

**Transatlantic Interdisciplinary Research Colloquium Small
Forms. Aesthetics – Media – Modernity**

Abstract

Thomas Howard (University of Washington, St. Louis)

***Aphorismus* and Nineteenth-Century American Literature: Reading “Double-Consciousness” Aphoristically**

This presentation draws from my dissertation project, which examines aphoristic thinking and writing in nineteenth-century American nonfiction prose, by detailing part of my chapter on W. E. B. Du Bois and his *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903). I argue that we can productively read the passage on “double-consciousness” as an aphorism, especially one aligned with the German tradition of the Aphorismus. Comparing the passage to Friedrich Nietzsche’s aphorism in the third essay of *The Genealogy of Morals* (1887), I suggest that Du Bois’s term is less a concrete, portable concept than an ambiguous, open-ended aphorism that encourages readers to continuously reread, reinterpret, and rewrite double-consciousness in an ever-changing environment.