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Radical Cosmopolitanism: W.E.B. Du Bois, Germany, and African American Pragmatist Visions for Twenty-First Century Europe

Introduction

At the centennial of the publication of W.E.B. Du Bois's most famous book, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), we asked the questions: What has been its influence? What does or can it mean today at the beginning of the new century, in a time of globalization, relocalizations, and violent conflicts among nations, religions, ethnic and racial groups, a time of postcolonialism and new manifestations of imperialism, in a time of postmodernism, a radical critique of the enlightenment tradition, and the powerful manifestations of minority and border discourses?

It is well-known that Germany played an important role in Du Bois's intellectual development and that he travelled to Germany several times over more than six decades. He wrote about his very different experiences in the country and the intellectual and cultural influences he took up, appropriated, and transformed for his own purposes. He discussed the multiple genres and kinds of discourses he used and developed in order to come to terms with the various conflicting strains and modes in German culture and society in his many books and countless articles. Yet his work has remained virtually unknown to the German-speaking public outside academia. During the second half of the 1960s his *Autobiography* was published in a German translation, or, better, edited version, in the German Democratic Republic, *Mein Weg, meine Welt* (trans. Erich Salewski, preface Jürgen Kuczynski, 1969). And, interestingly enough, *The Souls of Black Folk* was finally published in 2003 as *Die Seelen der Schwarzen* in a German translation by Jürgen Meyer-Wendt by Orange Press, Freiburg, with a preface by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. In advertising this first translation of the book into the German language, the publishers write: "After 100 years the book is still of undiminished relevance, both in its formal aspects as a modern mixture of theoretical and narrative texts and in the central question it poses: Where and how are the lines of difference between cultures drawn?"

In my essay I want to take up the questions of the role of *The Souls of Black Folk* in the development of Du Bois's cultural and political philosophy, in American (and African American) intellectual and cultural history, and, more generally, of the dialectics and dialogics of his way of thinking. I will discuss the transformation and transfiguration of the objectives, motifs, and distinctive modes of writing he created and explored over the course of more than seven decades and the challenges and provocations his unequalled rich and powerful work poses for our struggle with the problems of the twenty-first century.

I will first point out a number of crucial aspects of *The Souls of Black Folk* that I find most important for identifying the achievement of the book seen from the beginning of our new century. They will indicate the complexity and the productive tensions of his international intellectual and political activities of the preceding two decades that culminated in the composition of *The Souls of Black Folk* and the directions he pursued in his work for the next sixty years until his death in 1963.

I will then contextualize and historicize the book in Du Bois's career and time and indicate the competing and concurring intellectual strains and philosophical approaches that shaped his philosophical, cultural, and political practice. I will indicate the strong emphasis on Du Bois's *pragmatism* in recent scholarship, on his specific version of American pragmatist philosophy, and read *The Souls of Black Folk* as his first powerful effort to bring his German-influenced Hegelian and his American Jamesian pragmatist way of reflecting on society, politics, and culture in a productive interrelationship. Yet this is only part of the story. These philosophical negotiations can only be grasped in their formative and energizing power, if we realize that in *The Souls of Black Folk* they are *rearticulated* through an immersion in, and transfiguration of, African American (folk) cultural traditions and expressive modes.

I will next focus on *one* perspective, *one* highly complex, intercultural, and transnational set and process of the negotiations of different intellectual lines of thought, cultural traditions, and modes of inquiry and writing in the social sciences and the humanities, of the interrelationship of aesthetics and politics, and of modes and genres of writing in Du Bois's career, on *his relationship to Germany*.

My analysis will be selective. I want to highlight some of Du Bois's reactions to Berlin and the University of Berlin during his studies in 1892-94, his own accounts of the intellectual changes during those years, and his later reassessments of the intellectual influences he reappropriated for his own projects (such as *Dusk of Dawn*, *Autobiography*, essays). I will discuss in more detail some aspects of the use he made in his fiction of his stay in Berlin during the mid-1920s, in his important, but often neglected novel

Dark Princess (1928), in which he dramatizes the experiences, reflections, and visions of a young African American intellectual who gets involved in the programmatic of a coalition of all the “darker people” of the world against white colonialist supremacy and the relation of this anticolonialist fight to the quest for liberation of black Americans. I also want to indicate how Du Bois’s articles about his longer stay in Berlin in the mid-1930s show in which way his complex and exploratory way of thinking enabled him to offer penetrating insights into the dynamics of Third Reich politics and how his impressions helped him extend his own understanding of different racial formations in the world. The last part of this long section will be a discussion of Du Bois’s final stay in Germany in 1958, when he was awarded an honorary doctorate at his German *alma mater* in Berlin, then renamed Humboldt-Universität.

The concluding section of my essay will give a tentative reassessment of the complex interplay of different philosophical, social scientific, cultural, and literary discourses and of competing political principles and practices in Du Bois’s career. It will take up the question of how *The Souls of Black Folk* speaks and should speak to our contemporary cultural and political problems, focusing on Germany as seen in the perspective of the difficult processes of achieving something like a multi- and transnational “unified” Europe. I think that we can characterize W.E.B. Du Bois’s work as a powerfully challenging model of what I would like to call “radical cosmopolitanism.”

The Souls of Black Folk—The Poetics and Politics of Double Consciousness

W.E.B. Du Bois’s *The Souls of Black Folk* is a book that did not fit any established category or genre of discourse of its time. What kind of book is it? What are its main energizing and formative concepts, features, strategies, and visions, as seen from our perspective one hundred years later?

Let me remind you of some key terms and issues:

In his “Forethought” to *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois writes about the metaphors of the “Veil,” of “the two worlds within and without the Veil,” of the dialectic of “leaving . . . the white world” of racism and “stepp[ing] within the Veil,” into the “deeper recesses” of the black world, black folk culture, “the meaning of its religion, the passion of its human sorrow, and the struggle of its greater souls,” as expressed particularly in the “Sorrow Songs,” both religious and secular. The black American is denied full participation in American society and is “born with a veil,” but he or she is *also* “gifted with second-sight in the American world,” a prophetic sight

that deconstructs and transcends the limitations and structures of racist white society from within (359). But the dialectic of the Veil also relates to Du Bois's stepping out of the Veil of (racist) American culture at large and seeing and analyzing it from a distance, from the very different world of Europe.

The next crucial concept is Du Bois's much-discussed and influential notion of "double consciousness" as a dynamic, open, bi-(or multi-)cultural mode of inquiry of African American experience, culture, thinking, and discourse. Its references in the work of Hegel, Emerson, and William James have extensively been debated. Among the many interpretations of the concept I find Bernard Bell's and Nahum Chandler's reflections particularly pertinent. For Bell, "double consciousness" does not just describe the fate of all immigrants in the U.S. or "hyphenated Americans," but articulates a *specific* complex double vision of African Americans that is *both* "a mythic blessing" *and* "a social burden": "the distinctiveness of African American double consciousness is a dynamic, rather than merely static and essentialist, residual African spirituality expressed in 'the great message' of African American folk and formal art" (93). Bell sums up his argument by writing:

Rather than a sociocultural conflict that has been inevitably internalized as incipient personal pathology, African American double consciousness thus signifies a biracial, bicultural state of being in the world, an existential site of socialized cultural ambivalence and emancipatory possibilities of personal and social transformation, and a dynamic epistemological mode of critical inquiry for African Americans. (95-96)

This "dynamic" reading of double-consciousness as a negotiation of "unreconciled" and *unreconcilable* "strivings" and discourses, of keeping gaps and contradictions, the tension between dialectic and dialogic discourse open, is also emphasized, in a more deconstructivist vein, by Nahum Chandler, who argues that Du Bois "never ceased to affirm this heterogeneity as *also* a good, a resource, in general," a discourse on "impurity" that "opens a powerful critical reflection upon its own historical production" ("Economy" 85). As a "movement of ambivalence" (Chandler, "Originary" 272) it marks out "the very space and possibility of desire and the future" ("Originary" 275):

On the one hand, it maintains the social being of the Negro in a domain of identification that refuses to abide by the oppositional logic or categories of racial distinction; one can be both a Negro and an American. It confounds the ultimate premise of racial distinction, a categorical or oppositional logic of distinction or identification. On the other hand, it affirms a difference as operative in American, one that Du Bois, perhaps strategically, perhaps anachronistically (and perhaps not), names 'African.' ("Originary" 275)

What I find crucial about these reflections is that in the emphasis on difference, on ambivalence, on a dynamic mode of cultural analysis they try

to grasp the *specific* quality of African American double-consciousness—as against the conflict between the “original” and the “new” culture immigrants have to confront—but, at the same time, that they indicate that “[t]his difference produces a heterogeneity within the general social field of American life and history” (Chandler, “Originary” 273). This “heterogeneity” and decentering multiplicity, of intra- and intercultural difference, of culture and/vs. power/politics, of the encounter and clash of different cultures has increasingly permeated U.S. American culture and society in the last decades of the twentieth century.

Clearly, these reflections are intimately related to and illuminate the repercussions of Du Bois’s famous statement at the beginning of his “Forethought” to *The Souls of Black Folk* that “the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color line” (359). Du Bois transcends the frame of “the Negro problem” in the United States and places it, or begins to place it, in an international, intercultural perspective that affects both the colonized and the colonizers, as he elaborates his statement in the second chapter of *The Souls of Black Folk*, “the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia, Africa, in America and the islands of the sea” (372). By using and again and again revising and rearticulating the term “color line” in its interrelations with the notion of “double consciousness,” Du Bois prophetically opens up decentering perspectives that permit him in later years to see the “American Negro problem” *in its global comparative context* and to see American racism, American racial formations as grounded not just in economic structures or ethnocentric prejudices, but in worldwide patterns of colonialism and imperialism.

As a consequence of Du Bois’s reflections on “double consciousness” and the “problem of the color line,” the question poses itself how to turn these tensions, hybridities, and challenges into political practices. It could no longer be sufficient to define African American politics in terms of the “Negro problem,” of the workings of the Tuskegee machine, of asking for a “fair deal” under the “separate but equal” doctrine. *The Souls of Black Folk* sets out to redefine the meaning of “black politics,” to explore different visions of black political practices, before the background of Du Bois’s experiences in Europe and the first Pan-African Congress held in London in 1900.

But these reflections on doubleness, hybridity, and new cultural and political practices also urgently ask the question of *how* to *articulate* them in modes of *writing*, in new, experimental, exploratory discourses. In its multi-voicedness, its provocative mixture of genres, *The Souls of Black Folk* is a *modernist* text, a collage, a force-field of different discourses and their mutual transfigurations. By printing the musical scores of black spirituals at the beginning of each chapter, the text also emphasizes its performative

quality and the transcendence of language. It is only through the multiplicity and flexibility of literary forms and discursive strategies that Du Bois authorizes and reaffirms his antiracist, anticolonial, and anti-imperialist political and cultural critique and practice. But *The Souls of Black Folk* is a *black* modernist text, as it is energized by black folk culture and modes of folk expression, double-voiced, intertextual, a founding text of a black modernist African American “vernacular” aesthetic, literary, and cultural tradition, as they have been theorized in recent years, in different ways, by critics such as Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Houston A. Baker, Mae Gwendolyn Henderson, or Hortense J. Spillers.¹

What is crucially important, however, is to emphasize again that Du Bois, in *The Souls of Black Folk*, does *not* set out to establish some new “program” or “ideology” in his understanding of “black political practices,” *nor* does he propose any new aesthetic dogma for African American writing in the twentieth century. His book was so powerful and influential because it was pronouncedly *exploratory* and *tentative*, because it dramatized in an open and suggestive way the complexities, the heterogeneities, and the hybridities of the multi- and intercultural, cosmopolitan dynamics of African American and, therefore, American culture, society, and politics at large, opening up the perspectives for a wider, global discourse.

The Souls of Black Folk—Dialectics, Pragmatism, and African American Discourse

The Souls of Black Folk is a highly complex, radical text, or “interim report and program,” of Du Bois’s thinking and his mode of writing at a critical juncture in his career. The book, in its intellectual and philosophical tensions, its dialogical dynamics, and its multi-voicedness forces competing and heterogeneous discourses Du Bois had drawn on and reappropriated during the preceding one and a half decades into a productive, enabling conjunction without blurring any differences or looking for a “synthesizing” unity. At the same time, the book opens up new realms of experience, discourse, and actions, setting an agenda for the twentieth century, in politics, cultural critique, and modes of writing. As Du Bois wrote in his self-review of *The*

¹ Robert Gooding-Williams strongly argues for the “inseparability” of a “literary and political reading” of *The Souls of Black Folk* in his essay “Du Bois, Politics, Aesthetics: An Introduction.” It should be noted, however, that these two readings may not only support each other, but can also be in tension, mutually deconstruct the “convergence” and challenge or transcend each other, as my reading of *Dark Princess* will show. See also the essay by Vilashini Cooppan, “The Double Politics of Double Consciousness: Nationalism and Globalism in *The Souls of Black Folk*.”

Souls of Black Folk a year after its publication, the book is characterized by “rather abrupt transitions of style, tone and viewpoint and, too, without doubt, . . . a distinct sense of incompleteness and sketchiness” (“Review” 9). “On the other hand,” he continues, “there is a unity in the book, not simply the general unity of the larger topic, but a unity of purpose in the distinctively subjective note that runs in each essay” (“Review” 9). He quite rightly emphasizes that the “unity” of the book is not a consistent theoretical or ideological program, but the critical and explorative engagement of his searching and “self-revelatory” attitude and tone. It dramatizes a prophetic voice, both spiritual and secular, he finds in the African American spirituals and in the tradition of the black preacher and the African *griot*. There is not one central consciousness, but something like the inquisitive, performative power of his “double consciousness” that articulates his “message” in a powerful manner. If there is “a central message” in the book, “around this center there has lain a penumbra of vagueness and half-veiled allusion which has made [some readers] especially impatient. How far this fault is in me and how far it is in the nature of the message I am not sure” (“Review” 9).

Du Bois tries to indicate the rich, experimental, and performative quality of his way of thinking on the “question of the Negro in the United States” (and the world of the time), of his strategies of representing the double consciousness and the multiplicity in the African American experience in a powerful and unique force-field of the philosophical traditions he had absorbed and reshaped in the United States and in Berlin during the preceding years. Du Bois’s philosophical thinking around the turn of the twentieth century was characterized by his untiring efforts to bring the philosophical traditions of Hegelian dialectics and of American pragmatism (William James) in a productive interrelationship, trying to let them revise each other (Ross Posnock), and also stage a creative dialogue of philosophical thinking with the “historical method” and social scientific approaches of detailed and informed empirical research, as Cornel West, Paul Gilroy, Shamoan Zamir, and Ross Posnock have convincingly shown in recent years.² However, in characterizing the specific quality of the intellectual challenge of *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois, at the end of his self-review, highlights the *aesthetic dimension* of the text in a way that I find particularly illuminating: “In its larger aspects the style is tropical—African” (9). Again, Du Bois does not offer a precise, programmatic statement, but talks of the

² See Cornel West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism* (esp. 138-50), Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (esp. ch. 4), Shamoan Zamir, *Dark Voices: W.E.B. Du Bois and American Thought, 1888-1903*, and Ross Posnock, *Color and Culture: Black Writers and the Making of the Modern Intellectual* (chs. 1-4). See also Muller, “Du Boisean Pragmatism and ‘The Problem of the Twentieth Century.’”

“blood of my fathers [that] spoke through me and cast off the English restraint of my training and surroundings” (“Review” 9). But by using the terms “tropical style” and “Africa,” Du Bois insists that the provocative, enabling power of *The Souls of Black Folk* and its unique literary, discursive thrust on the reader does not lie in his negotiation of different *white* intellectual traditions or philosophical schools, nor in something like an avant-garde montage *avant la lettre* of different discourses and genres of writing. Instead, Du Bois finds it in the specific aesthetic quality of an *African* expressive tradition, or, more precisely, in the performative dynamics of an *African American* aesthetics that draws on and reconfigures the African American musical and narrative expressive tradition from slavery to the beginning of the twentieth century. In his careful reading of the “folk elements” in Du Bois’s *The Souls of Black Folk*, Eric J. Sundquist has shown how the book is the founding text of a black diaspora aesthetic in American culture (*To Wake the Nations* 15). Du Bois’s self-review of *The Souls of Black Folk* also makes clear that he is not simply interested in redefining the specific quality of the African American experience, but that he envisions a new reading of “America,” of “American culture at large.” This means that African American culture is an integral part of American culture, that there is no (U.S.) *American* culture that is not permeated and energized by the African American culture it usually dismisses or despises, thus answering the question he posed near the end of the last chapter of *The Souls of Black Folk*, “Would America have been America without her Negro people?” (545).

I see Du Bois’s major achievement as a highly suggestive, provocative, and searching project that succeeds in opening up a wide-ranging multiplicity of new questions and modes of thinking, writing, and political practices. They do *not* “de-fine” any fixed ideologies or truth-claims, but set critical analysis in motion in an experimental, exploratory way to be pursued in a force-field of unending intellectual and practical revisions and rearticulations that is dynamic, inherently intercultural, and transnational.

The Dialogics of Transcultural Interrelations: W.E.B. Du Bois and Germany

Interestingly enough, the tremendous power, the penetrating insights of Du Bois’s experimental, open, and multi-voiced critical, aesthetic, and political discourses and the processes of revision and rearticulation they underwent over the decades, from the end of the nineteenth century to his death in 1963, can be seen through the prism of his relationship to Germany. Of course, this is only *one* prism we can bring to the overpowering scope of his work. As the ground has been covered more recently by Paul Gilroy, Hamilton H.

Beck, Sieglinde Lemke, Werner Sollors, Kenneth D. Barkin, Nahum Chandler, and Barrington S. Edwards, I will be selective in highlighting a few aspects and questions I have found particularly illuminating.

1892-1894—W.E.B. Du Bois and his Studies at Friedrich Wilhelms-Universität, Berlin

The University of Berlin played a crucial role as the model of a modern university, the ideal of the freedom and the interrelationship of research and teaching (*Freiheit von Forschung und Lehre*), of the humanities and social sciences (and natural sciences), of the importance of the historical method and of empirical studies in the social sciences and political economy.³ It also represented the close relations of scholarship and citizenship or politics, i.e., a strong commitment to social reforms among the professors Du Bois studied with most closely (political scientist Heinrich von Treitschke, political economist Adolf Wagner, and historical economist Gustav Schmoller; also Max Weber and the *Verein für Sozialpolitik*), as Kenneth D. Barkin and Sieglinde Lemke have pointed out (see Lemke, “Berlin and Boundaries”).

Du Bois studied socialism, attended socialist meetings, heard August Bebel; but he rejected any kind of dogmatism, of fixed ideologies. He intensively experienced European culture, not just high culture (*Kultur*), but also became aware of the powerful role of folk culture and its expressive forms, as the basis for a culture of a people (Germany had been “unified” through its *Kultur*, before it was established as a nation-state—cf. Herder). Du Bois discovered in Wagner’s operas a powerful, suggestive “synthesis” of “high art/classical music” and the folk/popular tradition. He learnt to understand culture as functional, which opened the perspective for cultural relativism and for a move beyond the fixed ethnic group version of cultural pluralism. This also strongly confirmed his conviction of the supreme importance of Black American folk music and folk culture for “American culture” at large (see Lemke, “Berlin and Boundaries” 51; cf. Brown, “Du Bois and Wagner”).

In Berlin, where the famous conference of the colonial powers had been held in 1884 and 1885, which divided the continent of Africa into their respective areas of political power, Du Bois realized the close connection of

³ For the latter aspect see Kenneth D. Barkin, “‘Berlin Days,’ 1892-1894: W.E.B. Du Bois and German Political Economy” and the careful study by Barrington S. Edwards, “W.E.B. Du Bois Between Worlds: Berlin, Empirical Social Research, and the Race Question.”

European culture and colonialism. In *Dusk of Dawn: An Essay Toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept* (1940), he writes:

Under these teachers [at the university of Berlin] and in this social setting, I began to see the race problem in America, the problem of the peoples of Africa and Asia, and the political development of Europe as one. I began to unite my economics and politics; but I still assumed that in these groups of activities and forces, the political realm was dominant. (47)⁴

His stay in Europe opened up to him a more global perspective, seeing the U.S. and its specific achievements and failures from a vast distance: stepping out of the Veil of race and racism and the “world of the Negro” as constructed in White America. As he wrote much later in his *Autobiography* (published 1968): “From this unhampered social intermingling with Europeans of education and manners, I emerged from the extremes of my racial provincialism. I became more human. . . . I ceased to hate or suspect people simply because they belonged to one race or color” (160). “I found myself on the outside of the American world looking in,” as he later put it (Du Bois, “My Evolving Program” 40). It will guide him to see the differences among various countries in Europe and to realize that in all of them racial formations are very different from those in the U.S.

Racism is redefined as culturally and socially constructed: “I began to emphasize the cultural aspects of race” (Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn* 102). Du Bois rejects biological foundationalism, but he does not simply replace earlier concepts of race with the “right” or “true” one, but he reassesses their limitations as well as their strategic potential for his project of illuminating and transcending the destructive and disabling impact of racism. Looking back on his essay of 1897, “The Conservation of Races,” he points out in *Dusk of Dawn* (1940) that the “concept of race has so changed and presented so much of contradiction that as I face Africa I ask myself: what is it between us that constitutes a tie which I can feel better than I can explain?” (116-17). His reflections on the “social heritage of slavery” that “binds together not simply the children of Africa, but extends through yellow Asia and into the South Sea” (132-33) will lead him, finally, to explicitly addressing the very problem of elaborating a theoretical “concept” (137) of race and racism. When he gave *Dusk of Dawn* the subtitle, *An Essay Toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept*, he indicated the very close, life-long interrelation of the discursive construction and revision of the “concept of race” and of autobiographical rearticulations, writing at the end of the chapter “The Concept of Race”: “Perhaps it is wrong to speak of it at all as ‘a concept’ rather than as a group of contradictory forces, facts and

⁴ See Du Bois’s earlier essays such as “The African Roots of the War” and “Race Pride.”

tendencies,” in the reassertion of personal and collective life “in the modern world” (133; cf. vii-viii).

Some conclusions on the transformations of Du Bois’s thinking can be drawn: We find significant qualifications, extensions of what he had learnt at Harvard, with George Santayana, Josiah Royce, and particularly William James. But his earlier training also enabled him to approach philosophical ways of thinking and sociological methods of research in Berlin in a different, more exploratory perspective (vs. “system,” vs. “absolute truth” claims). In the following years, he increasingly revised his indebtedness to the Hegelian tradition and emphasized the importance of William James’s pragmatism, but extended its application to the intricate problems of social action in a racist society, to “build[ing] an interracial culture, broader and more catholic than ours” (Du Bois, “My Evolving Program” 58).

In his reflections on the occasion of his twenty-fifth birthday in 1893 in Berlin on Truth, Goodness, and Beauty, Du Bois described his life project as “working for the world’s good” in relation to his own best development, and his “plans: to make a name in [social] science [*Wissenschaft*], to make a name in literature and thus to raise my race. Or perhaps to raise a visible empire in Africa thro’ England, France or Germany.” His commitment is strong, his project multi-directional and still vague, an open quest that tries to do justice to the complexity and the contradictions of these efforts: “I wonder what will be the outcome? Who knows?” (“Celebrating” 26-29). As he put it later in his essay “My Evolving Program for Negro Freedom”: “I returned [to the U.S.] ready and eager to begin my life work, leading to the emancipation of the American Negro” (43), an effort that did *not* accept a rift between theory and practice in social studies.

After Du Bois’s return to the United States, he pursued various kinds of work in different parts of the country, finished his Ph.D. thesis at Harvard about the *Suppression of the African Slave Trade to the United States of America, 1638-1870* in 1896, and got immersed in Southern black folk culture, taught in the South, and strongly affirmed cultural “hybridity” (in contrast to von Treitschke’s remark in one of the lectures Du Bois attended in Berlin that “Mulattoes are inferior; they feel themselves inferior” [qtd. in Du Bois, *Autobiography* 165]). But he also dedicated himself to detailed empirical social science studies on the situation of African Americans in the U.S., first a project at the University of Pennsylvania, then the numerous Atlanta University studies on the situation of the Negro, where he accepted a professorship. Crucial essays before the turn of the century that register Du Bois’s revisions in his notion and study of “race” and reflect on the interrelations of German/European thought and his American experience, training, and philosophical way of thinking and that project the direction of his thought for the future are: “The Conservation of Races” (reflections on

the concepts of race and the role of racial distinctions in history), “The Study of Negro Problems” (plan for a comprehensive, systematic study of African Americans in the U.S., including their oral tradition, literature, music, and art; in its combining social scientific detachment and a commitment to racial equality it has been described as the founding text of African American Studies in the United States), and “The Strivings of the Negro People” (which became in a revised form the first chapter of *The Souls of Black Folk*), all in 1897.⁵

The decades after his return to the United States also brought a significant extension of his political activities on an international scale, e.g., the participation in the Pan-African Congress in London in 1900, the Universal Races Congress in London in 1911, and the Pan-African Congresses in Paris (1919), in London, Brussels, and Paris (1921), and in London and Lisbon (1923). The Universal Races Congress was for him “the greatest event of the Twentieth Century so far,” as representatives of a majority of all the nations of the earth “openly and explicitly [took their] stand on the platform of human equality—the essential divinity of man” (Du Bois, “The World in Council” 196⁶). Du Bois published in the *Atlantic Monthly* and other magazines, was active in founding the Niagara Movement in 1905 and the NAACP in 1910, became the editor of *The Crisis*, which he used to create a radically open, interracial, intercultural, global “black” public sphere which staged controversial debates about all the issues pertinent to the age, especially to the “darker races” in Africa, Asia, and “the Islands.”

1926—W.E.B. Du Bois, the Harlem Renaissance, Germany, and “Third World” Politics

During the 1920s, the years of the Harlem Renaissance, an African American urban modernism developed in literature and the arts.⁷ The powerful cultural movement that inscribed the new African American culture into the directions and visions of modernism and modernity in the United States, of

⁵ See Chandler, “Economy” 86, and also Mostern, “Three Theories of the Race of W.E.B. Du Bois.” On the importance of these three essays and their interrelations see Chandler, “Economy” 83 ff., and Bell, “Genealogical Shifts,” who explores the changes in Du Bois’s thinking during the time that leads to the “tension between dialectic and dialogic discourse” in parts of *The Souls of Black Folk*.

⁶ See also Du Bois’s article in *The Independent* of August 24, 1911, “The First Universal Races Congress.”

⁷ See my essays “Symbolic Space, Communal Rituals, and the Surreality of the Urban Ghetto: Harlem in Black Literature from the 1920s to the 1960s” and “The Transfiguring Imagination of a Black Urban Modernism: Recodifying Public Space and Cultural Rituals in the Harlem Renaissance.”

“ultramodernism,” to use Alain Locke’s term, also radically challenged and redefined the relationship of cultural and political movements (Garveyism), of “art” and/vs. “propaganda.” Du Bois’s famous essay “Criteria of Negro Art” (1926) is *not* a simple plea for the “propagandistic function” of art, as sentences like “Thus all art is propaganda and ever must be . . .” (1000) seem to demand. Instead, it is a strong, subtle attempt to subvert traditional oppositions and reassess the relationship of “art” and “propaganda” by *redefining both terms* and their dialectical interaction, envisioning and articulating the cultural and literary power of a new black urban modernism, not too differently from Alain Locke’s seemingly radically opposite position.⁸

It is also significant that the founding anthology of the Harlem Renaissance, *The New Negro*, edited in 1925 by Alain Locke, concludes with Du Bois’s long essay “The Negro Mind Reaches Out” on the world of European imperialism and colonialism in Africa and a report on the beginning anticolonialist fight against the imperial powers all over the world. Du Bois writes: “Modern imperialism and modern industrialism are one and the same system; root and branch of the same tree. 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” (386). The “problem of the color line” is redefined in the context of the “dark shadow” of Western colonialism and imperialism (386).⁹

Du Bois traveled to Germany (and Russia, Greece, Italy) in 1926 and reflected on seeing Berlin and a “prostrate Germany” again after thirty years during the economic and political crisis of the post-WW I years: “The sight of the German Republic struggling on the ruins of the empire and tottering under a load of poverty, oppression and disorganization made upon me an unforgettable impression” (*Dusk of Dawn* 286-87; cf. *Autobiography* 287). Nevertheless, he also saw Berlin as a wide-open, cosmopolitan city of the Weimar Republic that was no longer a colonial power. Therefore, in his important novel, *Dark Princess* (1928), he chose Berlin as the site of the meeting of representatives of all the “darker people of the world” and of African America where the future of the colonized world and the anticolonialist and antiracist fight of what later was called the Third World, including Black America, was debated and envisioned.

⁸ See Ross Posnock’s suggestive analysis of the essay in *Color and Culture* 138-45.

⁹ As John Carlos Rowe has shown, Du Bois developed during the first decades of the twentieth century a critique of what he called “modern industrial imperialism,” exploring “how culture is employed by and potentially may be used to resist, perhaps even transvalue, U.S. imperialism,” envisioning the practices of a “postcolonial socialism” (215; cf. 196, 207).

Certainly, the novel is not a major literary achievement, but it is very significant for several reasons. It is set between 1923 and 1927 and uses *the mode of fiction* for exploring the intellectual and political repercussions of the worldwide anticolonialist fight for liberation among the colonized people of the “darker races.” Du Bois dramatizes the crucial question of what this means for the antiracist struggle of African Americans in the U.S. and what kind of role African Americans could play in the global anticolonialist fight of the “darker people.” “Our point is that Pan-Africa belongs logically with Pan-Asia” (Du Bois, *Dark Princess* 20). I think it is important that the first part of *Dark Princess*, “Exile,” is set in Berlin in 1923. The novel is written with an explicit awareness of the great achievements of European modernist and avant-garde art and literature and its debt to African cultures, referring in the conversations to “expressionism, cubism, futurism, vorticism,” to Picasso, Matisse, Kandinsky, but also to Maran, Proust, Croce, Meyerhold’s theater in Moscow, and Schoenberg. Africa is no longer a “premodern” place to be romanticized or rejected, but recognized as part of the contemporary “modern” world. In the famous Café Viktoria, Unter den Linden, the black American intellectual Matthew Towns, a very successful medical student who was prohibited from finishing his training by outright white racism and has fled to his “exile” in Berlin, meets the ravishingly beautiful, “colored” Princess Kautilya, daughter of an Indian maharajah, of the independent state of Bwodpur in India. Through Kautilya he gets involved in a grand and highly contested worldwide movement, or organization, of representatives of the colonized world to overcome white racism, colonialism, and imperialism. He admires and envies the cosmopolitan culture these “aristocratic” “ambassadors” of the “darker peoples,” of Japan, China, Egypt, and “Arabia” represent. But what does this all mean for black Americans? How can they contribute?

Berlin is dramatized as the site of the first “Third World” international “anticolonialist conference” that *includes black Americans*. Du Bois does *not* romanticize or glorify this coalition of the members of this group of people of the “darker races,” but throughout the novel highlights the tensions among them, their deeply rooted racism, and their elitist contempt for the “masses,” for the common people. This “color line within a color line,” this “prejudice within prejudice” (22), as Kautilya puts it, manifests itself most glaringly in their contempt for the “black race in Africa and elsewhere” and, particularly for African Americans, for they see the descendants of former slaves as primitive, uneducated, and passive “Sambos” that would never rise against white American racism and oppression (22-34). Matthew criticizes the reverse racism of the other members of the committee who regard the “darker peoples” as the “superior race,” and he emphatically defends American blacks (“they are the bravest people fighting

for justice today” [30]). He strongly argues that it is the common folk that come out of the “depths” that produce “most of the worth-while things in this old world,” in the arts as well as in politics, “buried among millions of men down in the great sodden masses of all men and even in Black Africa” (23-25). He powerfully sings a “slave song” that “came out of the black rabble of America,” the spiritual “Go Down, Moses,” as a testimony to the creativity and beauty of “the souls of black folk” in the U.S., of the African diaspora.

Thus, Matthew not only criticizes and subverts the elitist, racist ideology of the representatives of the Darker Peoples and asks for the inclusion of Black Americans in their fight against colonialism and white racism, but he can assert now the *crucial contribution* his group of people can make to this global fight, revising the notion of “culture”: “America is teaching the world one thing and only one thing of real value, and that is, that ability and capacity for culture is not the hereditary monopoly of a few, but the widespread possibility for the majority of mankind if they only have a decent chance in life” (26). Kautilya, who just had visited communist Moscow, where she read a very encouraging report about the revolutionary potential of Black Americans, is the only member of the coalition who supports Matthew and who argues that “you American negroes are not a mere amorphous handful. You are a nation!” (16). She remarks that the coalition “represent[s] here much of the Darker World. Indeed, when all our circle is present, we represent all of it, save your world of Black Folk” (19). Rejecting the others’ fixation on “pure blood,” Kautilya points out that “all of us,” including herself and even Buddha himself, are “mixed blood” and that “Pan-Africa belongs logically with Pan-Asia” (19-20). She makes the decision to explore for herself more closely the political and cultural potential of African Americans by going to the United States:

I have started to fight for the dark and oppressed peoples of the world; now suddenly I have seen a light. A light which illumines the mass of men and not simply its rulers, white and yellow and black. I want to see if this thing is true, if it can possibly be true that wallowing masses often conceal submerged kings . . . I want to see for myself if slaves can become men in a generation. If they can—well, it makes the world new for you and me. (34)

As she looks back, near the end of the novel, on the encounter in Berlin with Matthew, “the son of slaves,” and the “flash of new light” she experienced when he talked about how the “masses of men of all races might be the best of men simply imprisoned by poverty and ignorance,” she realizes that she then “began to feel that my dream of the world based on the domination of an ancient royal race and blood might not be all right, but that as Lord Buddha said, and as we do not yet understand, humanity itself was royal” (247-48).

The second and third part of the novel, “The Pullman Porter” and “The Chicago Politician,” dramatize in graphic, “realistic” detail Matthew’s, but also, less directly, Kautilya’s, “immersion” into the world and everyday life of the black working-class and black politics. *Dark Princess* here offers penetrating portraits of Matthew’s work as a black pullman porter, joining the first independent black labor union in the U.S., and of the maneuverings of a militant black leader, modeled on Marcus Garvey, and of black machine politics in Chicago, the center of black politics in the nation, that brings Matthew close to being elected a candidate for Congress and to “selling his soul” to the temptations of wealth, influence, and power in a corrupt political system. Du Bois also describes Matthew’s digging as a subway worker (in the fourth part of the novel) and mentions Kautilya’s work as a waitress, a domestic worker, and a union official. That is, the “romanticization” of the proletarian experience as the source and ground of the black liberation struggle is matched by Du Bois’s strong determination to immerse his two protagonists in the *real* social world the majority of black Americans live in. It is an experience that also has some crucial redeeming moments for them and that opens their eyes to ways to “align [themselves] with national and world forces as to gain our own emancipation and help all of the colored races to gain theirs” (59). If Chicago is the center of black machine politics, it is also, as Matthew realizes, “the epitome of America”: “Chicago is the American world and the modern world, and the worst of it” (284). But Kautilya disagrees:

America is not the center of the world’s evil. That center today is Asia and Africa. In America is Power. Yonder is Culture, but Culture gone to seed, disintegrated, debased. Yet its re-birth is imminent. America and Europe must not prevent it. Only Asia and Africa, in Asia and Africa, can break the power of America and Europe to throttle the world. (285)

It is this tension that defines the force-field of political liberation and cultural rebirth that the final part of the novel, “The Maharadjah of Bwodpur,” dramatizes.

The first part of *Dark Princess* is set in Berlin as a public space of a global non-Western/non-White alliance and projects Du Bois’s vision of a transnational, global dialogue between Western and non-Western, African as well as Asian cultures. The conference envisioned in the last part of the novel takes place in London, assembling the “leaders of a thousand million of the darker peoples, with, for the first time, black Africa and black America sitting beside the rest” (225). Du Bois here draws on his participation in the Universal Races Congress of 1911 in London and on his own activities during the decade after World War I to complement and extend his commitment to Pan-Africa by a vision of solidarity with Pan-Asia, of an internationalist Afro-Asian race and labor consciousness of a global

anticolonialist and anti-imperialist emancipatory movement. In his aesthetic and political vision he also foreshadows the Bandung Conference of 1955 where the non-aligned states, many of which had just become independent or were struggling for independence, met to form the political organization of the “Third World.” Interestingly, Kautilya, in a letter to Matthew he receives just before the end of the novel, talks about a meeting of the “Great Central Committee of Yellow, Brown, and Black” that includes Matthew and that unites representatives not only of all regions of the globe, but also of *all religions*. She talks of the vision that years of preparation and intensive struggle will lead to a worldwide emancipation: “In 1952 [!], the Dark World goes free—whether in Peace and fostering Friendship with all men, or in Blood and Storm—it is for Them—the Pale Masters of today—to decide” (297).

Du Bois does not provide a “realistic” description or utopian projection of *how* the liberation of the Third World will or can be achieved, but he offers something like a visionary pageant, a “romance of the darker people.” After their long years of struggle in the United States, of immersing themselves in the working-class and black/union politics, Matthew and Kautilya have achieved a degree of maturity so that they can be reunited and, symbolically, through the birth of their son, the new maharajah of Bwodpur, unite the peoples of Asia and the African diaspora in a transnational hybridizing of cultures and political vision of liberation. Berlin was the symbolic site of their vision of a unity of all the “darker peoples” of the world, including Africans and African Americans, and they return in their discussions about the future of the world of the Darker Peoples several times to their meetings in Berlin. Now, it is through the return to the heart of the *Black South in Virginia*, a “cabin by the wood,” and to the spiritual power of Matthew’s mother whom Kautilya adores as “Kali, the Black One; wife of Siva [Shiva], Mother of the World!” (220), that this vision is enacted.¹⁰ In this liminal or marginal space of the Black South (“the edge of a black world”), the “center of the world . . . where beats down the fiercest blaze of Western civilization, and pushing back this hell, [we have to] raise a black world upon it,” the power of the black diaspora in America and the power of “black India” out of which “the world was born” and into whose “black womb . . . the world shall creep to die,” can be united and the ambassadors of all parts of the colonized world convene in a ritual of rebirth and liberation (227, 279, 286). As Kautilya tells Matthew:

¹⁰ See Du Bois’s celebration of the “primal black All-Mother of men down through the ghostly throng of mighty womanhood, who walked in the mysterious dawn of Asia and Africa” (165) in the chapter “The Damnation of Women” of *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil*. For a perceptive discussion of this chapter and the debate about the role of women in Du Bois’s work cf. Rowe, *Literary Cultures* 209-14.

Thus I see a mighty synthesis: you can work in Africa and Asia right here in America if you work in the Black Belt. . . . My home and heart is India. Your heart of hearts is Africa. And now I see through the cloud. . . . I believe in men; I believe in the unlovely masses of men; I believe in that prophetic word which you spoke in Berlin and which perhaps you only half believed yourself. . . . Only working thinkers can unite thinking workers. (286)

The last chapter ends with a hymnic celebration of the marriage of Matthew and Kautilya and a fairy-tale happy end of the unity of all religions (Jesus Christ, Allah, Brahma, Vishnu, Siva, Buddha) and “darker peoples” praising the future of the child as the “Messenger and Messiah to all the Darker Worlds” (311).

Yet the truly “extravagant” conclusion, this final invocation is followed by an “Envoy,” set in italics, in which the author and narrator thanks the “sprites who, with curled wing and starry eyes, have clustered around my hands and helped me weave this story, . . . that rich and colored gossamer of dreams which the Queen of Faerie lent to me for a season,” “her Mauve Majesty,” to “tell to us hard humans: Which is really Truth—Fact or Fancy? the Dream of the Spirit or the Pain of the Bone?” (312). In a narrative move, comparable to Alice Walker’s at the end of *The Color Purple*, Du Bois suspends his “realistic” responsibility as the author of the “romance,” dedicated to (Shakespeare’s) “Titania XXVII By Her Own Grace Queen of Faerie,” and *reopens* the question of the power and “truth”-value of modes of fiction, of material bodies and flights of the imagination, of the complex interplay of strategies of the realistic novel and the “romance with a message.”¹¹

If *Dark Princess* cannot be seen as a successful novel in the usual sense, it still is important to point out that Du Bois’s novel offers his version of a polyphonic black modernist diasporic fictional text, by no means sexually Victorian and puritanical, cosmopolitan in its range of cultural references and voices, and politically searching and radical in multiple ways. It dramatizes versions and visions of the question if and how the fight of

¹¹ Du Bois on *Dark Princess* in a letter to his publisher, quoted in Tate 52. In her psychoanalytical analysis of *Dark Princess*, Tate reads the book in terms of its author’s own “psychological reality at the time of the novel’s creation” (80) and neglects the fictional, reality-suspending “phantastic” qualities of the text, seeing it as a “failure,” criticizing, e.g., the concluding “Envoy” as “a flight into fancy,” the “messianic finale abandons virtually all semblance of political association” (79, 83). The explicitly “feminist” critique of Du Bois’s “genealogy of race, of nation, and of womanhood,” especially in *The Souls of Black Folk*, is elaborated in Hazel Carby’s *Race Men* (1998) 9-41. Another challenging reading of *Dark Princess* is Keith E. Byerman’s in his book *Seizing the Word: History, Art, and Self in the Work of W.E.B. Du Bois* 129-37. But he also reads the novel as a “failure,” seeing no value in Du Bois’s “political fantasy” (134-35).

African Americans for freedom and the anticolonialist struggle in other parts of the world can be combined. Du Bois had, since 1906, pursued his notion that the problem of the twentieth century was the problem of the color line in his writings and his political activities as a global problem of a new era, of the “awakening” of the “yellow races” and of the brown and black races, in Africa, Asia, and the Sea Islands.¹² Obviously, in *Dark Princess* Du Bois drew on the tradition of “Ethiopianism” in Pan-African cultures that combined a Bible-based visionary romanticism of an imaginary homeland and the historical emergence of black independent churches in South Africa. For Du Bois, Ethiopianism provided a “critical dimension of his prophetic self-conception” in the early decades of the twentieth century (Sundquist, *To Wake the Nations* 552, 553; see the whole section 551-63).¹³ But Du Bois forged it into a *revisionary* diasporic aesthetics and politics and political philosophy, striving toward a global anticolonialist fight and movement. As a literary text, *Dark Princess* mixes different discourses and modes of the novel, particularly the tradition and the narrative strategies of the romance or of melodrama or of prophetic pageants and of realistic, almost naturalistic fiction. But this “incoherence” of the novel, this heterogeneity of styles of writing *also* can be seen as a multi-voiced effort of grasping and exploring the multiple and competing dimensions of African diasporic, of “Third World” writing *avant la lettre*, that at the time was in its very infancy. The contradictions, inconsistencies, and gaps of verisimilitude can be read as Du Bois’s effort to open up a vision of the future that could not be conceived or “imagined” in “realistic” detail as yet. Perhaps we can characterize his literary and political project in *Dark Princess* as a radically secular, cosmopolitan version of what Eric Sundquist has called Du Bois’s “messianic imagination” (*To Wake the Nations* 24). As a whole, *Dark Princess* suggests, as Du Bois put it later in his essay “My Evolving Program for Negro Freedom,” a new model of the meaning of “American society” as an “interracial culture, broader and more catholic than ours,” an interracial, hybrid culture as superseding the goal of a “purely American culture.” It also projects and affirms the insight Du Bois later emphasizes in the same essay that “the richness of a culture . . . lies in differentiation,” that the “crowning

¹² See the detailed account and analysis in Mullen, *Afro-Orientalism*, ch. 1, esp. 1-3, 7-8, 15-16. See his analysis of *Dark Princess*, which relates the plot to international, Pan-Asian politics (13-22). On the concept of Afro-Orientalism see xv-xvi, xx, xxvi-xxvii, xxxviii.

¹³ See also Du Bois’s pageant *The Star of Ethiopia* of 1913, 1915, also other texts in *Darkwater*. For the historical meaning of the term see Shepperson, “Ethiopianism and African Nationalism.” For Du Bois’s early use of the Ethiopianism tradition, see Wilson J. Moses, “The Poetics of Ethiopianism: W.E.B. Du Bois and Literary Black Nationalism.”

of equalitarian democracy in artistic freedom of difference is the real next step of culture” (58, 60, 67, 69).¹⁴

1936—W.E.B. Du Bois and Germany during the Third Reich and Worlds of Color

In 1936, Du Bois received travel funds from the Oberlaender Trust for a five-month-trip to Germany, especially Berlin, to do a comparative study of industrial education in Germany and Austria and Booker T. Washington’s educational philosophy and its institutional implementation in the United States (see Lewis 388, 395-405). Du Bois knew, as Lewis puts it, that “he was entering the eye of one of the deadliest political storms in modern times” (395), and he observed Nazi Germany and its self-presentation to the “youth of the world” during the Olympic Games carefully. He was careful not to express his critical opinion of Nazi Germany publicly during his stay. For the *Pittsburgh Courier* he wrote reports about current social developments and cultural events, but in the articles published after he had left the country in December, he compares the oppression of black Americans and the suppression and harassing of Jews in Germany, emphasizing the different political and social constructions of racism in the U.S. and Germany.¹⁵ Du Bois offers clear and unambiguous statements about censorship, restrictions of citizens’ rights, and particularly antisemitism and the prosecution of the Jews and the Nazi political system:

There has been no tragedy in modern times equal in its awful effects to the fight on the Jew in Germany. It is an attack on civilization, comparable only to such horrors as the Spanish Inquisition and the African slave trade. It has set civilization back a hundred years, and in particular has it made the settlement and understanding of race problems more difficult and doubtful. (*Pittsburgh Courier* 19 Dec. 1936; qtd. in Sollors 219-20)

However, again Du Bois does not simply condemn Hitler’s Germany during the mid-1930s, but looks for the reasons of his popularity with the people, and he pursues in detail his ambivalence about the development of German culture which he continued to admire in important aspects. He always,

¹⁴ Cf. Gilroy: “The conclusion of *Dark Princess* is important to the politics of the black Atlantic in numerous ways. Read as a beginning rather than an ending, it offers an image of hybridity and intermixture that is especially valuable because it gives no ground to the suggestion that cultural fusion involves betrayal, loss, corruption, or dilution” (*Black Atlantic* 144).

¹⁵ See the essay by Werner Sollors, “W.E.B. Du Bois in Nazi Germany, 1936,” which reprints parts of the articles. Du Bois’s articles for the *Pittsburgh Courier*, written during his stay in Germany, are reprinted in Aptheker, *Newspaper Columns* 114-59, especially 142-59 (published after he had left Germany).

perhaps not always successfully, tried to communicate the complexities of his cultural and political perspective. In some way, we can apply, or adapt, his own observation in his *Autobiography* about his earlier stay in Germany at the University of Berlin to his experience in Nazi Germany: “I began to feel that dichotomy which all my life has characterized my thought: how far can love for my oppressed race accord with love for the oppressing country?” (169). As Werner Sollors sums up: “Perhaps no point is as significant as the fact that he unambiguously condemned the Nazi political system while he remained distinctly fond of Germany—and of German culture, people, and . . . Wagner’s oeuvre—and of Europe in general” (221; cf. Brackman 68-69).

His highly critical, but also carefully balanced account of Nazi Germany also characterizes Du Bois’s later reflections on his experiences in Germany in 1936, but *also* their fictional treatment in his last, historical novel, *Worlds of Color* (1961), the third part of the *Mansart* trilogy *The Black Flame*, in which he was “trying by the method of historical fiction to complete the cycle of history which had for a half century engaged my thought, research and action” (Du Bois, “Postscript” 316). In the third chapter of *Worlds of Color*, this historical as well as visionary novel, “The Color of Europe,” Du Bois writes about the protagonist’s stay in Berlin, his efforts to understand what was happening in Germany. He renders his conversations with Berliners about the color prejudices of white Americans and American racism in contradistinction to the origins and the institutionalization of racism and antisemitism in Germany and other European countries and the forebodings of the Holocaust. At the end of the chapter, Mansart reflects:

[He] did do much reading, and he began to understand Germany as never before. He got some glimpse of what it had been in the nineteenth century—a great country of science and education, of ideals, with music and art. A people which, rising from the utter depth of conquest under the first Napoleon became in its own eyes and even that of the world, one of the greatest if not the greatest country on earth, and now was in the midst of revolution. (*Worlds of Color* 61)

Du Bois’s trip to Germany, the Soviet Union, and other European countries changed his understanding of the different foundations and social and political constructions of racism and of the fight against colonialism in world politics. But, later, the annihilation of the Jews in the Holocaust led Du Bois again to revise his distinction between the different foundations and psychological mechanisms of American anti-black racism and German (European) anti-Semitism and to radically question his belief in the civilizing mission of European culture. As he wrote in 1943 in the *New York Amsterdam News*: “If a group like this [of Jewish leaders in history] can be openly and publicly crucified in the midst of modern European civilization, what hope remains for human culture in Europe? Must we not turn to Africa

and Asia to re-center the world?” (qtd. in Brackman 86). Many of these ideas about world peace, the end of colonialism, and world governments he further developed in his book *Color and Democracy: Colonies and Peace*, written directly after WW II (1945).

1958—W.E.B. Du Bois’s Final Trip to Germany: Honorary Doctorate at Humboldt-Universität Berlin

After having been prosecuted and terrorized by McCarthyism and the FBI and refused a passport for several years, Du Bois could, finally, make a trip to Germany and several other countries in 1958. In Berlin, he was deeply troubled by the political division of the city and by how much its center had been destroyed. He was awarded an honorary doctoral degree at (the renamed) Humboldt University in Berlin in November 1958 (in economics), an occasion that caused controversies and unease among the authorities in East Berlin.¹⁶ What is significant, however, is that Du Bois gave a speech a few days before at Humboldt University about *Pan-Africanism*, “The Pan-African Movement.” The manuscript, which exists only in a German translation, as the original tape of Du Bois’ speech was lost, with many mistakes, was published, corrected and in some passages censored, in the *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin*.¹⁷ What is crucial, however, is the fact that Du Bois’s speech on “The Pan-African Movement” was *rejected* as not acceptable in ideological terms by the editor of the influential leading journal *Deutsche Aussenpolitik* where it was supposed to be published.¹⁸ Du Bois’s reflections on Garveyism, on the

¹⁶ For a critical account of these events see the concluding pages of Sieglinde Lemke’s essay, “Berlin and Boundaries,” and for further details, and Du Bois’s general relation to the GDR, Hamilton H. Beck, “Censoring Your Ally: W.E.B. Du Bois in the German Democratic Republic”; the event is completely ignored in David Levering Lewis’s biography, Part II, as he did not get access to the archives of Humboldt-Universität when he did research for the biography. Du Bois himself hardly mentions the occasion in his autobiographical writings though there is a short statement by him on the ceremony reprinted in *Against Racism* 299.

¹⁷ W.E.B. Du Bois, “Die panafrikanische Bewegung,” *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Gesellschafts- und sprachwissenschaftliche Reihe* 8.1 (1958-59): 105-109. There also exists a retranslation from the German version into English, with the original mistakes, which, again, in some important passages differs from the original German translation. Both texts, as well as the correspondence about publishing the address, can be found in the archives of Humboldt-Universität.

¹⁸ See letter by Hans W. Aust to Dean Prof. Dr. Mohrmann of December 19th, 1958, in the archives of Humboldt-Universität.

African American liberation struggle, on the role of Pan-Africanism and anticolonialism, and on the relation between communism and socialism were seen as confused, unclear, and aberrant from the orthodox truth of Communist positions and potentially dangerous for misleading the readers of the article. Du Bois was officially honored by the authorities of the GDR, but they were divided about his political thinking (as was confirmed in the later controversies about publishing his *Autobiography*). Even though Du Bois had moved closer to Communism, after having been harassed by the American authorities for almost a decade, he did *not* make any compromise in identifying with the positions taken by the regime of the GDR, but offered his own critical perspectives that acknowledged the complexities and contradictions of the contemporary world, including the “socialist world.”

The final decisions and activities of the last years of Du Bois’s life reconfirm his project of an African American “pragmatist” transnational radicalism that negotiates the tensions, hybridities, and the performative dynamics of the world of the twentieth century.

In 1961, he applied for membership in the CPUSA. A short time later he left the U.S. for Ghana, following an invitation by President Kwame Nkrumah, and gave up his U.S. citizenship to become a citizen of Ghana, a newly independent state with a revolutionary, (in Marxist terms) non-orthodox political program. He began work on the project of a comprehensive *Encyclopedia Africana* of the African diaspora. This shows again his independent spirit, his willingness to sustain tensions and contradictions. But it also reminds us (like his speech on Pan-Africanism at Humboldt-Universität in 1958) of the fact that from the time of *The Souls of Black Folk* to the very end of his career Du Bois saw the various intellectual traditions and political programmatics again and again, in different and changing ways, through the prism of his *African American diasporic experience and its discursive modes*.

W.E.B. Du Bois in the Twenty-First Century: Visions of a Radical Cosmopolitanism and Europe

Recently, Du Bois has been claimed as an “American pragmatist” in the vein of William James or John Dewey. But when he wrote, in *Dusk of Dawn*, that “no idea is perfect and forever valid” and that “[a]lways to be living and apposite and timely, it must be modified and adapted to changing facts” (303), this “pragmatist” insight also asks us *not* to forget the decisive role of *African American* culture and “signifyin’” discourses (Gates) in his working out in a “progressive” or “progressing” way the scope and the strategies of his whole way of thinking, writing, and political acting as a public intellec-

tual. Cornel West, in the final chapter, “Prophetic Pragmatism: Cultural Criticism and Political Engagement,” of his book *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism* (1989), characterizes Du Bois as a “[William] Jamesian organic intellectual,” who, however, crucially qualified the Emersonian tradition, subverting “the Emersonian theodicy by situating it within an imperialist and ethnocentric rhetorical and political context,” in an “international perspective on the impetus and impediments to individuality and radical democracy” (138, 143, 147). More recently, in his powerful and wide-ranging study *Color and Culture: Black Writers and the Making of the Modern Intellectual* (1998), Ross Posnock sets out to re(dis)cover an “underappreciated pragmatist cosmopolitan tradition” among twentieth-century black writers and intellectuals which began with Du Bois. “Pragmatism . . . encouraged the anarchic, aesthetic impulses that fueled Du Bois’s revisionary project.” From his philosophical move to make the Hegelian and the pragmatist traditions revise each other, instead of choosing between them, follows his acknowledging and making productive use of “ambiguities,” “ambivalences,” and “hybridities” and his “commitment to simultaneous and multiple forms of inquiry [and] the freedom this affords him.” Yet Posnock observes: “What anchors Du Bois’s career of course is unwavering activism on behalf of equality for black Americans” (24, 35-36, 121).¹⁹

This emphasis on Du Bois’s specific international and political experience and perspective should also make us realize that we—or someone like myself—can only adequately grasp the richness and the decenteredness and multiplicity of Du Bois’s work if we set out to complement and correct our response to his aesthetic, philosophical, cultural, and political work from a Euro-American perspective by non-Western (for shorthand) engagements with his rich body of work and activities and conduct dialogues with Du Bois scholars and readers positioned in other parts of the world.

I want to characterize Du Bois’s African American exploratory discourses as modes of a *radical cosmopolitanism*. In my sense, “radical cosmopolitanism” is an open, trans- (and post-)national, diasporic discourse that acknowledges and negotiates intercultural multiplicity, heterogeneous interests and positions, and hybrid publics. This version of cosmopolitanism, rejecting the thesis of an increasingly global homogeneity and rootlessness,

¹⁹ In the first chapter of his book, “After Identity Politics,” Posnock polemically rejects the pervasive use of terms like ambiguity, ambivalence, hybridity, or mestiza consciousness, creolization and the transnational in what he reductively characterizes in a questionable generalizing move as “multiculturalism and Cultural Studies,” charging them with a “rhetoric of anti-essentialism” that depends on “the identity/difference model of cultural pluralism” (25). For his own use of the first three terms see, e.g., 89, 106, 112-13, 132.

is *radical* in a double sense. “Radical” does *not* mean searching for, and depending on, “roots” in the sense of origin, ethnic or racial essentialism, on recovering something like an “originary wholeness.” Instead, it is radical in the sense of its decentering engagement with the multiplicity of *changing specifics* of localized cultural, social, and political practices and interests and their institutional consequences, and it is radical in the sense of being engaged and informed by an unending struggle for the emancipation of oppressed and discriminated people and for the realization of democratic human rights of cultural difference and multiply affiliated subjectivities. In both these senses it also is a radical search for working out discursive strategies, including artistic and aesthetic discourses, that explore, perform, and communicate this project of a new, transgressive cosmopolitanism.

Of course, the term “cosmopolitanism” has a controversial history, and its meaning has been hotly debated. It has been rejected due to its “bourgeois origin” and its implication in colonialist and imperialist discourses (Timothy Brennan), and its recent popularity also seems due to its being “hijacked” (Paul Gilroy) by conservative politicians and appropriated by the Bush administration for neo-imperialist political purposes (Charles L. Briggs).²⁰ Yet as there cannot be any concept or term that has not been and is not embedded in history and is not open for multiple and contradictory cultural and political uses, it does not make sense to replace the word by another (also historically charged) term or invent a new term that supposedly defines unambiguously a (positive) theoretical or philosophical position. The more recent debate among political philosophers, social scientists, and public intellectuals such as Ulrich Beck, Arjun Appadurai, Seyla Benhabib, Nancy Fraser, Iris Marion Young, Anthony Kwame Appiah, Edward W. Said, and Paul Gilroy has shown how challenging and productive the notion of “cosmopolitanism” can be argued and developed in efforts to re-assess and redefine the meanings of representation, sovereignty, philosophical foundations of cosmopolitan norms of justice, flexible, transnational citizenship, human and social rights, public culture, the cultural politics of difference, *and* the analytical and aesthetic modes of inquiry for a new theory of democracy in “a globalized world of uncertainty, hybridity, fluidity, and contestation” (Seyla Benhabib).²¹

²⁰ See Brennan, “Cosmo-Theory” 659-91; Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia* 58-83, 157-58; Briggs, “Genealogies of Race and Culture” 75-100.

²¹ See, e.g., Beck, “The Cosmopolitan Society” 17-44; Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*; Benhabib, *The Rights of Others*, and *Another Cosmopolitanism*; Fraser, *Redistribution or Recognition?*; Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, and *Inclusion and Democracy*; for Appiah, Said, and Gilroy see below. For recent contributions of several of these political philosophers to the debate see the booklet edited and introduced by Günter H. Lenz and Antje Dallmann of Distinguished W.E.B. Du Bois

Let me just refer you briefly to a few reflections particularly suggestive in taking up and further developing Du Bois's ideas for our century. Radical cosmopolitanism can draw on Edward W. Said's notion of a secular, radical humanism that is "a process of unending disclosure, discovery, self-criticism, and liberation" (12) and that is always "radically incomplete, insufficient, provisional, disputable and arguable" (21-22), as he puts it in his last book *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* (2004).²² It is energized by the strategies of James Clifford's vision of a "discrepant cosmopolitanism" and of Paul Gilroy's alternative idea of a "vulgar" or "demotic" cosmopolitanism, which is driven by the "principled and methodical cultivation of a degree of estrangement from one's own culture" that is now no longer a privilege of the elite, but "a routine feature of the postmodern and postcolonial processes that condition metropolitan life: diaspora dispersal, mass immigration, military travel, tourism, and the revolution in global communications." This version of a "postcolonial cosmopolitanism" and its commitment to cosmopolitan solidarity has deep roots, as Gilroy writes, in the work of Du Bois and Gandhi and finds expression in a "planetary consciousness of the tragedy, fragility, and brevity of indivisible human existence" (*Postcolonial* 75) and is the "fragile, emergent substance of vital planetary humanism" (*Postcolonial* 79). Radical cosmopolitanism can also take up black philosopher Anthony Kwame Appiah's reflections on the project of an open, dialogic, contested, "rooted," and "partial" (in the double sense of the word) version of a cosmopolitanism that continually negotiates a kind of universalism with the recognition of local cultural differences, both Western and African (Ghana), as a "shared search for truth and justice" that is permeated by the narrative logic of an inter-/crosscultural imagination.²³ In some ways, we can read the passage from the introduction

Lectures organized at Humboldt-Universität: Appiah, Benhabib, Young, Fraser, *Justice, Governance, Cosmopolitanism, and the Politics of Difference: Reconfigurations in a Transnational World*.

²² See my introductory essay "Irreconcilabilities and Transgressions: Edward W. Said's Idea of a Worldly Criticism – An Introduction" to the special Said issue of *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik* 52.4 (2004).

²³ See Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity*, ch. 6. Cf. his description of the goal of his version of cosmopolitanism: "The cosmopolitanism I want to defend is not the name for a dialogue among static closed cultures, each of which is internally homogenous and different from all the others; not a celebration of the beauty of a collection of closed boxes. What I want to make plausible is, instead, a form of universalism that is sensitive to the ways in which historical contexts may shape the significance of a practice. At the same time, I want to elaborate on the notion that we often don't need robust theoretical agreement in order to secure shared practices" (*Ethics of Identity* 256). For his reflections on the potential of "cosmopolitan contaminations" and "counter-cosmopolitanisms" see his book *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (2006).

by Sheldon Pollock, Homi K. Bhabha, Carol Breckenridge, and Dipesh Chakrabarty to a special issue of *Public Culture* as indicating the direction of all these reflections:

Just as feminist thought continues to struggle with the objections to universal discourse, so also cosmopolitanism must give way to the plurality of modes and histories—not necessarily shared in degree or in concept regionally, nationally, or internationally—that comprise cosmopolitan practice and history. We propose therefore that cosmopolitanism be considered in the plural, as *cosmopolitanisms*. (“Cosmopolitanisms” 584)

These tentative conclusions lead me to the final part of my essay, taking up the question I posed at the beginning: What does—or could—Du Bois’s work and his specific way of thinking, writing, and political activities mean for twenty-first century Germany and Europe?

Let me sketch a few ideas.

Du Bois was not very influential in Germany (and Europe) during the twentieth century, as he seemed too multiple, contradictory, “evasive,” never to be nailed down to a precise “position” or “discipline” (see his experience in the GDR), with no readymade dogmas or ideology. Or he seemed to be dealing with problems that did not seem to be relevant to Europe and its nation-states.

Today, from the perspective at the beginning of the twenty-first century, we realize—and “we” refers to Germans as well as to Europeans more generally—that the questions he explored and pursued so insistently, in writing, teaching, research, and politics over more than six decades of the last century *and* the *ways* he conceived them, wrote about them, (re-)contextualized them, pursued them in his politically committed work, have increasingly become pressing, inescapable problems for the European nation-states that have been in a deep crisis for quite some time. The issues explored by Du Bois are exactly the problems that European nations, in the process of creating something like a workable European Union, have to deal with in their efforts to redefine Europe’s place in a globalizing world where the conflicts Du Bois defined prophetically as central to the twentieth century have resurged in different, but very dangerous and seemingly uncontrollable ways. I think Europeans can learn from Du Bois how to move beyond traditional dichotomies and oppositions, beyond nationalist (or Eurocentric) myopia and arrogance, beyond foundational concepts of identity and community, how to distinguish among heterogeneous constructions of cultural differences and how to deal with them.

Du Bois could teach Europeans how “politics” as well as the relation of “politics and aesthetics” can be redefined beyond fixed ideologies and party positions *without* renouncing effective ways of doing political work on a national and transnational level. Reading his works can show that political,

scholarly, aesthetic discourses can work most effectively, when they are kept open to new experiences, when they acknowledge gaps and absences in theoretical discourses, expose themselves to concrete case studies and challenges in different locations and contexts, and decenter and re-define their objectives and methods. From his rich and demanding work we can learn how “culture” and “community” are not so much based on organic unity, ethnic or racial homogeneity, a closed and shared territory, or a material consensus on specific “essentialized” values, but that they are always multiple, intercultural, different, and hybrid, as well as diasporic. Du Bois’s work shows that there is no “authenticity” in culture that can be “lost” and has to be “reclaimed.” Of course, there *are* specific historical traditions and cultural practices that are important, but cultures and societies are always changing, are continuously reconfigured, and have to be reappropriated anew. In our world today, you have to draw on and negotiate a wide range of different, conflicting cultural traditions and practices, not just in what you might consider your “own” culture or cultural universe, like “Western culture” or the so-called “Judaean-Christian tradition.” Too often, Europeans still refuse to decenter their ethnocentric perspective and pursue a genuine dialogics of intercultural critique. If “citizenship” in Europe in the past was conceived of as coextensive with the nation-state, as referring to the (national) identity that comprised and included all other “local,” “partial” identities and affiliations, in the globalizing, politically highly fragmented and contested world of today Europeans can learn from Du Bois that citizenship does not constitute unity and stability, but has to be redefined in its multiple meanings and dimensions, its multicultural, transnational, and changing role. They can learn that culture finds its “richness” in “differentiation.” As he once put it: “This crowning of equalitarian democracy in artistic freedom of difference is the real next step of culture” (“My Evolving Program” 65).

This also means that there is no “pure” disciplinary (or synthesizing interdisciplinary) discourse, academic or otherwise, that can fully grasp the complexity, the contradictions, the hybridity of the dynamics, dialectics, and dialogics of cultures and societies in the twenty-first century. Thus, in conclusion, in a different way, of course, what W.E.B. Du Bois succeeded in articulating in *The Souls of Black Folk* more than one hundred years ago and the various aspects and dimensions of his multi-voiced, hybrid, and diasporic discursive modes of expression and representation discussed in this essay still can constitute a powerful “call” Europeans at the beginning of the twenty-first century should offer a “response,” or “responses,” to in a *different* historical situation that poses *different* challenges and priorities, and that asks for *different* strategies in cultural and socio-political discourses and practices.

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