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Chandler, Nahum Dimitri

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## **Introduction: Dry and Heavy: Or, Another Poetics and Another Writing—of History and the Future**

Nahum Dimitri Chandler

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# Introduction

Dry and Heavy: Or, Another Poetics and Another  
Writing—*of* History and the Future

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Nahum Dimitri Chandler  
University of California, Irvine

*This wood dry, but it still heavy . . . so dry, bone dry . . . lend me your axe. Will you  
lend it to me?*

—Burning Spear, *Dry and Heavy* (1977)

ADDRESSED BY THE OCCASION OF THIS SPECIAL ISSUE, I AM INELUCTABLY led to attempt to gather my own senses of horizon and thereby offer a remark of our horizons—in that undelimitable sense of *us or we*—amid the worldwide rumblings of ongoing irruptive strife and disaster, both within and among the human and across the supposed natural world in general, at the midpoint of the second decade of this century. In just such a way, one may be led to open anew a kind of implicit epistemic question with regard to the terms of the discourse that is offered in this volume: Is there a conception of our historicity, in all senses, that can account for the resurgent engagement across the past

decade and a half that has sought to rearticulate W. E. B. Du Bois as a touchstone within the history of modern thought, the latter conceived on a global scale of reference?

In brief, in the essays assembled here, the answer given to us in the form of renewed and persistent demonstration—at the letter of the text, so to speak—is a simple yet highly differentiated, yet recursive, affirmative: eight times, if you will. Why? How? On what basis might such an affirmation already be, or become, true? Gathering its incipient mark in the form of a conference held in June of 2007 at Shinagawa in Tokyo, Japan under the title “W. E. B. Du Bois and the Question of Another World,” following an earlier conference organized under the same heading that had been held in Sendai, Japan in 2006, the imperative that led to the emergence of this issue acquired its distinctive and original force across the decade that opened with the advent of a new millennium.

#### OF HISTORY

That imperative is the insurgent and historically radical reproblematicization of the limits of the concept of the so-called human in all its social forms, from 9/11 to 3/11, to the Arab Spring, to the body of Michael Brown and his virtual and real affective affines, to the persisting resistance of all contemporary practices of thought to the undoing of gender, to the emergent possibility of the radical displacement of *the* earth as *of* water, to the ongoing and tendentious entrepreneurialism of all practices of knowledge—with regard to this latter, in particular within all that is encoded in the reprojection of the idea of the human as genome—that marks the present generations, across the globe. Let us, then, recall the putting at stake of such limit by way of a few of the contemporary names, which yet still remain exemplary, of those (not only those we presume as human and also not only humans) so easily forgotten *in disaster*, earthquake and its aftermaths, for example—Aceh and Sri Lanka, southwestern China, Haiti, Chile, Japan, Nepal—that have remained in our time excessive to the grasp of reason and all of its avatars, just as it has been across the centuries of our entire epoch. At such a juncture and with such references, always multiple and multiplying—remarking not only a so-called

present but also from one turn of the century, that is the fateful twentieth, to the turn of another, our own, and the possible breadth of a new millennium—how ought we carry the necessity to carry on, to maintain, our responsibility, that is to give, in the practice of thought?

Across two conferences held astride the first decade of this century and the three special issues of this journal—the present one marking the third—concluding here astride the second decade, it may be offered that we have recognized in the work of W. E. B. Du Bois an order of attention that might allow us a distinct solicitation to the engagement of such imperative—both then (the time of his writing) and now (the circumstances of our own difficulties).

We have, in essence, two forms of question: one is about the practice in thought—or the thoughtful practice (proposed as without limitation of kind here)—of W. E. B. Du Bois; the other is about the *historial* order of the circumstantial incipit of a new millennium, as it might be adduced on the order of questions opened for us within our inhabitation of the horizons, at once epistemic and political, as well as questions of thought not reducible to either, that we still share with him, by which he remains, for a time, even if the times remain ajoint, our contemporary.

In a word, Du Bois's practice, oriented toward the incessant inhabitation of the practices of freedom, the resolute commitment to thinking beyond limit and boundary, yet by way of limit and boundary according to an asymmetrical form of a thinking of historicity, that is strictly in terms of a resolute commitment to its futurity, proposes that we might reopen or readdress the matter of the historial opening of our historical present to another order of question: its capacity to give rise to another meaning, which is always in the plural, to that which we still anachronistically place under the rather simplified heading of *life*.

As our critical mark or remark of history as itself never fully given, we can certainly gesture with regard to discourse in general—especially so at the outset of an ensemble of discourses gathered in relation to his practice—toward Du Bois's unceasing gesture to inscribe an account of the history of our epoch as configured within the tendentious unfolding of a distinctly modern form of practical distinction that he usefully placed under the supple and still

thoughtfully productive formulation of concept-metaphor: the “*the problem of the color line*” (Du Bois 2015). For, within such form of problematization—its very possibility, if you will—there must already have arisen an inaugural solicitation, to the practice of thought (this latter understood here as otherwise and beyond a traditional and outmoded even if still contemporary sense of theory or *theoria*), the possible affirmation of which will always have already comprised a remark beyond reproach. Indeed, the question that takes shape here and now is: *how* might—or, better, ought—we approach the implacable, apparently intractable, and incessant difficulty of existence that yet remains for all whom we might understand within a *we* that must always remain without delimitation, for the future that remains beyond all forms of limit, of any future that can here carry the name of possibility?

#### OF POIESIS

It should not surprise that the status of poiesis emerges as a decisive order of question—without any direct intentional cross-hatching or interweaving and even if not necessarily made thematic in these exact terms—within and across the ensemble of the essays gathered in this volume. For it may be said that such is most precisely what is always at stake in and of the practice of the one who occasions this form of thinking: in all forms of his activity—of writing, of the making of music in writing, of the composition of thought in writing, of the doing what must be done (in the mundane that is of the production of knowledge, in the inhabitation of thought in the practical arts of a living) in and on the order of the demands of writing, of the imagination of the illimitable by way of the practice that in general always entails a certain radical order of originality in writing—that is to say, the gift of giving that arises without declaration or conclusion.

Allow me, thus, to offer some lines of remark, for our entry into the discussion that arises from this gathering and those that previously arose in turn, to take reference to the prior gatherings in both text (as *CR* 6.3 and 12.1) and *in situ* and *viva voce* in the form of the conferences held in Japan amid the previous decade (in 2006 and 2007), all of which comprises the present setting to task in discourse.

## . . . AND WRITING/THOUGHT—IN GENERAL

Alexander Weheliye, in “Diagrammatics as Physiognomy: W. E. B. Du Bois’s Graphic Modernities,” carries out his ongoing reception of Hortense Spillers’s call across the past generation for a disarticulation of the supposed “‘real object’ and the ‘object of knowledge’ (‘Black people’ and ‘Blackness,’ for example)” and turns to Du Bois’s practice just before the advent of the twentieth century, in the latter figure’s *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study* of 1899, to adduce such a distinction as already afoot in the early work of this thinker (Spillers 2003, 428–70; 2006, 7–28). Referencing dimensions of Du Bois’s early practice to the powerful epistemological, political, and institutional formation of a discourse of historical economics at the University of Berlin in the 1890s (its influence felt not only within Prussia, Germany, or Central Europe but through its students to all continents, notably, for example, including the countries of Japan and the United States), notably exemplified in Gustav Schmoller and Adolf Wagner, from which Max Weber also took his incipit, Weheliye situates Du Bois as an original figure within the domain arising from a nascent sociology and an ongoing nineteenth-century historiography. Du Bois is offered here as an original practitioner whose practice of a certain kind of “diagrammatics” is precisely in contrast, contradiction, and perhaps direct combat, with a kind of traditionalized practice that would declare the ostensible directness of its mode of representation as a supposedly more profound and dominant order of truth. In Weheliye’s close elaboration, Du Bois’s practice marked the limits of the claims of such objectifying practices of knowledge. He demonstrates a practical graphematic intervention on the order of the diagram within Du Bois’s work, specifically, *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study*. Du Bois’s production is here understood as one that gives much more than any mode of representation may declare for itself. Weheliye may thus be said to have begun to adduce by way of his inhabitation of the thought of Du Bois a poetics of the production of knowledge that may yet stand as resource for a renewed and generalized “Black studies,” a practice that would move us beyond the limits of the dominant modes of knowledge, nascent at the time of Du Bois’s writing, which became hegemonic, and remain, still, in the time of our own practice.

Within “Place Post-Paradise: Poetic Epistemology in *The Souls of Black Folk*,” Kevin Thomas Miles proposes and performs a poetics—otherwise than a principle—according to which we may gather for reflexive inhabitation the composition of *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches*. In so doing, he gives us what I propose we take as always and at least a parable—exemplifying an inhabitation of the very practice that he recognizes in the itinerary of W. E. B. Du Bois—of the labor of thought as concerned with a beginning that is always otherwise and beyond the world as “objects and things.” And, this opening or bequest toward another sense of beginning would be so even as it is the making of the very possibility of world. It is always, at least, the making of *the* world, here and now, which still will have always yet been otherwise than any limitation to presence. It is the voice that is given, in friendship, as it were, that remains its most fundamental mark. And, it is the mark that remains. Thus, even if the main or the whole of the whole of the essay may be understood in the felicitous phrase that he offers as “a prolegomenous digression,” there is therein a certain poetics in manifestation. This may properly be understood as a philosophy otherwise and beyond what has been taken as paramount within the tradition that has come to a global dominance across the past half millennium. For, even if Miles’s assay here is a deep and distilled scholarly accomplishment, carried here as a way of living—worn so lightly that one is led to recall to mind the status of the feather in the ancient Egyptian thought of justice—such learning (for herein one may note *both* the ancient Greeks—Plato and Aristotle for sure, but also Hesiod, Homer, Sophocles, and then the New Testament and Saint Augustine—*and* the modern German efflorescence of a thought of the ideal and its aftermath—especially G. W. F. Hegel, but with Søren Kierkegaard, Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, and Hans Georg Gadamer—remarking the elaboration of the latter as both emergence and recession across a century and a half) is the resource that allows this voice to deliver to us its gift. For its claim on our attention is its poetical practice of a certain ethics. Its resolute commitment is to affirm both the legacies of generosity that make its own practice possible and to affirm possibility, itself, so to speak, from one beginning to another. In this essay then, Miles exhibits a willingness to do that for which his work calls, without calling. Rather than to decide or even determine the question, to



await it, that is to always inhabit the question. If this scholar-philosopher inhabits what is still known too easily and simply as *the* tradition, he has done so by indirect discourse. For that sense of traditional sense of tradition has been heard here by way of an always previous exemplary hearing of a “poetic epistemology” of *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* as offered by one W. E. B. Du Bois. Yet too, we can recall here that specific form of exemplary example given attention by the philosophical parabalist Miles—the listening as a group in play of Miles Davis, Herbie Hancock, Ron Carter, George Coleman, and Tony Williams—of music, from the emergence of “the spiritual” to the irruption of freedom “in the break” within what we can still call, even without lack of other words, “Black Music,” as in the music of the “souls of black folk” (Moten 2003).

Allison Laskey, it may now be said, in “Of Forms and Flow: Movement through Structure in *Darkwater’s* Composition,” recognizes and brings to available light most precisely the virtue of a reading and interpretive practice that takes its own practical responsibility for the form of gathering in thought, especially thoughtful imagination, which allowed for the textual production, that is to say, the composition, of the remarkable volume that Du Bois proffered in the immediate aftermath of the First World War. While the remarkable and complex point of view and the inimitable concept metaphors of *The Souls of Black Folk* has solicited critical engagement almost from the first moment of the publication of the 1903 text, the richness of its formal character could most certainly sustain even more and ongoing critical attention that might seek to adduce more possibilities for the address of the difficulties of living. Yet, such is even more so for the text and that aspect of it to which Laskey—in a most lucid and striking manner—calls our attention: *Darkwater: Voices from within the Veil* of 1920. We should recall here Du Bois’s explicit construction of an intertextual relation of the two volumes. For not only is the subtitle of the later collection, “voices from within the veil,” a citation of the pivotal concept-metaphor of the earlier one, indicating that he understood the later collection as a kind of sequel, he declares in his prefatory “postface” of the 1920 text that its only possible originality is its “point of view”—during and after the First World War, “in the world but not of it,” understanding it from a “veiled corner.” This may be understood as the practical theoretical operation

in the immediate aftermath of that first worldwide-shattering war of the twentieth century of the experience and epistemic production that had yielded for him at the opening of that century the thought the interwoven concept-metaphors of “double-consciousness” and “second-sight.” Attending most precisely to the form of Du Bois’s operation—his practice of writing, his composition, at once rhetorical and poetic—Laskey adduces the form of narrative known as a chiasmus, or a certain kind of parallelism, or most commonly as “ring composition.” If we follow Laskey’s astute attention to the text of *Darkwater*—both the order of its letter and its order of idea—the formal doubling operating within such a practice may be understood as the poetics of the “point of view” carried in the well-known concept metaphors of Du Bois as noted above. Yet, too, what is perhaps most decisive for the singular register of that is the discourse of Laskey is that she reads the composition of the volume as not only a form of repetition that might formally join emergent difference(s)—of past and future, of old and new, of earlier and later, of beginnings and ends, of the supposed mythical and the proclaimed historiographical, of the naive and the learned—but most precisely an exposing of limits and the exhibition thereby of possibility. (It is of import to note here that Phillips’s contribution in this volume likewise offers a distinct contribution on this question of Du Bois’s narrative process.) This is to say, if we work according to the kind of attention that Laskey exemplifies here in her readerly inhabitation of the work of Du Bois, we may glimpse some additional (even if not simply or wholly new) and essential references for the production of a form of narrative that is yet otherwise than a staid dialectics. Or, put another way, it may, by analogy, suggest to us a form of song, or better music in the general sense, that gives its poetic bequest as something otherwise than a form of return or a simple accumulation. Or to offer it in different terms, those of Laskey in the rhythmic flow of her own succinct discourse, she enables the reader—the rereader, if you will—of Du Bois’s text to follow the guide that solicited her, the enigmatic status of fiction in the interweaving of supposed fact and imagined fiction that gives the text its suppleness and sustainability in thought. As a form of chiasmus, the structure of the discourse offered within *Darkwater* may thus be thought, by way of Laskey’s contribution here, on the infinitesimal margin of symmetry—on the bias, toward the future, the

opening of the virtual, beyond this “narrow Now”—demanding thus that we take responsibility beyond even the possible futures that such discourse would solicit (as Du Bois brings the thought forth in the mourning of his son in the 11th chapter of *The Souls of Black Folk*).

. . . AND FICTION, AS SUCH

Within the context of the collection gathered as this special issue, it is apposite at this juncture to note that four of the essays in this volume place at the center of their concern works of fiction by W. E. B. Du Bois. (Also, it is notable that a fifth essay, Laskey’s as just remarked, places a short story at the center of her reading of the composite volume *Darkwater*.) The first published of Du Bois’s fictions, the short story “Of the Coming of John,” written in late 1902 and early 1903, which is placed in a singular manner as the 13th and penultimate chapter of *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches*, published in April of 1903, is the concern of two contributions, those of Christopher Powers and R. A. Judy. The last and most fulsome fiction of Du Bois, the 1,000-page narrative that comprises *The Black Flame: A Trilogy*, published from 1957 to 1961—*The Ordeal of Mansart* (1957), *Mansart Builds a School* (1959), and *Worlds of Color* (1961)—is the subject of a relatively brief but lucid and rich critical reflection by Lily Phillips on both the trilogy and some aspects of our contemporary engagement of it, for it was her early essay of a generation past that reopened discussion of this work, marking thereby the inception of a still ongoing renewed consideration of the three volumes as a whole. Du Bois’s magnanimous middle fiction, if you will—the first to sustain a worldwide purview or indeed a global-level perspective and horizon across its entire utterance—*Dark Princess: A Romance*, published in 1928—is engaged by Payal Patel in terms of the dispensation given by way of the interwoven historical fictions or historiographical allegories that operate its narrative.

The status of fictionality in the work of W. E. B. Du Bois—its poetics and its writing, if you will—is thus a central concern of the volume gathered here.

Lily Phillips’s “*The Black Flame Revisited: Recursion and Return in the Reading of W. E. B. Du Bois’s Trilogy*,” solicits us to readdress our attention to the very last of Du Bois’s fictions. Whereas in her earlier engagement with this

trilogy, one of the first attentive efforts among recent generations to address the trilogy as a whole, Phillips had provided some historical references by which to account for the formal production of the trilogy, the manner of its engagement with historicity as akin to the practice of a kind of realism (namely a “socialist realism” of the era of its production in the 1950s), in her contribution in this volume it may be said that she calls us to attend to (what I am led to think of as) certain overlapping dimensions of temporality in Du Bois’s narration (which may well be construed in a formal sense, but which in itself if not yet decisive for the claim of her essay) of Du Bois’s narration. On the one hand, while the body of the narrative that adduces the epic horizon—from the incipit of the aftermath of the American Civil War to the horror and destruction of two world wars of the first half of the twentieth century—that Du Bois wished to call into view (by way of the multiple generation life course of a family) may be understood as a deeply critical account of the past of the history of the present, wherein a richly pedantic sense of conspiracy girds this critical purview, Phillips calls to the foreground a prophetic resonance across multiple levels of the text, especially within the presentation of various characters that may be understood as “mad” or some such within *this* world, the world of the present, but who might perhaps attain some other sense of being in *another* horizon of world. This latter aspect of Du Bois’s narrative may be understood as more about the future than the past. As such, a prophetic sense, emerging within and articulating in a deep critical sense, on Phillips’s account, may remain available as a more radical gesture across the whole of the trilogy. On the other hand, upon an ongoing and long-term persistent reflection (even if as she suggests, at times it has seemed oddly irksome), Phillips has adduced within the movement of the trilogy as a whole a process of recursion—the reappearance of theme, context, character, and texts (the latter especially of Du Bois’s own, oftentimes both repeated and reframed)—that produces at once a sense of the orders of temporal change (of both historical eventuality as the theme of the narration and of discourse as another order or sense of telling) and of an order of atemporality (of an abstract problematic that remains and must be addressed at another level of understanding than simply the given or as a question of immediate and direct intervention). On Phillips’s reading, such recursion is expressed within the fiction of the trilogy

especially in the form of what she calls “twinning”—of characters and of discourse (of doppelgängers and the quotation, shall we say in shorthand). It amounts to a form of narrative revisiting that Phillips proposes is a decisive form of the praxis that is the production of the novels. For practice places great pressure on any presumption of the stability and singularity of a supposed exemplary example, yielding instead a profusion of alternatives—even among supposed ideals—resisting thus the terms by which we might seek to adduce closure to this narration as a whole. (And, here, we can note that this problematizing of how we might understand narrative turn in Du Bois’s work is at stake in Laskey’s contribution in this volume.) Thus, just as Phillips solicits us to rethink in our reading or rereading of this trilogy, so Du Bois’s narrative recursion solicits the reader to rethink the horizons—otherwise than the given past—for any address of the future as unresolved. There remains, more to come.

In a consideration of the fiction that comes from the last of the middle years of Du Bois’s sustained itinerary, Payal Patel’s essay amounts to a kind of sustained and carefully attended dwelling-with of Du Bois’s novel *Dark Princess: A Romance* from 1928. While this poignant novel, which cultivates a radical and stalwart hope for a revolutionary regeneration of the world by way of a projective organization of the “darker peoples” of the world, began to receive new readings across the past two intellectual generations or so, not only in the United States but on a more international level of literary and political discussion, Patel’s intervention here is notable especially and in particular for its willingness to place the stakes set for practical thought, if you will, within and by way of the novel as the terms of her reception of its narration. In her essay, critical engagement is manifest as the capacity here, to recognize, hear, and remark, registers of historicity that a willful decision of the work’s supposed theoretical stakes would likely miss or mis-hear. Taking her orientation from a studied sense of Du Bois’s formulation of fundamental order of problem among humans, both of his moment and of the modern era in general, namely that epoch that he scored with the onset of modern systems of enslavement on an international level, that is the tendentious practice of categorical distinction among humans, situated on a perspectival level that we may now properly view as global, that is, in Du Bois’s words, a global-level

“problem of the color line,” Patel adduces both the historical and fictive imperatives that solicited this fiction. It is thus, in the most decisive sense of its performance as an intervention for contemporary thought, Patel’s inhabitation of the discourse of this novel works with, through, and over the epistemic space that adjoins fiction and historiography. As a result, such distinction is herein rendered impertinent for our understanding of both Du Bois’s novel and her engagement with it. What is set afoot rather is the raising into view the terms of an allegory that solicits one toward the imagination of a possibility that would otherwise be set aside out of hand or at first glance. Within both the novel and Patel’s essay, we are led to imagine the thought of a new narrative trajectory—in which a new sense of the south or the southerly bears forth—which we can give here in geographical terms, of a movement reciprocal, timely and timeless, across not only the southern seas but the southern continents and their southern-most projections. Read on Du Bois’s terms and not those of others of our contemporary moment, this remains a strikingly prophetic—both fictional and historiographical—sense of allegory. Patel’s path of reading may be said to traverse its own forms of recursion, most precisely by way of a certain remaining with the paths of Du Bois’s own narrative procedure. (In so doing it may be well placed proximate to the concerns of the contributions of both Phillips and Laskey in this issue and likewise adjacent to the contribution of Rebecka Rutledge Fisher in *CR* 6.3 [Fisher 2006].) Patel’s essay recurs to touchstone gestures both within the novel and across Du Bois’s writings so as to build up a kind of layered sense of the ground of meaning and value built up within the novel itself. Our allegory is a thought of something *beyond world*, certainly beyond *this* one, a horizon that would radically displace given forms of determination that have issued as “the *problem* of the color line.” We may allow the thought to stand in the form of a rhetorical reduction to only one sentential question: who, then or now, could imagine that the progeny of one princess of south Asia and one ordinary black man of Southern America might stand as the most resolute form of light to a another world, a future beyond the limit to world? As a form of question, in all truth, it directs us to reckon anew with the form of problem—the global-level “problem of the color line”—as also susceptible to a yet unthinkable solution. As Patel formulates it, the proposal of such a solution in this

path of this novel, one that would stand beyond all forms of piecemeal address to forms of limit produced as a putative “color line,” taken according to the multiply refracting possible forms of the generalization of such a “solution” (collective and otherwise, material and ideal, historical and immediate, etc.) is the distinct and most original dimension of this narrative. This placing at stake of the possibility of another, if not simply new, sense of world, of the yet impossible possible sense of the human, in the form of a child of the so-called darker races, bespeaks the deeper recesses of the narrative: a prophecy, at once religious and secular, historical and futural, historiographical and fictional, of the coming “rise” by way of a form of intermingling of the so-called darker races as both prospect and, perhaps, realization of the human, otherwise than has yet been.

The meditation that comprises the essay offered here by Christopher Powers, “Figurations of Passage through ‘Of the Coming of John,’” in its inquiry into the practices of “imaginative mimesis” that Du Bois offers in this short story, may be understood to propose that its fiction exemplifies a poetics. Understood as something otherwise than a form of rhetoric, such a Du Boisian poetic practice, as Powers unfolds it, is supple enough at the level of its apparent mimetic operations to move beyond the given forms of binary—the apparent historicity—that his fiction must address. For all such binaries—of wealth, family, background, education, supposed “color” or “race,” and so forth—would presume a given status and thus a preset form of limit; which to say that if presumed at the level of a form of mimesis they would appear as a kind of poetic reproduction of the binaries, in thought, precisely what Du Bois’s fiction proposes to question or move beyond. The privilege of such binary as given would foreclose any radicality for a thought of the negative that would question existence. It would preclude poetic access to all that would contest such ordination in a radical manner. For Powers, instead, the work of fiction in Du Bois’s short story may best be understood to practice, or to enable, a poetics that could recognize the possibility of affirmation otherwise than the presumption of a binary to secure its supposed pertinence (beyond any given idea of the negative or of the critical refrain toward existence, of whatever kind, e.g., that exemplified in the “problem of the color line,” indeed beyond even the distinction of life and death). Thus, the trajectory of

one John Jones, the Negro American protagonist of this fiction, who returns home to discover his own death, must be understood as exemplary not only for the Negro, or the American, and so on, or only for the historical moment of the turn of the twentieth century, but rather to encode a problem and a mark of possibility that is general to the problem of the human as supposed subject of existence and historicity, whether in supposed life or supposed death. It must be noted then, that on the reading given by Powers, such capacity to move beyond staid forms of limit, even as death, perhaps also should not be reduced to an economy of “sacrifice.” The “Du Boisian aesthetics,” which he adduces at the level of an attention to the letter of the text and, even more so, on the level of the infraorder of the story that is such inscription, marks out a certain “incommensurability of ideals and history,” such that figuration is mobile, on the move, incessant, ineluctably at stake, again, always one more time, such that if there is an exemplarity to John Jones and his supposed fate it is given as a figure that remains only as a form of problem. In this sense, the short story “Of the Coming of John,” on the order of the reading given by Powers, as story (and also the stories within this story of John, e.g., the story of the other John, or the story of *Lohengrin*, the Richard Wagner opera so decisively cited within the story, or the story of Jennie, the sister of John Jones, that story that remained in the time of the fiction yet to be told), is a kind of philosophical reflection on an experience that is constitutive of the subject in general. It remarks that violence of the break that opens any possibility of the subject. If we follow Powers in his essay, such institutive doubling as that which called forth the figure of a Negro American subject in Du Bois’s early discourse, so poignantly elaborated as the figure or allegory of the double (e.g., there is also in this story of John Jones the story of John Henderson, the boyhood friend of the “other side” of the “problem of the color line”), solicited from Du Bois the practice of a kind of poetics of the double (beyond relation to binary) in the production of his fictions for thought. (One may note this problematic as adduced in the essays herein by both Phillips and Judy, as well as Laskey.) In turn, it is perhaps of exemplary interpretive importance to note that one of the signal contributions of Powers’s essay is his scholarly excavation of the distinctive status of the *poetry* of Elizabeth Barrett Browning as she may be seen to grapple with requisites of such a poetics (as given therein,



especially, on the overlapping figures of woman as mother, child, and the Negro, as modern enslaved person) within both the text of this short story and within the text of *The Souls of Black Folk* as a whole, pointing toward the importance of both the thought and the example of this figure, whom Du Bois admired much, within his thought as a whole. Thus, we may note a certain path within Barrett Browning's poetry as an exemplary writerly example, now re-inscribed not only within Du Bois's vocative but rearticulated within the kind of poetic hearing practiced here by Powers. For what emerges thereby, across all three voices, is an affirmation of the unsentimental sense of what is at stake if one takes on the exemplary form of the problem of the Negro American as historical subject or subject of historicity. As exemplified by John in "Of the Coming of John" the question as a form of problem, given to us in this writing and this reading, posed as otherwise than any given eschatology, is, How ought we situate an exemplary unchosen decision "to live without fear of death"?

In "Lohengrin's Swan and the Style of Interiority in 'Of the Coming of John,'" R. A. Judy extends our listening for "the lower frequencies" (in Ralph Ellison's sense) of this short story by W. E. B. Du Bois. Yet, whereas Powers's essay may be said to attend to the very form of narration as the incipit of its own problematization of the short story, turning thereby to work itself into the warp and woof of the text, Judy's inquiry may be understood to gather itself within what is perhaps the signal instance of the narration within the spacing or pooling that comprises the "style of interiority" that is specific to John (this one and not another one, here and now and not then or there) as that unarticulated hollow that has itself found its possibility and limit. (The narrative instance occurs when our young protagonist, caught up amid the grand solicitation to another world—one that questions the supposed justice of this world—that is carried in the prelude to the opening act of Richard Wagner's *Lohengrin*, suddenly finds himself arrested midflight as it were and brought thunderously back to this earth here and now, with a gentle tap on his shoulder, after which he is evicted from his seat in New York's Metropolitan Opera House.) In this radical sense, working from and by way of the letter of the text of this short story as well, Judy's path of consideration moves out and beyond the story of John, through and yet beyond, toward the limits of the inheritance

of Greek conceptuality in modern thought, that is to say toward another thinking of human possibility, in general. (Too, in this latter sense, Judy's work here is proximate to that of Kevin Miles, included also in this volume.) At issue for Judy is a certain form of struggle or "striving" with regard to that sense of "full freedom and humanity" that had opened within Jones's hearing of that prelude and his direct sense of the earthly contradictions of such freedom as possibility. It is a confrontation with two "grammars of sociality." The problem for John Jones, remarking in that name both Du Bois and Judy, as well, is to think beyond not only the contradictions of an American South and the "NorthSouth" (as African American colloquial history records it) but on the "lower frequencies" or metalevels of practical thought beyond the contradictions of what Judy remarks as "Western metaphysical thinking." On this order, Judy reads Du Bois's short story as an investigation into ways in which "black intelligence" might change or, most radically, remake the world. In Judy's own terms, such intelligence is best understood as poetic, for it is a doing; it is a making; as Judy puts it, it is the practice of "creative imagination." In a sense, across the punctuated trajectory of Judy's wonderfully fulsome essay, he gives an account of the emergence, persistence, and resolution of the struggle for freedom. It is the style of such that is his titular and tractable concern. At root, Judy adduces the resource that has been cultivated—made—in the creative work of "black folk" to realize the possibilities of freedom. The notable example is—not so much John in and by himself, as a singular, but John Jones as the expression and manifestation of a force that issues from among such folk—of his hometown, of "Altamaha." It was they who set out the refrain "when John comes," and it is they who in their historicity set the frame for and thereby exemplify the hope within the contradictions of that which has been given to them, an "unhopeful hope," that marks out a "beyond" of "this narrow Now," of the time of their own supposed living and supposed death (as Du Bois himself put it in eulogy for his son in the 11th chapter of *The Souls of Black Folk*). In the course of this trajectory, this account of an account that is at once Judy's and Du Bois's telling, of this "twice told tale," respectively, our essayist herein calls to account—in grappling with what is at stake in the story of John Jones—the full course of the traditionalized philosophical exemplars of Greek conceptuality, especially Aristotle, and their traditionalized avatars in modern thought,

namely, René Descartes and Baruch Spinoza, Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Immanuel Kant, and G. W. F. Hegel, then on to figures of Du Bois's early contemporaneity, from Ferdinand Tönnies, Edmund Husserl, and Max Weber in Europe to W. I. Thomas and Robert Park in the United States. While on the counterframe, he indexes the thought of Paul Laurence Dunbar, Richard Wright, and C. L. R. James, as nodal references aligning us to the rhythm and attention of Du Bois's own discourse. For, in Judy's reading, Du Bois's own thought of the social, as we have come to inherit it—as a problem for our own thought—is more radical than what was given in the traditionalized references. Its sense of democracy as the staging of the possibilities of “full freedom” extends beyond any inheritance of the European and American eighteenth centuries, notably outstripping a Rousseauism as an exemplar. Du Bois, in his narration of John Jones, gives us a theory of sociality, which may be read as encoded in the phrase from the “Forethought” of *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* as an account of the “meaning of black being,” or even more precisely as the force of “an intersubjectivity” that arises *of* (both from and about) a “poetic sociality.” It exhibits the necessity of freedom in the production of a way, “a way out of no way,” if you will (to quote an old and yet still new and renewed saying of an African American tradition), that amounts to the production and practice of “ethical styles,” to annotate Judy's words herein. Likewise then, as Du Bois inscribes it and Judy reinscribes it, for us, such an ethical practice—of John Jones in this “twice told tale” (whose actions are exemplary in a fashion of a generalized and extended reference to “Black folk” without any given limit), of Du Bois in the order of his telling, and of Judy in his distinct remarking of this story in the essay in this volume—brings into relief a “poiesis” that “formally exhibits what it exposes.” Let us call it the making of the possibility of a future that remains, in the plural, and not yet given.

#### OF THOUGHT

To assume responsibility for a thought—as the terms of your own possibility in thought—may well be the truest gift that arises within the path of thinking. It is most certainly this form of responsibility that is carried within the dis-

course of Ainsworth Clarke in his essay, herein, “W. E. B. Du Bois’s Fugitive Writing, or Sociology at the Turn of the Twentieth Century.” Taking Du Bois’s posthumously published essay “Sociology Hesitant” as the guide for his critical reflection upon the conditions for the determination of the project of a general sociology at the turn of the twentieth century, Clarke adduces an incessant aporia that arises for any commitment to render “experience”—namely and especially in the exemplary form of “black experience”—susceptible to knowledge as science. Formulating a reference to inquiries into the possibility and terms of a social science of the human of the late nineteenth century and the opening to the twentieth, most especially a certain German Neo-Kantianism, exemplified here in the work of Heinrich Rickert, Clarke situates Du Bois’s study and learning of 1892–94 at the University of Berlin within this general philosophical horizon and form of problematization as of signal contextual reference to understand the African American thinker. In a theoretical sense, Clarke annotates the enigmatic status and formal conditions of addressing “experience” as an object of knowledge as such a problematic took shape at the center of the discussions in Germany concerning the possibility of *Geisteswissenschaften* at the turn of the century. On Clarke’s reading, this was a problematic in which Du Bois was also inscribed. (A sense, it may be noted, that is proximate to the theoretical placement of the matter proposed, also, by Robert Gooding-Williams [Gooding-Williams 2009].) As Clarke puts it, the problem may be understood as configured as an interwoven and double organization of reference: for a determination of both the “conceptual tools” and the “object” of study were confounded, in and of themselves and in relation. As I read him, he proposes in this essay that the “fugitive” (indexing both W. E. B. Du Bois and the contemporary thinker Fred Moten) status of “chance” in relation to supposed law rendered the formalization of the general ontological or epistemological ground that might subtend a general sociology ineluctably indeterminate. Likewise, the “thing” or supposed “object” manifested a certain “resistance” to comprehension—at the level of theory, or better, the general projection of *theoria*—within the proclaimed progressus or ostensible architectonic of a science of the human. It may be said that Clarke’s thetic path in thought as given in this essay has been realized or gathered across the duration of a long-term reflection upon the example

and itinerary of Du Bois. Thus, the turning point of his assessment of the problem of knowledge in the work of this protean thinker is his suggestion that Du Bois's auto-reflections on his efforts in the projection of a social scientific study of the "experience" of the Negro American are marked in their eventuality by expressions of caution, sobriety, and a form of reserve concerning the limits to the possibility of such a form of knowledge. In themselves, such "hesitation" may mark Du Bois as registering a felicitous critical sense. (And, one must note here that to the extent that Du Bois may be understood in "Sociology Hesitant," circa 1904, as questioning the hesitation of "sociology" in the face of the problem of "chance" in human action, as it stood at the turn of the twentieth century, the sense of hesitation Clarke places here may be understood as an oblique gesture askew from Du Bois's apparent thesis, redirecting it in a critically affirmative manner toward the African American thinker's own practice [Du Bois 2015, 271–84].) Such felicity would have been given in Du Bois's insistence upon both the decisive status and the practical necessity of "judgment"—exceeding or resisting "theoretical grasp" on the terms of both "method" and "object" and thus calling for a form of *practical* responsibility toward precisely such excess or exorbitance, a solicitation to seek understanding rather than determination—in the study of the human. (And, Clarke's thought here may be understood to find resonance with Weheliye's recognition of Du Bois's practice of a kind of critical "diagrammatics" in his *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study*, as well as with Judy's sense of Du Bois's tarrying with the "creative imagination," not only of "Black folk" in general but also as found in Du Bois's own attention to such in his address to the history of modern social thought, as each of these latter contributors put the matter in this issue.) Clarke's formulations here echo and address in a distinct manner the question posed at the opening of this volume in the opening of Weheliye's essay: that the matter of the Negro-Colored-Afro-Afra-Black existence be taken not only as a problem for knowledge but also as the touchstone for questioning how objects of knowledge are produced as marking out a "field of study." In this rethinking of conceptualization in the social science of the human, Clarke not only questions this problematic along a certain line of intellectual inheritance and discussion—making nodal references to Immanuel Kant, Auguste Comte, Willime Windelbrand, Gustav

Schmoller, Max Weber, and Heinrich Rickert—he enacts on the most submerged levels of his discourse a thinking with and through the thought of W. E. B. Du Bois, not only as problem but also as gift.

#### AFTERWORDS

With regard to the forms of intervention posed across these three issues of *CR* (6.3, 12.1, and the present issue, 15.2) that remark the contemporary interest of the thought of W. E. B. Du Bois for us, a certain distinction may now be rendered legible. Whereas in the two earlier volumes, along with the direct engagement of Du Bois's own writings (in particular in the first), his work was placed in relation to two contexts of which he wrote with especial interest, Europe, as exemplified by Germany, and Asia, as exemplified by Japan. Within the present volume a subtle shifting may be registered, even as the kind of referential domain of the first two issues remains clearly articulated here. In the present volume, the epistemic contexts of thought—ancient to modern—are somewhat surreptitiously referenced to the exemplary practices of Du Bois's own thought. As such and as a kind of whole, this volume places both the received traditions in modern social thought and philosophy, on the one hand, and the received traditions of the engagement of the work of W. E. B. Du Bois, on the other, under the impress of a somewhat new kind of attention to his work, a kind of patient writerly attunement and inhabitation—that is to say, more presumptive of the integral status—of Du Bois's way of thinking.

It is such that we may also remark, then, that this present issue is less about the forms of limit produced as modern history, named herein at the outset of this introduction, as the global-level “problem of the color line,” than it is about the necessity and possibility of finding another way, of attending to the problematizations of the past and of remaking the possible forms of inheritance that will be at stake in those futures at stake in our present—here and now. For the practice of freedom is never simply given or available, nor may it be an end in itself. Such is the recollection maintained within this issue, this act of maintenance and preparation, by its ongoing engagement with the thought of W. E. B. Du Bois. Such is the patience required to think with Du Bois, to sustain the long-term itinerary in thought and practice.

Allow me to close this “prolegomenous” discourse with two punctuations—of two traditions, at least, always, and never only—a kind of “twinning” that remains unresolved, at once and several, open, futural, with more, perhaps, to come.

As the Burning Spear, drawing from generations of a proverbial order of thought and living—ostensibly driven to the margins of a global *historial* order, from one inception of an epoch in the fifteenth century to the pivot of another in the twenty-first century—delivered it to us: it is indeed a long way around, but perhaps, by this way, “we will find good on the other side.” I recall, thus, his solicitation, from the epigraphic form of our quotation, given in song-poetry of a specific time and place as yet a demand for another poiesis, for yet other times and other places: “This wood dry, but it still heavy . . . so dry, bone dry . . . lend me your axe. Will you lend it to me?” (Burning Spear 1977).

Or, we may turn once more and recall this solicitation in the form given to me in both voice and music by Cecil Taylor—remarking to me *viva voce* the contribution of W. E. B. Du Bois on the track of the music of *The Souls of Black Folk*: we must begin with what he had available, and receive his gift from that place of giving. It thus may be said that such repetition may be understood as itself an exemplary production of the opening by which a first time may become susceptible or legible for a form of remark, recognition, or re-inauguration (Taylor 1966).

I invite you then to take the words that I have given here as “after words,” best read/reread, or heard, in light of the mark and *following upon* the resonance of the words of the discourse of the contributors to this issue. With such recognition and solicitation, we can now turn, as conclusion to these introductory thoughts, and gesture simply and directly to the opening of this issue.



#### NOTES

For the texts of W. E. B. Du Bois, the 37 volumes of *The Complete Published Writings of W. E. B. Du Bois*, published by Kraus-Thomson, edited and introduced by the late Herbert Aptheker, from 1973 to 1986, remains the best and most comprehensive source. (For specific citations one may consult the bibliography of a recent collection of his early essays [Du Bois 2015].)

Several scholars, colleagues, and former students—not otherwise noted in the three *CR* issues (6.3, 12.1, 15.2)—were essential in making possible the two conferences on W. E. B. Du Bois in Japan at Sendai in 2006 and at Tokyo in 2007. Lisa Brawley, Jonathan Flatley, Fred Moten, Kalpana Seshadri, Masako Nakamura, Reginald Kearney, Aigul Kulnazarova, and Koji Takenaka presented papers, with Moten and Takenaka offering keynote addresses in 2007. Organizational support of colleagues of the School of Global Studies, a division of Tama University—in Fujisawa (at Shonandai), in Kanagawa—Najwa Waheed Naohara, Jennifer Seaman, and Toru Yonekubo, were essential to the event of the 2007 conference; so also for Kazuko Nishimoto, Makoto Miyazaki, and Takahiko Miyasaka as students; and so too for Terry Joyce, Gerald Cipriani, Greg Poole, as faculty, and Kuniko Miyanaga as dean. The generous documentary work of Winifred Shiraishi in 2007, also a colleague, was singular in helping me build the scaffolding by which the special issue of *CR* 12.1 and the present volume were constructed. Sarah Hamblin performed immense and detailed editorial and curatorial work assisting me in the preparation of *CR* 12.1. Abdulhamit Arvas has likewise given such essential care and precisely intelligent attention in the preparation of the present volume. My wife, Ayumi Chandler, worked beside me at each stage of this project—rendering for me the essential gift.

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