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Cultural Critique, Number 111, Spring 2021, pp. 135-155 (Article)

Published by University of Minnesota Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/cul.2021.0015>



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REVISIONS OF ONTOLOGY

ON NAHUM DIMITRI CHANDLER'S *X—THE PROBLEM OF THE
NEGRO AS A PROBLEM FOR THOUGHT*

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

Upon receiving his doctorate from Harvard in 1895, William Edward Burghardt Du Bois wrote:

I was dissatisfied with my study of the Slave Trade because it ended too abruptly and yielded too narrow a field for valid judgment of human action. If I could study what man had done, why not investigate thoroughly and scientifically what he was doing now and what he might do in the future? In other words, I was seeking a science of human action which could be used not only for studying the Negro problem, but for all the problems of the poor and ignorant.¹

And when in his 1940 autobiographical text, *Dusk of Dawn* he wrote, "We black folk are the salvation of mankind," he was speaking the same thought: to nurture the emergence of a general description of human thought/action through a study of slavery (241).² Nahum Dimitri Chandler in his brilliant book *X—The Problem of the Negro as a Problem for Thought* understands it by the passion of his theorizing and recognizes the nature of Du Bois's work as both epistemic (think difference generally) and practical (generalize difference in action). This book shares a characteristic with *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), a book he reads carefully and in detail. *Souls* is a collection of diverse pieces, written for different occasions. Anthony Appiah, in his superbly researched book on Du Bois, suggests that the "Folk" in the title and the content of the book comes from the German *Volk*, given Du Bois's feeling of general liberation in the two years he spent in Berlin at the Friedrich Wilhelm Universität (58–61). I myself feel that *Volk* was *aufgehoben* or sublated by Du Bois, negated and preserved on a different register.

Du Bois offers the following principle of unity for the book:

Some of these thoughts of mine have seen the light before in other guise. For kindly consenting to their republication here, in altered and extended form, I must thank the publishers of the *Atlantic Monthly*, *The World's Work*, the *Dial*, *The New World*, and the *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* . . . need I add that I who speak here am bone of the bone and flesh of the flesh of them that live within the Veil? (58–61)

That principle of unity is one that stays with Du Bois: my words are representative words; my autobiography is the autobiography of a concept: race.

For Chandler's book, the principle of unity is spelled out in the title—that the problem of the “Negro”—a historically charged word—is a problem *for* thought. That historico-racial difference that is called “Negro” teaches us that difference is irreducible in general ontology. It is a problem for thought as such, when, identified with a Euro-US white subject, it is ready to think itself unified with its object. Du Bois's autobiography is representative of difference at the origin. Chandler is influenced by the early Derrida.

Chandler points out that *The Souls of Black Folk* starts with the word “between” (3). His own book starts with the words “We must desediment” (1).

“Desediment” is the word used by Derrida in his early writings. Chandler himself describes it thus: “labor . . . that would mobilize—that is, disturb—the lability of the shifts and fault lines that configure the ground that surrounds them” (20). This lacks the clarity of an explanation. Let me mark here, once and for all, the complaint about this grand book that I hear from good readers: too hard to understand. Yes, sometimes. Compare Derrida's practice of desedimentation in *Of Grammatology*: respectful engagement with historical criticism of a text—in this case Rousseau's *Essay on the Origin of Languages*—to show that it is not possible for careful textualist work to assign a guaranteed date for it—and then, after engaging with and placing this sediment aside, attempting a critical intimacy with the text and entering the history of words—paleonymy. Prescription for the deconstructive critic: empiricism without guarantees. Not necessarily easier to understand.³

Chandler also enters the history of words—not paleonymy but catachresis (word used when no literal referent can be found): “I have sought to affirm the hyperbolic character of Du Bois's practice and to elaborate some of its effects of catachresis” (2).

However hard it may be to understand these descriptions of methodology, the question is whether Chandler succeeds in practicing it. Within the axiom that practice is always a halfway house, I try to show in this review that the answer is in the affirmative. Chandler succeeds as he brings us to “African Diaspora” as a nominalist catachresis at the end of this book. I discuss it at the end of this review.

It is appropriate that, in this book, the influence of the early Derrida is supplemented powerfully by the work of Hortense Spillers. (To “supplement”: break open the totality of a system, fill the carefully predetermined textual blank, dangerously introducing the incalculable):

if by ambivalence we might mean that abeyance of closure, or *break* in the passage of syntagmatic movement from one more or less stable property to another, as in the radical disjuncture between “African” and “American,” then ambivalence remains not only the privileged and arbitrary judgment of the postmodernist imperative, but also a strategy that names the new cultural situation as a wounding. (148–49)⁴

In this connection, I thank Chandler for recognizing his interaction with my own work of that period (109 and *passim*). I might even say that I have re-encountered myself through Chandler’s text because the author has established many connections with my own way of thinking that I had lost touch with as I moved forward (I hope), learning from my mistakes.

Chandler argues that Du Bois’s sustained autobiographical use of himself as an example theorizes how to think being and knowing as such within the problematic of difference as the historical. This approach is most clearly developed by Du Bois, according to Chandler, in *Dusk of Dawn*, whose subtitle, *An Essay toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept*, almost provides Chandler with his entire argument. He maintains, however, that this way of constituting the problem was already there in *The Souls of Black Folk*. As I have mentioned, Chandler notices that the book begins with the word “between.” He carefully “reads” the opening sentence: “between me and the other world there is ever an unasked question.” By way of Chandler’s reading, we are able to see that this is a general onto-epistemological description and that there is immediately a slipping away to a specific situation: why people do not ask the question that involves “being a problem,” and Chandler shows us that this is a problem for thought. Many of you have read

the book, and many will go on to read it, I hope. So, I will refer to a few passages from it and then proceed to a reading, which is more about how the reader would perform this book according to its invitation, rather than how the book looks forward to the more formal practice of Du Bois's use of autobiography. Here, then, is Chandler's closing sentence on Du Bois's opening word: "between." "By its formal structure, 'between' is nothing in itself. It remains that by this time of its enunciation, 'between' is the disseminated simulation of a scene of dissimulation. Such is the very stage or frame (of what shall we name us?) as a problem." As we have seen, he will cite Hortense Spillers to describe this movement as "ambivalence":

Let us keep Chandler's and Spillers's formal problematic in mind. Chandler's point is that Du Bois's sustained autobiographical use of himself as an example theorizes how to think being and knowing as such within the problematic of difference as the historial. In an essay called "The Negro Mind Reaches Out," summarizing his experience at the Pan-African congresses, Du Bois writes: "the race problem is the other side of the labor problem; and the black man's burden is the white man's burden. . . . Empire is the heavy hand of capital abroad. . . . What might happen if Europe became suddenly shadowless—if Asia and Africa and the islands were suddenly cut away" and goes on to differentiate between and among various kinds of imperialism. Chandler does not in fact consider this essay, but his methodological lesson for us is that when we read such a piece of writing, we should try to understand it also as establishing how to think the human in difference as such—being and knowing, ontology and epistemology. I would like to go on to suggest that if we take the specificity and the generality of this difference seriously, as does Chandler, we will see the differentiations within colonial activities as the moment where, in actual practice, difference establishes the possibility of translating the general theory into unmediated practice as such. Is he universalizing? An important question. Chandler, much taken by the early Derrida, is rather speculating about undoing Europe as the same over against which difference is computed. Indeed, he fascinatingly compares Du Bois's commitment to taking autobiography as an example of the problem of constituting a general ontology and epistemology with Derrida's description of Husserl's search for the origin of objectivity. Husserl "had to navigate . . . logicizing structuralism and

psychologicistic geneticism," Derrida writes about Husserl's "Origin of Geometry." "This common root of structure and genesis," he continues, "which is dogmatically presupposed by all the ulterior problematics . . . [was] the problem that was already Husserl's, that is the problem of the foundation of objectivity" (82–83, italics author's). We are, in other words, speaking of being ever mindful of a problem, not of a universalizing solution. As a practical classroom teacher, I ask my students to track universalizables within these problematics without universalizing, a hard thing to learn, because we are not mindful of the problem. In his comparison of Du Bois and Husserl on the track of the general and the objective respectively, Chandler belongs in that discussion. I have connected Du Bois's remark that "Negroes must . . . hold unfaltering commerce with the stars" with Gramsci and Fanon's cautious hope for liberal education.⁵ It is important that Chandler links it with the quest for generalization. This is to be ever mindful of a problem lurking at the center of the specific, not of a universalizing solution. Chandler's task is to state the problem, not to solve it. This is why he takes to Spillers, for he sees her as engaged in revising the "epistemic representation" of the proper subject of theory re-thought, "although already implicated within, the still dominant sense of the problematic as one of political representation" (173). And he correspondingly sees Du Bois as developing his politics "in light of [an] epistemic conception" of the Negro as the subject of an as yet unwritten general history. (172)

We can connect this excess to identity to our colloquial use of "the phenomenological approach," to be distinguished from the onto-phenomenological or the ontological, which connects the phenomenological to the space of identity. The everyday use of "phenomenology" asks us to imagine that the thing *is* not; it must be traced through its "forms of appearance," contextually, according not only to the programmed "mind" circuit (Hegel) but also to a historical one (Marx), where the notion of "the realm of freedom" allows us to make room for contingency (Marx, 958–59).⁶ This set—"open[ing] upon the historical form of a certain kind of metaphysical inquiry"—is effortlessly implicit not only in the somewhat disconnected arguments in the various sections of the book but also in the extraordinary readings that Chandler offers. It should be mentioned here that, although Chandler does not discuss Du Bois's "magisterial" *Black Reconstruction*

because, I presume, “virtually every major thought put forth by Du Bois in this book had been announced in his earlier texts,” he does acutely point out that the thing that has been hardest even for more progressive scholars of the ‘60s and thereafter is “the *epistemological* importance” of this paradigm shift in historiography (133, 203, emphasis author’s).

First among the readings, then, *The Souls of Black Folk*. The historical contingency is Los Angeles in 1992; it makes Du Bois’s text, published in 1903, appear as a recalling of the “transcendental:” “an explosion, . . . before beginning . . . a black hole in the whiteness of being, in the being of ‘whiteness’” (2). The use of the quotation marks around the second use of “whiteness” moves us from a million acceptable uses of “whiteness” as a description of the formlessness of being itself to its “historical” shock to the Black person. (Should I mention here that “black hole” hits me as a Calcuttan?). Ontology moves to phenomenology by way of reference to a dated, publicly available case of law: *California v. Powell* (1967), the first text cited on line 8 of the entire book. At this point, Chandler is haunted by Derrida—he is not “applying” him. *The Problem of the Negro* rewrites Derrida’s concept-metaphor of the ex-orbitant.⁷ The dates—1967, 1992—here, as in *Shibboleth*, form a covenant, like a ring, coming back every year (Derrida 2005a, 2, 63). It dictates the *Souls*’ first word “between” to be the form of appearance by which the mere legality of the argument of the defending counsel in *California vs. Powell* attempting to undo the verdict against the two black men can be supplemented. Defense counsel argues for due process and the rule of law; the first word is “but”:

But if a government of laws is to be preserved, our justifiable outrage must not result in denying to these defendants a fair trial and a dispassionate review of their appeal. We deplore their acts, but it is fundamental to our system of justice that these defendants be accorded the same treatment under the law as that provided the least blameworthy of wrongdoers. The sad lesson of history is that any other path leads inevitably to the arbitrary injustice of the tyrant. It is to protect the rights of the innocent as well as the guilty that rules of law must be respected, and therefore that these defendants must be tried a second time.⁸

In fact, if we read the trial record that is intertextual with Chandler’s argument here, we cannot miss, in the cracks of the heartless questioning, the incredible life of “the insidious pain, the psychic

destruction . . . , the torture, the physical and sexual convulsion, the horrendous unending repetition of violence upon violence" (California v. Powell, 1) that produce this kind of uncaring violence that is impervious to the fear of death. It is just that there be law, but law is not justice. It is in the name of justice that Chandler claims a complicit responsibility in the sense of being com-plicit, folded-together, with both sides. "It seems we are in a black hole. But then again it could be white. And so our preamble must end: or fold" (3). Folded together with black and white, as superimposed on the book cover. Com-plicit. "Du Bois must acknowledge in a certain way his participation in the game he wishes to overthrow, his complicity with some of the most embedded premises of the systemic structure (in every sense) that he seeks to make the object of a radical critique," writes Chandler (49). And it is in the name of a justice ex-orbitant to the law that Du Bois claims complicity with John Brown: "The forcible staying of human uplift by barriers of law, and might, and tradition is the most wicked thing on earth" (1973a, 147). Fanon writes thus of thinking white before Aimé Césaire returns to Martinique and says "it's fine and good to be a Negro" (Fanon 21). Chandler reminds us that he himself spoke his own words, now a part of *The Problem of the Negro*, "just a few blocks away" (181) from where Du Bois was living in Philadelphia in 1897, when he probably wrote that passage of *Souls*, advising us, among other things, that "double-consciousness" is not only a "loss" but also a "'gift'" (36, see also 120, 153; the passages quoted reminding this reader at least that Derrida often adds "if there is any," after the word "gift," for we can grasp it only as accountability). To "determine the sense of identification . . . of being a Negro at the turn of the century in the United States for Du Bois is . . . undecidable" (37).⁹ This undecidability thickens the problem of the color line (69). And it is this amphibolic double consciousness that allows John Brown to appear as an "African-American" to Du Bois (120), of which more later.

It is also in this chapter that the deconstructive approach of the book is most clearly set out:

The violence by which the historical conditions of the emergence of the Negro or African American as such makes the very historical emergence of this entity the scene of an ontological question. . . . Thinking this question, then, means that one cannot move under the heading of innocence or neutrality. I have proposed, by way of the itinerary of W.E.B. Du Bois,

that one must engage this situation by responding *simultaneously* to its premise and its conclusion: (a) one must respond to the unavoidable premise of essence by thinking beyond such, and (b) one must also think short of the conclusion that essence is not given by affirming the possibility of a difference, not just difference in principle, but *this difference, this one, here, now*. This possibility at stake in this present. This complicated situation is an economy, a system of the same, or of difference, of origin or end. And yet one must think otherwise than its absolute givenness. (57–58)

Although *Souls* is a central text of reference in *X*, many other Du Bois texts receive careful readings, always within the set—transcendental/historical as in a phenomenological autobiography—that I have described. These readings are enhanced by a running commentary of narrative footnotes and a meticulously researched bibliography. Since part of the task of this review is to show the “hauntology” (if I may) of Derrida in this book, it might be added that these long footnotes are an exaggeration of a Derridean practice, finding its Penelope-like maximum staging in “Circumfessions.”¹⁰

Of the many fine readings in the book, I will refer briefly to the readings of *John Brown* and *Dusk of Dawn*.

(But not before I say a word about *Dark Princess: A Romance* [1928]).

Some years ago, I proposed that it was not necessary to have only positive words to describe the transcendental. I showed why the word “rape” was just as suitable.¹¹ Similarly, attempting to access the other may just as well be called “*aimer manger l’autre* [to love and eat the other],” as did Derrida in his seminar of 1989–90, a revised version of the seminar of 1987–88 “*Rhétorique du cannibalisme: Politique de l’amitié*.” Writing during the coronavirus epidemic, I cannot access my books or my notes. But at least in Period 32 of *Circumfessions* “*aimer*” [to love] is just given as an alternative: “why I chose ‘eating the other’ or ‘loving-eating-the-other’ for this year’s seminar.”¹² I would suggest that the dark princess, Princess Kautilya (incidentally the first name of an extremely well-known male political theorist of the fourth century BCE), the protagonist of *Dark Princess*, is loved but not eaten well as an other. I am enabled here by Oswald de Andrade’s “Manifesto of Anthropophagy,” published in 1928, the very same year that *Dark Princess* came out. Here is a passage where de Andrade lays out the concept-metaphor of anthropophagy pretty clearly: “What result[s] is

not a sublimation of the sexual instinct. It is the thermometrical scale of the anthropophagic instinct. From the carnal, it turns elective, and creates friendship. Affective, love. Speculative, to science."¹³

This is the story Du Bois wanted to tell. But the thermometer failed him.

I have suggested elsewhere that, when you globalize colonialism to fight it everywhere, you must establish connections with the progressive bourgeoisie, which, in the name of a necessarily Orientalized nation, is fighting the masters. It is not possible in such a situation to confront the internal problems of the colonized country in any nuanced detail.¹⁴ In *Dark Princess*, Du Bois implicitly sympathizes with the worst problems in India: caste and class. The princess is a Brahmin, a benevolent absolutist monarch. In the implausible wedding ceremony between the princess and Matthew (the Black protagonist), Buddhism, Islam, and Hinduism come together. One must, I suppose, admire the desire to see this happen, but the details of the three religions are so absurd, and this implausible coming together is so out of sync with the fierce and convincing realism of the Chicago chapters of the book, that the internalization promised by successful eating of the heroic enemy's heart fails as a ritual of representation. Just as implausibly, and in response to just as admirable a desire, this autocratic princess has immediate access to black subalternity. (In *Black Reconstruction*, by contrast, Du Bois rhetorically stages his inability to touch the enslaved in affect.)¹⁵ In the final section of *Dark Princess*, the usual passionate exchange of the epistolary form is turned into a mechanism: one "fact" after the other.

Chandler simply lists the novel as "indeed" narrating, among many other texts, "a new global order" and offers no reading (133). It may be a symptom of a broad misunderstanding of the limits of establishing uniformity among colonized nations in order to liberate the color line.

In the discussion of Du Bois's (auto)biography of John Brown, the white abolitionist who was hanged for his raid at Harper's Ferry, Chandler provides a superb example of his appreciation of Du Bois's practice of the phenomenological way operative within a certain Marx.

Chandler recognizes that this intuition makes Du Bois read John Brown as something like an "African American" (I cannot help but think of Denver in *Beloved*), in a "study [that] is a sustained inquiry into the structures of 'double consciousness' of a 'White' man, understood

by Du Bois to be configured as such by way of his being with reference to the Negro in America" (126).¹⁶ As Chandler notes, Brown is placed within a "genealogy" of "African American leadership from 1750 to 1900" (231). And Du Bois finally cites Frederick Douglass's judgment that it was John Brown who started the Civil War that led to Emancipation: "not Carolina, but Virginia, not Fort Sumter, but Harper's Ferry and the arsenal, not Major Anderson, but John Brown began the war that ended American slavery, and made this a free republic" (*John Brown*, 152).

For Chandler, Du Bois's biography of John Brown is better than other biographies because Du Bois is able to see the doubleness of Brown's life. Death was its central meaning. He had to die once as a "white" man and once again as a person with a proper name. Chandler's deconstructive sympathies sees the double here as well, since the relationship between the "proper" name and the person is not in any sense necessary. Du Bois understood this as John Brown's having to die by way of becoming "otherwise"—a passage by way of the other. And so Du Bois studies him from the point of view of the Negro: itself, again, the site of a double "cathexis"—occupying with desire—of Africa and America: a loving/eating offering a second sight, both points of view internalized. "Within the gesture of this affirmation of the bearing, the legibility, heterogeneity, of a double reference is situated the conceptual resource on which he draws to illuminate the question of John Brown" (120).¹⁷ To bear witness to this white/Negro double reference, Chandler notes that the biography begins not with life details of John Brown but with "the contribution of Africa to the making of America. . . . This narrative does not begin in New England, in Connecticut, where John Brown 'proper,' so to speak, was born in the flesh, but by reference to Africa, to another beginning" (121, 123). We must remember the visceral image of the connection repeated in chapter 5: "John Brown was born just as the shudder of Hayti was running through all the Americas, and from his earliest boyhood he saw and felt the price of repression—the fearful costs that the western world was paying for slavery" (*John Brown*, 28)—"a shudder in the loins engenders there."¹⁸

Once again, Chandler uses the concept-metaphor of the fold, fold upon fold, "another form of fold"—being folded-together, being complicit, in another way, that the narrative of John Brown's life/death

provides for Du Bois (127). This model of a complicit claim to responsibility is a much stronger model of practice than identitarian behavior except as dictated by the focused murders from the other side. Black lives matter. . . .¹⁹

John Brown broadens out into anticolonialism in the end. That is Du Bois's sense of "The Legacy of John Brown." From the African American end it is a major step to expand the color line to all colors but white. But the impossibility of loving/eating the ungeneralizabilities, the complex internal details of the functioning of power inherent to colonized space—from the point of view of only the colonized (not their leaders)—remains in place, especially in the italicized pages he added in 1962. Chandler pays no mind to them, but one must take the relay from Du Bois's heroic anticolonialism and run elsewhere today and earn the right to learn from the inequities of postcolonial nations how to practice freedom after a nominal Independence. Our world knows, as Du Bois's world could not, that national liberation is not a revolution. Time will not allow a discussion of this here. Postcolonial global history calls us elsewhere: we must apply the concept of domination, hegemony, oppression, exploitation to the period before the interplay of capital and colony, including accounts of collaboration and admiration. This makes room for an acknowledgment of complicity—folded-togetherness—rather than forcing global inequality to be conceptualized as good or evil or both *after* colonialism. I am asking for us to see that development as sustainable underdevelopment has a longer history and perhaps even that this history is beginning to make itself visible as the pattern of globalization explodes economic growth into developing inequality. This immense labor must have the second sight of ungeneralizability even as it must generalize. One must permanently agitate for a collectivity where the double-dying colonizing countries—this double death is the legacy of John Brown—dies again—sacrifices the proper name—with the internal resistances against the history of located evil.

Dusk of Dawn seems written to prove Chandler's thesis, for it is "a practical effort to think, which is not simply to describe, simultaneously the order of the constitution of the African American subject and the order of the phenomenon of the systemic practice of racial distinction" (83), race itself as simultaneously real and other than real (88). In *Souls*, he notices the play of "between," "and," and "the unasked

question" "How does it feel to be a problem?" (*Souls of Black Folk*, 1). *Dusk of Dawn* stages this structure:

Thus, by its fidelity to its theme and the form of its telling, the autobiographical, Du Bois's discourse, it seems to me, comes upon a rather profound and profoundly original structure. Stated at the level of the subject, and this mode of thematizing its constitution, Du Bois desediments the fact that according to his most intimate genealogy *the other is*, quite literally, *himself*. And, this is *true* in a double sense: (1) he is other than himself, his subject position fashioned through the other, by the structure or play of a certain X: and (2) that which he thought was *the other, is he, himself*. This originary structure would be *as true for a white as for a black* Du Bois. (105)

According to Chandler's vocabulary in this book, Du Bois deconstructs (reverses and displaces the binary opposition black-white) by "desedimenting" the fact of white paternity—"passing" father, "reported" great-great-grandfather, white great-great-grandfather on both sides, and so on—by recognizing that in this articulation of "I am my father," the definitive predication of patriarchy, the problem of the Negro supplements the Oedipal scene. This is "originary," sets all men going. This is the "between" and the "and." The unasked question staged in *Dusk of Dawn* may be "what is it like to be white/black?"

We have to remark, of course, that gendering would confuse this. Something that is recognized by Chandler when he puts the X in this consideration of genealogy as follows:

Dr. James Du Bois "never married, but had one of his slaves as his common-law wife, a small brown-skinned woman born on the island" (*Dusk*, 105). Du Bois does not know a proper name for this woman [think "circumfession"] who would in its eventuality become his paternal great-grandmother. Du Bois records, marks, but does not explicitly re-mark this absence. *She appears, if she can be said to appear at all, as an absence, or under the sign of absence, an invisible X, perhaps.* (101, italics mine)

The reader is invited to unpack the rhetoric of this "pivotal" passage, supplementing the fierceness of the patriarchal question, the invisible X of the title, its phenomenality an unanticipatable appearance under the sign of absence, itself given in the rhetoric of alternation.

Chandler finds two main themes in the text: exemplarity and intermixture.

Let us consider the aporia of exemplarity first. If you take something as an example, it loses its quiddity as it becomes an example of your proposition. If one chooses oneself as an example of a concept's play, the seemingly autobiographical takes away the ontic identity of the subject, staging the self in its many forms of appearance, its phenomenality. Yet there is no guarantee of objectivity; hence, notes Chandler, the introductory section of *Dusk* is titled "Apology" (96). I am grateful that Chandler connects this to my own "deconstruction of identity by identities" (109). "In the folds of this European civilization I was born," Du Bois wrote, "and shall die, imprisoned, conditioned, depressed, exalted and inspired. . . . I did little to create my day or greatly change it; but *I did exemplify it and thus for all time my life is significant for all lives of men*" (85, emphasis Chandler's).

"Intermixture" is more like what we have called "complicity," being folded together. That is not Chandler's vocabulary, but still the occasional "fold" gets said, as in the discussion of *Souls*. When Du Bois writes, "We have been afraid in America that scientific study in this direction might lead to conclusions with which we were loath to agree; and this fear in reality because the economic foundation of the modern world was based on the recognition and preservation of so-called racial distinctions," Chandler describes Du Bois's insistence on demonstrating complicity rather than opposition as "inscrib[ing] scholarship in [the] *folds* [of the process of racial distinction]" (96, emphasis mine). It is probably not Derrida's influence but rather being haunted by Derrida.

Du Bois tells us that he was born into accepting racial identity and shows how, as he moved into the world of work, his concept of himself, as well as his ideas of how he knows what he knows, changed out of the confines of a narrow racial identification. Elsewhere I have called this imaginative activism. Chandler tells us this story as "epistemological," as he shows us that one of the most important features of intermixture is the undoing of the strict binary opposition between white and colored. Chandler cites Raymond Martin in an obscure footnote to mark originary creolity (225). When men such as Frederick Douglass and Du Bois claim their fathers, I can think that they are situating rape as if on a taxonomy of all heterosexual arrangements as consensual rape for social security and passage of property. Frederick Douglass's symbolic answer to the critics of his second marriage to

the white suffragist Helen Pitts, nearly forty years younger than he: "My first wife was the color of my mother and the second, the color of my father" is a clue to this. And Du Bois's peculiar relationship to James Du Bois on one hand, leading to his deadbeat dad, his grandfather passing for white, brought up as a "gentleman" (read "white"), who left him when he was two and about whom he has affectionate, understanding things to say. (What would pop psych say to Du Bois and Gramsci both having absent fathers, the former a happy-go-lucky guy, the latter, also come down in his fortunes, an embezzler?) And the peculiar figure of his great-great-grandfather Tom Burghardt ("this African has had between one hundred and fifty and two hundred descendants," and of whom it is "recorded that [he] was 'reported a Negro'": *Dusk of Dawn*, 110–11, emphasis mine). Such undecidable reporting of ancestral identity helps in the undoing of whites as necessarily oppositional and only oppressively disavowing authority. To an extent it is once again the "form of appearance" question. If in the phenomenology of slavery, or postslavery "passing," white is oppressive, in the reality of intermixture, unacknowledged paternity might appear as perhaps patriarchy undone. Raymond Martin reprimands anthropology for insisting on the pure primitive. Chandler shows that even anthropology can go by blood quantum, only half in jest: "the peculiar sense of shock I create every time I inform my students, deadpan, that Frederick Douglass, the son of a slave and a slave-owner, was one of the most distinguished white Americans of the nineteenth century," wrote Karen Fields, a brilliant and ironic anthropologist (207–8).²⁰ Complicity.

In the same desedimenting mode, toward the middle of *Dusk of Dawn* Du Bois stages a conversation with a second imaginary white friend, the long exchange with whom ends with the following question, asked by the friend: "'Honest to God, what do you think Asia and Africa would do to us if they got a chance?' 'Skin us alive' I answer cheerfully, loving the 'us'" (*Dusk of Dawn*, 167). That "cheer" is the mark of intermixture as complicity.

As Chandler writes,

The autobiographical runs throughout Du Bois's itinerary and likewise it might be shown that its sense guides sets [*sic*] the tone of the narrative and suffuses on the order of example and perspective even his most systematic historical work. . . . The definitive turn, or deepening, of Du

Bois's inhabitation of this order of discourse would have been the construction of *Dusk of Dawn* in the closing year of the 1930s. (217)

It remains curious that Chandler does not read the final autobiography, edited by Aptheker and published in 1968, five years after Du Bois's death.

Du Bois's real efforts to discover "the legacy of Africa" (122) is to be found in his readings late in life among the highly annotated historical and anthropological texts and periodic official reports to be found in his final collection at the Du Bois Centre for Pan-Africanism and Culture in Accra. So it is appropriate that that effort is recorded by a different trajectory in Chandler. Du Bois's responsibility "to the great legacy of ancient Africa" is contained in the fact that Du Bois's reporting of the narrative of John Brown's life "does not begin in New England, in Connecticut, where John Brown 'proper,' so to speak, was born in the flesh, but by reference to Africa, to *another beginning* (123, emphasis mine). Chandler moves through Du Bois's own desedimentation of his own paternity and then into Pan-Africanism. Certainly the trajectory of *The World and Africa*, which Chandler does not discuss, does give us a sense of Du Bois imagining Africa in geological and then broad historical time, somewhat abruptly moving into the contemporary. In between, there is a reading of Olaudah Equiano's *Interesting Narrative*, again approaching Africa through a transitional moment.

Chandler reads Olaudah Equiano as offering another way to understand "between," the concept-metaphor that gives him Du Bois, so to speak. Equiano is "between" because, as property—enslaved—he negotiates property, "commence[s] merchant," as he says himself in his book—until, by following the rules of mercantile capitalism, buying cheap and selling dear, he amasses £40 and buys his freedom. And, by understanding property as himself property, he also accedes, however figuratively, to the status of the subject of the Law.²¹ (This is part of his "between"-ness, "between" Africa and its other, as in Olaudah Equiano's putative African homeland, "'money is of little use,' though some coins are in circulation."²² From barter to exchange-value, then, with self-exchange at the origin.) Chandler also suggests that by making his master realize that without him the master will simply not be able to continue his own work, he puts Hegel's master-and-slave dialectic also into a "between"-structure, by showing that the master depends

upon the slave. By the end of the book, Equiano, having done a great deal in the service of the antislavery movement in Britain, tells us that Africa is now open to commerce and thus on the road to development.

Chandler does not give much time to *Black Reconstruction* in this text, although I know that he has been engaged in reading the book with his students, because I had the good fortune to participate in this process at the University of California–Irvine. I would like to suggest that in that text, Du Bois offers an account of the enslaved acceding to subjectship by way of capital that is rather more complex.

We should certainly admire Equiano's use of property as property himself in order to access freedom. We should admire him when he shows his master that he cannot do without him. My own feeling is that we should admire him rather more for his extraordinary labors toward the eradication of the evil of slavery and his brilliant descriptions of today's Iboland in Nigeria, where he was born and where he grew up.²³ Or describe the *faux bond* or missed date between the text printed on paper and the one you inscribe on memory:

I had a great curiosity to talk to the books, as I thought [one] did and so to learn how all things had a beginning for that purpose I have often taken up a book, and have talked to it, and then put my ears to it, when alone, in hope it would answer me, and I have been very much concerned when I found it remained silent.²⁴

And we should of course remember that Hegel warned against narrativizing phenomenology (although the rhetorical conduct of the text constantly asks us to make that mistake).

The best way to show the master that s/he cannot do without the worker is to go on strike. That is how the fugitive slave negotiated property even as she was herself property; she recoded herself as "free" labor by downing tools and walking away. This is not mercantile capitalism, buying cheap and selling dear. This is not money-lending, Equiano's mature profession, precapitalist commercial capital. This is industrial capitalism, based on the theft of surplus value.²⁵ The enslaved is not accessible to the theft of surplus value for her entire labor is unwaged. But by operating the downing tools gesture and then not remaining with the master, refusing to continue within the unacknowledged labor situation, the contraband (Du Bois knew a couple as child) defines herself not as a single person but as a collective as

“free” as in “free labor.” Subsequently, slaves did define themselves once again by becoming the appropriate subject of the first New Deal of the United States: Reconstruction. This is human property refusing to remain property that Du Bois managed to recognize. Marx’s criticism of Hegel’s *Phenomenology* was that it was confined only to the mind and that he himself would introduce history and go on to write the phenomenology of capital. He empirically saw a double, with discontinuous collective subjects that are more appropriate to the historical. Read in detail, *Black Reconstruction* stages unacknowledged constitutive difference—racism, classism, and the politics of power and greed destroyed the first New Deal.

The book ends beautifully with an invocation of Africa and a look toward change in the future anterior, the undecidable future perfect that marks the vanishing present. Chandler presents Du Bois as thinking of the Negro as a global diasporic ensemble, not only as Africans all over the world but also as the best subject of Pan-Africanism, further globalized into general anticolonialism.

According to Chandler, Du Bois’s thought was predicated on “the possibility of the other” (70). Along that line, the color line became a rainbow long before the “rainbow coalition” became a metropolitan diasporic watchword. And today, in May-June 2020, with that coalition coming forward to call for a collective transformation of the United States, we confront a form of appearance of that global diasporic ensemble. Chandler’s ending can take on board the precarious future of this ensemble today.

It is clear from the posthumous *Autobiography* that Du Bois knew that Pan-Africanism had not caught on, and indeed a specifically “global” anticolonialism did not seem likely. To think the subject of these movements Chandler names an African Diaspora that is not a thing but “a name—a theoretical object—for thought” (174). The syntax—perhaps representing hesitation—is careful. “African Diaspora” is a name for thought. Or, African Diaspora, as a theoretical object, is a name for thought.²⁶ It is an impossible thought, and yet it must be thought, with an eye to the future, always, to cite Derrida, “to come.”

Chandler does not use Derrida’s phrase, although he does avoid the “is.” Does he avoid Derrida’s own criticism of these futuristic phrases that “suspend . . . the ontological copula of the ‘is’?” (Derrida 2005b, 51). I think to be guilty here is complicity in extremis. Africa is

the name of what was outside. Diaspora is the throwing of that seed, outside that outside. It will mark difference, not only in general ontology but also in the originary historicity of the vanishing present. Our time will pass tracking it. Fred Moten and, once again, Hortense Spillers have been his leading collaborators upon this track. “Perhaps we should just call it ‘X’” (177).

Chandler takes no particular notice of gendering in Du Bois. Yet that too is part of the play of irreducible difference in fundamental ontology, noticed by Derrida in his work on *Geschlecht* and by Spillers everywhere. I have noted that he marked Du Bois’s great-great-grandmother with an X as well. But that is not enough, for it is the mark of no work rather than a whole book’s worth of work. The delicate task of that analysis, given the ancestor-worshipping mode of much contemporary study of these great male figures, will have to be crafted by trans-workers from within.²⁷

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Notes

1. W.E.B. Du Bois, “Russia and America: An Interpretation,” unpublished manuscript completed in 1950, <http://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b221-i082>, 5.

2. Cited in Chandler, 207.

3. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 175–76.

4. Cited from Hortense Spillers, “Moving on Down the Line: Variations on the African-American Sermon,” in Spillers, 262.

5. See Spivak, “Education,” in *Talking to Du Bois*.

6. For a discussion of the concept-metaphor of the realm of freedom, see Spivak 2018a, 281–82.

7. “Of Exorbitance” is the title of the first chapter, a chapter recounting Derrida’s graciousness to Chandler’s submission of it to him in 1996.

8. Justice Traynor, *California v. Powell* (1967), 67 Cal.2d 32, 63.

9. I have spliced a few sentences together.

10. Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 10; Spivak, "Three Women's Texts and Circumfession," 7–22.

11. Spivak, "Crimes of Identity," 207–227. I have commented on the hauntology between Marx and Hegel in "Global Marx?," 272. For a feminist conceptualization of hauntology, see Musser, 83.

12. Derrida and Bennington, 164.

13. De Andrade, "Anthropophagic Manifesto," 43; translation modified.

14. Spivak, "Du Bois in the World: Pan-Africanism and Decolonization."

15. Spivak, *Talking to Du Bois*.

16. It is interesting that this choice came after two biographies of Black heroes—Frederick Douglass and Nat Turner—failed for editorial reasons. The story is told in Aptheker, 88–89.

17. For a feminist use of double-consciousness and second sight, see Musser, 82.

18. W. B. Yeats, "Leda and the Swan," l. 9.

19. This sentence was written before the mourning of George Floyd dislocated mere identitarianism.

20. Cited from Fields, 196.

21. In his excellent speculative study of racial capitalism, David Kazanjian places Equiano among a larger group of "black mariners," only to demonstrate his uniqueness. In spite of the usual racist impediments, he literally (re)writes his abstract subjectship, manipulating his double identity as African and American as "active social subject"ivity, away from the sea, attaining a position of moral suasion and intervention, supported by patronage and the "economic subjectivity" of usury. It would be out of place here to dwell on the distinction between mercantile capitalism, mercantilism, and primitive accumulation by the capitalization of land; Kazanjian notes the important Marxian insight that individuals are collectively constituted by the forces of production. Kazanjian, 50, 60.

22. Cited in Carretta, 14. See also Kazanjian, 59.

23. Some have doubted his African birth. The debate is summarized at <https://brychchancarey.com/equiano/nativity.htm>.

24. Cited in Phillips, 16.

25. "In a passage in *Capital III*, Marx offers an interesting and important gloss, which is, however, different, from *The German Ideology*, above all in the tightness of its formulation: 'The specific economic form in which unpaid surplus labour is pumped out of the direct producers determines the relation of domination and servitude, as it emerges directly out of production itself and in its turn reacts upon production. Upon this basis, however, is founded the entire structure of the economic community, which grows up out of the conditions of production itself, and consequently its specific political form. It is always the direct relation between the masters of the conditions of production and the direct producers which reveals the innermost secret, the hidden foundation of the entire social edifice, and therefore also of the political form of the relation between sovereignty and dependence, in short, of the particular form of the State.' Here it is the relations of

‘domination and servitude,’ defined far more specifically in terms of the way surplus value is extracted in capitalist production, which ‘reveals the innermost secret, the hidden foundations of the entire social edifice;’ hence, its political forms; and thus the forms of the state itself. In another, more significant, passage, Marx quotes his own words from the 1859 ‘Preface’ in a long and important footnote in the chapter on ‘Commodities’ in *Capital I*. He quotes it without modification—and clearly with approval. . . . Indeed, this ‘double relation’ is conceptualized as asymptotic: since, in production, the social relations themselves progressively become ‘a productive force’” Hall, 86–87, 89.

26. The reader will forgive a long self-quotation: “Let us enter the task at hand by way of the ‘ism’ of names—“nominalism”—and open up once again that famous sentence, written to be repeated: “One needs to be a nominalist, no doubt: power, it is not an institution, and it is not a structure; it is not a certain strength [puissance] that some are endowed with; it is the name that one lends [*prêter*] to a complex strategical situation in a particular society” (Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, tr. Robert Hurley, New York: Vintage, 1980, vol. 1, p. 93). This provisional ‘naming’ by the theorist is not simply to code within a given system. ‘This multiplicity of force relations can be coded . . . either in the form of ‘war’ or in the form of ‘politics.’ ‘The field of possible codings can be, in principle, indefinitely enlarged. The nominalism is a methodological necessity. One needs a name for this thing whose ‘mechanism [can be used] as a grid of intelligibility of the social order.’ It is called ‘power’ because that is the closest one can get to it. This sort of proximate naming can be called catachrestic.” Spivak 1993, 26.

27. Stepping-stones: Spillers, Carby, Weinbaum, Yvonne DuBois, Williams Irvin . . .

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