Introduction

This book began with work on two quite distinct topics: the theory of technology and the history of shipwreck and risk in the Atlantic world. Reading separately in both these areas, I realized that the slave was a figure around which various questions clustered – in writings about technology a point of reference for talking about bodies and machines; in the maritime world an object of insurance claims, a body in need of ransom, and also a figure of pathos in shipwreck narratives. It was this set of observations which impelled me to seek figurations relating to slavery in other areas – a search that eventually took in sculpture, recorded music, the psychology of trauma, and debt, among other possible topics. The questions that arose were, of course, intertwined with the history of slavery and involved both African-American and a wider Atlantic culture.

What follows is a report on findings. While the study of slavery has understandably been focused on its history and experience, it became clear to me that there is more to be said about the figural implications of slavery's presence in Western tradition, the way it subtly infiltrates the fabric of other modes of thoughts and shapes what is thinkable, informing what could be called a culture of slavery. What is involved in this book is in part the investigation of the hidden consequences of slavery; in part a tropology, a study of metaphor.

In *Seeing Things Hidden*, Malcolm Bull has characterized the modernity produced by slavery as what he calls a 'coming into hiding', not simply in the sense of repression, but in a sense that the hidden becomes a category of analysis, so that the dark contradictions of an inherited world become more sharply apparent.[1] And indeed, forms of occlusion are central to slavery: the effacement of the self-possession, work, and voice of the slave. These denials enter African-American tradition, as so many writers have noted, in notions of a veiled and secret identity. But they also inform a wider tradition in less self-conscious and more oblique ways. I will argue that a splinter of the cultural legacy of slavery enters our thinking when

we insure ourselves, emote at the pain of others or the past; when we admire a commodity's surface without considering its making, think of the power of our machines, or perhaps even simply feel imposed on by the assumptions of others. The history of slavery, that is, is knitted into the way in which we see ourselves as having an assignable value; the way we understand technology and making; the way we understand our relation to history and memory. It is this distribution of slavery as a shadowy presence across other fields that allows us to talk of a wider 'culture of slavery' which is both historical and discursive.

Toni Morrison wrote in 1992, 'Race has become metaphorical – a way of referring to and disguising forces, events, classes and expressions of social decay and economic division far more threatening to the body politic than biological "race" ever was'.[2] This implies a linguistic entanglement that is longstanding in the history of Atlantic slavery, a transportation of material suggested by the root meaning of 'metaphor', a conceptual passage binding slavery to the way we see a range of economic, social, and legal relations. But to say slavery provides (or involves) metaphor may seem like a weak claim, given the harsh actuality of slavery's experience. Why not write on slavery itself? One answer to that question is that slavery itself is *necessarily* metaphorical: no human being is in any direct or literal sense an instrument of another or a commodity; no collective memory is in fact a wound. The violence with which terms are imposed on human subjects and human bodies makes such metaphors necessary objects of study: not simply in Foucault's sense that discourse involves power relations, but also in the sense that subjects are required to contain, internalize, and meditate on those meanings.

As Morrison's sensitivity to these issues suggests, it is in the African-American tradition that the tropes generated within slavery and its aftermath have received their most considered and self-conscious treatment. In particular, they are written into the topics and styles of African-American discourse, whether the legends of the tar baby or John Henry or the philosophical notion of the 'veil'; or vernacular modes and expressions which register the operations of power like the toast or 'reckless eyeballing'. From Wheatley in the eighteenth century to Du Bois to Morrison, black writers have found ways to understand the history of race in America which are not simply descriptive; which register its conceptual underpinnings, language, and psychic consequences. Wheatley's translation of Ovid deals with pain sealed within the self by using the story of Niobe, a woman turned to stone. In the figure of Du Bois, American literature sees one of its titanic self-originators, in that the multi-generic work which is *The*

Souls of Black Folk codifies the analysis of the logic of slavery from the point of view of its inheritors, assimilating all that has gone before but rendering it a unique fusion of performance and analysis in Du Bois's discussions of debt, hope, sacrifice, doubling, and music.

In such writings, figuration, cognition, and power are shown to be carried across time in ways that present both dangers and opportunities, which may be bound into the self and which may also be subject to revision and analysis and unbound. In focusing so often on African-American writing, my argument on the cultural presence of slavery mirrors that which one could make about 'race' as a concept: it cannot be seen in any essentialist fashion (as biological, as 'blood' or 'spirit'), but neither can it be dissolved into culture (making it performative, sociological), because it has been forcibly imposed on groups of identifiable people as a historical experience.[3] Du Bois is perhaps the best example of a writer who, as Ross Posnock has suggested, managed to sustain both a romantic notion of racial soul and a pragmatism which declared that race would eventually be transcended.[4] But it is interesting that when Du Bois wrote his essay 'The Concept of Race' in 1940, he provided a detailed *narrative* of his family history, both white and black, not a coherent formal definition.[5] The same narrative account (of encounters with race, of its presentations) is characteristic of a great deal of African-American writing, and it suggests that cultural metaphors should be seen in terms of something like a *typology* (in the biblical sense used by so many African-American texts): as modes of expression which work through a series of re-presentations which carry historical memory with them; which have a point of origin in the actualities of the past (here slavery) but are also sites of further work.[6] Thus Du Bois's sense of Africanness is conveyed under the sign of Freud's *nachtraglich*: he remembers his grandmother's song as an emblem of a lost Africa; but it is his encounters with racism in the South that energize the identification with Africa which gives that song meaning:

> [S]ince the fifteenth century these ancestors of mine and their other descendants have had a common history; have suffered a common disaster and have one long memory. . . . But the physical bond is least and the badge of color relatively unimportant save as a badge; the real essence of this kinship is its social heritage of slavery; the discrimination and insult; and this heritage binds together not simply the children of Africa, but extends through yellow Asia and into the South Seas.[7]

While this is less than adequate as a global analysis of race, it brilliantly captures the way in which the understanding of slavery is historically perpetuated, carried from context to context and reinterpreted; here as disaster, badge, and bond.

One important issue in this study is thus the legacy of slavery. That legacy could be conceived in two ways: firstly, as the question of the actual long-term effects of slavery (economic, political, institutional); and secondly, as the question of the resonance of slavery in collective memory and the way slavery has been imagined or even deployed as a conceptual resource, an available way of thinking. Clearly the first set of issues is important, involving histories of segregation, disenfranchisement, economic and educational deprivation, and legal inequality which begin in slavery and still have a major impact on American society. But a study of this kind, with its focus on slavery and culture, is necessarily drawn towards the latter set of issues. Two things might be added to that: firstly, the culture I examine centres on but is necessarily wider than that of African-American writing, because slavery was knitted into American society as a whole; and secondly, the question of actual inheritance, on the one hand, and that of memory or representation, on the other, are once again bound together: because ideas have a psychological and social legacy; because cultural memory has a politics; because we think in a language marked by history and agency.

The most obvious example of the situation in which historical inheritance and memory are mixed is the debate on reparations for slavery, which involves quite specific legal arguments (so far largely unsuccessful in the courts) about the historical liability of institutions and the state, and much more compelling arguments about moral debt, a stolen inheritance, and ultimately about American national identity and the shape of history. The relation between actual damage carried across generations and its perception is also central to Toni Morrison's project in *Beloved* and in her comments on the sources of the novel in an interview. Morrison asks, implicitly, what the status of African Americans would be if there were no memory of slavery, if all they knew was their people's situation *now*. Her answers, encapsulated in syntactic modulations of the phrase 'This is not a story to pass on', are too complex to easily summarize, involving the suggestion both that forgetting is impossible and that remembering has dangers, and involving also the insistence that this is a matter of possible disavowal for white as well as black Americans. What examples such as Morrison's suggest, then, is that slavery's 'residue' is not an easy issue to address in a way that separates history from its representations, or politics from rhetoric.

If its central materials are literary, this study also touches on law and economics, art and aesthetics, philosophy and psychology, history and ethics.

Eric Sundquist suggests in relation to African-American tradition that 'justice and value must … be recognized to be aesthetic as well as philosophical terms, to have literary as well as legal application' – a plea which leads one towards an analysis embracing all these terms.[8] The finer structure and linkages of the book are provided by a few commonplaces derived from the long history of slavery: commonplaces in the sense that they both mark and mask a place where power works on the subject. These formulas derive from the status and condition of the slave: the slave as a captive; the machine with a human voice; the hands of others; the master–slave relation; manpower versus horsepower; the climate of slavery; the wound; the veil. In examining the topics which these commonplaces generate, my aim is once again to move from the familiar ground of the actuality of slavery to its legacy and culture: as the work of scholars like Saidya Hartman and Stephen Best implies, the ideas applied to slavery have mutable locations and applications.[9] And because what I examine includes both African-American writing and anglophone culture generally, because it can be traced across different contexts and authors in ways which occasionally estrange it from those contexts (i.e., from the immediate conscious control of authors), because we can trace slavery's presence across different intellectual and artistic domains – for all these reasons we can, as I suggested earlier, refer to a 'culture of slavery' which is more than simply an available rhetoric; which is linked firmly to the oppressive presence of race in Western history. The figures which are linked here by a logic of juxtaposition – a net of meanings which is at times admittedly stretched by my desire to encompass a diversity of examples – are ultimately referable to the violence with which values are imposed on bodies and persons.

The argument in this study is organized around three related topics – debt (or economics), technology (the tool and the use of others), and pain – each with two main chapters assigned to them. Chapters 1 and 2, and to an extent Chapter 4, deal with the forced *abstraction* of the body of the slave to an object of value: its reification and negation; its consumption; and the figuration of the slave in terms of debt, as well as the narrative consequences of that figuration. Chapters 3 and 4, and in part Chapter 5, deal with the *instrumentalization* of the body of the slave into notions of technology and intellectual labour. The slave provides a way of thinking about the scale of technology and its relation to the human body; about what it means to use others; about what might humanize a machine. Chapters 5 and 6 deal with the way that history is *reproduced* and unbound in the aftermath of slavery. How is its pain released, and what work can it do?

In all these paired cases we move, sometimes between chapters and sometimes within chapters, from a metaphor which is articulated or indeed enforced more or less consciously as simile – a slave is 'like' a machine or a machine is 'like' a slave; a slave 'owes' his or her labour to another – to a more hidden understanding of the same equation in which it informs a buried metaphor: the mechanical as a 'ghost'; the narrative consequences of foreclosure; sacrifice as the operation of power; the 'curing' of the self. Thus slavery as captivity is linked to the history of life insurance in the opening chapter, which includes a discussion of the metaphor of sacrifice as founding a group identity, and maritime cannibalism as an emblem of sacrificial inequality. Slavery considered as debt is explored in terms of narratives of self-purchase in the second chapter, but also in terms of its formal legacy in effects of narrative closure in the African-American tradition and in Faulkner. Slavery's presence in debates about technology is considered in Chapter 3, which explores the Aristotelian understanding of the slave as a tool and the tradition of reading slavery as inhibiting technological development in both Greece and the American South, but also the way in which the slave returns as metaphor registering the presence of the human body in twentieth-century discussions of machine culture. Technology is explored further in a discussion of the making of sculpture in the nineteenth century (Chapter 4), where the focus is what happens when the same metaphor of the human instrument is written into the aesthetic as a hidden presence, central to its status. Both Chapters 4 and 5 deal with the issue of a stored pain. If the statue contains a hidden message of pain, spirituals and other music considered in Chapter 5 also figure that storage and its release, as if the statue could speak its feelings and history. Here, in recorded music, the slave's close alignment with technology eventually comes to signify from within the technological itself: as a guarantor of technology's humanity but also, because of the enduring trauma and pain associated with slavery, as an index of technology's ability to contain and transmit feeling, to sound the depths of the past.

Trauma is central to the story of slavery: when the abolitionist movement applies a moral sympathy derived from Adam Smith to the slave, stories of pain enter Western consciousness, opening up (as Marcus Wood has argued) a narrative of wounding and identification which is still with us.[10] It is perhaps an exaggeration to say that the story of slavery founds what we think of as 'trauma studies'; but certainly the story of slavery and its historical consequences is bound up with the notion that trauma might inform a collective identity. For this reason, my last chapter (Chapter 6) attempts to unpick some of the metaphors of occlusion – of enduring

debt and pain – which were discussed earlier in the book, providing a counter to the traumatic understanding of slavery's legacy in its analysis of an alternative figure, that of the weather and weather's more localized states of mind.

The temporal focus is that of the *longue durée*. *The Logic of Slavery* ranges over the history of slavery from the eighteenth century to its present memory, though there is a rough structure in the discussions which moves us from the external to the internal; from captivity to the work of the slave and the former slave; from resistance in the nineteenth century to rebuilding and memory in the twentieth. The materials are various – popular narratives, legal writings, musicology, histories of technology, art, sculpture, and writing on sculpture. But as I have suggested, the central resource is the African-American tradition and related American literature, to which I return often as I explore the self-understanding of those who have experienced slavery and its inheritance.

One background issue requires further commentary in this introduction, because it is implicit in a great deal of what follows. That is the Aristotelian description of slavery and the questions it generates: a description in which the slave is a 'natural' slave, inferior to the master, and whose deficiency of will is compensated for by the master (though Aristotle also admits that some slaves are simply captives of war, not at all inferior). The slave becomes, for Aristotle, an instrument of living, an extension of the master. Aristotle's account of slavery is contradictory and ultimately unsustainable. Nevertheless, it is the only systematic defence of the practice in antiquity and has been of huge influence in subsequent analyses, including those of Hegel and Du Bois.[11] Much of what I discuss here has its origins in three governing metaphors which structure Aristotle's thinking in the *Politics*: body/soul, craftsman/tool, and whole/part.[12] These can be set against Aristotle's more shameful suspicion, implicit in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, that slavery is merely a legal convention and an effect of power, a debt imposed on others (a topic I take up in Chapter 2).

In a recent study of the 'black Frankenstein', Elizabeth Young points out that the romantic reanimation story is thematically linked to accounts of metaphor which stress its power to give life to objects; to notions of synecdoche which stress part-for-whole relations at a bodily level; and to notions of 'dead metaphor' which can only awkwardly be brought to life.[13] Slavery works in a similar manner, though with a much longer history. Aristotle's account of the slave as instrument makes the human take on qualities of the thing, embodying a set of ideas about control, worth, and

action. The 'vehicle' for the various metaphors implicit within slavery – the metaphor of value, the metaphor of control – is the body of the slave. Moreover, for the Greeks the control of language in rhetoric is in a general sense the public equivalent of the management of slaves in the household. The control of plot, diction, and language in Aristotle's *Poetics*, as well as the elevated level at which the action of epic and tragedy are addressed, involve a social and linguistic order in which the slave – conceived as a barbarian or linguistic outsider – is subordinated to his or her superior.[14]

The most fundamental element of the Aristotelian account of slavery is the ascription of a superiority of soul to the master. The slave lacks *thymos*, or 'spirit'; indeed, he or she is likely to come from a non-Greek people who lack that capacity as a whole. The master supplies that spirit, inaugurating a separation of the power to direct instruments and that which enacts his decisions, the body of another. Georges Canguilhem argues that the closely related distinction between knowledge and being, set up by the Aristotelian definition of man as 'reasoning animal' (*zwonlogikou*), means that 'the Aristotelian theory of the active intellect, a pure form without organic basis, has the effect of separating intelligence from life', or the final cause from its embodiment.[15] The Cartesian understanding of knowledge or rationality is divorced from the body, and formative action (or work) is related to the Aristotelian distinction: it is the theorist who unifies knowledge, overcoming the partial and local knowledge of the artisan; physics subsumes mechanics. Canguilhem invokes Descartes's contempt for 'technique without understanding' (*VR*, 221); but elsewhere he cites a well-known countervailing passage from Kant's *Critique of Judgement*, in which the issue is reversed:

> Art, regarded as human skill, differs from science (as ability differs from knowledge) in the same way that a practical aptitude differs from a theoretical faculty, as technique differs from theory. What one is capable of doing, as soon as we merely know what ought to be done and therefore are sufficiently cognizant of the desired effect, is not called art. Only that which a man, even if he knows it completely, may not therefore have the skill to accomplish belongs to art. [Petrus] Camper [the morphologist] describes very carefully how the best shoes are made, but he certainly could not make one.[16]

It is the *slave* who establishes a point of difference here: the person in whom art and technique are invested, but from whom (in theory) a directing rationality is removed; who enables thought to be dissociated from making, while at the same time grounding the production of the object in the mechanism and habits of the body. Notably, the actual agency and self-direction of the slave are over-written in these formulas.

Tools thus found the Aristotelian conception of slavery: if there were no need for tools, he says, there would be no need for slavery (though this comment is in conflict with the idea that the slave has a deficiency in self-direction that requires another's will). Aristotle's tangled arguments about 'natural slaves' seem in that respect a justification of what has already been established as necessity in the Greek world. (This a topic taken up in Chapter 3, which explores slavery and technology.) The slave as tool is related in turn to the distinction between soul and body, whole and part. Reflecting on the history of human evolution and Leroi-Gourham's declaration that 'it is the tool, that is *tekhne*, that invents the human, not the human who invents the technical', Bernard Stiegler comments that 'here the human is the interior: there is no exteriorization that does not point to a movement from interior to exterior'.[17] The tool inaugurates a difference which both defines the human and produces an 'illusion of succession' (of the human hand coming before the tool). The prosthetic view of technology is thus intimately linked to the existence of the slave as extension of the master's body in Aristotle's account, and the slave as figure represents a putting-outside of the human, allowing its putative 'inside' status (the mind as the director of instruments) to be sustained; it both disguises and represents the fact that *the tool is us*. The paradoxes here are drawn out in the mocking opening arguments in Hegel's introduction to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, where he stresses that if the 'tool' (*Werkzeug*) of cognition is used to comprehend the Absolute, then that entails a forming of the thing and a change in the thing, so the Absolute is no longer absolute.[18] For Hegel, that which acts and that which acts upon it cannot be so clearly separated, and as a consequence the master is stranded, as it were, in his own sense of the personal absolute.

The notion of whole versus part governs Aristotle's thinking on the incomplete soul of the slave. Canguilhem points out that Aristotle uses the term *organon* to designate 'a functional part (*morion*) of an animal or vegetal body such as a hand, beak, wing, root or what have you' (*VR*, 206). *Organon*, 'tool', is a term derived from 'the lexicon of artists and musicians'. A famous passage of the *Politics* imagines a world of tools:

> [A] slave is a sort of living piece of property; and like any other servant is a tool in charge of other tools. For suppose that every tool we had could perform its task, either at our bidding or itself perceiving the need, and if – like the statues made by Daedalus or the tripods of Hephaestus, or which the poet says that 'self-moved they enter the assembly of the gods' – shuttles in a loom could fly to and fro and a plucker play a lyre of their own accord, then master-craftsmen would have no need of servants nor masters of slaves. (1253b23, p. 65)[19]

This finds an echo in earlier and later Greek and Roman writers (Crates and others), though always in a comic mode: automaticity is hilarious as things fly about in a self-animated fashion. Aristotle himself seems to regard the possibility of such automaticity with suspicion: all human activities which tend towards the automatic and focus on one part of the body alone – such as the display of skill in the playing of musical instruments – are suspect, because they reduce the human to the status of the instrument (1341a5–1341b8, pp. 469–71). Such tasks and skills are more suitable to slaves than citizens. The master, on the other hand, is the person who can judge the whole – whether it is the musical piece and its performance, the functioning of the household, or the thing which the slave makes, the best shoes or what have you. (This is a topic I take up in relation to slavery and music-making in Chapter 5.)

However, in making music a central example, Aristotle links the slave to action (*praktikon*) rather than to making (*poesis*). While this is usually explained by referring to his assumption that he was talking about domestic slaves (as opposed to those in the mines, fields, or factories, say), it also indicates the way that the conception of the slave as tool or extension of the master's body refuses to see the slave's work in terms of an agency which is expressed in the object (the foundation of Chapter 4). This has a number of consequences. One is an aristocratic distain for labour, even if skilled. But another countervailing consequence, taken up by Hegel, is the possibility of a different account of the slave's relation to work and of the master's narcissistic self-regard. Hegel says that the master depends on the slave for validation of his status, and indeed for his relation with material reality (*Dingheit*), since all he does is consume the slave's products. For the slave, the struggle with subordination produces self-knowledge. Initially – having founded his identity in the debt which is his existence, when he is defeated and chooses captivity over death – he is an extension of the master's will. But by his labour and by making things, the slave becomes aware of autonomy and freedom, conceived as an internal renunciation and the projection of a self outwards. This allows us to throw in relief the danger implicit in the slave–machine equation: the danger of a narcissistic solipsism in the master, as well as the fantasy of reversal, whether that reversal appears as comic dependency (Bertie Wooster and Jeeves) or the revolt of the machines. A much-cited passage from Pliny's *Natural History* comments on the loss of selfhood implied by the detachment of actual work from the master: 'We walk with another's feet; we see with another's eyes, we greet by another's memory; we live by another's work … only