



PRECEDENCE, TRANS* AND THE DECOLONIAL

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To cite this article: Daniel Brittany Chávez & Rolando Vázquez (2017) PRECEDENCE, TRANS* AND THE DECOLONIAL, Angelaki, 22:2, 39-45, DOI: [10.1080/0969725X.2017.1322817](https://doi.org/10.1080/0969725X.2017.1322817)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0969725X.2017.1322817>



Published online: 17 May 2017.



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These words are a collaborative effort to think across different practices of knowing and sensing. They don't pretend to compose a complete article. They are simply an assemblage that wants to open spaces for dwelling, for connecting, for dissenting. As such it gravitates around the images of Daniel Brittany Chávez's performance: "Quisieron Enterrarnos ..." (2014), his artist statement and Rolando Vázquez's notes on precedence, trans* and the decolonial. In this conversation, we are allies and accomplices in thinking through trans* as a prefix both of non-binary transgender identity (Daniel B. Chávez's artist and subject position) and from Rolando Vázquez's conceptions of trans* from decolonial thought and praxis. In conversation, we offer this assemblage not from a space of tension but from a space of mutually nurturing decolonial praxis.

artist statement (daniel brittany chávez)

It has taken me a number of years to find a genuine synthesis between my intellectual practice and my activist and artistic practices. Furthermore, when invested in decolonial ways of walking and doing, we are constantly held accountable to ourselves, our communities, and our collaborators in ways that ask that we always be shifting, moving, and pushing the boundaries of what we hold truest and dearest. I am invested in this synthesis of knowledge production sites as a method of thinking corporeally from multiple axes and nodes. As our colleague Benvenuto Chavajay has expressed on multiple occasions, this is a directionality and temporality where the past is in front of

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us and the future is behind us. This flow requires that we consider ancestry, history, memory, and multiplicity of knowledges on every step of our paths.¹

As a transgender (transmasculine) performance artist working from a multiply-constituted decolonial praxis, I consider trans* as a prefix to be a detonator of possibilities rather than a form of reifying a static notion of unchangeable identity or limited to gender alone. It is my feeling that this static notion would do trans* a disservice. At the same time, I believe it is essential not to devalue trans* as a gender identity that has very real material consequences in our binary-colonial-patriarchal-capitalist world. It is crucial to mention that trans* as a gender

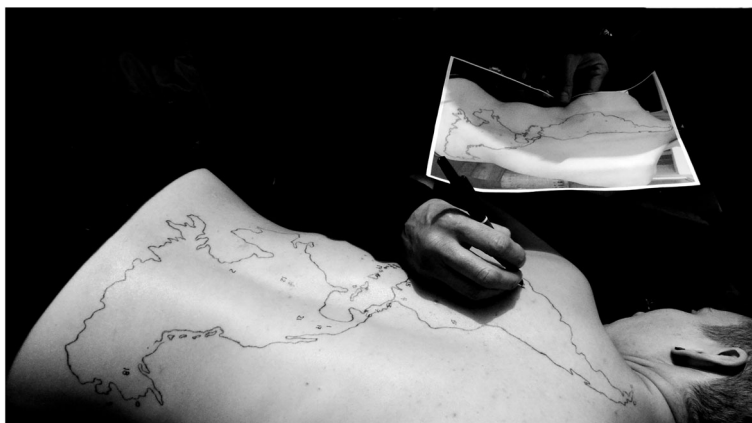


Fig. 1. Documentary photograph by Nelly Cubillos from the performance “Quisieron Enterrarnos ... No Sabían que Éramos Semilla” by Daniel Brittany Chávez (18 November 2014). © Daniel Brittany Chávez. Image reproduced by kind permission of photographer Nelly Cubillos and artist Daniel Brittany Chávez.

identity is not a clothing item you can take on and off with no consequences. Within this very real corporeality in the world, I want to briefly consider trans* as a mobilizer of possibilities.

Trans* allows for manifold becomings and the quotidian existence of unfixed definitions. Fluidity, indeterminacy, non-foreclosure, movement, spiral, non-linear, and other in authenticating gestures that refuse a congealed and static whole are part of what make up this state in movement and in motion. Within performance, then, trans* means to peel back layers not otherwise seen or called into being. In my practice, I do not separate processes of race and racialization from those of gendered becomings because, as an afro-descendant, these transformations make manifest their multiple interactions and their mutual constitution. As I come closer to my trans* self, I come closer to my blackness and vice versa.

As a performer working with my own trans* body, I desire to transgress its limitations and even its enclosure as purely trans* and instead come in conversation with all that is open in the world from decolonial sensibilities. By putting trans* and decolonial thought in conversation through performance, resistance comes in the form of a racialized trans* body that breaks open the bounds of colonial signifiers and cartographies across the body canvas.

In performances these layers present, undo, and reinvent themselves time and time again, with no set goal of re-representation, and with total intention of being. What you think you are seeing is called into question by what you feel. What you think you are feeling is called into question by what you sense. What you think you sense is then called into question by how you are affected and moved ... perhaps even transformed. Trans* from the perspective of performance is an open invitation to be transformed before what cannot, and refuses to, be fully named. This slipperiness that performance brings forth is an opening for un-writing, undoing, and ever manifesting.

In my performance, “Quisieron Enterrarnos ... No Sabían que Éramos Semilla,” responding to the disappearance of the forty-three students in Ayotzinapa school in Iguala, Guerrero, Mexico, I desired to point to the excessive state violences the Americas (Canada to the Southern Cone) had experienced in the year 2014 to that date. Marking the sites most affected on the inverted tattoo of the Americas that marked my back, I had an assistant insert twenty-seven needles into my back, commemorating my twenty-seventh birth year as a gift to still be alive as a student with a racialized and gender non-conforming body. Then, twenty-

seven cuts were made alongside each of the needle insertions as the needles were removed. As the Americas bleed, I raise my body back up and allow the blood to run. The performance lasted for around thirty minutes and I was then lifted off the altar table and taken away.

notes on trans*, the decolonial and precedence (rolando vázquez)

I want to invite a dialogue between trans* studies and decolonial thought. I am interested in thinking trans* as a movement of transgression and transformation beyond the modern/colonial forms of subjectification. Thus, I am not so much interested in thinking trans* in relation to the notion of transition from within a given framework that is already circumscribed by a set of normative identities. I am not interested in thinking along the notion of performativity when it is circumscribed within the modern field of possibilities. I am interested in thinking trans* in relation to the possibility of a decolonial transgression not just of normativity but of the very field that circumscribes that normativity. Decolonial artists such as Daniel Brittany Chávez, Benvenuto Chavajay, Teresa María Díaz Nerio, Jeannette Ehlers, Raúl Moarquench Ferrera-Belanquet, Mwangi Hutter, Patricia Kaersenhout, among others, have been showing how a transgressive and decolonial subjectivity can lead to the recovery of our capacity to feel the suffering of others, of compassion,² the recovery of our capacity of affect and being affected that has been taken from us through the modern/colonial heteronormative forms of subjectification and individuation.

When thinking subjectivity across the colonial difference (Mignolo), one comes to understand that there is a dimension of privilege that remains uncontested when the transition is a possibility for those who are not de-sexualized, de-genderized, de-humanized under what María Lugones calls the coloniality of gender (Lugones).

Trans* as transgression and transformation can signal a decolonial move that challenges the field of identities in which enframed

chávez & vázquez

performativity is played out. The trans-decolonial is not a movement for recognition within the spectrum enabled by the given framework, somewhere in-between maleness and femaleness. It is, rather, breaking away from its parameters to enact relational forms of personification that are often not only in a fluidity of genders but also in a non-individualized position, in a fluidity between the communal and a plural self, and a non-anthropocentric position, in a fluidity between earth and the communal.

In particular I want to think about the body as not confined by the temporality of presence, by its materiality. I want to think of the possibility of crossing from the individualized body of presence to the embodiment of the relational and the ancestral. Daniel Brittany Chávez's performance "Quisieron Enterrarnos ..." [They Wanted to Bury Us] is here our locus of contemplation to think the decolonial as a form of crossing beyond individuality, to exceed the instrumentality of chronology and to inhabit relational temporalities.

In these images we can intimate how Chávez's performance, "Quisieron Enterrarnos ...", bridges the boundaries of individualized bodies. The performance happened during the first anniversary of the disappearance of the forty-three students of Ayotzinapa in Mexico. His body enters into a mode of enactment that exceeds individuality; it becomes a historical site of sensing, of compassion, of remembrance. It enables itself to be affected by the open wound of coloniality. The compassionate body becomes a site of perception for the pain of others, in its silence it becomes an expression of the un-utterable horror of violence, it confronts the oblivion perpetrated by the disposable life, the un-mournable death of the modern/colonial order.

The body awakened to the relational is no longer reduced to its individuality – it becomes porous and capable of com-passion, of feeling the suffering of others. It exceeds the surface of representation and becomes a historical site, a site of remembrance. By giving itself as a locus for the recognition of what has been silenced by violence, decolonial



Fig. 2. Documentary photograph by Nelly Cubillos from the performance “Quisieron Enterrarnos ... No Sabían que Éramos Semilla” by Daniel Brittany Chávez (18 November 2014). © Daniel Brittany Chávez. Image reproduced by kind permission of photographer Nelly Cubillos and artist Daniel Brittany Chávez.

performance is a way of inhabiting the colonial difference. It opens the possibility of temporal relationality, as a form of hope, a form of healing grounded on the possibility to fight oblivion, to recover the memory of what has been erased. The decolonial appears as an ongoing struggle against the silencing, against the oblivion of suffering that is imposed by power. The mnemonic body recognizes its form of inhabiting the limen between the presence of recognition and the absence of what is threatened to be forgotten. The thin skin of the now is open, is bleeding.

decolonial embodiment

Practices of decolonial embodiment challenge the boundaries of individuality; they should not be confused with the performativity of individual identities. In their relational verbleness the practices of decolonial embodiment challenge the temporality of contemporaneity, its cult of novelty and the reduction of experience to the empty now of the materiality of presence.

Decolonial performance art helps us to intimate the possibility of overcoming modern

forms of subjectivity and the reduction of the body to a material entity, its confinement to individual objectivity, to the surface of presence and its domain of representation. It shows us the possibility of recovering a relational, an ancestral body. The relational body overflows the present/presence as the sole dimension of experience; the relational body is not confined to the surface of immanence, to the metaphysics of presence.

The body as individual materiality is transgressed in the verbleness of decolonial performance, in the grounding and gathering of embodiment. For a deep moment the body becomes a temporal vessel in the swaying before the before, in the presence of precedence. In its opening, beyond the individual-now, it sways towards the horizon of the always already ancestral, of relational temporalities, of the communal in time.

What is at stake in the divergent temporalities, in the divergence between the chronology of metaphysics and relational temporalities, is our relation to the real. Decolonizing Western metaphysics is a way to delink from the surface of instrumentality and representation.

the question of precedence

Decolonial embodiment enacts relational temporalities and transgresses the reality principle of modern metaphysics. Relational time, deep time, emerges as the radical alterity of materiality, of the total affirmation of immanence as the whole of reality. Relational time brings to question the metaphysical order of modernity and its confinement of the real to the surface of present/presence. The decolonial calls for the question of precedence (Vázquez).

The overcoming of Western metaphysics requires delinking from the immanence/transcendence dichotomy that has delimited the understanding of the unfolding of being. The ancestral body is not a body reducible to its material immanent existence, nor is it a body seeking the transcendental, a higher state other than the body; it is a body that in its ancestrality is open to a different mode of being in the world, to the mode of precedence.

Whereas transcendence marks a relation to the beyond the world outside time, into eternity, and immanence speaks of a relation contained within the materiality of presence, precedence speaks of a mode of being in the world in time. It is the mode of being through relational temporalities, in which the presence and the material body appear as the incarnation, the surfacing of an active plurality in precedence, of an always already coming into presence, of the before before us.

Precedence reveals a temporality in which what has been is ahead of the formation of presence, of consistency and embodiment. Many philosophies of Abya Yala's first nations have an understanding of the past as being in front of us.³ This is what we are here listening to and naming *the mode of precedence*, that is, a relation to a deep temporality that precedes us precisely in that it is both ahead of us and before us. The mode of precedence is a being before: both at one and the same time being in front of us and anterior to us.

Modern metaphysics has bounded our ways of being in the world to the empty present of the surface of appearance and representation,

to the world as artifice and pure materiality, to the mode of immanence and to the artifice of a futurity, a mode of utopic projection outside time, as a secular expression of the mode of transcendence.

The decolonial comes under the sign of the return, it disobeys the reduction of time of modern metaphysics, the emptying of the present and enacts the mode of precedence as a deep temporality that is capable of overcoming individuality by relating us to our communal earthly and ancestral ramifications and which enables us to overcome the chronological order of instrumental domination.

Decolonial embodiment is not reducible to the assemblage of elements from the plane of immanence; its form of enactment is an attunement and an allowing for the movement of precedence to configure the now of experience. In the attunement to its communal precedence the body ceases to be reducible to the present of individuality and opens itself up to its relationality. The temporality of ancestrality, of communality, is not reducible to what there is in presence; it is not reducible to the plane of immanence.

The ancestral is not just the potency of virtuality, it is the ground of certainty of what has been lived, it is *whenin* the lived experience of coloniality remains latent under the veil of the empty present of modernity, under the forces of negation, of absencing, of oblivion. Oblivion of coloniality appears as the dispersal of what has been and the negation of its coming into expression, of its gathering and enactment to configure the order of presence.

When modernity appears as the destruction of relationality, we see the breaking of tradition and the removal of the temporal linkages as a form of un-grounding, emptying both the subject and the present. The coloniality of modern times has meant the negation of relational temporalities to force a subjection to the empty time of chronology, instrumental domination, and simulacra.

In transgressing the confinements of modern individuality and more generally modern forms of subjectification, decolonial forms of embodiment transgress the chronological order of



Fig. 3. Documentary photograph by Nelly Cubillos from the performance “Quisieron Enterrarnos ... No Sabían que Éramos Semilla” by Daniel Brittany Chávez (18 November 2014). © Daniel Brittany Chávez. Image reproduced by kind permission of photographer Nelly Cubillos and artist Daniel Brittany Chávez.

modernity. They signal the crossing beyond the binary immanence and transcendence, presence and future. They enact a movement of precedence through which the colonial wound and its mnemonic presence come into expression as a radical questioning of the modern/colonial order of presence and domination.

The subject confined to inhabit the empty present of presence, of the surface of representation and to dream of an always to come utopia, is a subject that has been dispossessed of hir/her/his capacities of affect, of being affected, of compassion. The colonial wounds that have been silenced and remain hidden have been denied a mode of appearance in the present. The decolonial as rooted in the

ancestral unfolds in the manner of precedence, and in its unfolding it reconfigures the order of the present and the reduction of the subject to superficial individuality.

Decolonial aesthesis dwells in the open hiatus of the colonial wound, in which the precedence of coloniality bleeds. In its embodiment it disobeys the order of representation, the denial, and reaches towards the frail healing of remembrance.

The mode of precedence is the swaying, the rhythm between the recognition of memory and the radical alterity of time: between the memorial that unfolds *before* us and the unfathomable depths of the mnemonic *before* us. The *before* as a mode of precedence that is at one and the same time in front of us and

grounding, sustaining us. It is the relation in time: temporal relationality.

seascape, swaying breath,
ebb and flow
liminal mirror
of unfathomable depths
receding, gathering, surfacing ...



disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

notes

1 Here, specifically, I am referring to Chavajay's artist talk given at HD: Haceres Decoloniales at the Facultad de Artes ASAB in Bogotá, Colombia in August 2015.

2 For more information on these artists see their websites at: <www.danielbchavez.com>; <<https://teresadiaznerio.wordpress.com/>>; <www.jeannetteehlers.dk>; <moarquench.wordpress.com>; <<http://www.mwangi-hutter.de/art/welcome.html>>; <www.pkarsenhout.com>.

3 As expressed, for example, in the paraphrase of Benvenuto Chavajay's philosophy made by Daniel Brittany Chávez in the statement in this text.

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