

Across oceans: A conversation on otherness, hospitality and welcoming a strange God

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This chapter is a transcription²³⁴ of a dialogue that took place between the authors on 16 April 2018. The purpose of the conversation was to create an opportunity for Richard Kearney to engage with some of the questions posed by authors in the preceding chapters of the book.

Daniël P. Veldsman: Richard, it is a great privilege to have this conversation with you. We value your response to the perspectives from which the various contributors to the book have engaged with you. We are excited to present this publication to the world, as a first engagement of this nature between African thought and a philosopher representing some of the most current thought in Continental philosophy.

Richard Kearney: Not at all, this is a pleasure for me too. I have to say, going through the conference papers that you've sent me, as well as the questions from the authors, the collection appears to be a very substantial body of work and I feel greatly honoured.

Yolande Steenkamp: I also wanted to say how much appreciation I had for the way you wrote your intellectual biography, for sharing so much of yourself. It was such a pleasure to read.

Richard Kearney: Thank you.

Daniël P. Veldsman: Let's get on with the discussion then. It is a great privilege to debate Otherness with you from a number of South African perspectives. We're going to start with the more philosophical questions, first by Justin Sands from North-West University, and then from Pieter Duvenage, a philosopher from the University of the Free State. Justin Sands says that he has always noticed a concern for the political throughout your thinking, both in your early philosophy of imagination and narrative and your later philosophy of religion and the stranger. He finds this especially so in your works that discuss Ireland and

234. We express our sincere gratitude to Bernice Serfontein for the many hours she spent transcribing and editing this dialogue.

its political situation and also in texts such as *Strangers, Gods and Monsters* (2003) and *Anatheism* (2011). He calls to mind a response to Merold Westphal where you considered a certain metaphysical, theistic concept of God as a 'recipe for war'. Could you please elaborate on your concern for the political factors in the philosophical projects you choose to undertake, and how this concern for the political becomes integrated into your hermeneutical-phenomenological method? Or, rephrased slightly more simply: How does your ethical concern for violence and your desire for hospitality to the stranger inform your decision to take philosophy to its limit?

Richard Kearney: I would say that my thoughts regarding politics were informed by my growing up in a country like Ireland, bitterly divided by political and religious ideologies. I experienced the damaging influence of two kinds of theocracy in both parts of the island. North of the border one had the ideology of a Protestant parliament for a Protestant people, while south of the border, in the Republic of Ireland, we had for many decades after independence from Britain a more or less Catholic parliament for a Catholic people. In the 1937 Constitution of the Irish Republic, there was a special privileged role assigned to the Catholic Church. So I grew up with a strong feeling that it was not good to have 'national' religions - Irish or British. Even looking at Europe, there were still several national religions: the sovereign Monarch of the UK was also the head of the Church of England, and Lutheranism was the national religion of some Nordic countries. This nationalising of religion was originally in reaction to the imperial legacy of the Holy Roman Empire (as was, in a more radical sense, the secular atheism of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution). But it still made for a certain confusion between Protestant church and state.

So I grew up in the sixties and seventies in Ireland with the view that one should separate church and state. The idea of any sort of authoritarian ideology, be it political or religious - or worse the two together - was something I felt needed to be

unmasked and debunked with what my Paris mentor, Paul Ricoeur, called a 'hermeneutic of suspicion'. I agreed with Ricoeur's call to set the 'three masters of suspicion' – Freud, Marx and Nietzsche – loose on all ideologies of power and dissimulation. It was necessary to smash the idols of power in order to let the symbols of genuine spirit speak. I embraced the idea that one needed to practise a radical critique of religion before opening up new possibilities for a 'hermeneutics of affirmation' (hope, love, justice, hospitality to the stranger). Already as a young student what I liked about phenomenology was that it began with the epoché: you bracket out all ideological presuppositions and prejudices in order to return to the 'things themselves' – the lived phenomena of experience as if you didn't know the answer. One suspended all answers inherited from Party, Church or State.

So in a sense my initial philosophical position towards religion was antinomian and anti-authoritarian – beginning from not knowing as a way of opening paths for genuine faith. The methods of phenomenology and hermeneutics, as I understood them, prevented philosophy from becoming an ideology, an instrument of a hegemonic institution, religion or state. By recognising the finite limits of human reason, hermeneutic phenomenology still leaves space aside for a genuine experience of the infinite, whether you call it Ultimate Reality or any of the names for God found in the great wisdom traditions – or the absolute Other along with Levinas and Derrida, an infinitely demanding sense of justice that is always still to come. What I would later call 'diacritical hermeneutics', starting with *Strangers, Gods and Monsters* (2003), invigilates the limits between finite and infinite experience, preventing one from fetishising or fixating any one of our ultimate concepts as Cause, Substance, Idea or Being – lest we succumb to what Jean-Luc Marion calls 'conceptual idolatry'.

Daniël P. Veldsman: This actually ties in well with the second question: is your critical concern for the abuse of the political a reason why you are careful not to completely conflate philosophy and theology? Your texts pertaining to the philosophy of religion

are explicit about their scope, and in *Anatheism*, you directly state that you are not proposing a new theology of any sort. Does your concern for the political inform this resistance or is it more a professional preference of some sort?

Richard Kearney: It does, and in a way I think I've answered the second part of the question first, because my response was very much a critique of the theologising of politics, about which I have deep reservations. There are two main reasons for this: First of all, I'm not a theologian, and as such I am not competent. I haven't been trained in theology, and I learned from Ricoeur and Derrida during my research with them in Paris that philosophy and theology are different disciplines. Theology presupposes Revelation, or at least this is what Husserl and Heidegger thought. If you answer the question of philosophy, namely 'why is there something rather than nothing?' with a theological answer - 'On the first day God created the world' - then you've got your answer before you begin. So I tried to practise what I would call a methodological agnosticism, which never meant I ceased to be a Christian or a believer, but that I never began by invoking the answers of divine Revelation to respond to the questions of philosophy.

So that's one reason. The second is the autobiographical one that I mentioned above. I grew up in an Irish-British context where politics - often a violent, exclusivist and repressive politics - had been identified with the Protestant or Catholic religion, which I thought was a total betrayal of the authentic goodness of both Protestantism and Catholicism. In Kierkegaard's terms I saw it as 'Christendom betraying Christianity'. So I wanted to leave Christianity free for faith, and in a way free for genuine theology and a certain kind of Christian way of life - both as action and contemplation. I was aware of the limits of philosophy: it can go so far, and no further. You can of course raise the God question in a hermeneutic phenomenology of religion, but you can't answer it. Responses, if they exist, belong not to philosophy as such but to the realms of prayer, liturgy and spiritual practice - and, at an intellectual level, theology proper.

Daniël P. Veldsman: The next question, from Pieter Duvenage, research associate at Free State University, ties in very closely with the question of the role of religion. He is curious whether there is anything specifically Irish that set you on a path of becoming a very important interlocutor in the broad post-phenomenological debate globally? To the point, he asks what there may be specifically in Irish Catholicism that finds an alliance with philosophical movements in the 20th century? Who were your Irish influences and mentors that set you on your way to do your postgraduate work under the Catholic-influenced Charles Taylor in Canada and the Protestant-influenced Paul Ricoeur in France?

Richard Kearney: Apart from the negative and repressive side of my Irish Catholic formation mentioned above I would also readily admit there was a positive side. First I would cite a deep sense of the sacramentality of everyday things. A sense of sacred times and places and saints and events deeply linked to the liturgical seasons. A sense that there was actually real presence of the holy in the life of ordinary incarnate things, of simple epiphanies. That's what I learned from the Benedictine monks of Glenstal Abbey, where I attended boarding school, and from Patrick Masterson and Denys Turner, my professors of philosophy at UCD – the idea that there is a 'mystery deep down things', as Catholic authors like Gerard Manly Hopkins, Gabriel Marcel and Bernard Lonergan wrote.

Phenomenology also resonated, in a certain way, with this Catholic sense of the depth of ordinary things. I remember reading Sartre saying phenomenology empowered us to philosophise not just about first causes and supreme beings but about ashtrays and lamplights – there was nothing ineligible for phenomenological investigation. And this insight into the profundity of the everyday, of our being-there-in-the-world, was also shared by Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty and feminists like Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva, whose thought greatly influenced me during my studies in Paris and Montreal. The sentiment that

visible reality is an invisible gift. *Es Gibt*. This lineage also includes more recent colleagues like Jean-Luc Marion, with his phenomenology of the ‘saturated phenomenon’ as a pure givenness of the gift – a notion informed by a certain mystical Catholic spirituality going back to Patristic mystics like Dionysius the Areopogite and Gregory of Nyssa. When I worked with Charles Taylor in Montreal for my master’s degree in 1976–1977, I witnessed somebody who could be both a practising Catholic and a serious independent philosopher. Not that he did ‘Catholic philosophy’ as such, but his thinking displayed a very careful attention to ‘epiphanies’ of transcendence within immanence, as would later be powerfully expressed in the final section of *A Secular Age*²³⁵. Regardless of whether you interpret these sacred manifestations of word and deed as revealed signs of Christ, Buddha, Krishna or Yahweh – that is a matter for different theologians and believers to decide. You make that decision when you exit the phenomenological brackets, the epoché, and return to questions of religious faith and practice.

Two other Catholic intellectuals who informed my hermeneutics of religion during my time in France were Stanislas Breton and Jean Vanier. Breton was a priest of the Passionist Order who taught at the Institut Catholique de Paris and served on the examining committee of my doctoral dissertation, *Poétique du Possible*²³⁶, along with Ricoeur and Levinas. Breton was very conversant with atheist postmodernists like Foucault, Althusser and Derrida, while remaining deeply committed to the mystical tradition of Meister Eckhart, John of the Cross and Theresa of Avilla. Perhaps, this early exposure to the vibrant Paris dialogues between theists and atheists was already sowing seeds for my later formulation of anatheism. Lastly, and also in France, I met and worked with Jean Vanier, who had been a professor of philosophy in Canada and then devoted his life to setting up

235. Taylor (2007).

236. Kearney (1984).

homes for young people to live and work with the disabled. Here I found an extraordinary witness to the ‘thisness’ of each person, a *haecceitas* that is utterly precious and invaluable – a Scotist nation with a certain Catholic valence.

That said, however, let me add that from Paul Ricoeur and others I learned the very important Protestant gesture of critical distance and questioning, the value of limits and of critiques and not being taken over by mystery in a way that might lead to mystification, as can sometimes happen with people like Heidegger and the German idealists. This is all to say that I grew up in between Catholic and Protestant traditions of thought, in Ireland and later again in Canada and France. Not to mention the vital importance for me of Jewish thinkers like Levinas and Buber – and of Hinduism and Buddhism during my journeys to the East (India, Nepal, Japan) between 2009 and 2014.

Yolande Steenkamp: Thank you, Richard. Our next question comes from Anné Verhoef from North-West University in Potchefstroom. He sees a specific tension in your work. On the one hand, there is the need to have something more than ‘religion without religion’, more than faith without content, more than empty secularism. The need is for religion with its specificities, with its own foundation and spiritual depth, with its word, rituals, liturgies and traditions, or as formulated earlier: a notion of theism within ana-theism, of radical or ‘vertical’ transcendence within immanence. On the other hand, however, he detects the continuous move away from dogmatic formulae, a refusal of all absolute talk about the absolute and especially an opposition to religions that violently impose their own view of the Absolute on others. Religion should thus have content (it cannot be empty secularism), but on the other hand it should not be taken too dogmatically. His question then is whether this is possible. Can one have religion with only a ‘little bit religion’? When is the particularity, the content of the religion too much?

Richard Kearney: I see this as basically a call for a ‘discernment of spirits’, as Ignatius of Loyola said. Rather than swallow any

religion whole, without question or challenge, I think it is crucial to discern, discriminate and differentiate between the good and bad 'bits', before making a second more mature 'anatheist' recommitment. Regardless of our religion, are we not all obliged at some point to make distinctions between the 'bits of religion' that breed bigotry, scapegoating, hatred, exclusivism and the better, truer, more authentic and life-affirming 'bits of religion' that foster love, justice, good living and openness to the widow, the orphan or the stranger? I deem it responsible for us to jettison and deconstruct the perversions of religion (all too common in all traditions alas – is there any tradition exempt from abuse?) in order to retrieve the uniquely liberating and enriching gifts of religion. Philosophical critique is part of this work.

So I do not see anatheism as an empty secularism void of content but rather as a purgative emancipation and transformation of tradition – rediscovering a second theism or post-theism after (ana) having rejected naïve dogmatic infantile theism. In this sense, anatheism is a catharsis of faith. 'Smashing the idol to let the symbol speak', as Ricoeur puts it. I reckon there is always the need for a certain discernment of spirits, a wager and choice for the bits that give life and the bits that don't. Further, I wouldn't say that the bit 'that brings life and brings it more abundantly' (as Christ says) is just a 'little bit'. On the contrary, I would see it actually as the 'big bit' and the 'most important bit', although it comes through the 'little things' of nature or 'the little people' as Vanier calls the disabled and disinherited – the widows, orphans and strangers. The Samaritans and Syro-Phoenician women singled out by Jesus in the gospels. They may seem small but so does the mustard seed. The little children as portal to the kingdom of heaven (childlike faith is not the same as childish – infantile, blind – faith). The 'big bits' are often in the 'little bits'. The first as the last and least of these. When Christ comes back, he doesn't come back as a grand emperor or master of the universe. He comes back as a fisherman, he comes back as a cook – a maker of breakfast on the shore of Galilee – or as a gardener to Mary Magdalene. Once again the fullness is in the emptiness.

The resurrection (*anastasis*) presupposes the emptying and letting go (*kenosis*), the arriving presupposes the departing and decreasing – in order to rise again, to be born again, to begin all over again (*ana*).

I remember once talking to Chokyi Nyima, the great Buddhist Lama of the White Monastery in Kathmandu, about the Heart Sutra of Buddhism – ‘emptiness is form and form is emptiness’. He replied that there is nothing fuller than emptiness. In that sense, I would see the emptiness that comes from the atheistic voiding of dogmatic, theocratic, violent theism as a salutary kenotic emptying that precedes a new fullness. Like the phenomenological bracketing which empties us of our illusions, prejudices and attachments in order to get ‘back to the things themselves’ (*zu den sachen selbst*), so that we can rediscover the fundamental ontological meaning of being (*Sein*), a meaning normally covered over in our ‘natural attitude’ of ostensible fullness. When we are ‘full of ourselves’, cocksure, arrogant, self-sufficient and supposedly sovereign in our ego world, we cannot hearken to the stranger in others and ourselves. Only after a spiritual voiding can we retrieve the secret mystery of things, to which we are habitually blind and inattentive.

It is like the AA 12-step movement where the admission of our ‘helplessness’ before our addictions and attachments is the necessary prelude for embracing the ‘higher power’ at work in our everyday lives – in community with others (there is no ‘cure’ in AA except in the community of fellow or former addicts). And the healing is always one day at a time, never once and for all. There is no big road to Damascus – or rather every moment is a potential road to Damascus, in the ordinary moments, the quotidian surrenders and responses to the call of reality and other people (our neighbours and strangers). In the Christian story, this cycle of emptying and rebirth is also at work, not only in the Pauline vision of *kenosis* as the father emptying himself to take on the form of the incarnate human son (Phlp 2) but also when that same son, Jesus Christ, descends kenotically into the void of hell during and after the Crucifixion, for three days, before

rising again (*anastasis*). So in my opinion, the Christian *kenosis* – the evacuating of power in order to embrace what Paul calls ‘the weakness of God’ – is actually the promise of a new surplus, a new fulfilling.

It is interesting that Anné talks about a horizontal transcendence as opposed to a vertical transcendence, but I actually do believe in vertical transcendence – what Levinas calls ‘Height’, what Paul Ricoeur calls ‘the Surplus’, what William James calls ‘the More’, what Derrida calls ‘the Other’, what I call ‘the Posse’ always to be realised. There is always this ‘extra’ that we only fully appreciate when we’ve gone through the emptiness, but it’s a greater fullness. That allows for the notion of the Divine as excess, as the Stranger still to come, *à-venir*. So I acknowledge both kinds of transcendence – horizontal and vertical – and actually see atheism as potentially richer, more life-fulfilling and more full of substance and content than most old conventional formulations of theism. Of course, it’s the same set of stories, it’s the same metaphors, the same teaching, the same memory, the same events, the same truths, but revived in another way – atheistically.

Yolande Steenkamp: So if the Absolute, which you said we can think of in terms of love and justice, if the ‘big bit’ that is left of religion or theism in Anatheism, if that can give us access to the Absolute, then Anné’s second question is whether secularism can give us similar access to the Absolute, let’s say in the form of love or kindness to the widow, the stranger and the orphan. Put differently: While it is true that some sources beyond and beneath ourselves for hospitality and love can be found in religion, without understanding one’s religion as the exclusive access to the Absolute, his second question remains: can secularism offer us the same fulfilment, inspiration, hospitality and meaning as that which religions offer, with us thereby avoiding the risk of hyper-transcendence and Absolutism? Is it not better to speak of ‘religion without religion’, and to move away, so to speak, from the specificities of religion altogether, avoiding the risky wager of atheism, to embrace a more horizontal transcendence?

He wonders whether this risk of the anatheistic wager is necessary or worth taking?

Richard Kearney: The Stranger, the Other is in every person, including secular people, in all relationships – in my relationship to a secular person and a secular person’s relationship to me. I had this exact conversation with James Wood in a dialogue published as ‘Theism, Atheism, Anatheism’ in *Richard Kearney’s Wager: Philosophy, Theology, Politics*²³⁷ – a book which is very much a companion piece to this volume. He basically said, and I paraphrase, ‘Look, I’m a secular humanist. I believe in doing good, I believe in breaking bread, I believe in welcoming the Syro-Phoenician woman and in sharing water with the Samaritan woman. But what I don’t get is, what has God to do with it?’ And my response to James Wood – and to Anné – is this: God is a word or notion used by billions of people since time immemorial to designate the miraculous exchange of radical hospitality and love – and all such exchanges take place in the profane world because the sacred doesn’t come from elsewhere, it’s in and through the profane, it’s the infinite in the finite, the transcendent in and through the immanent. This opens up a dimension which I call the *Posse* – or the divine possible beyond the impossible. In the realm of one’s human secular powers and possibilities, conventions and presuppositions, something else emerges and surges up. Religion, and in my case the Abrahamic religion, provides me with names for that – Yahweh, Elohim, Abba, Father, Christ; the Greeks call it *theos* in its various forms and guises. If there is one divinity, there are many names for it. The Buddhists have their words for sacred persons and phenomena – nirvana, sunyata, Bodhisattva, Guanyin, etc. – and the Hindus have hundreds of words.

As Stanislas Breton says, the unnameability of God is the omni-nameability of God. Religions offer a set of parables, liturgies, narratives, memories, testaments, promises and missions that articulate that sense of the possible beyond the

237. Kearney and Wood (2018:40–68).

impossible, where hostility converts into hospitality, where hate converts into love, where the profane becomes sacred. We say about certain things and people in our ordinary language: 'Oh, this place is sacred to me, this day is sacred to me, this person or thing is sacred to me'. It is in the ordinary and everyday that 'the more' surges up – the sacred is in and through the profane. It seems to me that religion provides us with a language and a liturgy for articulating this enigma, which the secular humanist has to do without. Even though it's in many respects the same experience, religion provides us with a hermeneutic – not just any abstract or facile language but a special language of liturgy, a way of performing it, where I'm not alone in discovering the mystery. There are traditions. It's been discovered before by communities, holy peoples and saints, by Jesus and Mary, by Jacob and Abraham, when they opened the door to the stranger, shared food with the alien, welcomed Gabriel so that a child could be born or broke bread on the road to Emmaus. Why go without these stories?

Yolande Steenkamp: A cloud of witnesses [...]

Richard Kearney: Yes.

Daniël P. Veldsman: Or from another angle, someone calls it a double vision [...] it opens up a double vision.

Richard Kearney: This doesn't mean that the religious person is better than the secular humanist. It simply means that the former may choose to make an anatheist wager, whether it's conscious or unconscious, and that by reinscribing themselves anatheistically in the narratives of their sacred tradition (whatever that may be) they rediscover a 'cloud of witnesses' as you say, a community of saints, holy ones or wise ancestors, a scripture of ongoing testimony regarding the act of hosting the stranger – where one is not alone. Religion simply means I'm on a road with other people who have walked this way and taken this wager before me. One cannot invent wisdom traditions out of nothing. Now James Joyce, one might say, invented *Finnegan's Wake*, a new language from his imagination, because he was a total genius – and because it was fiction. But even

Joyce, inventing an entirely new creative language to express the wonder of the universe, resorted to dozens of other pre-existing tongues, which he mixed and blended in the writing of his text. He was not working *ex nihilo*. He was not some omnipotent God creating from nothing but a human author recreating a new literary imaginary from a whole inherited thesaurus of linguistic possibilities, a rich archival memory bank of multiple languages and witnesses. If this is true of literary scripture, how much more true of sacred scripture? No man is an island when it comes to fiction or to faith. Although they are not the same thing. The later makes a truth claim to the divine; they latter does not.

Yolande Steenkamp: Moving on to Johann Meylahn's first question, which he asked in the first section of his chapter, concerning the possibility of a book such as *Anatheism*. Is the fictional *as if* not the impossible possibility of configuring that which is beyond figuration? He points out that this question is not meant as a critique but as an attempt to understand his own role as an author in an age of literature (cinders there are), specifically when you argue that anatheism is not a fictional *as if* but a creedal *as*.

Richard Kearney: That's a great question. Derrida implies that all we have are figurations; there is nothing outside of the text. In my first book, *Poétique du possible* (1984), I explored a hermeneutics of figuration – prefiguration, refiguration, transfiguration, configuration – in terms of our human attempts to come to terms with the big questions of Being and God. All seeing is a seeing-as, as both Heidegger and Wittgenstein agreed. All experience is interpretative, that is, figurative in some form or other (from the dreams of our unconscious to the parables of the Gods). Hermes goes all the way down and all the way up. But I see figuration not just as a finite limitation to what can be thought and said but also as a positive occasion – when it comes to sacred matters – for theopoetics. Figuration is good. It is better that God be translated into figures for us than that we would ever assume to have a literal and immediate possession of divine

mystery or alterity. That would be to ignore our finitude. It would be to presume that we possess God, that we can comprehend God, that we can be Hegel: the idealist presumption that human consciousness can actually identify with absolute consciousness. That's the big temptation. So we are saved by figuration. We are saved by the figurative 'as'.

Now the figurative 'as', when it comes to God, is in my opinion a way that works dually, like the 'double vision' Danie mentioned earlier. Theopoetics is divinity making itself accessible and available to us through figurations – through performances, rituals, liturgies, narratives, icons, cathedrals, synagogues, mosques and many other forms of religious art and architecture. We can access God through what Sufis like Ibn al-Arabi called the 'imaginal'. This is an experience of the divine Other as a 'figure'. After the resurrection, we see Jesus *as* a gardener, *as* a fisherman, *as* a shepherd, *as* a breaker of bread, *as* a healer, *as* a wanderer on the road to Emmaus. The sacred stranger always manifests figuratively *as* this or that. And we finite humans respond with an act of interpretation, which is often a wager of faith in the call and promise of this Other *as* divine. It is faith rather than knowledge, as one can never *know* for certain; one can never be sure whether the figure is a figuration of something beyond us or a mere figment of our imagination, a pure supreme fiction projected by our minds. I have faith in you *as* gardener, giver of bread, cooker of fish or saviour. It is, however, a saviour *as* a particular figuration.

Anthropoetics responds to theopoetics. God reveals divinity through figures, and we respond with an anthropoetics, which can go two ways. It can figure God faithfully *as* this or that, or fictionally *as if* God was this or that. For instance, the gospel narrative of Jesus crucified and resurrected is different from D.H. Lawrence's fictional account of Jesus marrying Mary Magdalene and having children or Kazantzakis' novelistic take on the crucifixion in *The Last Temptation of Christ*. It is wrong to confuse the two – the *as* and the *as if* – and to censor or condemn fiction writers for blasphemy when their fictional configurations

are not making any truth or faith claims as such. This is also true of the controversy surrounding Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*. It is a category mistake to confuse the different modalities of figuration. Literature is not religion. Though religion is often literature. That said, the two modes of figuration – credal transfiguration and fictional configuration – can often supplement each other. Acts of hospitality represented in great works of literature – Homer, Joyce, Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*, Karen Blixen's *Babette's Feast* – offer deep insights into the act of sharing with strangers. Here the fictional *as if* opens our imagination to all kinds of possibilities, irrespective of whether we are theists or atheists, Christians, Jews or Hindus.

Now, the credal *as* comes about when my response to the stranger who comes takes the form of transfiguring (faith) rather than configuring (fiction). The credal *as* takes another step, a second step, a step from imagination to prayer. And this involves a hermeneutic wager. Not that the two are incompatible. In fact, I would say that literature is often a powerful portal for genuine faith. In faith, the 'willing suspension of disbelief' (Coleridge's definition of poetic imagination) is accompanied by a second anatheist belief beyond disbelief (and of course beyond the first naïve 'literalist' belief that God is some kind of object, fetish or possession). It is this second belief beyond disbelief which involves a spiritual or credal transfiguring – I have faith in you *as* a sacred Giver of life as well as experiencing you as a human person in a profane finite world. That second step of believing-*as* is different from the imagining-*as-if*. They are distinct figural moments. For example, when Thomas is first told about Jesus returning he believes it is a ghost – a mere *as if* figment of the disciples' configuring imagination – but when he encounters Jesus himself and declares '[m]y Lord and my God', he is claiming it is true and thereby moving from configuration to transfiguration. When he has faith in Jesus *as* the Giver of life who is born again he has moved from the *as if* of the phantom to the commitment of *fides* and *confidens* – faith and trust that this is true. That's the difference between literature and religion. They're both acts

of imagination but the latter is a trusting in the truth of the statement.

Now that truth must never be, in my view, inflated to the point of dogmatism, in the sense of a smug authoritarian certainty. We should have humility about saying that we have confidence, we have trust, we have faith. Faith is a question of humour and humility, as I suggest in *Anatheism*. It is not 'believing that' but having 'faith in'. Faith is having confidence in this person as a divine bringer of bread and life. But we must always remind ourselves that this cycle of figuring-configuring-transfiguring never ends, never escapes from the hermeneutic circle of *as* and *as if*. To pretend to be able to escape from hermeneutics, even as I am carnally touching the body of my saviour (like Thomas), is the radical temptation of turning stone into bread, which is precisely what Satan tempted Jesus with in the desert. It is the temptation of Dostoyevsky's *Grand Inquisitor*, namely to forget figuration. The flesh and blood of my saviour is a body transfigured by faith – flesh is always already figuration. Flesh is word and word is flesh. Or as Aristotle put it in the *De Anima*, 'flesh is a medium (*metaxu*) not (just) an organ'. That is for me the importance of carnal hermeneutics. Creedal hermeneutics involves both carnal hermeneutics and poetic hermeneutics. Faith needs both flesh and imagination. The three are indispensable, I think, for any genuine understanding of the atheist wager.

Yolande Steenkamp: So Johann's second question, which is also from his chapter, is whether anatheism would not be the perfect state-religion of the liberal-intellectual centre of the European Union, at least for all those with slight leanings towards the left? As a South African he finds himself sensitive to any creedal *as*, and therefore he is more inclined towards a fictional *as if*. The reason is that the *as if* for him remains hospitable to all those who might find themselves welcomed by an *as if*, while an *as* always already excludes those who are not in that specific configuration of the *as*.

Richard Kearney: I think I have already touched on this. For me, faith is a credal *as* that is always in dialogue with the fictional *as if* – which it made into a wager. The fictional *as if* doesn't make a wager or leap of faith as such but opens an imaginary space – what Danie calls an 'acoustic space' – for new possibilities of epiphany and annunciation, of hospitality and *caritas*. I repeat: these possibilities can be read in either of two ways, (1) either purely fictionally – which is what I call configuration (after Ricoeur's reading of Aristotle's poetics of *mythos-mimesis* as fictional emplotment in *Time and Narrative*²³⁸, Vol. I) or (2) credally in the form of an anatheist wager which triggers a transfiguring of our prefigurations (our everyday dreams and interpretations) and configurations (our texts and readings). And that's where the divine becomes human and the human divine, theopoetics and anthropoetics entering into mutual play. That's when the fictional *as if* is transformed into a credal *as*. One may read the gospels in either of these ways: as pure literature or as sacred scripture. Or as both together. When I read Hindu myths or the Upanishads, for example, I read them not in terms of a credal *as* – because I don't actually believe in Rama, Vishnu or Krishna – but I marvel at the power of the literary *as if*. Likewise with Greek literature: I love reading Homer but I don't believe in his gods. Let me repeat: I think all people who make a commitment to a credal *as* need to remember that it never escapes figuration. It is always figural, never literal (or you get fundamentalism and positivism). In credal figuration, in order to remain tolerant, you should constantly be able to take a step back every so often and remember that this is also a language of metaphor, myth, symbol and trope. We must have modesty about this, because it is always at some basic level an act of human imagination responding to a divine call. To forget this is to succumb to the danger of theistic dogmatism.

So I believe that Johann is misreading what I mean by anatheism. I often refer to Keats' definition of 'negative

238. Ricoeur (1984).

capability' – being in a state of 'mystery, uncertainty, and doubt, without the irritable reaching after fact and reason' – to keep faith decent, open and tolerant. As such, negative capability may serve as a portal either to good poetry or to good faith. It's potentially a portal to both, but you make your choice. For instance, I'm going to read Homer today as literature and Luke's Gospel as faith because I happen to be Christian and am committed to the truth claims in the text (in terms of both a hermeneutics of affirmation and suspicion). However, if you go to the annual meeting of the Modern Language Association, many papers discuss the Bible, the Koran or whatever religious text they're working with, in terms of the fictional *as if*. That's perfectly legitimate, as all these texts are works of religious *language*.

Anatheism implies a second step, as I have been trying to explain, which is optional and which needs to be taken again and again. It's not like something I do once and for all and I'm forever redeemed. We are never done with negative capability. Rather like Kierkegaard's three phases – the aesthetic, the ethical and the religious. It's not a necessary one-way dialectic, where you begin as an adolescent in the 'aesthetic' with your passion for the possible and your fantasies, then you become serious, get disillusioned and become 'ethical' (make your commitments, get married, have children, pay your taxes, get a job) and then finally you make your Abrahamic leap of faith at the end. No, these are 'stages on life's way' that are lived every day, in different measures and mixes, not as some preordained script with different sequential chapters. It's not that when we make the leap of faith we're saved forever. Abraham wasn't. He made a leap of faith on Mount Moriah, but he was a bad bastard who did all kinds of terrible things. After he performed the inaugural act of sacred hospitality by welcoming the three strangers at Mamre, he cast his wife Hagar and son, Ishmael, into the desert. A leap of faith is never a done deal, once and for all.

Furthermore, it's very important to remember that in a credal *as* there is already a gap – the 'qua' which separates self and

stranger, word and action, imagination and reality. One must never forget that when one says, 'I have faith in God', that one believes in God as this or that experience; one is not saying, 'I *am* God', or, 'I *know* God absolutely'. There is no absolute way to the Absolute; it's always a figural path and we are always figuring it out. We are saved by the *as*: God is saved from us and we are saved from God. That *difference*, that little *as* which Stanislas Breton called the 'little servant of the Lord', saves us from the presumption of over-identification with the Divine. The *as* is prophylactic against fusion and confusion. There is deep modesty in the *as*, as well as an invitation to respond to the call. Atheism is not a non-committal kind of European liberalism. It is deeply engaged, but not uncritically so.

Yolande Steenkamp: We return to your professor of philosophy in Dublin, Patrick Masterson, when it comes to my question about steering a third way between transcendence and immanence. I'm curious how you would respond to the conundrum outlined by Masterson in this regard. At the same time, could you take this puzzle as a case in point to illustrate how a 'third space' operates in dialectical philosophy, so that, in between poles, you attempt to say *more*, not *less*?

Richard Kearney: Sure. I see the 'between' as a *more* rather than a *less*. Again, maybe it's something I learned from Paul Ricoeur, that the way of mediation, the middle way, is a wiser way, because it's a both/and rather than an either/or. I don't see immanence and transcendence as an either/or. I think some philosophies go too far in the direction of transcendence and end up with nothing. This is the danger of Derrida, in my opinion: he so stresses the undecidability and asymmetry of alterity that he ultimately evacuates the other of any lived content and carnality. It is all text without context in the end. Other philosophies go too far in the other direction and get too caught up metaphysically in a great linked chain of Being which drags God down like an iron anchor of immanence: we basically reduce the Other to our anthropomorphic fixes of metaphysical presence (or what Heidegger and Derrida called 'onto-theology').

Therefore, when I talk in *The God Who May Be* of an ‘onto-eschatology’, what I want to say is this: There’s a truth in the ontology of immanence, and there’s a truth in the eschatology of transcendence, and we need to hyphenate them rather than oppose them. We need to travel the middle path of both/and/neither/nor. The truth is neither radical transcendence, nor mere immanence, but both one and the other. My friend William Desmond has coined the term ‘metaxology’ – a philosophy of the between (*metaxu*) – which he traces all the way back to Plato. But you find it in Aristotle too. In *Carnal Hermeneutics*²³⁹ I took the idea from Aristotle (1968, Book 2 of *De Anima*) that flesh is a medium, not just an organ of immanence to be opposed to a spirit of disembodied transcendence: flesh (*sarx*) is at all times a mediation which discriminates between differences. The body discerns. The senses make sense. The Buddha also preached a middle way; and I see Jesus as performing a mediational journey as *both* human *and* divine. In my opinion one finds versions of the middle way in most philosophical and wisdom traditions, where the between operates not as a function of *less* – as some lukewarm mediocrity to be spat out – but as a wiser and fuller way, a way beyond binary dualities, a double vision of the *more*.

Yolande Steenkamp: Thank you.

Daniël P. Veldsman: We are going to move now to the understanding of strangeness and otherness. Schalk Gerber poses the following question: How, from a diacritical hermeneutical perspective, would one address the question of tradition? For example, are we completely predetermined by tradition, or should we abandon it in light of critique?

Richard Kearney: I see atheism as a critical retrieval of tradition. I recall Ricoeur once trying to mediate between Habermas and Gadamer, with Habermas arguing for emancipation and Gadamer arguing for tradition. Ricoeur responded that liberation is itself a tradition; it wasn’t invented in the French

239. Kearney and Treanor (2015).

Revolution by chopping people's heads off. Liberation was already being witnessed by the stories of Moses and exodus, of Christ and Resurrection, of Spartacus and Socrates. In other words, we have traditions inherited through narrative memories, and what I call 'diacritical' hermeneutics (in *Strangers, Gods and Monsters*) is always a reinterpretation of the old in light of the new, and vice versa. Here I take the term 'ana' very seriously: The diacritical is the *between*, but it's also the *after*. The 'ana' goes back over sacred history and turns it into story. It takes the facts of the past and turns them into fiction or faith – a retrospective transfiguring of tradition in the name of the 'messianic' always still to come. Anatheism is not at all about getting rid of tradition but about reliving history as sacred story.

Daniël P. Veldsman: Secondly, Gerber would like to know your thoughts on interpreting Otherness in terms of the universal and the particular?

Richard Kearney: Again, I would say that the 'dia' in diacritical hermeneutics is the 'between' that interprets the other in terms of a radical thisness of particularity, of singular *haecceitas*, while never abandoning the horizon of the universal. In the case of Jesus Christ, I would say that *Jesus* is the particular, singular, embodied *haecceitas*, whom Thomas touched with his finger, and who offered bread and wine, food and fish after the resurrection to his disciples; while *Christ* is the universal figure of redeemed humanity who Paul hails as neither man nor woman, neither Greek nor Jew, but who recurs again and again in each individual person. It's the universal Christ figure, the cosmic Christ, the transindividual, transnational, transhistorical Christ who comes back again in each unique individual person. As the poet, Gerard Manly Hopkins powerfully puts it, 'Christ plays in ten thousand faces, lovely in eyes and lovely in limbs not his, to the Father through the features of men's faces'. That's the universal in the particular, the cosmic in the embodied. The 'dia' is the hyphen between them. Perhaps it would be more accurate to talk here of a diacritical hermeneutics of the quasi-universal and the quasi-particular.

Daniël P. Veldsman: We come to Helgard Pretorius from the University of Stellenbosch. He asks of you: What, in your experience, are some of the biggest contemporary challenges (ideological, material, political) facing those institutions that we rely on for cultivating/formative tasks? What, for instance, threatens the cultivation of hospitality (and other virtues for that matter) in our institutions of learning?

Richard Kearney: Helgard talks brilliantly about induction and initiation rituals and the liminal space. There's so much to be said about these important things; I wish we had the space and time to cover everything. I think there is a huge need for rituals of initiation. I had a wonderful experience with my brother, Michael, at a sweat lodge with Native American Indians in Santa Barbara in 2015. People of different religions came and we all went down into a hollow cave scooped out of the earth together, inhaling the steam from water poured over red-hot volcanic rocks. It was a very powerful initiation rite and I believe people have a real need for such liminal journeys and crossings – of body and mind – and sometimes, if disillusioned with their own religion, look to ancient or so-called New Age rites for it. Yoga, for example, can serve this need, where you meet different searchers from different faiths (or none) and pursue something that is spiritual. I very much believe that the Christian Eucharist could also serve as an interconfessional rite where people are received, initiated and welcomed while respecting their different spiritualities. I strongly advocate for the right to have dual or multiple belonging in religion. When I was in India I met several people who were both Catholic and Hindu (dual religious belonging); and I think that rituals and practices of liminal crossing are very meaningful here. It's no accident in my view that the Song of Songs is an Egyptian love song that becomes the centre of Jewish and Abrahamic spirituality. There is a sort of mystical *fiancialles* going on there, a 'nuptial metaphoricity', as Ricoeur says, which serves as a chiasmic initiation of Egyptians into Judaism and Jews into Egyptianism – and of course, the Egyptians were the enemy, as we know from the biblical tradition.

It is therefore very important to rethink our religious rituals in this way. On that note, I think that sport and rock music festivals – think of Woodstock in 1969 – can also at times operate as secular rituals that serve the important function of bringing different kinds of people together, across divisions of class, creed or colour. I saw the movie *Invictus* recently about Mandela’s meeting the South African rugby team, the Springboks. Given that rugby was traditionally such a ‘white’ sport it was a hugely symbolic gesture of reconciliation. Similarly in Ireland, the fact that Northern and Southern Irish play in the same Rugby team, regardless of whether they are Protestant or Catholic, is an example of an initiation rite bringing people together symbolically. I’m not saying that sport is the same as religion – as Nietzsche would – but I recognise that secular forms of initiation are important also.

With regard to Helgard’s discussion of institutions of learning, I think that we’ve become very exclusivist in our models of competition, rivalry and rankings. Everything has become quantitative, using performance units in order to justify more grants and funding. Numbers rule. Our institutions of learning are becoming paradigms of corporate power – pyramids rather than playrooms. The university should be a *Spielraum* – a place of free scholarly experimentation, of spiritual and intellectual immunity, as it was when it was first set up in the early Middle Ages in Bologna and Paris. This links up with your article, Danie, written with Mirella Klomp, about the Christian passion play being re-enacted as a contemporary street process and interactive Internet event. The play element is so important, without voiding the passion element. Universities have become *artes serviles*, as opposed to *artes liberales*, to use Cardinal Henry Newman’s famous distinction in his *Idea of the University*. We’re losing the idea of the university as a place of creation and recreation. Creation is recreation – hanging out together, dreaming out loud with one another without the pressures of fixed production outcomes and placements. When I was doing my BA in Dublin, we had no exams for the first three years; there

were only last year finals. So one was able to go to different lectures, to listen, learn and read without any formal assessment for years. You were free. Now every week students have tests and quizzes where everything is quantified and computed. A far cry from the celebration of play – ‘*Imagination au pouvoir!*’ – in the university revolutions of 1968 in Paris, Prague and Berkeley. Or to put it in the religious terms of the mystic Angelus Silesius, we need ‘God-play’ for gifts and graces to happen, for accidents and inventions to surprise us. I know it’s a bit utopian and people do have to do exams, but I’m a great believer that God is play. Education too!

Yolande Steenkamp: I think changing that might be a case of the impossible-possible.

Richard Kearney: Absolutely!

Daniël P. Veldsman: Let’s turn to Wessel Bentley from the University of South Africa, who makes things very concrete. It seems to him that there is a resurgence of the drive for determining identity as a basis for exclusion/inclusion in the recent phenomena of American nationalism/patriotism, Brexit and the dilemma of receiving refugees in Europe. Why, in your opinion, is this exclusivism growing instead of calls for diversity and inclusion?

Richard Kearney: I would say that, first, it is an anxiety about belonging, an identity crisis of nationalism and tribalism driven by fear. It’s a desperate need to belong which fears the stranger or immigrant and projects these fears onto the other as enemy and scapegoat. One clings to one’s identity by disparaging the other. This was a main theme of my *Strangers, Gods and Monsters* and I have two things to say about this. The European Union, if it is to work, will have to operate on three levels. It has to be transnational, which entails opening the borders to other nations as the *Single European Act* (1992) decreed – and pooling sovereignty (which by definition, going back to Bodin, Hobbes and Rousseau, was defined as ‘one and indivisible’). The notion of national popular sovereignty has often been a recipe for war. The EU has been pretty good at sharing sovereignty and there

are still many who wish to move towards a kind of more confederal or federal Europe. At a second level, one has to respect nation states with their differences: they are not yet ready to disappear completely (as the Brexit backlash shows). And thirdly, finally, the EU requires a greater degree of regionalisation, where one recognises people in their local, municipal and regional identity. This is the problem of the Basques, the Catalans, the Bretons, and many other regional groups and dialects in Italy and the Balkans, for instance. If these three levels of federation–nation–region are not equally respected, citizens will reject the open crossing of borders, retreating back into nationalisms and micronationalisms. We need to understand the need to belong. If we do not, people will withdraw into themselves and fixate on one particular identity, as is happening now in Hungary, Poland and with Brexit, and of course in the growing nationalist populism, protectionism and isolationism of Trump's 'Make America Great Again' movement.

This is a danger for every nation. To overcome such fear and xenophobia we need to work towards an ethos of intercommunal hospitality. And I think genuine religion and spirituality has an important potential here for offering liturgies and languages of sharing, whether it's around ritual, or the Eucharist, or the reciting of Psalms and the Scriptures. At an AA meeting, for instance, people come with their pain, their anxiety, their addiction and trauma, sharing narratives together. It is, as Thomas Merton said, one of the most important spiritual movements of the 20th century. Something needs to be done to supplement the political with the spiritual. Politics alone will not solve the problem. When he was helping to found Europe, Claude Monnet famously remarked that 'Europe will be cultural, or it will not be'. In my opinion – and I am deeply committed to a more federalist-regionalist model – Europe has not paid enough attention to a cultural–spiritual exchange of stories, a mutual and multilateral sharing of our historic narratives of wounds and of promises. Ricoeur has a beautiful piece called 'Reflections on a new ethos for Europe' (1995), where he talks about the need for interlinguistic,

interconfessional and intercultural translation between the different nations. I think this has been lacking; and it might even be true of America, too. The stories of the US Civil War need to be retold between north and south. The stories between black and white need to be told, as well as the stories between the Mexicans and Americans regarding their past wars. All these wounds and traumas need to be revisited with the help of a vigorous ethic of translation – a cultural and spiritual task which supplements the political.

When Habermas says we need a ‘constitutional patriotism’ for Europe, he is right; but law is not enough to deal with the question of identity. Nobody lives or dies for abstract laws and constitutions. People need narratives, traditions, stories of belonging, because if you don’t *feel* in your heart that you belong, you cannot share your identity with others. If you don’t feel like you’re a host in your own home, you can’t open the door to the guest. For the guest to be welcomed there has to be somebody home! There has to be a host language to translate a guest language, to turn hostility into hospitality. The impossible can only work in terms of such a spiritual wager, a leap of imagination and faith. Politics cannot legislate for that.

Yolande Steenkamp: Moving on to Rian Venter from the University of the Free State, who considers the notion of (micro)-eschatology to play a prominent role in your theopoetics – how does this relate to conventional Christian understandings of salvation, or soteriology?

Richard Kearney: Again, they are not incompatible for me. Micro-eschatology believes in salvation as an everyday salvaging. My new novel is called *Salvage*, but my next philosophy work could also be called *Salvage*. Maybe even *Anatheism* could be called *Salvage*, because it’s about salvaging the remainder – what’s left of God after the omni-God has crumbled or flown, in other words salvaging the little things, the little ones, the least of these (*elachistos*) as the gospel calls them. Abandoning the illusion of God as Mighty Magician, Grand Master of our servitude,

Superintendent of the world. That all needs to be debunked. The ‘anti-Godsquad’ have a point, you know. Dawkins, Hitchens and so on are cranks, but what they are attacking is often the Alpha God of power and manipulation that the ‘three masters of suspicion’ (Freud, Marx and Nietzsche) rightly unmasked. So I would say salvation rightly understood is salvaging with humility, with ‘faith in’ rather than ‘belief that’. I don’t believe *that* there is a saviour, I have faith *in* a saviour as somebody or something that is left in the least of things, in the stranger of Matthew 25, after the omni-God has gone. So first and foremost, micro-eschatology attends to the little stories, the little people and simple epiphanies in which we find the Divine. It is not an evacuation of the divine. If anything, it is the reinvention of the divine in all things, a kind of panentheism.

Yolande Steenkamp: Rian then refers to an interesting comment in *Strangers, Gods and Monsters*, that ‘[...] not every notion of the Trinitarian God [...] is a fetish of presence or hyperessence’ (2002:207), and wonders what you would consider a post-metaphysical interpretation of the Trinity?

Richard Kearney: I am very interested in a theo-poetics of the Trinity – the idea that God is an art, a play of sacred imagination between divinity and humanity. Hence the title of my recent edited book, *The Art of Anatheism* (2018). It is a post-metaphysical view which goes beyond the old ‘onto-theological’ model of a Trinitarian God as three male substances looking at each other, sufficient unto themselves. Breaking up that fetishised and frozen notion of God brings in movement again, the dynamism of divinity as ever new possibility (*dunamis*), as a dance around the core (*khora*), which of course is the feminine principle at the heart of the Trinity. *Perichoresis*, the Greek Fathers called it. At a more colloquial level, I would also see the Irish shamrock as a post-metaphysical figure, to return to a more popular figuration. There is the story of how Saint Patrick came to Ireland and explained the Christian Trinity to the native king by showing that the three leaves of the shamrock shared a single stalk. The Trinity

is already in nature, in the flora and fruits of the earth, everywhere – one does not need to go looking for it in some otherworldly Platonic heaven of Ideas, which is actually a form of ‘conceptual idolatry’, as Jean-Luc Marion rightly says. Of course, metaphysics never leaves us, and once you realise that metaphysics is metaphor, figuration and imagination, then metaphysics comes back to life, and we are able to see Aquinas, Scotus and Bonaventure as brilliant artists of the Divine. Also, it’s very important in a post-metaphysical interpretation of the Trinity to be open to signs and cyphers of the Trinity in *other* religions. In a way, St Patrick showing the shamrock to the king of Ireland is saying to a native pagan that the three-in-one is already to be found in his own nature-religion. And we should not forget that the Trinity is not just an idea of Western Christian metaphysics; it is also to be found in the Judaic story of the three strangers appearing to Abraham and Sarah at Mamre or the *Trimurti* in Hinduism. Interreligious dialogue is indispensable in this respect, helping us all to loosen up the Christian notion of God as a monotheistic metaphysical substance and to see it also as a movement, reintroducing the dynamism of post-metaphysical stories and tropes. Likewise, with ‘Salvation’, if you remove the upper-case ‘S’, saving becomes visible in everyday acts of salving (healing) and salvaging the sacred in the profane. This is my reading of soteriology as micro-eschatology.

Yolande Steenkamp: Danie and Mirella Klomp wrote a fascinating chapter on *The Passion* – also published in your book, *The Art of Anatheism* – which is an annually organised popular musical representation in the Netherlands of the suffering, death and resurrection of Christ. This has now grown into a large, open-air media event, and Mirella describes the event as a ‘ritual’ that ‘appears to open a space that may be described as a nursery for religious experiences: a space where people’s hermeneutic ability to deal with the sacred is being activated’. Their question to you is whether *The Passion* in this sense is a concrete contextual example of your philosophical commitment to third ways to

create an acoustic space for hearing the 'call of God' anew and again.

Richard Kearney: I addressed this briefly earlier, but I am happy to return to it. The short answer is yes. It is a perfect example of a third way and I think that there should be far more such examples of poetic and aesthetic retrievals of the liturgies in our contemporary digital culture. Back in the Middle Ages Passion Plays were acted out on the streets and in the fields. When it became locked into churches, and only certain people could enter, it lost its sense of a theopoetics – which as I say calls for an anthropoetics, which is an anapoetics, a constant interplay and replay. I like the charged term of a passion *play*, because it allows for the passion to be relived and retrieved – rather like Freud's famous example of the play of *fort-da* in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* as a poetic-therapeutic way to deal with the trauma of loss. Because the passion is trauma. It is only when it is replayed poetically, aesthetically, liturgically – where you've got the fictional *as if* coming together with the creedal *as* – that it becomes a creative recreation. Recreation in English can be a place of recreational play. The art of play does not mean artifice as merely made up. 'Making' is not 'making up' in the sense of pure fantasy. The work of religious imagination is very much alive in the passion play, and using contemporary technology to have it televised and viewable on the Internet in order to make the street procession more publicly available is a powerful way of bringing the sacred back into the profane, and vice versa. I am all for that. To return to Andrei Rublev's famous icon of the Trinity as a play of *perichoresis* between the three divine persons, what we witness is a recreation of three persons in movement, which is constantly open to an endless hermeneutic, to repeatable viewings, representations, interpretations. That is the greatness of classic religious art. There is nothing more true than poetic play. Which is what Aristotle says in *The Poetics*: art as *poeisis* gives us access to an essential truth that history will never get to. Whereas history is a mere chronicle of facts – one thing *after* another – poetics as *mythos-mimesis* is a creative redescription

of lived action and suffering in a way that shows one thing *because of* another. It introduces ‘meaning’. This is what solicits the religious imagination of viewers to see Rublev’s icon or the Dutch passion play either as a fictional *as if*, or as a creedal *as*. If the former, then one happily enjoys the art of a good performance. If the latter, one sees these plays and paintings as epiphanies of the Christian mystery. Like Mardi Gras, you can enjoy it simply as a festival of fun or as a crucial preparation for Easter. Or both. Very often these events can be viewed at both levels at once: poetically *and* confessionally.

Yolande Steenkamp: Robert Vosloo from the University of Stellenbosch takes on the work of Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela (who wrote the preface to our volume) and your focus on carnal hermeneutics. In her work, the notion of ‘empathy’ (or ‘emphatic repair’) plays a central role. The question Vosloo subsequently poses is: How do you think ‘carnal hermeneutics’ can be valuable in engaging with bodily signs of empathy, also in contexts marked by historical injustices and misrecognition? Also, in memory studies one often finds reference to ‘performativity’ or ‘performing memory’, where remembering is more than mere repetition. What perspectives can we glean from carnal hermeneutics in thinking about the embodied and performative aspects of memory? In a way, I think Robert’s question ties in nicely with the notion of ‘playing’ after the fact that you have been discussing.

Richard Kearney: Very much so. I would say two things, and because I address much of this in my intellectual biography in this volume, I will be brief. To begin with, I think the point of moving from retributive justice to restorative justice is very important, and as Ricoeur says, justice as restorative implies some ‘extra’ dimension of mercy or love. Love goes beyond justice (without dispensing with it) introducing what exceeds law, rules and moral judgement – the surplus of empathy, *le petit miracle* of pardon, the grace of super abundance, as Ricoeur says in his epilogue to *Memory, History and Forgetting* (2006). But leaving aside Ricoeur – I know he is a very important influence,

not only for me, but for Pumla and Robert as well – let us return to the idea of carnal performance. The therapeutic working-through of suffering and trauma often involves a carnal performance which goes beyond the purely verbal – even the *fort-da* of Freud is not just verbal. The two words – ‘here-gone’ – comprise an embodied act of little Ernst, playing with something material (a spool of cotton), casting it away and pulling it back in a way which mimes the loss and retrieval of the love-object. We have here an act of healing through the double verbal-physical act of play, which in fact is a symbolic replay of actual loss and possible recovery (.e.g. the comings and goings of Ernst’s mother). The therapeutic detour of symbolic performance. The carnal gesture is just as important, if not more so, as the two words – *fort-da* – repeated again and again. But this embodied gesture of play is almost always overlooked by Freudian commentators. So I would see Pumla’s act of touching the hand of the killer De Kock as a ‘little miracle’ of impossible contact – with all the ambiguity involved. What prompted her? What made that impossible gesture possible? Just as we might ask, to move from South Africa to Northern Ireland: what made it possible for Ian Paisley to shake the hand of his arch-enemy Martin McGuinness, who was fighting Protestants while Paisley was fighting Catholics? And we might cite here other historic handshakes like those of Mandela and De Klerk or Sadat and Begin? It’s the carnal gesture of ‘chancing your arm’, which in each of these instances brought about an end to war and violence. There is something about the hand-to-hand that is more important than just giving our word. When Lord Fitzgerald put his bare hand through the door of Dublin Cathedral in 1492 and shook the hand of his enemy Lord Butler, it was more than just saying, ‘I promise if you come out, I won’t kill you’. It was actually laying his body on the line. Words into action. And we could go all the way back to Homer in the *Iliad* when Glaucus and Diomedes put down their swords and shake hands; or to Jacob and Esau physically embracing after Jacob had wrestled with the dark angel in the night. In all these instances, there is something

absolutely fundamental about the carnal gesture of exchange which supplements and surpasses the exchange of narratives and words. Both are necessary. Before and after words, the handshake.

Yolande Steenkamp: We come to our last set of questions, which is from Wilhelm Verwoerd, senior researcher at Historical Trauma and Transformation at the University of Stellenbosch. He would welcome any further insights regarding the dynamics of betrayal when hospitality is shown to a (former) enemy. You referred to this in your intellectual biography, Richard, in saying how Pumla felt guilty for having felt compassion for De Kock. So how do you understand the accusation of betrayal when hospitality is given to someone with the blood of ‘our community’ on their hands? Any suggestions, firstly, regarding how to transform this dynamic? And secondly, Wilhelm is curious about your thoughts on the potential role of a contemplative, apophatic spirituality in the cultivation of hospitality towards the enemy.

Richard Kearney: This is why I endorse a hard-core, impossible hospitality, rather than some cheap mantra of ‘let’s be nice to each other’. When forgiving the enemy you may be accused of betraying your own. It’s hard. Betraying here has a double sense as both travesty and manifestation (as in ‘betraying your emotions or thoughts’). There can be a sense that you’re letting your own people down by siding with those who have been killing your people. The other sense of betrayal, however, is to show your inner secret instinct for ostensibly impossible pardon – translating it from inner spirit into external words and actions. So there’s always a huge risk and wager in hospitality, of taking something inside you – the desire to do the impossible, to make a leap of faith, love and empathy to the enemy – and translating it into an embodied act of forgiveness. In one sense, of course, this is the very core of Christianity – ‘forgive your enemies’ – and of Abrahamic hospitality (welcoming foreign desert strangers into one’s tent). But to actually *do* it (not just say or preach it) is very hard, almost impossibly hard, and we have

to recognise the hardness. That is what I really appreciate about Wilhelm's question. Hospitality is not easy. If it is, it is not true. You are exiting your familiar comfort zone, your closed secure domestic space, exposing yourself to the incoming other with all the dangers that may imply. You are fragile, vulnerable, attentive, all eyes and ears and open hands. Like St Francis, when, at the height of the bloody Crusades, he went to meet the Islamic leader, Sultan al-Kamil: he went barefoot and unarmed and stayed with him for weeks in a tent. They shared words and prayers and bread together and Sultan al-Kamil recognised a saint in spite of their religious differences. Unfortunately, nobody listened to Francis when he returned back to the Christian camp, and the war continued. It was too hard for the other Christians to forgive and make peace. In his supping with the enemy Francis in a way betrayed his own, sitting down with Sultan al-Kamil for the time that he did. He chanced his arm. It was a Franciscan-Sufi moment of impossible hospitality made possible – for a moment. A moment at once mystical and carnal, where they prayed and ate together for three days and three nights – which alas could not be translated back into a more collective political settlement between the Christian and Islamic armies. Like Christianity itself – it was a failed experiment; but it leaves us a testimony of the 'impossible possibility' of hospitality and pardon, which always remains a promissory note, an endless call which never goes away.

Regarding Wilhelm's second question, whether there is a connection between contemplative spirituality and cross-border compassion? I think the answer is yes. This is certainly something I am committed to as founder-director of the Guestbook Project, not that I am a peacemaker to the degree that Pumla and Wilhelm are. In a small way I can speak from the perspective of Guestbook, however, and I would say that those working in Guestbook are inspired by the example of people like John Hume in Northern Ireland, Gandhi in India, Ernesto Cardinal in Nicaragua, Thich Nhat Hahn in Vietnam, Mandela in South Africa and so on, all figures who in their unique ways combined spiritual depth with

political peace-making. To repeat Ricoeur, in the impossible act of pardoning the enemy there is a 'little miracle' of superabundance at work that has more to do with love than justice. Now the ideal is to have love and justice together; but sometimes, with restorative justice, you need to go beyond retribution and the claims of wrongs and rights to something else. That doesn't mean that it should be a travesty of justice, or a refusal of law – as Ricoeur says 'there should be no amnesty without amnesia' – but it recognises that justice has limits.

In my own small way meditation and prayer have played a role in my modest efforts with Guestbook, spiritually guided by a contemplative neo-monastic movement inspired by Thomas Merton, Richard Rohr, Thomas Keating and Cynthia Bourgeault, where it is about getting beyond the 'false self' based on borders, boundaries, fears – me versus you, us versus them – in other words, transcending the binary adversarial oppositions which characterise our normal social prejudices. Not that we all don't need egos and borders, boundaries, and identities – up to a point – but you get to a level where that is less and less important. We need again a double vision – recognising questions of identity, belonging, borders and law as necessary realities, but also being able to cross those borders in a leap of impossible compassion. It is only impossible until it happens! The impossible occurs and then we realise for a moment that everything is possible! But when the impossible becomes possible one is rarely on one's own. Or not for long. It is just too hard and too lonely to do the impossible on your own. That's why in AA, the people who get beyond their addictions never do it alone. It's always a group – a community sharing narratives, pains, traumas and recoveries. That's what makes the impossible-possible: moving from the avowal that one is 'helpless' before one's addiction, that one is incapable of overcoming them, until one surrenders to what AA calls a spiritual 'higher power' (however you define it). To surrender to a higher power – which makes the impossible-possible – always invokes or convokes other witnesses. Testimonial contagion. I think that's very important. Subsequently,

then, the person who recovers becomes a sponsor for others, in an ongoing interplay of healing through testimony and compassion.

Daniël P. Veldsman: On that wonderful note, I'm going to say a trinitarian thank you, that is, a playful way to say I do not have any words of deeper appreciation for the wonderful conversation we have had across the oceans on a strange kenotic God, on Otherness and on hospitality. Richard, you have left us with much to ponder in our South African situation on God-talk that is crying out for many impossibilities to be realised in a deeply scarred society. May many little and exciting things follow in the wake of our conversation. Thank you, it has been a privilege.

Richard Kearney: Well, likewise from me.