

Race and Double-Consciousness

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When W.E.B. Du Bois articulates his famous and influential concept of “double-consciousness,” what exactly is he performing? Is he describing a phenomenon? Is he making a prescription? Is he coordinating a template in search of a new epistemology? Is he voicing a manifesto, a call for action? Is he making an adjudication? Is he producing a demystificatory reading of a phenomenology veiled in illusion? Is he being diagnostic and/or curative in his elaboration of the concept? Is he thinking, or acting, or “thinker-tinkering”¹ as he produces “double-consciousness?” If he is doing all of the above, how does he orchestrate and synchronize the relationship, the flow chart as it were, among the different possibilities? How does he derive one register from the other?

Take for example the following statements. He is short. She is tall. They are blond. We are from Africa. They are Indian. The African American is double-conscious. I would suggest that all but the last predication belong to the register of description based on facts and information, i.e., in so far as facticity and information can be claimed at all as neutral, value free, pre-hermeneutic, and pre-ideological. But the last predication about the African American being double-conscious is in fact an interpretive and ideological formulation. So, is Du Bois suggesting that African Americans should be double-conscious, or that they are indeed double-conscious but are in a state of active disavowal about it? As we know, as the model of revolution changes from Booker T. Washington to Du Bois, the description changes axiologically, ideologically. A double-conscious subject or agent would enunciate a different program of action than the mono conscious subject/agent. Depending on the epistemological description: double-conscious, minority, separatist, subaltern, black nationalist, Afrocentric, a different subject would be formed; and based on that subject formation, a different relationship would be delineated between the subject of knowledge and the agent of political action. In other words, the epistemological or taxonomic self styling would constitute entirely the platform of praxis towards social transformation. The challenge here is the following: how to turn the descriptive salience of the term “double-consciousness” into a progressive interpretive possibility. How should double-consciousness be valorized such that out of the

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given ambivalence a positive and resolute direction may be elaborated?

I am thinking here of the enigmatic legacy that haunts and taunts the nameless protagonist of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*: the compliant and obsequious smile of the dying grandfather. Was he a traitor, or was he an idiot, or was he truly subversive: and how can you tell, given the fact that the semantics of his smile cannot be separated from the rationale of double-consciousness? What makes this dilemma even more complicated is the reality that the inheritance of this double-consciousness is historical as well as ontological. Just as Frantz Fanon would deal with this same problem in the context of colonialism and postcolonial national subjectivity, here in the context of the African American experience, the challenge is this: how to produce a solidary and undivided ontology from the unfortunate and deplorable given-ness of political double-consciousness? When Ontology, with a capital O is just plain human, i.e., it is not marked as "white," "black," "dominant," or "subaltern," why should the African American subject alone be constrained to wear the political mark of "double-consciousness" as a necessary precondition towards the production of a free and politically un sullied ontology?²² Why does the white subject not have to take on the burden of double-consciousness as well, having caused it on the African American subject in the first place?

My simple point is that whether it is "double-consciousness," "subalternity," or "indigeneity," or "separatism," or "hybridity," what we are looking at is the transformation of a lived reality into a cognitive model: a model that will determine "what is to be done." A subaltern plan of action, whether conceived strictly along class lines as envisioned by Antonio Gramsci or loosened up to include other locations and positions in the after-life of the concept, is ineluctably addressed both to itself and to dominance, hegemony, civil society and the state, nationalism and internationalism, and so on. In its address to itself, the subaltern mode of self subjectivation (to use Foucault), and its mode of interpellation (to borrow from Althusser), are a function of how it addresses the other constituents of its conceptual schemata. In other words, no dominance, then no subalternity; no hegemony, then no subalternity. It is in the act of political naming and epistemological baptism that the subaltern becomes "subaltern," and only then can Gramsci lay out the six point program and beyond on behalf of the subaltern. Will the subaltern speak and can the subaltern speak depend on the context in which the speech making occurs. Remember that Gramsci does not suggest for a moment that subaltern reality or history does not exist. His point is that subaltern histories are episodic, fragmented, and discontinuous and that is the reason why they are unable to hegemonize themselves. His naming them "subaltern" has a double purpose: both diagnostic and curative. The naming makes possible a form of praxis, and as a result the subaltern subject knows what it is to be done to disalienate itself. Similarly, in the case of Du Bois's double-consciousness, the all important question is: what is to be done with the double-consciousness? How is this double-consciousness, besides having been discovered by the diagnosis, to

be produced agentially towards self recovery, empowerment, and legitimation? But on the other hand, what if a different way of theorizing and historicizing African American subjectivity gave no credence to the category of double-consciousness? Would such a refutation of double-consciousness be empirical, or theoretical, or both? In other words, is it possible to demonstrate 1) that double-consciousness is not an empirical verity, and 2) that double-consciousness may not be the only available interpretive-analytic category to analyze African American subjectivity and subjecthood?

Du Bois, as he moves from description towards prescription, talks about two souls warring within one consciousness: the African and the American. It is a war, and not a counterpoint as it would be for Said. It must also be remembered that at no point does Du Bois posit more than one consciousness, more than one arena. How should such an internal war end and how should the successful resolution of interiority play itself in the exterior context? Is this context African, African American, national, diasporic, international, pan-African, global, regional? Should double-consciousness be conceived as a symptomatic and pathological condition to be rendered corrigible by way of Americanization, Africanization, African-Americanization, American-Africanization? What is the statute of limitation on double-consciousness? Is there a statute or is it to be revered as a permanent human condition as far as African Americans are governed? Does double-consciousness then become something like an originary moment to be officialized into an *a priori* so that no future generation of African Americans will forget that they too are and will be interpellated by double-consciousness? I am thinking here of Hortense Spillers's memorable expectation that every generation of African Americans should remember the originary impact of slavery and the middle passage. Given Du Bois' own historical trajectory, his renunciation of American citizenship, his deep disillusionment with a racialized America, and his death in Ghana, etc., what should the disposition of double-consciousness be towards American identity, national identity as such? Let us hear directly from Du Bois:

After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-thought in this American world—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings, two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.

The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife,—this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer

self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face. (45-46)

Before I get into a detailed analysis of the flows of thought in this famous passage, I would like to point out that this entire elaboration of double-consciousness is set in motion by a pathology: a pathology that has been foisted on the American Negro as the precondition for his ontological emergence. This is how Du Bois begins his essay, "Of our Spiritual Strivings."

Between me and the other world there is ever an unasked question: unasked by some through feelings of delicacy; by others through the difficulty of rightly framing it. All, nevertheless, flutter around it. They approach me in a half-hesitant sort of way, eye me curiously or compassionately, and then, instead of saying directly, How does it feel to be a problem? They say, I know an excellent colored man in my town; or, I fought at Mechanicsville; or, Do not these Southern outrages make your blood boil? At these I smile, or am interested, or reduce the boiling to a simmer, as the occasion may require. To the real question, How does it feel to be a problem? I seldom answer a word. (43-44)

Du Bois' formulation, as much cognitive as it is affective, and as much theoretical as it is existential, begins with an axiomatization: the axiomatization of a certain "between-ness" and how that between-ness is made operational by the rationale of a binary world sustained and structured in dominance. Any ontological contemplation or introspection that is available to the American Negro is always already mediated by the immense and brutal power imbalance that is the immediate and intended result of the self-other structuration. It is the unasked question of white racism (in other words, white racism is so much in ontological and political control and so utterly unmarked in its "naturalness" that it does not even have to ask the question explicitly) that interpellates the subjectivity of the American Negro. It is only by responding to the reprehensible question, "How does it feel to be a problem?" that the American Negro can begin to stammer out his ontology in the symptomatic discourse of criminality and pathology. The all important question, if the American Negro wants to avoid the chronic complicity as well as the agony of double-consciousness, is: Why even answer that question? Of course Du Bois realizes this when he concludes that paragraph thus: "To the real question, How does it feel to be a problem? I answer seldom a word" (44). And yet, despite this refusal to be interpellated by racism, Du Bois is constrained

to acknowledge that “being a problem is a strange experience.” There is the crux of the problem. “How does it feel to be a problem?” is not a real question, and yet, in actuality, given the regime of racism, it has historicized itself as a real question with the power to organize human history. The legitimacy of this question is just like the authority of “race” which after all is nothing but the authority of a lie, a deception, and a corrosive and hateful ideology masquerading as truth.³ The American Negro is not a problem and his self consciousness does not and ought not to have anything to do with the condition of “being a problem,” “and yet,” Du Bois has to concede in a schizophrenic vein that alas “being a problem” is all too true experientially, historically. In other words, “being black” has been brutalized by racism into a position where it has become a conceptual and an ontological impossibility: a point that Lindon Barrett makes powerfully in his essay, “Mercantilism, U.S. Federalism, and the Market within Reason: The ‘People’ and the Conceptual Impossibility of Racial Blackness.” And I quote from Lindon Barrett:

The perplexity, then, is that the impossibility of racial blackness seeming to lie within the limits of the economic fundament of the modern West as well as the limits of modern psychic rudiments belies the signal importance of the emergent circumstances of the concept of racial blackness: the rise of the Atlantic system of trade on which the articulation of the modern depends. (100)

Lindon Barrett’s argument makes the significant diagnosis that “the impossibility of racial blackness” is not a real impossibility, but a vicious ideological effect manufactured by white racism in complicity with colonial modernity. Barrett’s thesis is that, from a different perspective that takes into account the economic ravages and the depredations that are euphemized as modernity, racial blackness is indeed conceptually viable. As Lindon Barrett argues,

African-derived populations, conscripted under the rubric of racial blackness, become the decisive point of nullification in the geo-political, economic, and phantasmatic confluence that ultimately betrays the large co-extensiveness of the modern market, the ideally infinite arena of ideally infinite exchange, and modern subjectivity, the animating turns of the imagination yielding functional self-coherence, ‘our inaccessibility to ourselves,’ in the phrase of the Lacanian psycho-analytical critic Joan Copjec. (100)

Barrett’s thesis is that colonial modern subjectivity racializes blackness in such a way that blackness, in the form of black bodies laboring in servitude, becomes available as the invisible raw material that sustains and enables the modern subject, and at the same time racial blackness is denied any kind of conceptual access within modernity. It is within the aegis of such a duplicitous coding of race that colonial modernity indulges in its superior negative ontology,

in its allegorical “inaccessibility to itself.” Such an allegory insists on the nihilation of the *pour-soi* of racial blackness: for now racial blackness has been spoken for by the *En soi* of Eurocentric reason. The conceptual invisibility or nescience of blackness, or better still, blackness as conceptual invisibility or nescience is the cornerstone of colonial modernity.

With some of these formulations in mind, I would now like to return to the Du Bois passage on double-consciousness. It would seem that Du Bois concedes a lot more to the constitutive power of double-consciousness than would Lindon Barrett’s analysis of “racial blackness.” It is of interest that Du Bois talks about the Negro in racial and civilizational tones: he is a belated seventh son, but unlike his predecessors who seem to have emerged into world history open and unconcealed, this seventh son comes with a veil, and the veil takes on the authority of a congenital imperative. The second-sight which is a necessity caused by adversity turns into a gift: a sort of *pharmakon*, poison and remedy at the same time in a strategic expression of doubleness (Derrida). What does one do with this gift of “second-sight,” a gift that is inseparable from its historical provenance? Why should the American Negro not aspire towards the innocence, or the spontaneity, or the naturalness of a “first sight” unencumbered by the burden of having to internalize the dominant Other’s gaze as the “first”? Why should “the second sight” even be necessary as a paranoid reaction formation?⁴ Why should the African Negro sustain and nurture the historicity of double-consciousness when such a consciousness condemns him/her to a “second sight” vision of himself? To put it differently, why should the American Negro acquiesce in a program of self emancipation that is no more than a signifying on a certain “givenness,” the given history of slavery and abject racialization? Why not erase such a “givenness” and open up a different historiography that is forever rid of double-consciousness as *pharmakon*?

Let us listen attentively again to the Du Boisian formulation. Du Bois is not quite clear what to do with “this American world” which denies the Negro his true self-consciousness. Are there two Americas, is there more to American possibilities than just “this American world,” are there other Americas? What is puzzling is why the American Negro, to whom America has been nothing but an America of denigration and degradation, should even entertain the possibility that “America has too much to teach the world and Africa?” I am aware, as was Du Bois, that the narrative of western enlightenment is indeed janus-faced, and that Du Bois himself was empowered up to a point by Western education (Gilroy *The Black*). It is also clear that he makes a distinction between Europe and America, particularly in the context of race and racism. Still, the question remains: what is the basis for the hope and the generosity that makes Du Bois assert prophetically that America has much to teach to the rest of the world and to Africa? The irony here is that the only way America can become a teacher is by correcting herself, ridding herself of her own infamy, and by apologizing and expiating and making reparation totally and fundamentally for its own sorry

and bloody genesis. In other words, it is an America of the future, where the Negro will no more be a problem or a pathology, that may have something to teach the world: a lesson that would have to begin at home. The further irony here is that the agent of such an ethico-political as well as economic revolution will have to be the Negro subject who is not yet a fully enfranchised American subject. In other words, no American subject can take credit for the anti-racist revolution to come. i.e., to the extent that an Americanized subject and a racialized subject are but flip sides of the same currency. In other words, given the reality that racism and American subjectivity are mutually constitutive, anti-racist American projects cannot be circumscribed within the sovereignty of American subject sovereignty. For that matter, Du Bois himself is not an empowered American citizen or subject: he is a split subject seeking full sovereignty in the name of an America that is yet to happen. Having said what might sound like a harsh evaluation of Du Boisian optimism or generosity on behalf of American possibility, I would also like to add that it was precisely this kind of political imagining that set him apart from the less ambitious aspirations of a leader like Booker T. Washington who was satisfied with "Separate, but equal," and the Atlanta compromise (Du Bois 79-95). It is Du Bois who ups the ante by proclaiming that America has a responsibility as well, that America should transform itself in response to the Negro problem: a problem that is after all the vicious creation of white racist America. But to make such a demand, the Negro subject has to think of itself as a double-conscious American subject, and not as a subject in secession or as a Negro subject returning to Africa as a response to American racism. "This American world" has to be changed, and if this American world is the site of the strife, then the American Negro is constrained to take on American subjecthood, but a subject-hood that can only be premised on double-consciousness. I realize that the volume of which this essay is an integral part is intended as a validation of a multi-ethnic subjectivity that is not reducible to a Du Boisian model of double-consciousness. I am also aware that Latino/a, Chicano/a, and Asian American scholars have in recent years theorized the racialization of the American subject from their respective perspectives. My point is that, despite all those contributions, the Du Boisian model, in my understanding, continues to be the wheel that does not need to be reinvented.

Sure enough, Du Bois balances his double-consciousness with the assertion that the Negro "would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world." If learning and teaching were to happen in a double direction, what would be the site of such a transformative pedagogy: Africa, America, the world? Would such a transformation be diasporic or nation-centric? Before I respond to that question, I would like to dwell a little longer on the disposition of Du Boisian double-consciousness: its affective as well as cognitive purchase, its potential as answer and its complexity as problem. As it would be for Fanon too in his colonial context, to Du Bois the staging of

double-consciousness is primarily a problem of audience and communication context. Who is the addressee, and which is the platform? If, as Du Bois would have it, the “would-be black savant was confronted by the paradox that the knowledge of his people needed was a twice-told tale to his white neighbors, while the knowledge which would teach the world was Greek to his own flesh and blood,” and in addition, “the innate love of harmony and beauty that set the ruder souls of his people a-dancing and a-singing raised but confusion and doubt in the soul of the black artist,” (46) it is only inevitable that “this seeking to satisfy two unreconciled ideals, has wrought sad havoc with the courage and faith and deeds of ten thousand thousand people,—has sent them often wooing false gods and invoking false means of salvation, and at times has even seemed about to make them ashamed of themselves.” (47) Why does Du Bois privilege here the artist and the savant rather than the people (the problem of the intellectual and the “talented tenth” in Du Bois looms large) is a question I will not get into here for lack of scope and space.⁵ What is obvious is that Du Bois is aware of the extent to which how and where the problem is posed immediately restricts the nature and the scope of the answer/the resolution.

To Du Bois the doubleness, the ambivalence is both a curse and a possibility; and the challenge is how to transform the curse into a creative possibility. Can the “two” be reconciled, are they reconcilable? It is interesting that even as he speaks of strife, a strife embodied in the non-conceptualizable blackness of the Negro body, he also speaks of two “warring ideals.” In other words, the America that has enslaved the Negro is still imaginable as an ideal: Du Bois does not, on the basis of slavery, condemn America *tout court* (Said *Humanism*). In a way, there is hope for America, thanks to the Negro; for the realization of American ideals is dependent on what will happen to the Negro *within* American history. It is indeed a question of history and historiography: which history and which historiography, whose history and whose historiography? As Du Bois puts it, “the history of the American Negro is the history of this strife,” and the question is: Can this history be left behind, transcended, pre-historicized? Will the history of the strife also be able to accommodate the time of the period *after* the resolution of the strife? Will there be a break? Du Bois clearly wishes to resolve the strife perspectively, but it seems that he would not want to end the doubleness: it would now have to be a doubleness in harmony, in reconciliation after reparation and rectification. To invoke Hegel, what Du Bois is looking for on behalf of American Negro consciousness is not an *aufhebung*, not a sublation, but rather, the merging of the “double self into a better and truer self,” but “in this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost.” “To be both a Negro and an American” within a historical simultaneity: that is the objective and the desire. Is this misguided, impractical, politically confused or naïve? Is this a way towards false gods and false means of salvation? Is America the answer to the Negro’s national striving? Is double-consciousness in the final analysis to

be nationally circumscribed, or set free from national containment?

With this beginning I would now like to enter the problematic areas of race, racialization, and racism. My point of entry again will be Du Bois: his famous statement about color/race being the dividing line at a particular juncture in history. It seems to me that although many things have changed, for good and bad, since the time of Du Bois, the color line still seems to stand. The question is: how is this line to be deconstructed, shattered, destabilized, and transcended? Who will be, i.e., which particular "marked" human subject will be the protagonist of this endeavor, and who will be "the enemy" to be defeated? I put in an agonistic and antagonistic context to drive home the point that we are indeed talking about strife here, and not a bland ideology-neutral humanist maneuver. How will such an irreducibly perspectival endeavor be carried out and secured in the name of all?⁶ How will such a project be informed profoundly both by rigorous memory and an equally uncompromising counter-memory so that the act of transcendence will bring about a judicious balance between forgetting and forgiving, between learning in an allegorical-universalist mode and paying the price for a history gone brutal, between a utopically conceived and therefore "blind justice" and a situated justice whose figure, to borrow from Langston Hughes, has wounds in the place of blind eyes, between an all seeing blindness and a compromised, suborned, and guilty omniscience? Furthermore, what will be the nature of the ethico-political and epistemological path that will take the human subject beyond racism? In this context, will the ethical, the epistemological, and the political avenues be the same; or will each journey have to be made differently and differentially with regard to one another, to be synchronized as a total revolution in a deferred fullness? To borrow from Amitav Ghosh and his context of nationalism, will the movement towards a post-racist society have to go through "the shadow lines" of racism and the sovereignty of racist thought; or is there an available *hors-texte*, an outside to the regime of race, racialization, and racism? Before I begin to parse the differences between anti-race and anti-racism, and the semantic and the ideological distinctions among race, racialization, and racism, I would like to say something about division, binarity, and the wanton production of the other by the self within the epistemic regime of binarity. Here is Du Bois' famous pronouncement on race:

The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line,—the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea. It was a phase of this problem that caused the Civil War; and however much they who marched South and North in 1861 may have fixed on the technical points of union and local autonomy as a shibboleth, all nevertheless knew, as we know, that the question of the Negro slavery was the real cause of the conflict. Curious it was, too, how this deeper question ever forced itself to the surface despite effort and disclaimer. No sooner had Northern armies touched Southern soil than this old question, newly guised,

sprang from the earth,—What shall be done with the Negroes? Peremptory military commands this way and that, could not answer the query: the Emancipation Proclamation seemed but to broaden and intensify the difficulties: and the War Amendment made the Negro problems of to-day. (54-55)

This is indeed a highly nuanced posing of the problem. Du Bois' rhetoric moves from the particularities of history to the underlying attitudes and civilizational biases and dispositions of which history is a symptom. The analysis takes on a causal direction, but causality in the hands of the sociologist Du Bois is not restricted to mere empiricism; instead it points towards a deeper level of reality of which the empirical is the surface. When Du Bois makes the confident diagnosis about the color line, he makes it at the highest level of world historical generality, and then examines how this generality is instantiated in specific historical conjunctures. It is here that the theorization of race becomes crucial. What is "race"? Is race nothing but what it does? What then is the binding and mandatory relationship between the "isness" of race and its performativity? Is it possible, as I will be arguing later, that race is indeed an egregious misnomer with zero epistemological validity; and yet, a brutal regime brought into existence by pure power play and the desire for domination that animates human behavior? It is in this context that "the relation of the darker to the lighter races" takes on a monumental significance and begins to operate as the very premise and *a priori* of a race based and racialized humanity. As Du Bois astutely points out, the Negro problem in the USA is but a phase of this deeper, and what would seem to be, a fundamental civilizational and even primordial determination of humanity and its many variations. So, race is relational, but relational in a non historical and essentialist mode. Furthermore, it is based on an ideology of intra-human difference that is construed and legitimated hierarchically with an intention to create forever an imbalance as well as a separation based on notions of inferiority and superiority. As Lindon Barrett's essay makes the point memorably, the real motor of racism is economic exploitation, and the entire language of racialism is but a shabby attempt to legitimate exploitation as the rightful domination of one people by another. The dominating people dominate because they deserve to dominate for the very simple reason that their humanity is intrinsically superior to the humanity of the darker races. One can see how skin color is made to bear the burden of racial thinking. Dark skin and light skin become indices of "the human," and all relationships are epidermalized beyond the reach of history and historical rectification. Now that a racial epistemology has ontologized the very being of the Negro in the mold of a problem, even the Emancipation Proclamation as the answer to the problem remains trapped well within the problem. To put it in psychoanalytic terms, the Negro remains the chronic symptom to be consumed as problematic pleasure by white racism.

It is this deeper question that interpellates the Negro, and Du Bois can neither accept nor by pass this racist hail. The real historical

problem is that of slavery, and of exploitation and domination, but as Abdul JanMohamed points out in the context of slavery and Hegelian phenomenology and theory of history, this all too real problem is mystified in racial terms. Race, racialization, and racial thinking maintain their spurious epistemic dominance, i.e., the truth of the lie of race, as a “natural knowledge” that is invulnerable to historical diagnoses and transformations. The so called “relation between the darker and the lighter races” remains the organizing principle of “race relations.” Du Bois too unfortunately succumbs to this rhetoric, particularly when he uses terms like “blood” uncritically. “Race” operates much like the “fly in the bottle” in Wittgenstein’s analysis of the ontology of language: if Wittgenstein’s question was “how did the fly get into the bottle?” in Du Bois’ context, the question is: how to get rid of race as a discursive *fait accompli*?

When Du Bois talks about division, he is talking about it historically, but in the process he is also raising meta-theoretical and second order questions about the epistemic temporality of binarity and its historical instantiation in determinate chronotopic conjunctures: as race, as gender, as color, as sexuality, as colonizer-colonized, master-slave, nature-culture, etc. There are two components to the Du Boisian way of talking about race: on the one hand he talks about different races that have had their hegemonic say in world history and those that haven’t, and on the other, he relates racialization to color and the epidermalization of human reality. Perhaps he means that at any one given time in world history, one race holds sway and creates its particular patterns of othering, but now human history is being subjected to white/European/Western dominance with color operating as the official line of division. My concern here is two-fold: the perpetuation of race and racial discourse as a specific act of historical inauguration based on conquest, invasion, and the denial of humanity to “other” humans by humans in power; and the anchorage of the race-based division in the second order rationale of binary thinking and its formally irrefragable commitment to the production of alterity. I am also concerned about the way in which notions of nature and perception get insidiously woven into the divisive politics of skin color.

The question that both Fanon and the nameless protagonist of Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* ask of the spectating world instantiated by the white man’s gaze is this: When they see me, what do they see? Either the black human being is invisible, or is a spook or a ghost in the white imagination (this is Ellison); or the black being is totally epidermalized into skin color: black (Fanon). What is most troubling in this encounter is that it is based on the logic of perception: that human faculty which founds the human in Nature. As Maurice Merleau-Ponty would have it, the world and the human being are co-implicated in the phenomenology of perception; and it is in perception that the world is made available to the human being, perspectively. If it is through perception in and by the human subject that the world “worlds,” in that case, when the white gaze sees “black” in the black man, who is the subject and who is the object of perception? Why, for example, is there no room for reciprocity

within the apparatus of the gaze? Why then does the white being not get seen by the black being, and why does the epidermalization not happen in a reciprocal direction? In other words, why doesn't "white" both as a visual sense datum and as a marker of racial human grouping not stand out, marked as a color? The connection that I am trying to make is between an unexamined, dominant un-self-reflexive anthropocentrism, and the brutality of colonialism. Within the scopic field of phenomenology where perception in general, and visibility in particular, reign supreme, how is the relationship of the human to itself and its "other" spelled out as a subset of the relationship of the human to the non-, the pre-human, the savage alterity of nature: the heart of darkness? I am raising this question against the backdrop of a long and well sustained tradition where blackness and Africa stand in for the alterity of nature; where the "dark continent" begins to operate as that indeterminate and aporetic threshold where the human vanishes and slides into nature and pre-history. In the project of what Merleau-Ponty would call "the laying down of Being,"⁷ how does the black body get hyperessentialized into blackness, and consequently exemplified as pre-historic nature while the white body is sublimated into the optics of the pure, untroubled, transparent, and transcendent gaze?

My point is that it is within such a reciprocal binary that knowledge establishes itself as dominance both in the intra-human realm as well as in the human-nature nexus. The intra-human negotiation then degenerates into the savagery of Colonialism where, to borrow from Conrad, the colonizing human goes out to kill, conquer, rape other humans who have a different color, or whose noses are shaped differently than our own. The phenomenology of the world spirit is now narrativized as the history of the colonizing human forever in pursuit of inferior humans who need to be tamed, colonized, butchered, or as Ellison would have it, turned into the non-chromatic splendor of "the monopolated white." The black body is in the process both dematerialized and dehistoricized; but on the other hand it is always necessary and always under beck and call, to be interpellated as that absolute threshold of nescience against which "white" omniscience can historicize itself. It is crucial to keep in mind that what is being established through the economy of this transaction of body and its meaning, script and intelligibility/legibility, nature and biologism, is the field of visibility itself, as well as its transparency and self evidence. It is a field of visibility founded on the premise that the racialism that constitutes the gaze will forever remain outside the scope of the gaze. The effect is that on the one hand the gaze is universalized as a result of this disavowal, and on the other hand, the semantics of visibility is rendered inseparable from the chromatism of race.

Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks, in her brilliant book, *Desiring Whiteness: A Lacanian Analysis of Race*, makes the following argument:

Race is a regime of visibility that secures *our* (emphasis added) investment in racial identity. *We* (emphasis added) make such an investment because the unconscious

signifier Whiteness, which founds the logic of racial difference, promises wholeness. (This is what it means to desire Whiteness: not a desire to become Caucasian but, to put it redundantly, it is an 'insatiable desire' on the part of all raced subjects to overcome difference.) Whiteness attempts to signify being, or that aspect of the subject which escapes language. Obviously, such a project is impossible because Whiteness is a historical and cultural invention. However, what guarantees Whiteness its place as a master signifier is visual difference. The phenotype secures our belief in racial difference, perpetuating our desire for Whiteness. (21)

So, what is a regime of visibility, and what is the epistemological purchase of such a regime on human cognition and recognition? When did a mere perception which is no more than a registering of sense data become a regime capable of administering truth claims and organizing and hierarchizing beliefs and prejudices? What does one see when one sees, and who is "the one" seeing? When did seeing turn into its own epistemological producer: a hermeneutic producer capable of transforming mere perception into an ingredient of knowledge? I am reminded here both of Fanon's plangent cry on behalf of the Negro, "What do they see when they see me?" and the "invisible" predicament of Ellison's nameless narrator-protagonist. When they see me, they see a black man. When they see me, they epidermalize me. They see an instantiation of an essence called "blackness." They see me in such a way that I am reduced to nothing but the color of my skin. They see me in such a way that I am constrained to accept the cruel and debilitating meaning that the truth of my entire existence is reducible to my visible chromatism. But what can the color of my skin mean, or for that matter, what can the color black, or the color blue "mean?" Colors "are" and do not "mean." How does a perception become semantically charged? How does surface turn into depth, and how does an adventitious externality turn into an essential interiority? How does "a man whose skin has the color "black," turn into the "black man?" In other words, when does an act of perception turn into a linguistic utterance magically capable of metonymic and synecdochic economies of meaning?

What I am trying to pry open here is the complicity between the naturalness of the scopic regime and the ideological freight of language. How does, to rejoin my conversation with Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks, perception procure for itself, by way of the white subject's gaze, the persuasiveness of language? When a white subject cries out in terror or in hate or in amazement or in disbelief or in ecstasy, or in some register that is a combination of all of the above, "Look mom! There, I see a black man," how does this articulation of a perception acquire the power to impale the black man to his skin and exact from him the evisceration of his entire being for the simple reason that his corporeality was available to the white subject's optic competence? It is in this sense that Foucault in his analysis of Bentham's panopticon makes the telling diagnosis that "visibility is a trap,"⁸ and it is also in the name of the ambivalence

of the politics of visibility that Ellison's protagonist both suffers from invisibility even as he instrumentalizes it against a racist regime. The point I am making is that race as visibility or race as visual signification is born at that unfortunate moment when the phenomenology of perception absolves itself of its objectifying dyadic structure. In other words, the phenomenology of perception unmarks and exnominates itself in the name of dominance with the result that the white gaze becomes "the universal gaze" that bestows "difference" as the historical marker of whatever it gazes on: i.e., a dominant gaze that will never become the object of some other gaze. It is precisely because of this ideologically engineered effect, that makes sure that the unmarked white gaze cannot be gazed back at, that even if the black man were to respond to the white subject's cry with something like, "I see a white man calling me a black man," such an articulation will be immediately bereft of significance. The descriptive phrase, "white man" will be read as a tautology or as totally deficient in denotative richness. If anything, the black man will be criminalized for having named the non-color white as a color. To put it differently, while white is not white, black is black. While white is not literal, black is. While white is epistemological freedom, black is epistemological abjection. While white is the spirit of omniscience, black is the body of nescience.

Escaping language of course is the same as escaping historicity. But the question remains to be asked. Who is the "we" that is mystified/persuaded, the "we" that is making the investment? What is the invidious correlation between the desire to overcome difference and the desire for ontological wholeness that whiteness seems to embody in its non-color, its superior coincidence with itself? A polemical way to pose this question would be: Why should "we" continue to talk about race and its regime of visibility even after the critical knowledge that white is a color: that whiteness is an intense historical and ideological construct; that race, to borrow from Nietzsche, is the history of a lie? In other words, what is the difference between being "against race" and being "against racism"? If, "the Negro is not, any more than the white man," as Fanon would have it, at what historical conjuncture, at what determinate threshold of memory and counter-memory, and at whose agential bidding or command should the destruction of the binary mechanism be valorized?

At this point I would like to make a polemical connection between the desire for wholeness and the need to resolve double-consciousness. In a raced and racialized situation where wholeness has been mystified as the at-one-ness of whiteness with itself, how can a different wholeness be invoked against the racial imaginary? Has the very desire for wholeness completely and forever been contaminated by the ideology of the racial binary? How would the racialized colored subject make that all important qualitative distinction between a real wholeness and that other wholeness which is nothing but a positional privilege that the unmarked white subject occupies by virtue of its naturalized visual dominance? We

can now see how the desire of the racialized subject to dream, and revolt above, beyond, and post- the sovereignty of the racial binary is itself unavoidably caught up in the politics as well as the epistemics of the racial regime. This is but another way of saying that the racialized double-conscious subject has to achieve a double articulation: proclaim the truth that race is a lie, but at the same time acknowledge as real and consequential the brutal and dehumanizing history of that lie. This has to be a dialectically oriented project where the emerging liberatory truth will have to be seen in process, will have to be seen in emergence as the result of an antagonism. There indeed has been another history than the one engineered by the racial visual machine, and the problem is how to make that other history emerge on its own terms, and not as the “other” of the scopic regime.

The problem for the racialized subject, in its effort to inaugurate a post-racial epistemology, is to announce a different content in the form of a “liberation from” and launch it into its own morphology, i.e., a form that will not be complicit, even in antagonism, with the rationale of binarity. The galling aspect of this project is that even the reclamation of other epistemologies and worldviews would have to be initially acknowledged under the rubric of what Foucault would call “subjugated knowledges.”⁹ Such a revolution of the “post-” would also have to deal with the problem of multiple temporalities and historicities. Would post-black immediately signify post-white; and would that in turn signify post-race that will then lead smoothly into post-binarity? Where should the “post-al” originate so that the entire edifice may come crashing down, including the systemic *a priori*? Part of the problem here is that despite the heterogeneity of “colored” American subjects which includes the chromatism of the “white” American subject, we are still forced to think of post-racial strategies as post-binary strategies. In other words, binarity remains the official trope as well as the lense that provides access to heterogeneity. When we take into account the differential racialization of the Asian American, the Chicano/a, and the Latino/a subjects, it becomes obvious that heterogeneity has to be theorized both with reference to and in excess of the binary model inaugurated by the black-white paradigm of racialization.

As I have already recommended, the agency behind such a total revolution can neither be systemic, i.e., a revolution starting at the level of the *a priori* intended then to trickle down as real historical effects, nor from the white subject in a deconstructive mode, but from the colored bodies as autonomous subjects. Such a thorough and rigorous revolution also needs to pay close attention to the following terms and their inter-relationships: race, racialization, and racism. To put it briefly, “race” refers to a scopic regime or epistemology that enjoys the status of a categorical *a priori* that is not open to historical construction and deconstruction; racialization is the actual process by which the human subject is profiled and read as racial with the caveat of course that “white” will not be subjected to such an epidermal read; and racism refers to the willful hierarchization of difference and the unleashing of brutal power on

the bodies of the inferior and pre-historical subjects. I turn again to Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks, elegant and persuasive analysis:

If we reduce racial practice to racism, defined as power's agency to hierarchize and discriminate, we must accept race as an a priori fact of human difference. The concept of race as a system that fixates on arbitrary marks on the body becomes neutralized, and racism becomes the enemy. In other words, there is no possibility of interrogating the structure and constitution of the subject of race. The question 'How do we become white, black, brown, or yellow?' will be foreclosed. We will fail to discern racial practice as stemming from race rather than from racism. (31-32)

Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks' anxiety that in our band-aid attempts to deal with racism we may well forger the reality that "race" and not racism is the real problem merits rich and rigorous attention. If "race" is to be given serious attention, then the question is: how to delegitimize "race" even as we grant it critical scholarly attention. The painful and debilitating reality about studying race is that we are in fact studying something that is not even real, except in terms of historical effects that it has produced: in other words, we should not even be studying it except as a form of total and unconditional dismissal. A delicate dance is in order: hold on to "race" methodologically so that race can be destroyed once and for all, but divest entirely and unconditionally from all putative racial and race-based truth claims. The discursive regime of what Paul Gilroy terms "raciology" thwarts and mystifies *intentional attempts* to escape the markings of race. Should these intentions be historicized and realized deconstructively within the discourse of race and raciology, or should they step out beyond and against "race?" Paul Gilroy, who states unequivocally in his preface to his controversial book, *Against Race*, that "the modern times that W.E.B. Du Bois once identified as the century of the color line have now passed," begins his book thus:

It is impossible to deny that we are living through a profound transformation in the way the very idea of 'race' is understood and acted upon. Underlying it there is another, possibly deeper, problem that arises from the changing mechanisms that govern how racial differences are seen, how they appear to us and prompt specific identities. Together, these historic conditions have disrupted the observance of "race" and created a crisis for raciology, the lore that brings the virtual realities of 'race' to dismal and destructive life. (11)

The troubling issue is this: When and at what point should the anti-race movement be allowed to historicize itself as post-racial? Has the time to come to declare the death of race? The Utopian answer would seem to be Yes. But a historical answer would have to be No, for the simple reason that racism still abounds, albeit in changed forms and modes. The assault on Affirmative Action, a fast

growing xenophobia particularly after 9/11, American paranoia and the global and generalized military assault on the "other," the mega state mentality that you are either for us or against us: all this and more point to the conclusion that the color line is still doing its virulent job. It is significant that this issue of whether to be for race or against race has become a fraught debate among African American theorists and critics. Even though terms like anti-race and pro-race seem like transparent categories, it is not at all clear how these positions are to be unpacked as specific cultural and socio-political platforms. What would be lost and what gained if "race" were declared a null and void category? One of the legitimate concerns is that such a premature theoretical declaration will fly in the face of the need for reparative justice: that the dominant white establishment will be given the opportunity to ethically and epistemologically exculpate itself without ever having paid the price or having done the hard work of losing privilege and establishing an even play field. Whether it is the debate about Affirmative Action, or a debate about race-blind justice, the discussion has to be routed back to the critical distinction that Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks makes between racism and race. Only if and when "race" is irreversibly de-epistemologized and shown up for what it is, i.e., a lie and an ideological fabrication, the real dismantling of racism can happen, i.e., a dismantling with more long lasting effects than that of even the most radical legislation. I am talking about a world where the phenomenology of perception will no more be captive to skin pigmentation. "When they see me, they see a human being." But this is easier said than done.

Here again I turn to Paul Gilroy who wisely and patiently anticipates the many objections and anxieties that the term "post-racial" instantly engenders, and I quote from him at length:

The first task is to suggest that the demise of 'race' is not something to be feared. Even this may be a hard argument to win. On the one hand, the beneficiaries of racial hierarchy do not want to give up their privileges. On the other hand, people who have been subordinated by race-thinking and its distinctive social structures (not all of which come tidily color-coded) have for centuries employed the concepts and categories of their rulers, owners, and persecutors to resist the destiny that 'race' has allocated to them and to dissent from the lowly value it placed upon their lives. Under the most difficult of conditions and from imperfect materials that they surely would not have selected if they had been able to choose, these oppressed groups have built complex traditions of politics, ethics, identity, and culture. The currency of 'race' has marginalized these traditions from official histories of modernity and relegated them to the backwaters of the primitive and the prepolitical. They have involved elaborate, improvised constructions that have the primary function of absorbing and deflecting abuse. But they have gone far beyond merely affirming protection and reversed the polarities of insult, brutality, and contempt which are unexpectedly turned into

important sources of solidarity, joy, and collective strength. When ideas of racial particularity are inverted in this defensive manner so that they provide sources of pride rather than shame and humiliation, they become difficult to relinquish. For many racialized populations, 'race' and the hard-won oppositional identities it supports are not to be lightly or prematurely given up. (12)

I will conclude this essay with a brief but deep reading of Gilroy's profound but controversial thoughts on the race issue. Though he does not name it as such, Gilroy is indeed tackling the deep structure problem of binarity in the passage quoted above. What kind of an obsession is the obsession with race such that both the beneficiaries and the victims of race want to hold on to it? One would assume that given the radically different nature of the two interests, the option beneficial to one would be *ipso facto* abhorrent to the other. But the problem here, as in the case of the master and the slave, and of Sherlock Holmes and Professor Moriarty, of American foreign policy in the Middle East and the *jihad* movements, the very structure of agonism and antagonism,¹⁰ of a virulent *status quo* and a violent revolution against the status quo are hatched together. One is unthinkable without the other; so much so indeed, that the structural commonality of the two opposed interests tends to depoliticize the real antagonisms that seem to have no other option but to be magnetized by the binary appeal. What this means, and this is a thesis that is not explicit in Gilroy, is that post-racial thinking, to be real, has to be post-binary thinking. I am reminded here of Fanon's cry, "The Negro is not. Any more than the white man." Race is the vehicle of a hateful allegory of which the tenor is binary thinking. What is also seductively endearing about the binary model is that keeps opposition alive endlessly and chronically. Justifiably, the anger and resentment of the subordinated groups finds the idea of dismantling the master's house with the master's tools viscerally satisfying. There is also some autonomous satisfaction in taking race away and the "nigger" word away from the colonizer and make them one's own. It is indeed difficult, close to impossible, to settle the debate whether the "N" word has a valence of its own that has nothing to with the binary economy of racism. This could be seen as a generic problem that confronts all "subjugated knowledges" that have existed experientially, but not hegemonically. The vital question is: in whose or what history does one rightfully locate these knowledges? It would sound quite perverse to maintain that it is their subjugatedness that constitutes them as knowledges. The problem is how to analytically separate a disastrous conflation that has been caused by the history of racism and slavery? What the history of slavery and racism has achieved is the de-realization of certain knowledges that can now only be recognized as subjugated knowledges.

The other problem that Gilroy alerts us to is what I would term a problem of transcoding. To those of us to whom it is important to hold on to race, the mnemonics of race is transcoded immediately as the mnemonics of history itself. It were as though all of history

has been stored up in one vessel and that vessel is "race." From such a perspective, the very idea of going beyond race sounds like a wanton disavowal of history. As Gilroy points out effectively, race becomes that soil that nurtures our continuity from the past to the present: forget race and you forget history too. But even more influential than the loss of history is the loss of power. For those people who have been subordinated by raciology, strangely enough "race" becomes the prized term that they wrench away from the racists: a term that they begin to re-signify, like the term "nigger," against its original grain, and make it their own, as Gilroy would have it, "in pride." There is intense counter mnemonic pleasure in turning something that was a measure of shame into a badge of pride; and such a transformation is possible only if "race" can be maintained as an ongoing site of contestation.

So, what is lost if "race" is altogether eliminated from our discourse? Would this mean that the term has run its course in history and lost all its explanatory and analytic prowess? And within the binary dispensation of racialized identities, who or which subject decides if the term is still functional or not? What is clear is that to those groups who have been racialized into inferiority and subordination, race is the only viable instrument for self empowerment. To be a race man or race woman sounds like a less compromised stance against white racism than any post-racial program of action. It is in hoisting the dominant discourse on its own petard that the raced black subject gets his enjoyment as well as empowerment. It is also not easy to underestimate the anxiety that could be caused by the simple question: What comes after race? It is a specific kind of "interregnum anxiety" that borders on the fear of anomie. In the indeterminacy of what comes after the superannuation of race, will there be any room for difference, differentiation, specificity? Will a post-racial world be uncritically captive to the undifferentiated, the amorphous, and hopelessly vulnerable to assimilation and "white wash?" These are serious and relevant questions, and the answer I suggest should go to the root of the malady and not just the purulent symptoms. To go back briefly to Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks' reading of the race problem, to isolate, in the name of performative effectivity or the comfort that the *status quo* provides, the political from the epistemological is never a good idea in the long run; and I am suggesting that it is the long run that should prescribe the plan of action in the present. I am aware that the long run cannot by definition be available as a fully realized vision within the clamor of present needs and concerns: all the more reason why every attempt should be made to imagine that distant possibility not merely as binary antagonism or as the placation of *ressentiment*, but as a second order transformation of the very field or discourse that has become synonymous with the problem. If racial thinking is to be abandoned as faulty epistemology, then it follows that "race" has to shown up as bankrupt on all registers.

"The Negro is not. Any more than the white man." That is what it all comes down to. Post-racial thinking has to initially historicize itself as anti-racial thinking before it reaches the desired temporality of the "post-al." There is bound to be a lack of synchronicity

between the two phases, although both phases are constitutive of a common historical as well as temporal “imagining.” If binary thinking itself has to be dismantled, along with its particular instantiation in race that divides the peoples of the world into “fair skinned” and “dark skinned,” which subject will initiate and supervise towards success such a revolutionary venture? I turn here to Edward Said and Nadine Gordimer, each of whom with great honesty and passion has attempted to understand and embody the different ways in which different geopolitical locations and discursive subject positions can participate in the global overthrow of binary, anthropological, and imperialist thinking (Said “Intellectuals”). Both of them acknowledge the asymmetry that structures the relationship between a white citizen committed to undo the effects of *apartheid* and its aftermath and a black south African citizen dedicated to the same task; between a Palestinian *intifada* subject and a Jewish Israeli citizen fighting against the racist-colonialism of the state of Israel. Having made the acknowledgment, both Said and Gordimer would want and desire a cooperative project across the asymmetry for the simple reason that the asymmetry has been caused historically, in a secular world. In other words, the asymmetry is not natural or essence or pheno- or geno type or pigment or civilization based. The conviction, both for Said and Gordimer, is that historically engendered asymmetries can be and should be corrected and then transcended historically. And in this task both parties have a role to play, albeit each has a different role to play. The erstwhile dominant group has to, to borrow from Gayatri Spivak, “unlearn its privilege as loss,” and practice a form of askesis described eloquently by Gordimer as “self-consciencization.”¹¹ The black subject has a different role to play as it hegemonizes itself in a mode that is not just exclusively political, but ethical and epistemological as well. In other words, such a project by definition is not and cannot be separatist. Within such a process, the white subject begins to understand itself as “colored” and as “historically different and non-normative” as any other subject. But this kind of multilateral learning and change in the name of a common objective cannot take place if “race” remains the dominant trope: on the contrary, it has to be historicized as a trope in flight and then out of sight.

In this context, Anthony Appiah’s critical analysis of the ontological as well as epistemological status of “race in Du Bois is particularly illuminating. Says Appiah, in his essay, “The Uncompleted Argument: Du Bois and the Illusion of Race”:

Talk of ‘race’ is particularly distressing for those of us who take culture seriously. For race works—in places where ‘gross differences’ of morphology are correlated with ‘subtle differences’ of temperament, belief, and intention—it works as an attempt at a metonym for culture; and it does so only at the price of biologizing what is culture, or ideology. To call it ‘biologizing’ is not to consign our concept of race to biology. What is present there is not our concept but our word only. Even the biologists who believe in human races use the term ‘race,’ as they say, ‘without any social implication.’

What exists 'out there' in the world-communities of meaning, shading variously into each other in the rich structure of the social world—is the province not of biology but of hermeneutic understanding. (36)

Appiah points out that it is in the context of a deterministic biological paradigm that raciology takes shape with its specious claims about genetic and therefore causal relationships between “gross differences in morphology” and “subtle differences” of temperament, belief, and intention.” The crucial distinction that Appiah makes between race as word and race as concept goes a long way in making us understand the duplicitous structure of race as it puts on the verity of a concept even though it is nothing but a mere non-representative word. To bring together Anthony Appiah and Lindon Barrett in a move that I am sure both would strenuously object to, the only way to conceptualize racialized realities into their real historical meaning and significance is by denying to the mere word “race” the authority of a concept. It is not blackness that is conceptually impossible; rather it is “race” that is conceptually impossible, nonviable, and void. Furthermore, I would like to believe in possibilities of fluid histories of the present with the potential to genealogize themselves both in opposition to false determinisms based in biology or essentialist thinking and to the crippling baggage of “where they come from.” In this context, Anthony Appiah’s final verdict on Du Bois’ position on race is eloquently honest:

In his early work, Du Bois took race for granted and sought to revalue one pole of the opposition of white to black. The received concept is a hierarchy, a vertical structure, and Du Bois wished to rotate the axis, to give race a ‘horizontal’ reading. Challenge the assumption that there can be an axis, however oriented in the space of values, and the project fails for loss of presuppositions. In his later work, Du Bois—whose life’s work was, in a sense, an attempt at just this impossible project—was unable to escape the notion of race he had explicitly rejected. We may borrow his own metaphor: though he saw the dawn coming, he never faced the sun. And we must surely admit that he is followed in this by many in our culture today; we too live in the dusk of that dawn. (36)

The poetic phrase “the dusk of that dawn” captures the pre-post-erous nature of the predicament. Not to face the sun and to know that the dawn was emerging is to embody the interregnum in a posture of reversed prolepsis. Post Du Boisians, who have learned immensely from Du Bois, would learn to face the sun as it dawns as though the seeing and the dawn were mutually constitutive. To conclude, Appiah’s analysis points out that, even in the hands of an expert theorist and thinker such as Du Bois, there is great harm in holding on, for purely strategic reasons, to a concept that is conceptually null and void. The problem with strategic positions is one of control: is the human agent in control of the strategy, or does

the strategy at some point begin to enjoy its own life and “play” the human agent? What I would call for here is an honest and rigorous double-ness: a doubleness, as in the case of nationalism too for that matter, that will have the ethical and epistemological courage to shout from all possible rooftops that race and raciology have been nothing but lies, illusions, and ideological effects, and at the same time take for real the effects of the lie, the illusion, the ideological effect, and combat all of it uncompromisingly. It is in that historico-theoretical gap or lag between a theoretical and cognitive refutation of race and raciology and an experiential historical engagement with the effects of racial thinking that a post-racial subjectivity can begin to take shape.

Notes

¹ “Thinker-tinker” is an evocative phrase that Ralph Ellison uses on behalf of his nameless protagonist in the novel, *Invisible Man*.

² For more on the ontological condition of subaltern peoples, see Sekyi-Otu and the chapter “Revisionism and the Subject of History” in my forthcoming book, *History, the Human, and the World Between*.

³ See Painter and the California Newsreel documentary series, *Race: The Power of an Illusion* (2003).

⁴ See Anzaldúa who elaborates on a similar perceptual protocol of wariness to “second sight” in Du Bois.

⁵ See hooks and West for a coherent and programmatic rendition of the condition of the black intellectual.

⁶ For more on the relationship of the perspectival struggle towards universalism, see the chapter, “The use and Abuse of Multiculturalism” in my book *Theory in an Uneven World*.

⁷ For a critical reading of “the laying down of Being” as enunciated by Merleau-Ponty in his *The Phenomenology of Perception*, see chapter 3 of my forthcoming book, *History, the Human, and the World Between*, Duke UP, Fall 2007.

⁸ See Foucault, *Discipline*. I refer here to Foucault’s famous theorization of Jeremy Bentham’s *Panopticon*.

⁹ See Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* for more on “subjugated knowledges.”

¹⁰ See Mouffe, for more on agonism and antagonism. See also my two essays, “When is Democracy Political?,” and “Minority Theory, Revisited.”

¹¹ See Gordimer for more on “self-consciencization.” For a detailed analysis of how the category of the “ethico-political” works in Gordimer’s novel, *Burger’s Daughter*, see chapter 5 of my book, *Theory in an Uneven World*.

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