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# The Archive is Also a Place of Dreams: On Creolization as Method

*Oscar Guardiola-Rivera*

**ABSTRACT:** This piece engages creolization as an approach to the history of philosophy and the sense of justice. Building on ancient philosophical and anthropological accounts of the institutional rituals as well as creolizing analyses by writers of the Black Diaspora, it focuses on the approach outlined by J. A. Gordon's pathbreaking political theory. Creolization is advanced as an invitation to intensify possibilities lying dormant in the archive of our collective histories and lived experiences. An imaginary or even visual site, first, and only then as a concept, or a discursive practice.

**KEYWORDS:** dreamscape, visualization, ritual, standardization, retro performativity, general will, possibility

## Introduction to Dream

One of my current projects is to write a little book of philosophers' dreams. I believe the history of ideas and the sense of justice could be re-enacted from the perspective of the dreams reported since antiquity by writers, thinkers, and visionaries who have done their best to examine our ordinary ways of seeing, envisioning, and relating to one another and to the objects and environs that surround us. Their imaginings count and account for life and lives, to mourn, let go, hope, and liberate. These are crucial aspects of existence.

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Correspondence: o.guardiola-rivera@bbk.ac.uk

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Take ancient Egypt, for instance. Akhenaten's *Great Hymn to the Sun-Disk* combines a powerful, dream-like image of the life-giving energy of the solar system "bounded forward in its views and symbolism to a position which we cannot logically improve upon in the present day," as Flinders Petrie observed (Petrie 1894, 214), with the dramatic and political mediating force of verses designed to be sung in ritual manner. When coupled with the recognition that the gods have "cease[d] to exist," the hymn's focus on the inconstancy and insufficiency of forms and beliefs bring to the fore a sharp contrast between, on the one hand, the living and contingent nature of politics (kingship) and, on the other, the traditional emphasis on the Osiris west, "with its negative connotations of, finality," gloom, death, and the afterlife (Reeves 2019, 135, quoting Donald Redford) on both cosmological and topographical grounds.

The result is a dream-like tapestry in which the traditions of finality and civic-religious cultic belief in immortality and the afterlife are abandoned or placed in the background. Instead, a renewed emphasis falls on life and hope in the here and now: "Make holiday / Do not weary of it! / Lo, none is allowed to take his goods with him," sings the *Inyotef Song*, a creation of the time, together with *The Immortality of Writers*, attributed to Irsesh. Moreover, the focus on the inconstancy of belief invites fruitful comparisons with ethical-political attitudes and rituals observed among Amerindians that have survived well into modern times (Carneiro da Cunha 2017, 15–50 and 78–101; Vivieros de Castro 2011).

"Eat, drink, be merry" was the proto-Epicurean cry of the time. Actually, a ritual cry. Rituals have their most powerful impact by bringing about a change of state in their participant actors as well as in their corresponding framework-cosmology by realizing a world presumed as its precondition through a dream—or montage-like sequence of actions and imaginings in which effects posit their causes and conditions take place in retrospect. This retro-performativity, which can be seen as both a linguistic and imaginary effect as well as a matter of the temporal intensification of experienced possibilities, can also be observed in the ritual origins of theater, promise—and treaty-making, rhetoric, and other performative practices in Ancient Greece and elsewhere in the Middle East (Csapo and Miller 2009; Kitts 2005; Karavites 1992).

For instance, Plato speaks of Socrates' choice between poetry and philosophy as media for the pursuit and practice of truth-telling and the making of likely likenesses, which would've come to him in a dream. In turn, Aristotle would have argued in *Protrepticus* for a force of presentation different from mimesis, logically prior to demonstration through probability, and associated instead with the ways in which enjoyment can be produced in the form of the

presentation itself. This would bring classical Greek philosophy much closer to those approaches that explore and emphasize the dream-like, visionary, or prophetic function of forms, symbols, and tropes in modern psychoanalysis and other analytical as well as dramaturgical practices (Aristotle 2010; Fanon 2018, 17–24 and 511–530; Lundberg 2018, 178–192 at 191).

Meanwhile, in China, Zhuangzi dreamed he was a butterfly. Famously, upon waking up he was unable to determine whether Zhuangzi had just dreamt he was a butterfly or a butterfly still dreaming of being Zhuangzi. Centuries later, Christian philosopher-theologians like Augustine and Thomas Aquinas would consider the prophetic qualities of dreams. And, of course, every philosophy student is familiar with René Descartes' dream argument in *Meditations I*. Why is it then that philosophy students and enthusiasts seem to be much less familiar with the fact that Descartes was beaten to it by five hundred years by a Muslim philosopher? In his *Deliverance from Error*, al-Ghazali delivered the first sustained argument from the existence of dreaming to the groundlessness of our waking life certainties.

In the previous paragraphs I've referenced a few instances of the history of philosophy that can be seen as exemplary of the practice of creolizing, all the while raising the kinds of questions that a creolizing perspective would invite. To clarify, creolization is for me first and foremost a participatory practice (a method?) as well as a way of seeing. In other words, I take creolization to be an invitation to consider the archive of our collective histories and lived experiences as an imaginary or even visual site, first, and then and only then as an idea, a concept, and a discursive practice (Kempadoo 2016, 2–4; Gordon 2014b, 76, on creolization as method).

As such, the kind of (perspectival) shift on perspective brought about by means of creolization can be said to privilege percepts over concepts. It can be rendered as a perspective that understands knowledge as a process, as a kind of ontological comparativism, as ideation, imagining and remembering through radical investment, de-composition and recomposition, cut-up and sampling, and otherwise engaging creatively with the existing archive of images, patterns of iteration, symbolic forms, code—and network-structures, or the illustrated and written documents found in formal and informal collections and published or circulated as songs, storytelling, historical, legal, artistic, or even mythical materials.

This is singularly the case for those of us who hail from the Americas and the Caribbean. It's so in the sense that researching material in such locations obliges us to recognize the distinction between materials plundered, retained, de-intensified, or conserved in former or current metropolitan sites in places

like Spain, France, the Netherlands, or Britain as well as the United States, on the one hand, and the residual or “poor” materials left in the postcolony, on the other, where apparent weakness in fact demonstrates an ability to survive the most violent onslaughts and even a capacity to re-evolve into higher economies and social formations.

Therefore, we must consider asymmetry (rather than complexity or complementarity) as the principle governing the differential relation between these two onto-geo-political spaces. In this respect, creolization can be associated with other terms in the extant literature such as “non-Being” (Frantz Fanon, Enrique Dussel) and “émigré” (Edward Said) that name a conflict between differences in kind, which map or index in diverse ways different lines of flight or fall into the outside as well as the subjects and objects that dwell there, without reservation or *à fonds perdu*, as the French and T. W. Adorno would say. Notice that mapping and other forms of discursive or imaginary deixis are themselves ways of seeing and visualization of (historical, sociological, perhaps even existential) data and meta-data, and thus part and parcel of a specific history of standardization and the production of tokens, derivations, and measurements of more generic space and time frames and conditions.

Understood this way, creolization/asymmetry speaks of effects not equal to their cause. It expresses difference as formal inequivalence and works to impede reciprocal relations turning into compromises of the universal for the sake of the particular. It also prevents simple reversibility. Its wider significance, philosophically speaking, has to do with a repetition, reworking, and even subversion of dialectics seeking to go beyond dubious or simplistic notions of entanglement, very much in the sense of Stuart Hall’s criticism of Édouard Glissant.

In this respect, it’s important to observe that Glissant was correct to point out that “creolization . . . overlaps with linguistic production,” an insight that I interpret to mean the retro-futuristic performative force of language and participatory dramatic ritualization, it “does not produce direct synthesis but *resultantes*.” That is to say, results, residual materials, “something else, another way” (Glissant 2008). However, what must be emphasized with Hall, among others, is “the violence of being torn from one’s historic resting place, the brutal, abruptly truncating violence in which the different cultures were forced to co-exist in the plantation system, the requirement to bend and incline to the unequal hegemony of the other” (Hall 2003, 35).

This specification, which makes the process of entanglement anything but simple and emphasizes the imaginary-performative force of creolizing in production and dialectics as well as in the fabrication of other futures, “introduces

the question of suffering and of the overcoming of suffering through the creation of meaning and a political program. Creolization, in other words, has a trajectory,” as Stefan Bird-Pollan says (Bird-Pollan, 2015, 4). This means that creolization entails the recognition that the existing historical archive, which visually represents current exchanges between set units, selves, or cultures, however divided or dividual, presents a limited perspective. Moreover, this insight is ultimately a matter of normativity and combat (a different trajectory, or an orientation). If so, we must expand the pictorial and historical often backward-oriented gaze into the Caribbean archive in a sort of “accelerationist” manner, in order to include contemporary and future-oriented works by thinkers and writers creating and created in the Caribbean as well as writings and artworks made about the Caribbean and the Americas from the standpoint of the Caribbean diaspora. The result is an archive that is also a timespace of dreams.

### **Interval: The Archive Is Also a Place of Dreams**

As Roshini Kempadoo proposes, the expanded *résultante* is a contiguous archive. For her “the term contiguous signifies a physical and metaphorical construct created and emanating from the interrelationships made between visual and cultural forms, spaces and language, heterogeneous and contradictory . . . a kind of symbolic touching or [perhaps even physical] contact between materials” (Kempadoo 2016, 4–5). What emerges with the contiguous archive is not only dimensionality but also a jump in scales, an opening and retro-futuristic spacetime where before the future seemed foreclosed. I call it the interval.

In the interval, work on the contiguous archive as a manifestation of creolization acquires two characteristics: the first, which Kempadoo and I emphasize, is visibility. It should be understood not only in the sense of a totalizing view of history or just in terms of the range of visual materials recognized as historical references intertwined. Also, or rather, as the intertwining between these historical references and a collection of contemporary-futurist materials, and in keeping with the results of a creolizing practice and its perceptual-conceptual frame, as the intensifying contamination between such imaginary results, artworks, and recognized historical documentation. The result, epistemologically speaking, is that history and theory are positioned neither entirely outside of art nor entirely inside it, but in continuous relay and combat. Normatively speaking, this entails creolization isn’t primarily a ‘theory,’ at least not in the formalist understanding of the representation of a given, coherent and stable system. Rather, intertwined imaginings, artworks, and historical documents come together in support of a strategic view that

guides, orients and shifts the perspective of those approaching the concrete tasks of political organization. At least in this respect, creolizing methods resonate with the problematic of hegemony and leadership (or “general will,” as J. A. Gordon would say).

In other words, creolized materials and perspectives allow us to approach different sequences or courses of history as superpositioned in time, like the vortex of possibilities inherent to each and every event as it plays itself out. The crucial philosophical insight is, in this respect, a conception of possibility ignored by most philosophers since at least Diodorus Siculus’s *Bibliotheca Historica*. This is to speak of possibility as the sea that surrounds what currently is, which is radically infinite and more intense if compared to the territory of what actually exists (not *potentia* but *potentialitas*).

The second characteristic of creolization has to do with the theatricality of combat. For the creolizing archive to be a generative practice rather than a museum-like retroactive one (in which the archive is taken as a final resting place of more or less inert past realities), it must use technologies and forms that are performative (or “protreptic,” in the Aristotelian sense) and, therefore, intensifying of the affects attached to the real events, lived experiences, and interrupted projects of the future-oriented past. This follows also from our recognition of the prophetic or visionary function of image or trope and the means by which it “organizes and elicits enjoyment” in a way irreducible to practical judgment, presentism, or probabilistic reasoning.

In turn, this perspectival shift impacts upon our conception of the outside-oriented character of action in the case of embodied, rhythmic, performing subjects: the public presentation of the subject is one with the prophetic, retro-performative, visionary, or protreptic charge of ritual drama and rhetorical becoming, which results in the opening up of other ways, dimensions, scales, or possibilities in history. Now we have a perspective, perhaps even a theory or in any case a philosophy with the means to engage the field of “failed and feigned unicity that constitutes the warp and woof” of not only inter-human relations, as Christian Lundberg says, but also inter-temporal ones including historically contingent or optional claims to justice (Lundberg 2018, 192; Appadurai 2016, 83–123; Meister 2012, 232–259).

This also involves accepting the fact that, as Kempadoo highlights, “the continuous and simultaneous activity of archiving, creating and authoring material relies on the process of decision-making, creative judgment, production, selection and re-selection,” in which artists and writers participate together with legislators, bureaucrats, workers, and owners, among others, oriented toward becoming spect-actors rather than mere spectators. (Kempadoo 2016, 5).

This dynamism of combat resonates with the idea that “the archive is also a place of dreams,” on the one hand, and, on the other, with the twentieth-century realization of the creolization-as-asymmetry framework in the historical instances of guerrilla combat and the *foco* theory. Namely, the privileging of partial and multiple initiatives the starting-point of which is concrete action in an incomplete reality rather than vanguard hegemony or the assumption of completeness, and of multiplicity and inhibition as well as concrete universality, instead of the constancy of the fully-formed will of all (belief), speaking for others, and the uniqueness of a particular kind of subject embodiment—male, white, owner, European, heterosexual—as the “normal” code-structure of the subject or the universal standard subtracted from combat (that is, as the discounted principle of counting or a “non-ideological” center).

Rather, the orientation of an action thus conceived is *inhibited* or *negligent* (of god, king, and law) in the sense of breaking free from, first, the centralizing and standardizing conception of action that binds the participant in collective acts or rituals to the god-leader, its earthly representative, and its cult (as well as binding the god to his function, turning the relation into a fetish), and, second, from any generalization of political action and struggle anchored in the perspective of the well-grounded, bound, or “impartial” spectator and his stone-like will that is authorized to speak for others and tell them how things must be. This new perspective on action is different from the quantitative restriction of lived experience (performance-measuring, function-binding, or identity thinking) that is the very mark of colonial-capitalist societies, and also from some sort of moralized legal preference for reduced or moderate action vis-à-vis dreaming big and radically investing in higher-scale actions.

In contrast with quantitative and moral restrictions, inhibiting action is understood in the context of creolization and the archive-place of dreams as the existential and normative orientation of the concrete universal or the unity that precedes fragmentation (including the unity of a subject who hands over his or her self to others), in the sense that the radical investment or the risk taken up by a concrete universal is thought and realized in and for the concrete situation. Thus, the point isn't to wait, to temper ourselves, or fall asleep in our desire, or drown in impotence, but to develop our potential precisely where it exists, in the real (*potentialitas*). Action, thus understood, is not oriented toward an abstract universal or a spectacular virtual. It starts off and returns to the concrete situation just as one escapes into a dream in order to turn and look back at the current situation (not only from the perspective of the Angel of History, but rather, that of debris) and return from the dream so as to transform reality. The



aim is radical alterity, including social alterity; therefore, the only acceptable injunction of equality isn't that of the same but a different beginning.

## **The Normative Import of Creolization**

I believe this is what political theorist Jane Anna Gordon and Hegel-creolizing philosopher Michael Monahan express when the latter writes that “the creolizing subject . . . is meant to capture you and me as subjects in the world, you and me as objects in the world, and you and me as thinking about particular subjects in particular ways” (Monahan, 2011, 188). Which is to say that in a moment like our own, comparable in significant ways to the Age of Revolution, “we need a universalizing history” opening itself up “at the edges of cultures,” or in my terminology, at the interval. For it is “in the moments when they betray and are betrayed, that the more subterranean forms of political identification, those that better approximate universal aims, emerge.” Creolization, Gordon says:

. . . aims to draw on the space for a more rigorous approach to the world of political theory opened by comparative work, while problematizing the ways in which “comparativism” may either problematize itself to the point of incoherence or prove the wrong name. [For] it also builds on the work of disavowal, but . . . rejects both a reluctance toward constructing new collectivities and the assumption that all cultures must collapse into being substantively similar to historical, national ones. (Gordon 2014a, 211; citing Susan Buck-Morss and Sibylle Fischer's approaches to disavowal)

The point is that one doesn't step outside of culture to exchange it with others while remaining trapped by it, but one is instead disclosed through a variety of symbolic forms, imagery, and pathos forms. “When its inadequacies are revealed it is precisely in light of something else. Out of our disappointments, one might, in ways that were not so before, be more open to resources and identifications through which to carve homes in the world” (Gordon 2014a, 2017). In other words, making ours, Drucilla Cornell's borrowing of Virginia Woolf, to make “a room of one's own,” an imaginary domain, or rather, an imaginary trajectory that has normative import.

I believe Gordon correctly points out that in this sense “if, in political terms, we could understand creolization as the generalizing of a shared, public will forged by individuals as they articulate what they seek in and through collectivities that comprise a polity, we could understand the creolization of political theory as its generalizing as well” (Gordon 2014a, 4). As she observes, this in-

volves rearticulating the shared world that is the condition of possibility of each singular perspective and to which all perspectives, in conflicting ways, refer.

Crucially, this singularity has nothing to do with claims that take cultural difference or subjective fragmentation as some kind of ontologically inescapable fact and the ultimate reference-point after the end of all points of reference. Such an unconditional affirmation—it's the very opposite of a position—would make the normative aspect of subjectivity meaningless. Arguably, without a meaningful notion, a sense and a normative conception of the subject underlying critical accounts of its traumatized, pathological, or fragmentary situation under the alienating conditions of coloniality and capitalism, it would become too difficult to press any ethical-political demands to justice on the part of the marginalized or oppressed subject. In other words, we shouldn't rush to assimilate subjectivity or humanity to what in specific contexts and singular concrete situations can be termed alienation, fragmentation, or pathology. For doing so risks making the pathology of the current situation into a "new" normality.

My approach to the singularity of silenced or marginalized voices and disappeared bodies re-entering the stage is in this respect both dialectical and closely aligned to what has been termed creolization in the previous paragraphs, after the work of Gordon and many others. That is, to clarify further, an approach that tries to overcome the "post-structural suspicion of the inevitably totalizing and repressive nature of any collective aspiration" (Gordon 2014b, 76) and instead invites us to understand the subject within its world.

She uses the terms creolization and creolizing to name an approach "to politics and to the engagement and construction of political ideas," to which I hasten to add the public presentation or appearance of the subject. While in literature, history, and the social sciences, creolization has often referred to distinctive ways "in which opposed, unequal groups forged mutually instantiating practices in contexts of radical historical rupture, ones through which people from elsewhere became indigenous," Gordon's use of the term draws our attention specifically to the "mutual transformation involved in molding that which emerges as politically shared." She suggests, correctly, that this focus can "provide models for how enriched political structures, discourses, forms of identification, and thinking might be envisioned" (these quotations from Gordon 2014a, 2-3; also Fanon 2018, 517 on being "foreign" to the given social context).

According to Gordon, creolization might offer "a powerful regulative ideal of how better approximations of a conception of a shared, public good or general will can be constructed." As she says, borrowing from Jean-Jacques Rous-

seau's terminology, when we shift to creolization as a methodological approach or as a way of doing political theory we can see how it "seeks and at best embodies a general will rather than a will of all"; that is, not merely an aggregation of differential particular perspectives, strategies, commitments, "or texts tied to interests of discrete actors and divergent disciplinary camps," but rather, "creolizing is instead an effort to rearticulate the world and, in this case, the project of political life, that these different approaches share" (Gordon 2014a, 3).

## **Philosophy Has Always Been Creolized**

Notice how in this quote the aims of creolization as a political program and as method become intertwined. However, it also becomes clear that rather than being a (depoliticizing) celebration of diversity or complexity for its own sake, creolization should be read as a sustained exploration of "generality" and universalization as a site of (ritual) combat and asymmetry, not harmony or synthesis. The result of the violent ruptures and subsequent re-contextualizations referred to by Stuart Hall in his critical comments on trans-Atlantic entanglement were *illicit blendings*, which, in Gordon's words, "unlike other instances of cultural mixture, referred to symbolic creativities combining contributions from those thought incapable of it and from those with greater power" (Gordon 2014a, 10). In these results, which aren't a mere synthesis, the presence of both elements that previously had separate histories can be recognized simultaneously with the singular and unexpected form or presentation borne of their combination. One of the terms isn't submerged in the other, thought of as ultimately invariable, or as gate-keeping device. As Gordon states, to creolize theory and political life is, in this respect, to break with identity-oriented conceptions of cultural frameworks, disciplines, and methods.

In contrast with the guiding ideals of most brands of market-sympathetic multiculturalism, which tend to establish fixed rules for gate-keeping and maintaining the relative separation and quasi-sovereignty of the distinctive cultural worlds in which subjects are supposedly embedded, thereby attempting to outlaw conflict from the get-go, Gordon reflects, "in processes of creolization, a given pressing aim or project trumps or prevails over principles that would in advance restrict by fixing a priori rules of engagement." Put otherwise, "in seeking to create viable forms out of what has been and is suddenly locally available, one assumes that each, while retaining some of its original character will, in being resituated and recombined, remain itself by becoming something new and distinctive" (Gordon 2014a, 3).

To sum up, creolization runs counter to and is the very opposite of the processes of (global) standardization that have accompanied the colonial and glo-

balizing generalization of cosmopolitical relations under capitalism, seeking to submerge one of the terms of the relation to the other as tokens of invariant types. Global standardization approaches tend to naturalize and simplify asymmetrical and contested geopolitical relations only incompletely solidified. In contrast, creolization emphasizes asymmetry over complexity or diversity, conceptualizes the task of thinking and acting in such a way as to create true interlocutions and dialogical relations, even if these appear at first improbable. Crucially, it avoids assuming a cosmopolitan stance that would merely invite those in “the West” to theorize or measure and compare from their vantage point the places that put together would comprise “the Rest.”

This entails that the concept of the knowing subject as a spectator invited to see exotic locales from a position of relative security, in order to fill in the otherwise empty “savage slot” (Trouillot 2003, chapter 1), which at least since the dawn of utopian writing and socio-psychological inquiry between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, has turned both spectators and others into invariant types, needs to be bombed.

The explosion would change the coordinates of what is involved in the theoretical and practical dimensions of such (non)relations, and as such the authority and structure of what functions as evidential, as Gordon and Paget Henry (Henry 2000) have taught us. The unlikely result is a sort of critical theory allied to or from the Global South, one that changes the usual coordinates of criticism in that now the most significantly advanced theoretical and political experiments toward the articulation of a global future would be taking place outside of the Global North.

In other words, none of the two terms in the (creolized) relation would remain the same but would always already be something else. Put in less linear, more provocative terms in relation to the story and the history of philosophy: Philosophy has always already been creolized.

### **Creolized Dreams, Tokens, and Standards**

A personal favorite in my *Brief History of Philosopher's Dreams* is Baruch Spinoza's, reported in a letter dated July 20, 1664, to his friend Pieter Balling, a merchant engaged in trade with the Iberian Americas. In the dream, the vivid image of a “wretched, mangy black Brazilian” haunted Spinoza's sleep. Aside from the muted homoeroticism of the dream, this may be the first register of the meaning of tokens in early modern Western culture in the context of the coloniality of the encounter between Europeans, Africans, and Amerindians in the Americas. The image of the black man disappeared, Spinoza says, “when, as a diversion, I fixed my eyes on a book or something else; but as soon as I turned

my eyes away from such an object while looking at nothing in particular, the same image of the same Ethiopian kept appearing with the same vividness again and again” (Montag 1999, 87, citing Spinoza’s letter).

We know who the black Brazilian is—a slave. But since this is a dream and in the seemingly absurd logic of dreams effects come before their causes and something may always stand for something else, we can also say that the “mangy Brazilian,” the person in question, is here denigrated or linguistically and retro-performatively turned into a derivative version of the human supposed to be the norm and the original, merely a token of a given type. If this is the case, then the relation between the individual reported in the dream, a sensuous particularity, and the unifying or coherent framework of normalization and standardization that makes his black body disappear and reappear as a token, is one of *subsumption*. This is confirmed by the operation of the book in the dream as a law-book, arguably a symbol for universal, unifying, and standard knowledge or a legal order that literally subsumes the body-image of the Brazilian slave, making it disappear and then reappear “again and again” as something else—namely a substitute object or a token.

Crucially, for the purposes of this essay’s demonic alliance between critical theory and creolization, this is the kind of relation that Adorno termed “identity thinking,” which he presented as the univocal rational and mythic core of thought and political practice. For him, rationalization as a historical process has meant that the comprehension or meaning of individuals is “increasingly had through their location within conceptual schemes whose fundamental terms are invariant and unchanging.” As can be seen, what Adorno calls “identity thinking” is precisely what we term standardization (quotations from Bernstein 2001, 30–31). Basically, standardization means the subsumption, inclusion, or absorption of something—for instance a voice, a body, a communal practice—in something else, more precisely a conceptual, visual, or normative and normalizing scheme, the terms of which are fundamentally invariant. This something else that is fundamentally invariant comes to stand for, both in the place of and as the place for what has been absorbed—the silenced voice, the missing body, or the devalued practice. A most powerful example of this logic of subsumption or absorption as substitution is the historical silencing of the voice of women, its expropriation and reappropriation as an objectified set of standards in the rhetorical toolbox of public speech labeled as inherently male. Another example is the way in which whiteness may have been retroactively posited as the norm and the standard in the place of and for the blackened body lynched and re-presented as a sexually threatening figure in the photography of the Jim Crow U. S. South, in accordance with the cogent argument of

Michelle Shawn Smith in her *Photography on the Color Line: W. E. B. Du Bois, Race and Visual Culture*.

According to Smith, “lynching photographs make absolutely apparent the fact that, as Eric Lott and Kobena Mercer have suggested, whiteness is a split identity formulated on the violent repression of the other. Such images represent white subjects’ vehement rejection of an inverted mirror stage for themselves by brutally transposing the fragmentation of subjectivity onto black bodies” (Shawn Smith 2004, Ch. 4, loc 2560, referencing Lott, 1992, 36–7 and Mercer, 1994, 215). She wonders how, if whiteness and blackness were so utterly distinguished in turn-of-the-century lynching photographs, one can understand the possibility that white American and European viewers may have recognized themselves in the white-looking “other” of Du Bois’s Georgia Negro photographs and infographics (Du Bois 2018).

She explains that Euro-American viewers who assume themselves to be white may have experienced a psychological rift in such an identification,

perhaps becoming conscious of the fundamental split that establishes identity, as well as the subsequent racial violence that affirms a fantasy of white wholeness. In order to sustain a unified image of the visual signs that constitute superficial whiteness, the white viewer could not help but see self in other. But in this identification also lies the unraveling of whiteness as a boundary between self and other, for the images of these white-looking individuals are located in an archive of “Negroes.” (Shawn White 2004, Ch. 4, loc 2571)

Indeed, the effect of the spect-actor ritual performed in the exhibition of Du Bois’s albums is to make whiteness visible as the repressed point in an archive of blackness. In other words, what is repressed is the very erasure upon which the photograph and its framing perspectival conventions depend, which is both historical and aesthetic as well as conforming to the legality of the time or what was assumed to be justice and just in that context. The erasure is a retro-active effect positing its cause (whiteness) as such and as normal, standard, or the origin.

Du Bois’s subversion of such a framework involves harnessing that same retro-active force while changing its vector orientation toward the future. This becomes clearer when one presents Du Bois’s photographs and infographics in the archive together with his seemingly Afro-futuristic literature (for instance, *The Princess Steel*) and the coloring and design patterns of his infographics together with those of the charts of Afro-American mutual societies of the time, going back to the time of the Haitian Revolution, and with surviving artistic

or geometric African traditions of abstract mask sculpture, quilting, or basket-tray weaving. At this point in the example, creolization is revealed as the practice and execution of retro-futuristic performativity.

Moving from black bodies to female voices, consider the classicist historian Mary Beard's brief and brilliant *Women and Power: A Manifesto* (2017). She narrates, from a seemingly non-creolizing standpoint, how it came to happen that the voices and bodies of women were trampled upon and taken over from antiquity onward by men, so that the latter could effectively brand the space and the rules of public speech, from politics to law and the post-war discourse of human rights, as their own. Add to Beard's brief genealogy, the accounts of anthropologists working with so-called "traditional" societies in the Pacific or the Americas where women would be exchanged in accordance with the law prohibiting incest so as to arrange marriage-alliances and foundational treaties among groups to form societies, or the archeological-philosophical evidence for women's equality in ancient Egypt. What you get is the enticing suggestion that the trampled, violated, decapitated, and silenced bodies of women came to be used as tokens at some point in the earlier expansionist history of "the West," just as the witch-hunts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Europe and the Americas predated and paved the way for the emergence of modern colonial capitalism— with bodies functioning as the original "universal" currency.

Notice that the aforementioned accounts of anthropologists have proven contentious precisely on this very aspect. Their rationalizations of the meaning of myths concerning the genealogy of law in the standard prohibition of incest seemed to hide at its core, and cover over, the cruelty and quantity of violence that must have occurred. For the voices of women to be silenced and their bodies vanquished so that those same bodies and ways of speaking could be turned into tokens of themselves, but this time branded by men as theirs and theirs alone, actually demarcating the space of public speech, the economy, politics, and law as exclusively male or patriarchal. Now think about the disappearing body of the black Brazilian in Spinoza's dream in a similar way. You get a very good idea of what coloniality and its accompanying civilization narrative, condensed in the concept of sovereignty, has meant and what is entailed in its reversal: the imposition of white patriarchal rule in history and to history as something inherent, seemingly natural, as the "gold standard."

For me this means we must posit once more not only the question of the (knowing) subject, as we did above following from Gordon, Monahan, and Henry's account of creolization, but also the question concerning the object as substitute or token of the vanquished body, of objects gathered where a meet-

ing of speaking voices or actual bodies could have taken place (or not-yet), now carved up or displaced and mined by something else or someone else to accumulate their value for plunder and power. This means asking again: where did these bodies go? The bodies of the disappeared, the voices of silenced women subject to oblivion, the peoples obliterated by the promise of civilization; weren't they part of a record that would serve as the basis of a case of law and reparation?

Coming as I do from Colombia, in Latin America, a country where the apotheosis of war has taken place for over sixty years and in which a woman is killed every other day, I know these questions hailing us from the distant classical or "traditional" past are a matter of the present and of the future in the past and of salvaging what is worthwhile in the present regardless of what the future may hold. In the process, a process of determinate negation, what is produced is yet another "illicit blending" of past and present so as to re-open the future and therefore a most hopeful creolization of the archive.

**Oscar Guardiola-Rivera** is writer, curator, newspaper columnist, Fellow of the RSA, and Professor of Political Philosophy and Human Rights in the University of London, Birkbeck College. He is author of *What If Latin America Ruled the World?* (Bloomsbury, 2010), which received the Frantz Fanon Book Award of the Caribbean Philosophical Association, and *Story of a Death Foretold* (Bloomsbury, 2013), which was shortlisted for the 2014 Bread and Roses Award and listed among the best non-fiction Books of the Year by *The Guardian/Observer* and *The Financial Times*. His recent publications include *A Defence of Armed Art/Struggle* (London and Bogota: UTAdeo, 2019) and "A Future for the Philosophy of Liberation" in Amy Allen and Eduardo Mendieta (eds.), *Decolonizing Ethics: The Critical Theory of Enrique Dussel* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2021). His poetic novella *Night of the World* came out in 2020 (London and New York: The 87 Press) and his docu-film *Art and Fire: A Journey in Five Films*, in collaboration with Hay Literary Festivals, is available at <https://www.hay-festival.com/p-16844-art-fire-a-journey-in-five-films.aspx?currencysetting=USD>

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