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Interlocution Not Conclusion: Farewell Letter to a Dead Philosopher

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ABSTRACT: Written in the shape of a letter to a friend and long-time collaborator, this piece focuses on Drucilla Cornell's most crucial lessons on a critical theory for the future: the intertwinement of aesthetics and politics; the need to figure and reconfigure techniques of liberation; the clarification that the decolonial turn is an ontological turn; the relationship between justice and negotiations; the reformulation of the feminine within sexual difference; and the impact of temporal naturalism. Together, they help us move beyond received views in phenomenology and existentialism, toward gravitational thinking and the priority of imaging over the understanding if we are to rekindle the revolutionary spirit of public imagination.

KEYWORDS: aesthetics, techniques of liberation, justice negotiations, imaginary domain, temporal naturalism, political spirituality

Dearest D,

For many years you joined us at Birkbeck School of Law in the University of London. We listened to and received the images and words you gave us as what they were: precious gifts. In 2004, you helped us create the Birkbeck Institute of the Humanities as part of a group that included, among others, Étienne Balibar, the Greek philosopher of human rights Costas Douzinas, psychoanalytical theorist Maria Aristodemou, Slavoj Žižek, and a younger me. The group would gather almost every year for public events and closer sessions at the Critical Theory Summer School, in curated encounters like Focus on the Funk, together with many activists, artists, and thinkers committed to the struggle for revolu-

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tion here, now, tomorrow. We learned from each other and engaged in what you called negotiations.

In time, we became close friends, accomplices, collaborators. We began putting together special collections for journals as well as book chapters, shorter pieces, conversations, courses, and plays. (Our love for poetry and theater brought us ever closer.) Some were successful, others failed or remain unfinished. They were things of truth and beauty.

We taught and presented together not only in London, but also in Senegal and South Africa, in my native Colombia which you loved so dearly, in literary festivals and at the Instituto Pensar in Bogotá. Your intervention there, together with our friends Lewis R. Gordon and Bob Meister, became crucial in the struggle for peace and against violence. (*Did I tell you our friend Roberto, the Institute's director, now presides over the Special Jurisdiction for Peace?*) Also at the Caribbean Philosophical Association, which became our intellectual home. We were educators in need of education.

You taught those present about negotiations: To negotiate is to *do justice*. To do justice as we negotiate "we also need 'aesthetic ideals,' which is to say visions of justice that can be judged to do better or worse in terms of the struggle to create a better world," you said (Cornell 2017, 202). These aesthetic ideas should be taken as integral to a technique of liberation. Such technique would proceed through negotiations. Citing Jacques Derrida, whom you read better than he read himself, you defined negotiations as ways of taking position, which is "inseparable from building institutions and indeed from fighting for ideals" (Cornell 2017, 202 citing Derrida 2002, 25–6).

What a crucial lesson! It allows us to transcend tired debates concerning the relationship of theory to practice. This is a particularly tiring issue for those who find ourselves teaching in law schools and other humanities or social science-related institutions now submitted to the imperatives of neoliberal privatization. When law and social sciences are merged with business and economics, the often implicit—at times explicit—injunction is that the usefulness and value of theory (that is, philosophy, legal and critical theory, the history and ethnology of communal social values) is zero. Without currency, its practitioners are unable to obtain high-income grants or guarantee the employability of our students.

Having little practicality and no value, we're told by managers and pragmatic colleagues, "theory" and the writing of theory should be dropped for more worthy (meaning profitable) research and "pure practice." These so-called pragmatics often also argue that "theory" is basically negative critique, passé, of little purchase vis-à-vis the "big" problems of our time, whether AI,

climate change, or income inequality, which require practical solutions rendering ethical markers transparent and easily translatable into our existing normative orders. They say practice is really about the fight for ideological supremacy, decisiveness, or "hegemony" in institutions.

Against such widespread nonsense, you argued correctly that the point of seeing negotiations as techniques, in the broader sense of *techné*, which includes a media-and-technology concept that does not alienate signs or images from their materials or abstractions, is to tie together "theory and practice, the ethical and the political, so as to shift our focus away from the theory/practice debate toward a much richer discussion of what our ethical responsibility is—and by 'our,' I do mean humans beings—to change the world in the name of justice" (Cornell 2017, 195).

Your proposal to take seriously a wider sense of *techné* immediately invited us to question the anthropocentric absolutism ("humanist hubris," you said) that has often accompanied the idea that human beings are the sole transformative agents of the world or a *legibus solutus*. You challenged us to set the discussion of negotiation as a technique of liberation in motion as a performative, subversive, transformative activity, to move the discussion within debates concerning posthumanist literature, speculative realism, the ontological turn, and temporal naturalism in academic philosophy, anthropology, and the social sciences. These were inspired, in part, by the "decolonial turn" that some of us helped to launch from the mid-1990s onward as way out of the apotheosis of violence in the lands of our childhood. To bathe ourselves in cleansing waters and breathe again. Clearing the murkiness without throwing the baby (who says the emperor has no clothes) out with the proverbial bathwater (Castro-Gómez, Guardiola-Rivera, and Millán 1999; Castro-Gómez and Guardiola-Rivera 2000, xxi–xlv; Taussig 1993, xv–xvi).

You made present to us how keeping non-representationalism and the critique of logocentrism (also a critique of ethnocentrism) that we learned from phenomenological and existentialist thinking also helped to move across and beyond such styles of critique. Chief among them was the orientation to look for and see things as they are in the blues and funk of everyday lived experience. However, this never meant giving up on hope or giving into the deadly spirit of seriousness of much Western philosophy and the affective moods of our geo-psychological, national, and political identities. On the contrary, this meant a distinctive attunement to the hopeful playfulness, irony, and humor of the wordsmiths, thinkers, activists, and artists who became our collaborators and our kin. This is an aspect of your philosophical attitude toward institutions, life-as-struggle, and teaching best captured in your practice and your

concepts of the imaginary domain, political spirituality, and revolutions. As you put it:

> People make revolutions. They always have. They always will. Struggles break out and spread like wildfire. No one can predict the shape of the future because . . . movements themselves create new conditions and new ways of being together that force us to rethink the very concepts of revolution. (Cornell 2022, xiii)

Second, you reminded us that insurrectional activity is fun, and it gives us time. Time to pause. Pause for reflection. Reflection and time for transformation. "We are of time, in time, but also against the times," you said many times during our debates and the classes we taught together and developed in writing. "The argument that time is 'real'. . . also means that the future cannot be determined in advance and therefore that theories or philosophies that 'tell us our fate', or . . . that we are fated for the worst are simply inconsistent with the most cutting-edge science" (Cornell 2017, 196).

In doing so, you were rephrasing Derrida's phenomenological insight while reinventing his notion of deconstruction-as-justice by making timespace for dialogue between political philosophy and science (physics and mathematics) on the one hand, and, on the other hand, political philosophy and art (audiovisual art, choreography), identities (sexual self-differentiation), and becoming. As in becoming woman, for instance.

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Your reformulation of the need to affirm the feminine within sexual difference as crucial to existentialist, phenomenological approaches to justice, made all the difference. You argued (together with Stephen D. Seely) for a way of becoming woman "that entails a bodily redoing of our ways of being in the world" (Cornell 2017, 200; Cornell and Seely 2016, 109–18).

You argued for reimagining—a world-making sensing and sense-making practice—and a transformative way of dancing, moving, and seeing the world anew in the wake of law-making violence justified as a restoration of law and order.

> The violence of the colonial situation . . . breaks up any "imaginary domain" in which a person is allowed to configure her own bodily integrity, let alone symbolize who and how she is in her own language, culture, mythology, art, music and so on, which are often outlawed . . . To rob a human being of her culture, intellectual heritage,

> language, the control over her bodily integrity and her imaginary throws her into the abyss of psychosis. (Cornell and Seely 2016, 110)

Into the death-driven night of the world and the look *ad pessimum*.

> A meaninglessness that is precisely the horrific capture by the *jouissance* of the Other with no barrier that can possibly be cast against it—even in the limited sense of the Oedipal . . . law because the colonized "man" cannot symbolize the father . . . This is why decolonization and a new choreography of love and sexual difference must always be part of revolution. (Cornell and Seely 2016, 110)

A new choreography of love. What would it look like?

You once told me, while we prepared to write a play together, that it meant something other than "love thy neighbor." That abstract notion didn't account for the historical practices and bodily rootedness—ethical flesh riveted to history rather than as given facticity—through which we come to know, not to know, or manage to know what not to know about our neighbors, their material affordances, and reciprocal affections.

Instead, you said, it would look more like the pathbreaking, kin-making alliances of a "young woman warrior who is seeking not only a new social order but a world in which as a young woman she can find herself mirrored in the world around her" (Cornell in Guardiola-Rivera 2020, i). This resonated historically, philosophically, and politically with the imaginations of mutual care that emerged in practice and theory after the 1871 Paris Commune. Also with twentieth-century and contemporary figurations of the poetics of revolt in literary and philosophical practices in the Americas (see Ross 2015, loc 2416; Césaire 2009; Ménil 2005, 131–298, 375–77).

Your gift and lesson were largely responsible for my ongoing experimental undertaking: writing a "genre-busting, dub poem" from the perspective of a young woman warrior that responds and takes to the next level the systematization of the ethopoetics of revolt by Black Surrealist and Boom writers in a trilogy titled *Night of the World*. "Crucial to the young warrior's struggle is the search for who she really is as a woman and a warrior," you wrote in the Foreword. "More broadly," you observed,

> it is an allegory for our time when the bombardment of promises of security lead to the forsaking of freedom and the search for new "species" of humanity to paraphrase Frantz Fanon's telling grade. We sink in that mire of these false promises and then hang on for safety. (Cornell in Guardiola-Rivera 2020, i)

Here and in your many other writings, your gift to us is a different sense of becoming. It is one that "releases the feminine within sexual difference from its so-called rootedness in the facticity of the body—the body seen here only as the weight and burden of imposed phallocentric fantasies" (Cornell 2017, 200). This means that when the feminine is accomplished through a revolutionary act of becoming "this redoing is always both symbolic and embodied" (Ibid.). Becoming woman needs to be actualized so that "sexual difference can be lived differently from the imposed bodily and psychic boundaries" of legality (Cornell 2017, 200–1). Constraints, conventional meanings, moral, and other liminal prohibitions "lock us into a prison from which the only escape is disavowal, self-destruction and denial" (Ibid.). In other words, becoming woman isn't an instance of mimetic excess. It "is not about imitating or transforming oneself into a woman; instead, it is a project that entails de-territorializing" our affects, sensing, and sense—our ethical flesh riveted to history—"from the domain of man" (Cornell, 2017, 200).

This project of transcending the absolutism of the anthropocentric viewpoint and the male gaze in politics, public culture, and society "cannot proceed if one simply tries to neutralize the feminine or step over its abjection" (Ibid.). Decolonizing as de-territorializing involves figuration and transposition.

Figuration may be understood, first, as a reworking of the performative that transcends the linguistic force of the seriousness of explicit intentions (which set context and indexicality in the background) and the dramatic force of the *mise en scene* toward the political power of irony and the *mise en image*. Figuration is a communal technique through which a material is instituted as the iconic sign of processual volatility, the effervescence and plasticity of mind and action, allowing us to be in situation in relation to others in time. It thus, also, permits the *relajamiento* of our fundamental commitment to values and ultimate frames of reference. Doing the work of the negative through joke and irony paves the way toward a different ordering. But second, this process isn't free (in the sense of "anything goes"), given to the sole fantasy of he who imagines or figures. It proceeds from a figural convention or framework, a scheme which is at once sensible and intelligible by means of which matter and form may be composed according to rules that tend to remain implicit and, as such, to give the impression of a grounded structure, an edifice affixed to identity (see Adorno 2008, 144; Sánchez 2012, 6, 55–60; Wengrow 2022, 3–19).

This is the "domain of man" that we must make evident, visible, and to be seen through. To let go of it and *relajarlo*. To suspend its law-making force and replace the spirit of seriousness that animates it, the repetition of the same (terror) that sustains it, this time in the service of a powerful subversion and

political spirituality. The political spirit and symbolization incarnated in trickster figures such as those that populate the literary and constitutional tradition of continental liberty found in the Americas.

Transposition is a Freudian concept which also relates to rhetoric and poetics. It describes the passage of one sign system to another. It is also a tertiary poetic process, in addition to metaphor and metonymy, whose Freudian equivalents in the work of the unconscious were condensation and displacement. This third poetic process is the psychoanalytical equivalent of position, a thetic position or the destruction of the old position and the formation of a different one. It's the deictic positionality which emerges when a person or group is forced to demark and de-identify with given frameworks of meaning amid a stream of changing semiotic regimes and kinds of value. It's related to a kind of memory-work that, in transiting between sign and value systems, induces considerations of representability that make visible tensions and contradictions between them.

A criticality emerges here. From the self-aware shifts in meaning and sense in the geography and visual landscape of reason, this criticality within figurative, semiotic, and value heterogeneity brings closer your reading of negotiations and what political theorist Jane Anna Gordon termed creolization (Cornell 2017, 196; Gordon 2014; Cornell 2018, 273–8; Guardiola-Rivera 2021).

If so, your reformulation of the affirmation of the feminine within sexual difference as crucial to the concept of justice as negotiation and a technique of liberation, drawing on Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's notion of "becoming woman," goes from the rhizome to the root. Not just any root but the square root of the mathematical imagination that pushes extensional logic—and the reduction of time to space—that persists in Western philosophy from Kantianism to analytical and structuralist philosophies to its limits.

It's not an instance of two French men dreaming of being women but a release of the feminine from its rootedness in the matter-of-factness of a given perspective and framework: the male gaze and the "domain of man." It is a release of the multidimensional relationships that perfuse and institute mythic matter as the (rhetorical) foundations of society in the diverse regions and historical trajectories of the ontological archipelago. Neither transcendence nor overcoming obliteration of sexual difference, but a creative and material transfiguration of the bodies of those who are "either identified as masculine or have taken the symbolic identity of masculinity in a racist, heterosexist, phallocentric society" (Cornell 2017, 200; Cornell 1999, 59).

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You taught us to focus our struggles and investigations on ways of being-public and ways of seeing, on the transit and moves between them. And thus, to see and conceptualize becoming not as a transcendence of sexual difference and self-differentiation in general but as an imaginative creative and material reconfiguration of it. "In this sense . . . reconfiguration can be understood as integral to a technique of liberation" (Cornell 2017, 199).

Figuration and reconfiguration are at the heart of transformative emancipation. As material techniques that include both re-symbolization through aesthetic figurations and reconfigurations materially challenging the body and the creative investigation of the dramas of consciousness. To help us disclose the fundamental ways we find ourselves affectively attuned to time and the world. And, in so doing, bringing us face-to-face with the night of the world. The nothing. The dynamic glimmering of that which is not yet, and not ever a marble-like ground or ultimate judgment in which the axiomatic and the arbitrary go hand in hand but instead always in motion, which may be slow or forest-like, without falling for the anxiety of not having something to hold onto.

You reminded us of the critical lesson that behind anxiety also lies aggression. Traditional thought and the conventions of perspective we often confuse with common-sense thinking, which it left behind after its demise as philosophy, persist in the call for an ultimate frame of reference and a final judgment or decision. Especially, the sovereign decision to suspend the rule of law and democracy for the sake of restoring law and order to democracy through law-making violence. You understood that the argument according to which "no sacrifice is too great for our democracy, least of all the temporary sacrifice of democracy itself" means Bonapartism and colonialism as the precursors of fascism and its derivations (Rossiter 1948, 314).

It's seen in our "tiny handful of republican states—if indeed they can . . . be called that" not as a contradiction in terms but as the litmus test of constitutionalism according to republican universalism. In the face of crisis and emergency, seen from a liberal standpoint, Bonapartism preserves the liberal rule of law by means of the (law-making) force and violence of law. This is the political theology of political reaction and the underside of republican universalism (Cornell 2022, 6; Friedrich 1968, 580; Bonefeld 2014, 178).

In other words, "cruelty," of which there are two kinds: an "ultra-subjective" violence "by which individuals and groups incessantly create various Others and target them with hatred, abuse, and death" and "ultra-objective" violence by "which 'impersonal' systems and processes produce a whole population of 'disposable' human beings—that is, the wretched of the Earth" (Cornell

2022, 6; Balibar, 2016). Cruelty, the litmus test of strong constitutionalism and republican universalism for the sake of sound economics, merely asks what is necessary "to secure bourgeois interests as the universal interests of society at a time of crisis" (Bonefeld 2014, 180).

The purpose of such cruelty is thereby posited as innately absolute, normal, and normalizing. But the absolutism of this framework is thoroughly dependent on a view of history that begins from an understanding of environmental and social relations as "naturally" antagonistic and violent, driven by the assumption of a war of all against all in an unchanging landscape of scarcity, from which the state supposedly emerges as a form of preventive and pre-emptive violence. This is a "conversion of violence" that elevates it to the status of a quasi-divine ordering force, to use Hegelian language, which maintains order and security only by making the will to violence constant, turning it into a principle of reality and thinking and actualizing such a threat in times of perceived crisis. To contain the presupposed original violence of the "state of nature," keeping it at bay and permanently under check.

From that perspective, cruelty is seen as inherently social and moral because what rulers perceive as social disorder can only be resolved by a strong state that, in attempting to suppress the class struggle, necessarily exports its own foundational (law-making) violence to the so-called peripheries or territories. In doing so, this mode of rule disavows the fact that such violence, as Aimé Césaire (1950) observed, will always come back home shockingly, like a boomerang. The results create an atmosphere of normalized violence everywhere all the time. In that context, to speak of "non-violence" and advocate it as a more "civilized" form of conflict resolution is simply a theoretical abstraction with no critical purchase and no understanding of justice as negotiations. It lacks any reference to real relations (Cornell 2022, 2n4; Graeber and Wengrow 2021, 1–77; Iacono 2016, 137; S. Césaire 2012, ix; A. Césaire 2004 [1950], 10–3; A. Césaire et al. in S. Césaire 2012, xxviii–xxx).

Common to these forms of cruelty is their reduction of human beings and their historical trajectories to the homogeneity of a lowest common denominator and the making of such reductionist framing invisible. That is, humans and environs are reduced "to the condition of things" (Cornell 2022, 6n19). The relativization of their different qualities and the suppression of their individuality by "treating them as quantities of residual pieces" (Cornell 2022, 6) means that they can be sliced, measured, and bundled in accordance with the *a priori* yardstick of the price mechanism. Consider the work it takes not to see these things. This not only implies that the homogeneity of the group and the fundamental identification between rulers and ruled come to be seen as

the foundation of the Schmittian program for "sound economy and the strong state" (Schmitt 1998, 212). This also implies that such harmonious homogeneity becomes the very basis for the perceived stability and predictive power of the so-called Masters of the Universe of our financialized economies and our derivative, precarious societies willing not to see (Flandreau 2016, 270–8; Meister 2011, 260–316).

Here, dear Drucilla, you made visible for us the hidden connections among colonization, war, and the slow violence of contemporary, financialized racial capitalism. Hidden in plain sight, in the infotainment atmosphere of our post-classical public spheres. Here, public imagination has no timespace or air to breathe.

"It is this violence—which Fanon will describe as atmospheric" (Cornell 2022, 7n20 citing L.R. Gordon 2015, 121) that matters most to us, beyond any dualist ontology of violence/nonviolence. It happens everywhere: in rural and urban areas; in the so-called peripheries and territories as well as in the metropolises;

> in the favelas, slums, shantytowns, and refugee camps where the planet's surplus are abandoned to pandemics and traffickers; the zones of "slow violence," where the afterlives of war, colonization, toxic dumping, and resource extraction are billions of systematically disabled, debilitated, and worn bodies, populations, and infrastructures that can barely sustain life. (Cornell 2022, 6n18)

This lesson on cruelty and violence proved crucial for those of us who come from the so-called Global South and witnessed the apotheosis of war and the market in the lands of our childhood. It resonates very strongly with our lived experience of national rulers' mortifying attempts to reimpose time and again "the reign of terror by recreating the system of the unipolar" homogenous group or nation as Fanon said (2018, 414) and through simplistic but effective reassurances of a restoration of greatness amplified by televisual means and media. It's this murderous, mortifying drive to preserve free labor markets, investors' trust, and free flow of capital by the force of law, the reign of terror that presupposes the group's homogeneity and fundamental compliance with the coordinates of an (ultimate) universe of presumably calculable harmony, that explains the apparent immutability and repetition of fascism within the republican universalism of our existing law and order republics.

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In this respect, a crucial insight comes from your reading of John Rawls as a third-critique Kantian vis-à-vis justice. Dear Drucilla, you read him in a way that nobody else does. Rather than reducing the question of justice to a matter of proceduralism, you point out that Rawls first performs and presents to us a notion of justice through the image of placing oneself behind the veil of ignorance (Cornell 2008, 27–30).

I'm very interested in the meaning and connotations of this image. It re-enacts our oldest image of justice, the Hunefer papyrus now in the British Museum evoked in the image of Lady Justice at the top of the Old Bailey Criminal Court in London. This veiled image at Saïs, as happens with most figurations originating in the ancient world, comes in triplicate form: Neith or Ma'at/Isis/Artemisa; the three Graces or Fates; the Gorgons; Pacha Mama, which, more radically, is a tetradic figure; or the three Weird Sisters depicted by Henry Fuseli, Jean Epstein's films, and Kiki Smith's photography.

A presentation of nature and, crucially, for us, of time. At the very beginning of *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls creolizes himself. He's no longer just a theorist of justice in the vein of the Western tradition focused on judgment, given precedent, inter-subjective consensus, or the promissory form of a contract. Rather, he suggests that grand philosophy, the kind that engages big themes, such as inter-temporal justice, is creolizing and creolized from the start.

This is a fantastic lesson. And I want to thank you for it. Creolization isn't just a methodology that should be placed among other possible methodologies in a sort of capitalistic auction of Cartesian ocular technologies or a competition at the end of which the most expensive would also be the best to get to the truth. We affirm that philosophy is creolizing and creolized from the start. This is not just a matter of method. It is a matter, as you said in relationship to what African/a philosophy does, of ontology. It's the way of reality: radical alterity, self-differentiation in and of time (not difference for its own sake).

How do you express the way of reality? Well, you cannot express it without the power of images and propositions. Images and propositions turn out to be about intensification and the radicalization of each and all seemingly simple dualities into triads or tetradic formations. Imagination is about reality as incomplete multiplication. Or a different beginning. That was also, as you said, the lesson of Salvador Allende of Chile (Cornell 2022, 107n1; Guardiola-Rivera 2013, 292–4).

Non-Euclidean utopian images and propositions or uchronies, to use a term introduced into natural philosophy by William James in his praise of Charles Renouvier and taken up by Alfred North Whitehead (James and Re-

nouvier 1929, 1–35; Whitehead 1978, 185; Le Guin 2016, 163–94), intensify affects which are attached to specific happenings, occurrences, historical events, and gatherings to provide those multiple possibilities and alternative courses of history with heightened value. In the process, agents of history devalued by progress-as-fact chronologies and narratives of history are given renewed importance. This is exactly what the poetics of Négritude and Black Existentialism does. As you wrote,

> In the work of black philosophers of existence and their reinterpretation of phenomenology we will continuously return to what [W. E. B.] Du Bois called the double consciousness imposed upon blacks in that they cannot only see themselves being looked at but also develop a second sight where they can envision how the whites are seeing them as less than human. (Cornell 2007, 105)

You argued that this insight from Du Bois, Fanon, "and a number of younger thinkers":

> not only opened up a new branch of phenomenology and the black thinking of existence but . . . also demonstrated the full force of the collapse of the ethical due the unconscious and also institutionalized belief that black people are somehow below the register of what can be envisioned as human. (Cornell 2007, 86)

You paired this with your re-reading of the Kantian imagination and images of freedom via Ernst Cassirer's critical reconfiguration of Kant's schema as at once intellectual and sensuous. Figuration, the reconfiguration of the schema, means "we symbolize our images in order to know anything at all, and these symbols are intermeshed with the phenomena themselves" (Cornell 2007, 86).

This is, for example, the case of mythical matter which imposes limits upon the richness of a concrete universe. "However, this separation in which humans seek to reintegrate themselves into a reality that includes them creates a magical world where we can both know our . . . place and find some sense of design in the things themselves as they create a reality as cognitively palatable to our ability to orient ourselves in existence" (Cornell 2007, 31, 105). Hence also, your reinvention of the Kantian schema and the political potency of aesthetic ideas via Rawls's implicit understanding of the role of the imagination in bringing a new and different categorical imperative into empirical theory, "and thus figuring the way in which such an imperative can actually speak to our desire for self-fulfillment" and self-differentiation (Cornell 2007, 105).

It's also a beautiful way of coming closer to an understanding of what the most up-to-date strands of non-classical physics call "temporal naturalism" and "superposition." This was your response to the challenge by Elizabeth Grosz to clarify your own position on whether it is only the human that has the capacity for imaging and transformation. Your answer hinged on the rekindling of (Kantian) imagination made possible by the reconfiguring composition of insights from Cassirer's theory of the multi-directionality of symbolic forms, Rawls's implicit intensification of imaging at the foundational level of his theory of justice, and Black Existentialist double sight. Also, by cutting-edge science (Cornell 2017, 196n4; Smolin 2013, 3–40).

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You agreed with Grosz that we're part of an ever-changing universe with continuously changing laws and "that change and transformative power are not located in the human alone. But . . . if time is real, then the reductionist understanding of the role of humans in the universe," which seems characteristic of a great deal of posthumanist, speculative realist, and especially accelerationist thinking, "is also challenged" (Cornell 2017, 208–11; Grosz 2005). In a speculative treatment of some of the fine-tunings of the basic parameters of atomic particles, which recalls an extension of the so-called Gaia hypothesis for the universe as a whole, it turns out that the universe itself "is a self-organizing system that is constantly transforming and fine-tuning itself . . . [so] this is not a dead [or inert] universe" (Cornell 2017, 208–11; Margulis and Sagan 2023. It may not be alive in the same way we perceive plants, animals, and humans to be "but it is a transforming and evolving system. And the laws of science," the so-called laws of nature evolve just as the laws of society do (Cornell 2017, 208–11; Margulis and Sagan 2023).

To clarify, the reality of time must not be understood as a kind of presentism because the real moment is one of succession and coexistence. It is neither the chronological succession of stages in the linear view of narratives of historical progress, nor the coexistence of many universes. It is the activity of time in a single universe. Two kinds of things are real at each moment of time:

> The first is the fact that there are "consistent events," which are real at a particular moment. The second is that "real things proceed through a process, which continuously brings forth new events from present events." According to this view . . . there are "no facts of the matter" about the future—not at the level of the cosmos and not at

> the level of the creatures in the cosmos, such as us. (Cornell 2017, 211; Smolin and Mangabeira Unger 2015, 162–258; Smolin 2013, 3–40)

A double move, a double twist.

> To put it succinctly regarding we humans and our relation to the Earth and the Cosmos: "we are of it; we are in it; and we make it." (Cornell 2017, 211n72)

This means that the future is at least partially open in the sense that if real things proceed through a process that produces new events and a truly novel system, then "its response to measurement will not be predictable from any information we already have. Only once we have produced many copies of that system does the principle of precedence take over" (Smolin 2013, 147; Smolin 1999, 299). Second, it means that the long-term evolution of the Earth and the universe is not computable and cannot be seen as reducible to or understandable in terms of a cipher or encryption. Thus, finally, the history of the Earth and the universe, including our role in it, of it, and making it, is not isomorphic to any mathematical object.

The implications of this succinct rendition of the meaning of our place in relationship to the Earth and the cosmos immediately challenges old and newer fantasies that converge in today's apotheosis of the market (and war) expressed in the framing of our imagination by the widespread belief in the governance of numbers. This belief is not a novelty or an accident of history. For too long, fantasies of unchanging legality and harmony through calculation have informed the search for the ultimate principles that would rule the world. Either combining laws and numbers through physics and mathematics in the case of order attributed to nature "out there," or through law and economics in the case of the order of society "in here." Only today's dream of harmony through the governance of numbers subordinates the content and effect of laws to a calculus of utility in "the service of the 'economic harmony' that would supposedly rule the functioning of human societies" (Supiot 2015).

One implication is that humans and nonhumans have properties that "cannot be captured by any computation" (Smolin 2013, 147). If so, even though the human brain is a physical system, because its figuration capacities are the result of and retro-actively impact its plasticity, it is not a programmable digital computer. It is not predictable in pre-emptive mode by coding or encryption. Further, moving backward and laterally from the temporal plasticity of the brain and its symbolic forms to the cosmos, it can be argued that the principle of precedence known to Common Law and Constitutional Law traditions—

whereby judges are constrained to rule as was done in the past when presented with similar cases—may be extrapolated to the workings of the cosmos. If nature operates according to a principle of precedence rather than timeless law, then when there are no precedents there will be no prediction for how the system will behave. "[T]hen the future is genuinely open" (Smolin 2013, 147).

Let's speak, in that sense of the openness of the future, of a double movement. Let's bring together the reading of Afro-Caribbean liberatory thought and that of renaturalization through quantum mechanics and the liberation of the atom from scalar imagined framings that characterize the explosive motion of your contribution to contemporary philosophy, dear Drucilla, from beginning to end. Let us speak of a double twist, acknowledging that it coexists in one and the same timeline in a single universe: backward to African/a contributions in terms of aesthetics, civilization, and ontology, which have been dismissed by the unconditional affirmation of Western selfhood, or what Enrique Dussel calls the *ego conquiro*, and then looks forward into the future and to the journey back to the present from such a future (Dussel 2017 [1993], 268n22).

What African/a aesthetic practice and philosophy do in writing, in playwriting, in particular, and in poetic and essay writing—and this is very important, because the technique of (play) writing mattered most to Drucilla and me, together with sculpture and visual art—is to go backward in time to intensify the importance of those contributions which have been dismissed by the alleged priority of a certain way of seeing and conceiving of philosophy that hangs on to an ultimate point of reference after the fall of all points of reference and of the conception of aesthetics that hinges upon the idea of a correct destination.

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Ultimately, we aimed to intensify the importance of those interrupted projects of the past, twisting them into a new configuration. For African/a philosophy, the point is not about the correctness of the destination. As you observed *in Moral Images of Freedom* (2008) and elsewhere, such was precisely the error of Martin Heidegger. His conception of time in relationship to being encrypts and encloses the dynamicity, the performativity of being within a linear timeline of being as destination: so-called origins, and what we are supposed to guarantee here and now toward an achievement. The result can be termed the cult of the current and of currency. That is, a conception of the work of memory and imagination as figures of *aletheia*, of being as restoration, reproduction, and harmony by calculation. Surely, there is a direct connection between that conception and racialized thinking if the goal of our motions through history is to guarantee the reproduction of "our" society and the restoration of "our"

pure, harmonious origins. Then history soon collapses into some sort of social Darwinism. And our daily aesthetic, ethical, and ordering practices collapse with it (Cornell 2007, 39–74; Sanín-Restrepo 2021).

In opposition to that, Légitime Défense, Négritude, and other African/a thinking make sure that as we return to intensify alternative courses in history, those possibilities not only speak of a possible future, but also become "principles." That is, principles in the normative sense clarified by Ernst Bloch, which can carry these possibilities into reality from the interrupted past and the present into the future. The final lesson of African/a philosophy, and of your gifted thought, dear Drucilla, is a normative and political one. Let us call it a metonymic and transpositional conception and use of color in theories born of struggle that also attempt a shift across and beyond given scalar dimensions.

Color, as used by Black Surrealist artists, musicians, thinkers, and writers ceases to be a reference to phenotypical or cultural difference. Instead, it becomes an index of explosiveness and volatility. Or the signifier for a position which is anti-imperialist in a struggle of active presence (the spirit of Bandung and the Tricontinental, as our friend Vijay Prashad would put it) that defines itself not by the idea of a city that could be built and defended but by the return trip of those who have seen that ideal city and who return to the countryside laden with principles and commitments to try to realize them in the struggles of the present. They shift the (temporal) scales of the present in the direction of a new future.

A different, not the same beginning.

Thus, let's speak of a more capacious understanding of the axiom of equality as liberation or freedom. Not as sameness in space or on the same plane of representation, but as a different beginning for all. A temporal and a geographical shift. And let us speak of the ability to create new principles of investment in the future the changing conceptions of which yield new and different information deriving from changes in underlying indices with no common denominator. Like marketable tokens of the market's coexistence with heterogeneous others that need not be presupposed as therefore similar. As we pointed out repeatedly in our courses and conversations, this can be called a "poetics."

This may also be the way the inner workings of financial capitalism can be better understood by we, mere mortals, and subverted by we, mere mortals. The key words here, which we were in the process of developing together, are rhythmics, turbulence, and volatility. Or as in the image of the whirlpool vortex so dear to the Afro and Indigenous peoples of the Americas who are our ancestors and have become our kin. Our political allies.

A politics of alliance not allegiance. That has been our project. In December last year, having presented the main tenets of our project, which was taking the shape of a theatrical play, to our friends at the Art & Human Rights Network at Bard College, I drove to New York City on a cold Saturday morning to have lunch with you and to agree on the next steps of our project. I also had a feeling. It was one of those feelings you and I shared because we were both raised in the schools of experience of the forest, of *santería* and *palo*, yours between Los Angeles and Watts in the U.S., mine between Bogotá and the Caribbean coast of Colombia. We figured these as the image and voice of the ancestors coming to us from the active past in the future. The feeling was that this would be our last encounter.

I waited for you that Saturday, while picturing time and again what to say and how not to appear sad or anxious. (I knew you would make me laugh, you always did.) How we would keep walking and thinking together no matter what. As it happens, the encounter did not occur. In the late afternoon I received a message from Sarita. You had to be rushed into hospital. I knew it. I felt it in my heart while driving from Bard to New York City. Yes, I cried. Then, I laughed. For this interlocution is not a conclusion.

Always your humble student,
Oscar

Oscar Guardiola-Rivera is Professor of Political Philosophy and Human Rights at Birkbeck School of Law at the University of London. He is author of *What If Latin America Ruled the World?* (Bloomsbury, 2010), which won the Frantz Fanon Award, and *Story of a Death Foretold: The Coup Against Salvador Allende* (Bloomsbury, 2013), which was shortlisted for the 2014 Bread & Roses Award. Both texts were selected as among the best non-fiction publications of their year. More recently, Guardiola-Rivera is author of "A Future for the Philosophy of Liberation" in *Decolonizing Ethics* (Pennsylvania University Press, 2020) and of the poetic trilogy *Night of the World* (London: the87press, [Book 1] 2021; [Book 2] 2024). A Fellow of the Royal Society for the Advancement of the Arts, his filmography includes the docuseries "Art & Fire: A Journey in Five Films," co-produced with Hay Festivals, "An Organisation of Dreams" (2012), and "Hamlet Within" (2023).

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