall. See the following genealogical reports: [http://www.whitsett-wall.com/Westfall/Westfall\\_Our\\_Family\\_Tree.htm](http://www.whitsett-wall.com/Westfall/Westfall_Our_Family_Tree.htm) and <http://westfall55.com/relfam6.html>. See also Westfall, *The Diary of Henry F. Westfall, 1861*.

#### RESPONSE: BUCK-MORSS

37 See 39, 75, 145, and 147. All other references, including quotations from other sources, are included as parenthetical references in the main text, with page numbers referring to *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History*.

#### RESPONSE: KAZANJIAN

38 A text that ought to be consulted here, were there space: Kosík, *Dialectics of the Concrete*.

39 Plato, *Gorgias*, 246.

40 Personal communication. On the politics of the proper name, see Lazarus, *Anthropologie du nom*. For a germane instance of Marx's rewriting of the proper name, see his reference to Faustin Soulouque, who became President of the Republic of Haiti in 1849: Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, 248. I thank Jeremy Glick for pointing me to this reference, and for rich conversations on this topic.

41 Benjamin, "On the Concept of History," 391.

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