

Looking for the Meaning of 'Decolonial Gesture'

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When Macarena invited me to participate in this special issue on "Decolonial Gesture,"¹ I had already been invited by Rozina Cazali to participate in an event titled "Del gesto al pensamiento decolonial" in Guatemala under the auspices of *Absurdo. Simposio de Arte y Pensamiento Político Contemporáneo*. Both titles bring "gesture" next to "decolonial." Since I have been working on the idea of "decolonial option(s)" in conversation with the "decolonial turn," it was both intriguing and compelling to think about this new dimension of decoloniality. "Decolonial *turn*" acquired its meaning in the frame of previously defined "turns": linguistic turn, pragmatic turn, and discursive turn. Furthermore, before going to Guatemala I attended a workshop in Pittsburg entitled "Mimicry and Decolonial Performance" where Native American art historian and curator, Jolene Rickard, opened up the workshop with a lecture in which Native American rituals and ceremonies were interwoven with Western performances. At that point I began to think that if we take "gesture" to mean a movement of part of the body, then the same term "gesture" would conjure different meanings when the frame is a ritual, a ceremony, or a performance. Why? Because ritual and ceremony, on the one hand, and performance on the other belong to different universes of meaning. If we, in front of a ritual or a ceremony, name them performance it would be as irreverent and offensive as it would be for a performer to hear his or her performance called ritual or ceremony.

"Decolonial *option*" was framed in relation to two universes of meaning. On the one hand, ideological options (systems of ideas) such as Christianity, Liberalism, and Marxism (pervasive in Western civilizations),

and Islamism or Confucianism beyond the West; and on the other, disciplinary options (social sciences, natural sciences, humanities, professional schools, etc.). What, then, are "decolonial *gestures*"? What are the set of "gestures" that are not decolonial and in relation to which "decolonial gesture" defines itself as an option? If "gestures" are signs and if "universes of meanings" are semantic frames, at what juncture could gesture be created or interpreted as decolonial?

The first step toward answering these questions, then, was reviewing the meaning of gesture:

ges•ture

\'jes-chər, \'jesh-\

n (ME, fr. AF, fr. ML *gestura* mode of action, fr. L *gestus*, pp. of *gerere*) (15c) 1 archaic : carriage bearing 2 : a movement usu. of the body or limbs that expresses or emphasizes an idea, sentiment, or attitude 3 : the use of motions of the limbs or body as a means of expression 4 : something said or done by way of formality or courtesy, as a symbol or token, or for its effect on the attitudes of others <a political ~ to draw popular support>. (Merriam Webster Collegiate Dictionary)

What, then, would a "decolonial gesture" be and/or do when its meaning lies not in the content but in the *process* and the *context* (in the universe of meaning)? Any sign that we—human beings or living organisms endowed with a nervous system, walking on two extremities, and using the other two to inscribe signs in flat surfaces, and the mouth to produce sounds that convey complex meanings—generate, create, or make is always embedded in universes of meanings that we also create and that allow us to understand a given sign, gesture, or attitude (see Mignolo 1989). When we say, for example, "sociology" or "Christianity" or "Islam" or "liberalism," none of these names name a homogeneous semantic field. All of them are "non-homogenous," and name a given universe of meaning. Sociology or liberalism or Christianity or Islam, etc., are such

universes of meaning. In spite of the diversity that characterizes a given universe of meaning, each carries in its definition its own frontiers. No one will confuse "liberalism" with "sociology" or "Christianity" with "Islam," although it is possible to talk about Christian or Islamic or liberal sociology. But no one will confuse sociology with psychology, for example, in spite of the fact that they are both "diverse" in themselves, solidified as they are by a narrative within each universe of meaning. Christianity, Islam, sociology, or liberalism—each of them is not an ontological entity that someone outside the universe of meaning has named as such. Universes of meaning are invented and constituted by a narrative that belongs to the same universe. There is no metanarrative that could constitute a universe of meaning to which the constituting narrative doesn't belong.

Similarly with "decolonial." It is certainly diverse, but few people will confuse decolonial with postcolonial for the distinction between the "de" and the "post" is non-negotiable by the self-constituting narrative of each respective universe of meaning. The "post" and the "de" belong to different genealogies of meanings, processes, and contexts, having in common an element of content: colonialism. Negotiations can take place among agents that engage in meaning-making in different universes, and become "observers" (scientific observers?) of "post" and "de" universes of meaning to which their own discourse does not belong.

The "post" remains within the modern colonization of time and space (see Mignolo 2011). The idea of European Renaissance was built upon a double colonization—that of space and that of time. The colonization of time consisted in inventing "Antiquity" and the "Middle Ages" and placing the "European Renaissance" in the present of a linear history. The colonization of space and time and the universalization of Western history made a number of moves possible: the "relegation" of the history of China to modernity's past; the demonization of Islamism; the exclusion of the entire African continent from history (e.g., Hegel); as well as

ignoring (Hegel again) of the splendors and contributions of Mesoamerican and Andean civilizations to human history. By con-fusing the European narrative of global history with the history of Europe, the self-fashioning narrative of Western Civilization left at the margin of its history the regions and people that Europe colonized. Simultaneously, the Middle Ages also made it possible to place Western Christianity at the center of their known world, which before the Renaissance was Jerusalem.

The "de" in decolonial emphasizes the confrontation with "colonial" at the very moment that it appears (e.g., the Taki Onkoy movement in colonial Peru). The history of the "decolonial," not as an academic discipline or field of study, but as a response to designs of the invaders, is part and parcel of the history of "modernity/coloniality" (see Mignolo 2009). As a matter of fact, the colonization of space gave rise to a historical complexity that can only be properly addressed if we delink from the Euro-centered assumptions that relate "les mots et les choses" and that Michel Foucault, after Jorge Luis Borges, brilliantly theorized. Modernity/coloniality/decoloniality is one complex concept—a concept that is not *naming a thing or event* but a complex relational structure of power that Anibal Quijano has summarized as "domination/exploitation/conflict" (Quijano 2000, 555). "Domination" and "exploitation" are not only physical relations but epistemic as well: dominance and exploitation require justification and legitimation. When both are taken for granted by the majority of the population they are hegemonic. This means that "domination and exploitation" could be achieved either by hegemony or by force (police, army).

That something like gesture, turn, or option, could become a name carrying "decolonial" as an adjective presupposes that gesture, turn, and option could be something not *only* decolonial. "Decolonial gesture" and "Christian, Islamic or sociological gestures" are all meaningful and acceptable expressions. But here we are now in the real nexus of what I

describe as the space of options. We have to conclude that not every gesture, not every "X," is decolonial. For an "X" to be decolonial it is necessary that such "X" carries *an indication* that connects a given gesture with the decolonial universe of meaning.

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The semantic domain in which "decolonial gesture" has been proposed invokes the notion of "performance" which, in general, describes some kind of action:

per•for•mance \pə(r)-'fɔr-mən(t)s\

n (15c) 1 a : the execution of an action b : something accomplished :deed feat 2 : the fulfillment of a claim, promise, or request :implementation 3 a : the action of representing a character in a play b : a public presentation or exhibition ⟨a benefit ~⟩ 4 a : the ability to perform :efficiency b : the manner in which a mechanism performs ⟨engine ~⟩ 5 : the manner of reacting to stimuli :behavior 6 : the linguistic behavior of an individual :parole; also : the ability to speak a certain language compare competence. (Merriam Webster Collegiate Dictionary)

If we understand the definition of "gesture" as a "a movement of the body or limbs that expresses or emphasizes an idea, sentiment, or attitude," we narrow down the meaning of "decolonial gesture": it is a body movement which carries a decolonial sentiment or/and a decolonial intention; a movement that points toward something in relation to something already constituted that the addressed of the gesture or whomever sees the gesture, recognizes in relation to "colonial gesture." Universes of meaning are never constituted in themselves but always in relation to networks of differences. If, for example, many of us have been pleasantly surprised by the several "decolonial gestures" of Pope Francisco, it is because many of us have been for years fed up with the

colonial gesture of any other Pope that we experienced in our lives. "The decolonial" option, turn or gesture is always at once analytic of and signs of delinking from coloniality. Delinking means always already being engaged in project and processes of re-existence, re-surgence and re-emergence of all signs of living in plenitude and harmony that coloniality repressed, suppressed, or disavowed in the name and justification of "modernity" as salvation.

Western Civilization has understood performance within the binary of the opposite, as either fictional or not fictional (see Pavel 1989, Mignolo 1987–88). When we say that Marlon Brando's performance in *The Godfather* was thrilling (or boring), for example, our judgment refers to an event at a different level than the event by which we qualify Mary's performance in class when we say that Mary performed very well, assuming that there is a Mary, there is a class in which she was registered. Ritual and ceremonies in non-Western Civilizations (e.g., Aztecs, Navajos, Ashanti, or Chinese before Western disruption) do not fulfill the expectation of the fictional. Rituals and ceremonies are no mimicry (pretending according to certain explicit rules, and distinguishing from "passing") in the Aristotelian sense. Aristotle's definition of *mimesis* is not universal; it made sense for the Greeks, and later on it was adopted by the builders of Western Civilization.² It traveled over the world with European imperialism, but never erased rituals, ceremonies, story telling, and ancient wisdom in non-Western civilizations. Now, in our time, we know it: resurgence, re-emergence and re-existence are the key words of building decolonial global futures. Decolonial gestures shall be part of these processes rather than a new academic fashion. When "decolonial gestures" delink from Western "performance" (and mimesis, and representation, and the limited universe of meaning of Western Civilization) they become part of decolonial options, attitudes, and turns, at the same time that decolonial options, attitudes, and turns need decolonial gestures to be constituted, felt, seen, understood as such. By delinking and resurging, decolonial subjects and subjectivities are

constituted. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson describes the moment in the "Grandmother Stories" of Elder Edna Manitowabi when:

Gzhwe Mnidoo put her/his right hand to my forehead and s/he transfereed all of Gzhwe Mnidoo's thoughts into me. There were so many, that the thoughts couldn't just stay in my head, they spilled into every part of my being and filled up my whole body. Gzhwe Mnidoo's knowledge was so immense from creating the world that it took all my being to embody it. (Simpson 2012, 42).

This quotation as well as the entire argument unfolded in her book, *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back. Stories of nishnaabeg re-creation, resurgence and a new emergence* (2012), are an unmistakable decolonial gesture grounded in a particular genealogy of being, sensing, believing, and knowing. Canadian First Nations after centuries of decolonial re-existing AND now with full consciousness of their re-surgence and new emergence. The phrase "all my being to embody it" does not refer to a question of the individual but of all individuals in the community. There is no mediation, like the church or the mosque, between the androgynous energy that concentrates and disperses knowledge through all the creation. Gzhwe Mnidoo reaches every living organism in the same way and knowledge is dispersed and embodied in the materiality of re-generation (not production or reproduction) of life.

Embracing and embodying such cosmology, instead of Western imperial Christian, Catholic/Protestant cosmology, means to affirm the equality of beliefs and ways of being. Such a strategy is a strategy of delinking from Western modern epistemology and its hermeneutic which is based in the detachment of soul/body, mind/body and in a Masculine superior being, and also a strategy of regaining the confidence and the knowing of the androgynous Energetic force of Creation. Gzhwe Mindoo (and equivalent names among Aztecs and Incas) is as relevant for *pueblos originarios* of the Américas as the Bible is for Christians believers. However, for First

Nations and Indigenous cosmologies, the Bible is also of relative significance in so far as Native Americans theologians of Liberations can bypass the institution, the Church, and embrace Christ as one of them (see Tinker 2004). Decolonial subjects are in the making, re-covering the principle that knowing is living and living is knowing.

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What do I mean by saying that Aristotle's concept of *mimesis* as the basis to understand *comedy and tragedy*, worked well for the Greeks, but that was that? For Muslim philosophers and Aztec men of wisdom it was an obscure concept. Jorge Luis Borges's genius and irony captures this dilemma in one of his memorable short story: "Averroes." It is the story of Averroes in the process of translating Aristotle's *Poetics* and running into serious difficulty to translate the Greek words *tragedy* and *comedy* which, for Aristotle, both presuppose *mimesis*:

His pen moved across the page, the arguments entwined irrefutably, but a slight preoccupation darkened Averroes' felicity. It was caused by the *Tahafut*, a fortuitous piece of work, but rather by a problem of philological nature related to the monumental work which would justify him in the eyes of men: his commentary on Aristotle. This Greek, fountainhead of all philosophy, had been bestowed upon men to teach them all that could be known; to interpret his works as the ulema interpret the Koran was Averroes' arduous purpose [...] The night before two doubtful words had halted him at the beginning of the *Poetics*. *These words were tragedy and comedy [...]; no one in the whole world of Islam could conjecture what they mean.*

Averroes put down his pen [...] From this studious distraction he was distracted by a kind of melody. He looked through the latticework balcony; below, in the narrow earthen patio, some half-naked children were playing. One, standing on another's shoulders, was obviously playing the part of a muezzin; with his eyes tightly closed he chanted:

"There is no god but the God." The one who held him motionlessly played the part of the minaret; another, abject in the dust and on his knees, played the part of the faithful worshipers. (Borges 1964, 148; emphasis added)

Averroes' difficulty translating the term comes from the simple fact that the Greek concept of "mimesis" was totally alien to Islam, and of which—let's say it, just in case—Islam has no need. Mimesis is not a universal concept. For that reason Averroes couldn't conceive that what the children were doing was, in the eyes of Aristotle, imitating. In Aristotle's *Poetics*, he expressed in the word *mimesis* what today is rendered as *performance* (often translated as "actuación" in Spanish).

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"Gesture" is something we human beings do with the body or that can be interpreted metaphorically as such: "Juan's gift to Mary was a nice gesture." This means that there is a social code by which we, human beings, can communicate, intentionally or unintentionally, by "gesturing" instead of by "speaking" or "writing" or "singing" or "walking." Speaking and writing are the means of communication by which a set of ideas is put together; or conversely, a set of ideas to be articulated requires oral or written expression (which could be in music, or painting, or video, and/or other semiotic sign systems). Speaking and writing are two faces of a particular kind of "language"—verbal language, to be more specific, which has two manifestations, the oral and the written.

French linguist and philosopher Emile Benveniste once observed that verbal language is the only semiotic code that is used to conceive itself as such (e.g., verbal language is a conceptualization created by the use of the code verbal language) as well as to describe, explain and interpret other semiotic codes: sounds (like music), images (like painting), moving images (like cinema) material forms (like sculpture), body movement (like theatre and dance). If you are a musician or a multimedia artist, you will

need verbal language (oral or written) to teach about your art, to tell journalists what you do or to convince donors that you need financial support to do what you do. Just dancing or showing videos to a committee that decides on grant and fellowships won't do. Although sometimes it may, like in *Flashdance* (1983). One can argue that it is also possible to conceive and describe a piece of music by dancing or a painting by composing a piece of music, etc. However, it is through verbal language (oral and written) that all other codes and the world, if you wish, is conceived and interpreted. It is also true that physics and astronomy, for instance, describe and explain many things with numbers. Nonetheless, and in the last analysis, verbal language (oral or written) is necessary to help people beyond the scientist to understand the meaning of a formula, and for the scientist to explain the context of his or her formula.

But that is not all. In verbal language the oral is transmitted through sounds and the written through visual signs. Whether the written code of a given idiom (English, Chinese, Nahuatl, Arabic or Russian) is alphabetic or not, the fact remains that the audible (speech) and the visible (writing) characterize the code identified as "verbal language." The alphabet for deaf people is an interesting case for it brings together the visibility of the written sign with the visibility of the hands's *gestures*. In these three cases (oral, written and hand-gestures) we remain in the domain of verbal discourses.

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Actions named by "performance" in Western Civilization can be either representational or non-representational, and can be fictional or not fictional. Fictional performance actualizes the *mimetic* code of Western poetics founded in Aristotle's legacies. Artistic performance actualizes the *aesthetic* code founded in Kant's legacies. Thus, if "gesture" implies performance, fictional and non-fiction, then fictional performances call

for the question of aesthetics.

Aesthetics became a philosophical concept in the writing of Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten. It was derived from the Greek word "aesthesis." Aesthesis refers to the senses, sensibility, sensing, and sensations we feel in the body. With Baumgarten "aesthesis" mutated into "aesthetics" and became a concept naming the philosophical discourse that provides a theory of "aesthesis." Shortly after, Immanuel Kant theorized the "sensations" (aesthesis) of the beautiful and the sublime. While in Baumgarten "aesthesis" refers to sensations in general, Kant restricted his use of the word to the sensations of the beautiful and the sublime. Kant's philosophical discourse became the historical foundation of "aesthetics," a branch of modern Western philosophy that regulates taste. Given the racist assumptions of the time, Kant uses the philosophical discourse on aesthetics (critique of judgment) as well as on reason (critique of pure reason) to classify and rank the population of the world according to their rational and aesthetic capabilities.³ Kant's aesthetics provided the foundations for the regulation of taste and genius (the artist) in Western modernity. Post-modern (Rancière), altermodern (Bourriaud), and dialectical aesthetics (Jameson) are all variations of modern aesthetics.

If "gestures," like performances, can be fictional or not fictional, are decolonial gestures also fictional or not fictional? The massive and collective gestures of the Arab Intifadas or the Indignados of Greece and Spain suggest a terrain in which the distinction between fictional and non-fictional doesn't apply. They were not fictional in the sense that the manifestations were fictional manifestations, or mimetic (in the Aristotelian sense) manifestations. Yet the graffiti that colored the streets of Tunisia and Cairo were visual images that implied body gestures (the movements of the hands) and the sensations of the entire body, the anger and the anguish, the indignation and the humor needed to deal with the absurdity of the situation. The graffiti are as much non-fictional

as they are fictional gestures and visual outcomes. However, it is very important that the graffiti in Tunisia and Cairo were part of the larger social phenomena, the Arab Intifada (see <http://electronicintifada.net/tags/graffiti>).

One could say that in this case graffiti is a manifestation of "art of protest," an expression popularized in the 1970s. Suggesting the connection with "art of protest," the graffiti in Cairo and Tunisia graffiti is different from, say that of Chicano/as in San Antonio, Texas. In San Antonio, there are two "genres" of graffiti in San Antonio: the majority celebrates the deeds and memories of the Chicano and Chicana community (Kim, 2010). These graffiti are basically "gestures of community building." On the other hand, there are graffiti that make visible the sensibility and the inegalitarian conditions of the Chicano/a nation within a state controlled by the imaginary of an Anglo/a nation. These graffiti are both "gestures of protest." Are these two modalities of graffiti "*decolonial* gestures?" It will depend, as I suggested above, on what "decolonial" means to someone arguing that certain graffiti in San Antonio is decolonial. This is a general rule of interpretation. To talk about "cubist painting" will depend on the meaning the interpreter assigns to "cubism" in relation to the painting. Reversing the direction, if an artist is aware that "cubism" provides a conceptual structure for a tendency in the world of art, the artist herself could shape her work in conversation with such frame. The same reasoning is valid, in my view, for the expression "decolonial gestures."

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The thesis implicit in what I said so far and explicit in what I will say from now on is the following: coloniality (short hand for the colonial matrix of power) is the structure of management that, since the sixteenth century, was set up by specific actors, categories of thought, and institutions (see Tlostanova and Mignolo, 2009.) Actors, categories of thought, and

institutions go hand in hand with the formation of subjectivities (e.g., a sense of being in the world, world-sense rather than world-view). Subjectivities emerge in the double confluence of, on the one hand, what we learn through the body (what the senses tell us) and, on the other, how we “process” this through our brains. The “mind” should not be identified with the “brain”; rather the mind comes from the conglomerate of the senses and brain. Expressed as a formula, this would be senses+brain=mind. Gestures are signs through which our body (senses+brain) expresses itself. The point, then, is that the colonial matrix of power (coloniality) was forming imperial subjects at the same time that *it* was formed by imperial subjects. Or if you wish, the subjects who were building the colonial matrix of power were forming themselves as imperial subjects. Imperial subjects, in their intent to make the world the image and semblance of the colonial matrix of power, generated all over the world, through five hundred years and across diverse temporalities (in America, Asia and Africa), colonial subjects and, of course, subjectivities.⁴

If then, *imperial subjects* formed and were formed by the colonial matrix of power, *colonial subjects* were brought into the spider web, some acquiescing and others not. For those who did and do not acquiesce and assimilate, there are many ways of expressing their/our disagreement, disgust, and anger with the humiliation imposed by the colonial matrix. Said humiliation is at one and the same time patriarchal and racist. Racism and patriarchy are epistemic ontologies. What may seem an oxymoron is part of the decolonial vocabulary: to dismantle and disobey the categories that built and sustain the colonial matrix. This is a task that colonial subjects are undertaking all over the world, to delink and decolonize ourselves (our subjectivities), and from there, to engage in world-making not regulated by the colonial matrix. What world-making could that be? It is necessary to invent them, and they are already underway: starting from our subjectivities, building economies to administer scarcity (or ecoSImias);⁵ delinking from democracy and

development toward a vision of life that embrace harmony and plenitude, as many of us have been learning from *pueblos originarios*, Native Americans and First Nations; delinking from religion to liberate spirituality; delinking from science and Western philosophy to liberate wisdom, knowing, and sensing; and delinking from aesthetics to liberate aesthesis.

“Decolonial gestures” would be any and every gesture that directly or indirectly engages in disobeying the dictates of the colonial matrix and contributes to building of the human species on the planet in harmony with the life in/of the planet of which the human species is only a minimal part and of which it depends. And that would contribute to planetary re-emergence, re-surgence, and re-existence of people whose values, ways of being, languages, thoughts, and stories were degraded in order to be dominated.

The original Christian impulse to control “souls” and territories where the souls dwelled, translated later on into the secular impulse of controlling persons and territories where “natural resources” dwelled. Not all “gestures” that express disagreement and condemnation to the current state of things are decolonial gestures (e.g., increasing devaluation of life, including human life, in all and every imaginable dimension (violence of all sort, political and familiar, war, exploitation, commercialization of human bodies and natural resources [natural resources are a “human right” not a commodity], human organs, increasing wealth and political power of “illegal” drug commerce, etc.). And of course, not everything in the world shall be decolonial, for the simple reason that the basic decolonial gesture would be to confront any global design with the pretense of universality. So, postmodern critics that accuse the decolonial of aiming toward a new hegemony are indeed projecting their own fears and desires.

Decolonial gestures would, then, be all gestures (fictional and non-

fictional, artistic and non-artistic) that explicitly confront the colonial matrix. If the confrontation is implicit, it would be the process of interpretation that brings a given "gesture" (and here I am taking "gestures" as synonym with "sign") in the decolonial frame. Decoloniality is an option that co-exists with other options in a given universe of meaning. Human life is a constant, conflictive co-existence of options and each option organizes universes of meaning in which which people dwell. Universes of meaning, needless to say, were not established with the creation of the world by some supernatural energies (Popol Vuh) or being (the Bible), but were created by narratives that told the story of the creation of the world by supernatural beings or energies. The Bible, the Koran and the Popol Vuh each framed the meaning of the world in creation-stories. If the Bible, as any other story of creation, tells us first how the world was created and, secondly, how the human species was created, the colonial matrix of power built a third narrative: the narrative of the Western Civilization.

Thus, the colonial matrix of power is the very foundation of Western Civilization. Therefore, from everyday life to disciplinary formation, universes of meaning built simultaneously an epistemology and ontology. The colonial matrix not only was built and maintained through millions of "colonial gestures," but it was successful in making believe that the fictional world thus created (epistemology) was indeed what the world was (ontology). Decolonial gestures purportedly undo the epistemic ontology of Western Civilization, but also work toward re-doing a world in which the imperial/colonial dimension of Western Civilization is erased and the emancipatory dimension is enhanced. This means to prevent any imperial bent: for example, the belief that Western Civilization could leave behind its imperial exploitative side and now engage in an imperial emancipatory campaign. Decolonial gestures, as suggested before, cannot be dictated by imperial subjects but should come from the creativity and the engagement of (de)colonial subjects.

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I turn now to one specific and complex “event” by the Berlin-based Serbian artist Tanja Ostojic, the provocative “Looking for a Husband with EU Passport (2000-05), the work that catapulted her to international recognition (Ostojić and Mignolo, 2013). The quotation marks on “event” alert you to the fact that what I will examine in the next few pages delinks from canonical frames to the extent that fiction and non-fiction collapse as well as the correlated distinction between art and life. This “event” is, above all, a magnificent indictment to coloniality in its manifestation in the twenty-first century.

The mutation of coloniality allowed the core States that formed the European Union to build a rhetoric of modernity and a logic of coloniality that could erase Eastern Europe and disguise the fact that Western Europe “is” indeed the European Union. The mutation of coloniality operates on the rhetoric of development and progress for former Eastern and Central Europe, the regions managed by the former Soviet Union. One of the consequences was and is migration. Migration from former Eastern to Western Europe was almost as difficult as from Asia, Africa, Latin America or the Russian Federation. The European Union [Maastricht Treaty](#) of 1993 clearly showed that, with the exception of Austria in Central Europe, none of the Central and Eastern European countries were considered in the Union. Migrations from the “East” to the “West” became an issue and Ostojic courageously confronted it through artistic means when she started the project “Looking for a Husband with EU Passport” in August of 2000.

A digression on the word “art-work.” What does it mean to use the word “art” today beyond the expressions that remain within the coded “genres” of art and literature established by/in the rhetoric of modernity. “Art” refers to a skill:

1 : skill acquired by experience, study, or observation (the ~ of making

friends) 2 a : a branch of learning: (1): one of the humanities (2) pl : liberal arts b archaic : learning scholarship 3 : an occupation requiring knowledge or skill (the ~ of organ building) 4 a : the conscious use of skill and creative imagination esp. in the production of aesthetic objects; also : works so produced b (1) : fine arts (2) : one of the fine arts (3) : a graphic art 5 a archaic : a skillful plan b : the quality or state of being artful 6 : decorative or illustrative elements in printed matter. (Merriam Webster Collegiate Dictionary)

Aristotle used the Greek word "poiesis" and put the emphasis on "making" instead of the skill necessary to make something.

Consequently, the skill to make something, learning to do something is not learning to make a "work of art." The expression "work of art" is the result of bringing together two universes of meaning: art as skill and art as making within the regulation of taste: the beautiful and the sublime.

While the sublime refers to the vibration of the senses, aesthesis, in front of the spectacle of nature, the beautiful captures the vibration of the senses, aesthesis, in front of the spectacle of a skillful (art) creation that conforms to certain rules of taste. We can admire the gymnastic flair of "artists" in a circus but that will not qualify within the rules of beauty established by aesthetics: the philosophical discourse that invented and managed the concept of beauty and sublime—end of digression.

The word that fittingly describes what Ostojic did is "event." An event is a composition of gestures or signs. Signs can be begotten in and by the body or by "nature": a dark and cloudy sky is a sign that it may rain, but has not been precipitated by a human body movement. Gestures and signs that con-form an event that could be interpreted as decolonial shall be gestures and signs created by and in the body of human beings.

Ostojic posted her nude photo on the internet and announced that she was looking for a husband with a European Union passport. This initial gesture (or sign) was a decolonial weapon working on several layers.

First, it brought to the open the veiled intention of many women in former Eastern Europe to do exactly what she was announcing, but through other means—by presenting themselves in sexually attractive clothes, make-up, and photographic poses. “Sexually attractive” here refers to the coded sexuality of the women’s bodies already embedded in the male heterosexual imaginary. By this “gesture” Ostojic uncovers the heterosexual contract that connect men and women through the fantasy of colonial love. By putting a naked photograph of herself on the web, Ostojic’s second gesture breaks up the veiled colonial fantasy that romance and love has anything to do with heteronormative marriage. In a liberal and capitalist society, marriage is a contract with the ethical complicity of religious institutions that legalize sexual relations.

By marrying a German man, one of about 500 candidates, Ostojic explodes into pieces—third gesture—the modern distinction between art and life, helping us to understand that such distinction is indeed a celebration of modernity that hides the logic of coloniality: art is mimesis, representation, a fiction, a fake, a simulacra of the real. Such distinction has imposed itself over ritual and ceremonies in societies for which such distinction did not make sense. Borges, always extremely perceptive, understood that Averroes couldn’t have understood what “mimesis” was: the children in the courtyard were playing but playing is not a fiction separated from life. It is life, it is a ritual, it is pleasure, it is living in community and love.

Ostojic came from former Communist and former Yugoslavia to Germany and Berlin unified after the collapse of the Berlin Wall. For Germany, unification meant the end of the Soviet menace. For the “nations” of the dismembered Yugoslav “state,” unification meant to be at the mercy of the forming European Union reinforcing its frontiers to control migration. In her fourth gesture, Ostojic’s discloses the underlying logic of Soviet colonial communism and the European Union colonial liberal capitalism.

The fifth gesture came when she divorced, after three-and-a-half years of marriage, and organized a party to celebrate the divorce. If marriage was a deal, a sexual contract, then divorce is another deal: the end of the social contract and freedom for both contractors. No tears, no mourning, nothing engendered by the myths of colonial love. Indirectly, this invites us to think that same-sex marriage—as important as it is—remains still caught in the web of colonial love legitimized by marriage. The sexual contract is a colonial regulation, part of the larger social contract and parallel to the racial contract (see Pateman 1999).

The public and private, a cherished distinction of the secular modernity, explodes and falls into pieces through Ostojic's work. If the word "performance" was introduced to capture the mutation of certain genres of modern artistic expressions, these mutations became post-modern—that is, these were changes within the same frame and universes of meaning of the modern. "Performance" was needed to capture the emergence of a series of "postmodern gestures." But Ostojic's work is no longer amenable to post-modern gestures because, precisely, her work makes visible the "unnatural" artistic conventions of modern (Kant), post-modern (Rancière) and alter-modern aesthetics (Bourriaud).

The sixth of Ostojic's gestures was to mount an installation in Berlin consolidating all the gestures and the processes during the five years that the project lasted. The installation consists of a series of photos, including her initial advertising photo looking for a husband, of the marriage and the divorce, along with texts of numerous candidates in the Wedding Book. These are presented as framed documents on three walls, and in rectangular display case in the middle with documents of the entire process. Hanging on the wall, between the pictures, a small flat screen television projects the first encounter of Ostojic and her husband in a green, peaceful, locus amoenus prairie in New Belgrade, Ostojic's home town. Ostojic's "decolonial event," then, consists of six "decolonial gestures" (which of course could be more or less depending on the

interpretation). The event can be read decolonially because each gesture delinks from specific regulations of the colonial matrix of power. But it is not just delinking; it is building on the ruins of the colonial matrix. Certainly, the colonial matrix is still there; yet there are also visions of the horizon of life that the colonial matrix repressed and is still trying to kill. But life cannot be killed.

I see two last and most radical gestures of Ostojic's decolonial "event." The first is to disobey all the expectations of modern, postmodern, and altermodern "aesthetics," as well as the postmodern celebration of "installations" (see Jameson 2012). As a matter of fact, aesthetics is out of the question. Ostojic liberates aesthesis, the senses, the senses of gender/sexual relations, of economic and political regulations, of racism and patriarchy. "Art" is used by Ostojic to liberate herself. But this is not just an individual act of liberal consciousness but a decolonial (deracial and depatriarchal) event that explodes not only aesthetics but the Western novelty of "performance art." Performance art indeed was introduced to escape the cage of representation, and it was and is important but, at the same time, like gay marriage, remains within the rules of the game established in and by the colonial matrix. Ostojic jumped—jumped to something else, to something that is coming, and we do not know what exactly that is. That is precisely her *aesthetic* (I am saying *aesthetic* and not *aesthetic*) force. The "event" is not representation of life. It is life made representation. And it is no longer Jean Baudrillard's "simulacra." The force of Ostojic's work is making technological games just that, pure games that can blur the lines on the screen between the real and the simulated. What Ostojic does is related to life, to the pain and humiliation of colonial subject, humiliated by racism, patriarchy, and the criminalization of migrants.

The second radical decolonial gesture is putting together an "event" that did not require funding from generous wealthy donors, and that most likely will not be funded by any generous wealthy donors. Grants are

embedded in the colonial matrix of power. The granting institutions not only have the privilege of setting the rules and appointing the committee that will "judge" the value of the proposals, but they also create a relationship of dependency that, on the one hand, is humiliating for those who are granted economic support, and at the same time disguises that humiliation (even for the person humiliated) by the "honor" of being recognized as a valuable person (artists, social scientist, scientist in general) and by being portrayed in the mainstream media if the award is big, or in the home institution if the award is of less national or international relevance.

"Decolonial gestures" are scalars and it is idealistic to expect always the most radical and to condemn them because they are not truly decolonial. Decoloniality is a long process that takes place at several levels in different times. Because the colonial matrix of power is a structure of interconnected domains that are made invisible by training "experts" in only one small domain, decolonial gestures in one domain impinge on the others. It is the butterfly effect. You can use a metaphor of modern sciences or of ancient indigenous wisdom: life is the interconnection of the living, not a privileged sphere of the human. To Poison the waters and the lands is to poison ourselves, even if we are the owners and administrators of Monsanto.

Ostojic's "event" remains a point of reference for complex delinking and for the art of living once delinking puts us in the void: for those of us who do not have a place to land when we delink (particularly those of us who are Europeans or of European descent) the void shall be the place to start anew together with ongoing projects, in which delinking is to re-merge, to re-surge, to re-exist from the devaluations, the disruption, and interruption that Western Civilization impinged on other civilizations in the name of salvation, progress, civilization, modernization, and development. Decolonial gestures, decolonial turns, and decolonial options are different aspects of a global march toward delinking from the

darker side of Western (post) modernity.

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Notes

1. We should also remember the concept "decolonial attitude," used by Nelson Maldonado-Torres in *Against War. Views from the Underside of Modernity* (2008). The concept "attitude" was also used in a different context by Remi Brague in his *Europe. La voie Romaine*

(1999). Defending the thesis that Europe is essentially Roman, Brougnot uses the expression the "Roman attitude" to profile European culture. The question is: what makes of an attitude, a gesture, or an option turn X instead of Y or Z?

2. Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* (New York: Signet, 1978) confronts precisely this puzzle. Her Native American knowledge is translated into the novel form, and the novel form is already caught into the fictional/non-fictional code. Border thinking, dwelling in the borders, involves using but not submitting (or the contrary subverting and re-directing) the novel-form. As in Chimamanda Acichie, the novel here becomes "storytelling," and storytelling in First Nation and Native American epistemology is both and it neither: literature and philosophy, fiction and ceremony, but always from indigenous cosmologies of the Americas absorbing the cosmology of indigenous, Europeans, and their descendants in the Americas.
3. Kant's racial discourse can be found in *Observations on the Beautiful and the Sublime*, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, and *Geography*. See the classic article by Chukwudi Eze, "The color of Reason," in *African Postcolonial Philosophy* (1997) and my own "The Darker Side of the Enlightenment: A Decolonial Reading of Kant's Geography" (2011).
4. I learned from two other sources other than the Greek and Biblical tradition, both con-joined by Saint Thomas Aquinas. One is the Persian translations of Q' uran and the other the philosophical wisdom of ancient civilizations in Atanhuac and Tawantinsuyu.
5. See the project EcoSImías, an alternative economic structure in Ecuador, analyzed by Quijano Valencia in *EcoSImías. Visions and practices of economic / cultural difference in the context of Multiplicity* (2012).

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