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Guardiola-Rivera, Oscar (2023) Prologue: we shall dance better. In: Clave-Mercier, V. and Wuth, M. (eds.) Decolonising Political Concepts. Routledge Research on Decoloniality and New Postcolonialisms. Abingdon, UK and New York, U.S.: Routledge, pp. 1-6. ISBN 9781032275918.

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## **Prologue: We Shall Dance Better.**

**By Oscar Guardiola-Rivera**

When we launched what is now known worldwide as “the decolonial turn” back in the mid-1990s, our mind was not set on producing yet another sociological type (“coloniality”, for instance). Instead, we wanted to place a bomb. To explode the framework within which the social sciences and the humanitarian arts of law and literature had been developed since at least the dawn of modernity.

Perhaps, in this respect, it would be best to speak of the “arrested development” of the sciences, of humanitarianism, and of the republican arts, which for us meant, quite simply, the making of things public.

We knew that a different kind of humanism and republicanism had emerged in the wake of the encounter between “Christians” and the societies that worked out or retained a bio-cultural wisdom, especially in the Americas, which made them resist the idea of progress toward perfection or achievement followed by stasis that had become a dogmatic principle of politics and the mind after the importation of the techniques of perspective to the practical knowledges of siege architecture, speculative geography, and surveyance which informed the expansionist enterprise of European kingly powers.

We knew such humanism and republicanism had actively stood against the association between a way of seeing and arguing with demonstrative pretensions, in which the axiomatic and the arbitrary go hand in hand, best exemplified by the defensive attitude and mentality expressed in the justifications of conquest and empire in the Americas put forward by jurist-theologian Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda during the famous debates of the 1550s. And we also knew that a different association could be made between the critique of the imperialist project and a different image-system that valued differently what happens to be the case in the world and argued about it in a fallibilist manner that can concede our world-formulas are at best approximations and continue work at them by making them present and concrete in bio-cultural sites that involve the affordances of rivers, the vulnerability of bodies, and the experimental power of judgment and the imagination.

Because of this, we focused our efforts on the concrete practices of internal colonialism, discipline and control of time or time-orientation as well as self-colonization as forms of “arrested development” that damned Amerindian, Afro, and creolised societies to a static past and foreclosed other futures, thereby condemning the sciences and humanitarian or republican arts to remain within a framework in which dialectics are affixed to an absolute viewpoint or subject, while at the same time insisting on the active presence and ongoingness of the signs, images, and concrete symbolizations produced and reinvented by those societies.

In other words, instead of producing trademarks or tokens like “coloniality” of... this and that to market them among the rapidly changing fashions of contemporary political communications and academia, or assuming that “decolonial” waves in the nineteenth or twentieth century had resulted in sufficiently clean and simple colonized/coloniser or victim/perpetrator binaries, to use the now ubiquitous language of human rights, we focused on the percepts and concepts left behind by “traditional” (meaning demonstrative,

arbitrary, and axiomatic) thought, historically associated with the expansionist enterprise, and the habits of sensing and familiar sense after its demise as philosophy.<sup>1</sup>

For us, the call for a frame of reference in which everything has its place after the fall of all ultimate points of reference, to seize a political philosophy, a concept, or something to hold onto, dissimulated under the pretext that such “center” or “ground” would better guide us to the promised land, was but a repetition and reinvention, for the new speculative global markets and relations, of the older ways of seeing that organised the visual world as the universe was once thought to be arranged for God. Also, a mask for nothing more than aggression, the desire to appropriate and take hold of a philosophy, a landscape, and everything in it, in the way that the schools of old used to devour each other. That predatory scene was never for us a matter of abstract theory, since the apotheosis of war and plunder surrounded us in the lands of our childhood when we launched the modernity/coloniality research project in the 1990s, and such apotheosis has now viral, global reach.

The present book shares and takes further that spirit and focus on percepts and concepts, political concepts, as much as the critical (as opposed to “traditional”) approach that animated the modernity/coloniality project in the first place. Not only it takes it up but runs with it! Its starting point is that the study of politics, law, and literature in the West largely stands on the premise that such things as politics, the communication of signs and symbolization, laws and kinds of value as well as literature begins with letters and images posited and made literary or civil within a proper, ultimate frame of reference. Against the call for a frame of reference, emerging with the acceptance of analytic geometry and calculation not only as an approximation to the world but as a more real world hiding behind this one, which we could decrypt or decode if we were in possession of The Word or Cypher, the essays in this collection invite us to see better and see through. To shift our (speculative) geography and perspective. Not just to de-centre but to tell better stories about the so-called centre or centres both in the political philosophical or jurisprudential and geo-political sense.

To question the fantasy of harmony through calculation which has returned in full twenty-first century garb, dressed up in shiny algorithmic or AI regalia that already contains quantification of what is spatially perceptible, abstraction according to conventional ways of seeing and thinking that may even be based on arbitrary axioms (so that the arbitrary and the axiomatic go hand in hand), and to translate our supposedly critical ideas and correct moral positions into parts of the imagination that are also points of contact with real relations -in motion, transiting, transformative and transforming.

The first two parts of this book explore and question relations of power and knowledge embedded in the ways we see and conceptualize the world in which we dwell, often using the image of a fork on the road or an intersection. The third part focuses on mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion operating in the dialectic between the displayed and the hidden in such concepts as citizenship, human rights, or identity and belonging. The final part of the book puts into practice other languages of refusal and resistance that may enable decolonial liberation across diverse geographical contexts and political movements.

Throughout, the emphasis is on movement or trans-motion. This entails a way of symbolizing, a symbol and a concept that is not a static one. Rather, it contains within itself a principle of differentiation. “Principle” in the powerful sense of a new beginning, and an

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<sup>1</sup> Santiago Castro-Gomez and Oscar Guardiola-Rivera (with Carmen Millán), “Introducción: Poscolonialismo, o la crítica cultural del capitalismo tardío” in *Pensar (en) los intersticios. Teoría y práctica de la crítica poscolonial* (Bogotá: CEJA, 1999) 9-19

idea capable of carrying that new beginning, in which all other pasts are present, into the future. As such, the very character of a concept is reworked in this book: it becomes a category that shows us the direction to follow. It is not only a matter of difference but one of difference and orientation.

However, and this is where the very idea of a decolonial turn, re-turn, or move makes better sense, the country in which a non-static symbol dwells, as in the Coyote or Donkey stories and word cinemas found throughout Amerindia, remains uncharted and not-yet subject to Euclidean mapping or geo-political lines of demarcation. If so, the political reason that emerges throughout the collaborations of this book is not the purer more Euclidean reason that builds and elevates utopia to the status of a “shared value”, belief, or faith. Would I dare saying that since such rationalist utopia is a power trip, monotheocratic, declared by executive decree or royal prerogative, maintained by strong willpower or constancy, premised on progress rather than process, and, therefore, Euclidean, European, and masculine, then this political reason is not utopian at all?

Or at least, this is not how utopia ought to look like. You will recall that the quality of stasis or static perfection (the “perfect” and “perfectible” communities of Second Scholastic political thought that still lie buried within our supposedly modern political and legal concepts) is actually an essential element, a quintessence or a deification (hence, our speaking before about the apotheosis of war and the market in the twenty-first century) and, therefore, also an element of the non-inhabitability of the euclidean, white European, masculine utopia.

If so, to attain a more inhabitable time and place when faced with the apotheosis of war and market, with climate meltdown, and fascination of abomination, we must not only turn (no matter how “decolonial” that turn might seem) but also re-turn, go round, go inward, undercover and underground, like investigative detectives, like Forensic Architectures investigative detectives, or like surreal detectives such as PI Clem Snide.

The latter, you may recall, would try to solve a case by sitting back, listening at random to sound recordings made in a device not too dissimilar to today’s Teenage Engineering PO portable mixers and sequencers “specially designed for cut-ins and overlays and you can switch from record to Playback without stopping” it. He would record the sounds of the forest outside the villa of the dead man, the rattle of dishes being washed, the sound of water and wind as he walks along a riverbed or the sea, as well as rave music to dance or even the toilet flushing. Later, he would randomly choose sections of the composite recording while watching TV so that he would listen only half- or sub-consciously.

To suggest that approach as an analog for doing political and legal philosophy in the digital era might strike some as either too Kitsch or too Dada, at a time when the bourgeoisie has grown bored of both, declared them unfashionable, for they move fast, so fast they see no more than the surface glitter of a life too swift to be real. They/we are assailed by too many new things ever to find the depths, the roots in the survivance and ongoing poetics of the signs obscured by a cultural logic of the archive, the court, and the museum as a final resting place in which everything has its place. The rush of life past, that stormy wind, they/we call progress, though it is now too rapid for us to move with it.

But what if it is no longer the case that Amerindian naïve or Dada have subsided into history, and instead, before the facts of pandemics and climate meltdown bringing back the re-enchantment of nature, it is history that is subsiding into Dada and magical realism? And

that can help when one knows not whether to go away or staying in the place where one's people dwell, when visited by war or with an infectious distemper.<sup>2</sup>

I want you to read this book because I know of no other work that takes for its central concern the political power of images, percepts, and concepts in a way that is neither utopian nor dystopian. But rather, a way that is no way, not on the road atlas, which is, after all, the only way to get to a place that is no place. The intellectual concern of this book is this matter of "westernization", "progress", or a mimetic power so excessive and so fast we can no longer move with it. This is perhaps the central fact and concern of our times. If so, of course this book provides no ultimate answer, model, roadmap, or solution; it simply indexes and indicates, like a lighthouse that is not a wreckers' lantern, the way that cannot be gone. Its poetic image is, therefore, that of an enantiodromia. Like a donkey moving backwards to the forest, or a porcupine backing into a crevice. To better see and hear the challenges ahead and think of a more habitable place. It moves sideways or backwards looking forwards. It dances. That is a proper decolonial move.

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<sup>2</sup> Michael Taussig, *Would a Shaman Help?* for quote.