Complex Communication and Decolonial Struggles: The Forging of Deep Coalitions through Emotional Echoing and Resistant Imaginations

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Abstract

This article elucidates and expands on María Lugones's account of complex communication across liminal sites as the basis for deep coalitions among oppressed groups. The analysis underscores the crucial role that emotions and resistant imaginations play in complex communication and world-traveling across liminal sites. In particular, it focuses on the role of emotional echoing and epistemic activism in complex forms of communication among oppressed subjects. It elucidates Gloria Anzaldúa's storytelling and Doris Salcedo's visual art as exemplary forms of epistemic activism that issue coalitional gestures and critical provocations that can wake people up from their epistemic slumbers and instigate forms of complex communication that can create new possibilities for coalitional politics.

Keywords: complex communication, world-traveling, coalitional politics, emotional echoing, epistemic activism, resistant imaginations

The vast field of decolonial theory includes a wide array of diverse contestatory practices, traditions and approaches grounded in the heterogeneous experiences of being subject to colonial forms of oppression and resisting to it in all kinds of contexts: in Northern and Sub-Saharan Africa; in North, South, Central America and the Caribbean; in the Middle East, in the Far East, in South Asia; etc. Those excluded and subordinated by colonial powers have had little in common other than their condition of being oppressed by colonizers and resisting that oppression. The specific problems of exclusion and subordination that colonized subjects have faced have been rather different; and even constellations of specific problems, such as the colonial oppression of women and sexual minorities, have taken many different and heterogeneous forms. Activists and theorists who address the coloniality of gender and sexuality and mobilize to resist sexual oppression in colonial and post-colonial contexts speak in different tongues and give voice to very different experiences, perspectives, and approaches. It would be misguided to think that all voices within the vast field of decolonial feminist theory talk in unison or even that they understand each other. But it would also be misguided to think that there is no conversation to be had here. This is precisely the topic of this essay: the conversations among oppressed subjectivities that can be had in liminal spaces, outside the mainstream and the normal, and the subversive potential of these conversations when they defy established norms of intelligibility, that is, when they amount to the kind of *complex communication* that can lead to resistant and transformative practices.

The starting point of my analysis is María Lugones's account of *complex communication* and her critical warning concerning Gloria Anzaldúa's suggestion that oppressed and excluded subjects will meet in the limen or the *borderlands* where they will be able to understand each other and create a community. In *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987) Anzaldúa describes the *borderlands* as the liminal space "inhabited by all of those who cross over the confines of the normal (*atravezados/as*)"; and she writes as if the *atravezados/as* "will understand each other" in this encounter and community-building will happen automatically (Lugones 2003, 79). Lugones, by contrast, is deeply skeptical about whether oppressed subjects, when they find themselves and each other in liminal spaces, will in fact be able to understand each other or even themselves. But being opaque to each other and to oneself does not mean that there is no form of communication to be had. Straightforward communication based on transparency and automatic

understanding will not happen among the oppressed subjects who meet in the limen; but there are other forms of communication to be had under conditions of opacity (mutual opacity and self-opacity), forms of communication that are not predicated on straighforwardness, but on obliqueness, and exploit the opacity of one's meaning and identity in a journey of self-discovery and mutual transformation. This is what Lugones analyzes in her account of *complex communication*, which is the kind of communication that happens outside established norms of intelligibility and expectations of transparency. Complex communication is the kind of communication that can lead to what Lugones calls *deep coalitions* among the oppressed, that is, coalitions that are based on processes of estrangement and mutual transformation, in sharp contrast to mere convenience-based pacts or superficial coalitions based on intersecting interests. In what follows I elucidate Lugones's account of complex communication and its potential for contestation, subversion and coalitional politics.

In the first section of this essay, putting the liberatory philosophy of María Lugones in conversation with recent discussions in political epistemology, I develop a meta-communicative elucidation of the interactions of oppressed subjectivities in liminal spaces and the subversive potential of those interactions. In my elucidation, following Lugones and other proponents of liberatory epistemologies, I call attention to the crucial role that emotions play in complex—self-transforming and mutually transforming—communication. In section 2, I explore how complex communication can be instigated by and cultivated through what I call *epistemic activism*, that is, subversive practices that defy epistemic norms and engage in contestations and provocations that create *epistemic friction* with our sensibilities. In this section I examine how public art can be used in practices of epistemic activism as critical provocations that can wake people up from their epistemic slumbers and instigate forms of complex communication that can create new possibilities for coalitional politics.

Complex Communication: Metacommunication across Liminal Sites and Emotional Echoing

María Lugones (2003, 2010, and forthcoming) has developed a decolonial feminist epistemology that calls attention to the communicative obstacles and epistemic dysfunctions that separate privileged and oppressed

subjectivities and also differently oppressed groups from one another. Bringing to the fore "the inter-locking of oppressions," Lugones argues that the phenomenon of the isolation of each form of oppression has to be understood as itself an epistemological instrument of oppression and marginalization, as an ideological tool for dividing and separating forms of resistance (2003, 140). Lugones's celebrated notion of "world-traveling" in her early work already pointed towards a way of resisting and undoing the isolationism of epistemic oppression and of developing new forms of sensibility and solidarity. Emphasizing the fluidity of identity and the relationality between one's selves and those of others, Lugones (1987) recommended "playfulness" and "world-traveling" as ways of overcoming the obstacles that block cross-cultural and cross-racial identification.

As Lugones describes it, "world-traveling" can be a mechanism for improving understanding and overcoming hermeneutical and testimonial obstacles for oppressed subjectivities. Complex and deeply transformative communication among oppressed subjects involves *traveling to each other's worlds*—understanding by *world* a shared horizon of meaning and interpretation that discloses possibilities for experiences and action; and understanding by *traveling* the departure from an interpretative horizon where one can make sense of oneself in a particular way and one's identity displays particular attributes, and the movement toward a significantly different interpretative horizon where one would make sense of oneself differently and one's identity could display different attributes (see Lugones 1987). Complex communication of this kind is certainly not an easy task. But only if this task is undertaken and at least partially achieved could we really talk about a genuine *meeting of the minds* and the kind of profound community-building that can lead to a *deep coalition* of mutually transformative subjectivities, rather than a coalition resulting from negotiating intersecting interests that leaves the participating subjectivities intact. The encounter of oppressed subjects in the limen does not guarantee that they will in fact travel to each other's worlds of sense, that they will be able to immerse themselves in each other's horizons of understanding and co-participate in meaning-making and meaning-sharing activities. This challenging task includes all kinds of epistemic and communicative obstacles that I will explore in this section. But let's begin by highlighting the potential of the communicative encounter of oppressed subjectivities in liminal spaces.

A liminal space is a space for the excessive and for those who cannot fit in pre-established molds of identity. To find oneself in the limen is to

lose oneself: in the limen, *encontrarse es desencontrarse* (finding oneself is losing oneself). The limen is a place for losing oneself, but also for reinventing or remaking oneself in the company of others who are in a similar predicament. Although the limen is a place of dislocation or disorientation, which can be painful and even traumatic, it is also a place that, when inhabited self-consciously and in critical and creative ways, can offer the possibility of discovering and inventing aspects of the world and aspects of ourselves that we would not be open to and attentive to otherwise: in the limen, *desencontrarse es encontrarse* (losing oneself is finding oneself). It is in this sense that liminal spaces can be spaces for creative possibilities and for rebirth and growth. Describing this self-conscious and critical way of inhabiting the limen, Lugones writes: "To understand that you are in a limen is to understand that you are not what you are within a structure. It is to know that you have ways of living in disruption of domination" (2006, 79).

Those who inhabit liminal spaces critically and creatively can have fruitful encounters with each other in negative and positive ways. On the negative side, they can experience together a loss of self (*desencontrarse en el encuentro*—losing oneself in the encounter), shedding off or outgrowing rigidified aspects of themselves or taking distance from—that is, disidentifying[1] with—the identities they have been given within structures of domination, that is, understanding that they are not what they are within those structures, as Lugones suggests. On the positive side, oppressed subjects who find each other in liminal spaces can help each other to encounter new aspects of the world and of themselves, new meanings and identities, in the midst of being lost and feeling disoriented (*encontrarse en el desencuentro*—finding oneself while being lost). But for these fruitful, creative encounters in the limen to happen, for the difficult processes of losing each other while finding each other (*desencontrarse en el encuentro* y *encontrarse en el desencuentro*—losing oneself in the encounter and finding each other in the loss) to happen, a particular kind of complex communication among oppressed subjectivities in liminal spaces needs to take place. This complex communication starts with a particular kind of recognition, the mutual recognition of liminality, of being in excess of "what you are within a structure." Lugones describes this recognition and the complex communication it can trigger when she astutely qualifies Anzaldúa's claim about meeting in the borderlands and understanding each other. She emphasizes that although there is no guarantee that oppressed subjects will understand their liminal

worlds and each other, when those who inhabit liminal spaces critically and creatively encounter each other, they do have unique opportunities for meaning-creation, identity-formation, and world-making:

> Though it is not true that if we stand together in the limen we will understand each other, we can make the *weaker claim that if we recognize each other as occupying liminal sites, then we will have a disposition to read each other away from structural, dominant meaning*, or have a good reason to do so as oppressed people. What we need then is both to be able to recognize liminality and to go from recognition to a deciphering of resistant codes. (Lugones 2006, 79; my emphasis)

How do we go from the mutual recognition of liminality to the "deciphering of resistant codes," to reading "each other away from structural, dominant meaning?" The mutual recognition of liminality provides the *openness to complex communication*, that is, the openness to travel to each other's worlds and to participate in the co-creation of new worlds of sense. But this recognition of liminality and the openness it contains may or may not lead to a process of complex communication in which we become entangled with and transformed by each other's lived experiences and memories, and in which new ways of orienting ourselves with and through others can emerge. Of course there is no guarantee that this kind of complex communication will take place among oppressed subjectivities when they find each other in liminal worlds, but the opportunity and openness for such communication is there after these subjectivities recognize each other as inhabiting liminal worlds. Let's begin with a brief elucidation of the different kinds of conversations that oppressed subjects can engage in in liminal spaces in order to identify the kind of complex communication that can make it possible for oppressed subjects to travel to each other's worlds and to form deep coalitions.

In her 2006 article "Complex Communication" Lugones distinguishes three different kinds of conversations that oppressed subjects typically engage in. In the first place, oppressed subjects engage in conversations in which they *talk back* to the oppressor in order to issue grievances and complaints about the oppressive system and culture. This is what Lugones characterizes as the form of communication that is structured by "a confrontational address to the oppressor." There is nothing wrong with this confrontational communication; it is a necessary part of resistance. But,

precisely because communication is here still addressed to the interpretive horizon of the oppressive culture and tailored toward the receptive sensibility of that horizon, we cannot expect to find here the unimpeded flourishing of non-hegemonic interpretive perspectives, and much less the development of a new language, a new constellation of meanings, or a new interpretive horizon. There is of course inventiveness at play here and new expressive and interpretative resources are developed in this kind of confrontational communication, but these are absorbed in the mainstream culture and become simply new ingredients of already existing frameworks. In colonial and postcolonial contexts, the confrontational address of colonized subjects can leave marks in the colonial language and horizon of understanding, but it will remain *monological* and will not inaugurate alternative interpretive frameworks within which colonized subjects can fully articulate their experiences, where they can fully be seen and heard, where *the subaltern can speak*, to use Gayatri Spivak's (1998) celebrated formulation.

In the second place, Lugones also describes a different kind of conversation among oppressed subjects: the conversation that involves "a dialogical, collective creation of the particular message and of the particular form of the address" (2006, 82). This dialogical communication in which the members of an oppressed group talk among themselves does not necessarily take an oppositional form that gives center stage to the oppressive culture and system by addressing privileged subjects in a way that they can understand. In-group dialogical communication among oppressed subjects offers a space of more expressive and interpretive freedom; it is not necessarily subordinated to the language and interpretative horizon of the oppressor; it constitutes a space for the articulation of non-hegemonic perspectives and hermeneutical resources. But insofar as it aims at the articulation of a *common* language, it can also have its own limitations. In-group dialogical communication and the collective creation of a common message do not guarantee that complex communication will take place. In-group dialogical communication may or may lead to oppressed subjects' traversing their differences, that is, to their traveling across worlds of sense. And, in fact, if it does, that means that the oppressed group has recognized its internal differences and has become pluralized, with in-group dialogue leading to cross-group dialogical communication. But if such communication remains *in-group*, then it will remain within a single world of sense and it will consist in negotiating and stitching together previously existing meanings and perspectives, without necessarily pluralizing the interpretive

horizons and the identities of the participating subjects. This is not to suggest that the innovations of in-group dialogical communication will leave the existing languages, identities, and interpretive horizons unaltered; but how deeply they are transformed and whether radically new meanings and subjectivities will emerge out of these innovations will depend on the communicative dynamics in which they are taken up and on what it is done with them. Think here, for example, of the speak-outs organized within the U.S. Women's Liberation Movement in the 1960s. As Miranda Fricker points out, women activists found themselves in the peculiar situation of organizing speak-outs in which "the 'this' they were going to break the silence about had no name" (2007, 150). In and through these speak-outs, women activists were able to articulate their experiences of sexual intimidations with new labels such as "sexual harassment." These new words and articulated meanings are indeed great semantic innovations, but whether or not they amount to new interpretive horizons and sensibilities, or they simply become mere additions and supplementations to existing frameworks, will depend on how they are used and the communicative dynamics in which they are embedded.

So what other form of conversational encounter is needed for complex communication in the limen to take place? Alongside the dialogical communication just described, Lugones suggests that there is "a concomitant third conversation, a third form, a coalitional form also spoken from within this limen" (2006, 83). This third form of conversational encounter where we can find complex communication and the source of deep coalitions is characterized by "a transgressive hearing from within other transgressive enclaves" (82). Lugones describes it as "*metacommunication across liminal sites*," a communication that is not outwards (directed at the oppressor) or inwards (directed at oneself or one's own group), but multidirectional (connecting heterogeneous subject positions, sensibilities, and worlds of sense). In this metacommunication liminal subjects develop an awareness of the shattering of established worlds of sense and the advent of new worlds of sense in the making *from multiple liminal sites*. At a meta-level, liminal subjects can communicate about the limits of ready-made meanings and the limitless possibilities of nascent meanings in heterogeneous liminal spaces. It is crucial that in this meta-communication nothing is fixed, not even the languages in which communicators express themselves. Hence the importance of the use of multiple languages and dialects in this metacommunication, and the willingness of communicators to partake in

and contribute to a multiplicity of linguistic formations and configurations. For, as Lugones puts it: "The metacommunication hinges on the form of the speech" (82). "Here, it is the form of the speech, its polyglossia, that communicates with other intercultural polyglots, and it may be both meant and heard as an invitation to open up, to complicate, the polyglossia" (83).

As I interpret Lugones's account, the "metacommunication across liminal sites" that is required for complex communication involves both positive and negative insights about shared and non-shared liminal worlds. As mentioned above, complex communication in the limen starts with the mutual recognition of the shared predicament of liminality from multiple sites, that is, the realization whereby subjects recognize each other as standing "beyond the reach of oppressive, paralyzing, demeaning, reductive descriptions" (Lugones 2006, 77). This recognition leads to important negative realizations: that ready-made meanings and fixed frameworks of intelligibility fail us; and, more importantly, that the norms and expectations that regulate our communicative interactions betray the complexity of our lives. In particular, Lugones emphasizes here the distorting and oppressive force of the norms of *univocity* and *transparency* that make communicators expect and demand that their meanings and identities be univocal and transparent to themselves and to each other. Complex communication can only happen when norms about univocity and transparency have been suspended, when we are not expected to speak in one voice, with univocal meanings, and making ourselves and our inner worlds readily understandable in a transparent way. But besides these negative insights, there are also positive insights that are key components of the "metacommunication across liminal sites" required for complex communication: in the first place, the praxical recognition of the value of opacity and multiplicity. It may appear that this simply follows from rejecting the norms of transparency and univocity; but it is one thing to open ourselves to non-transparent and non-univocal meanings in the abstract, and quite another thing to learn to appreciate, in practice, concrete opaque and multiple configurations of ourselves and of our interlocutors.

In the second place, another positive insight and attitude that guides complex communication across liminal sites is what Lugones describes as "an openness to the interlocutor as real" (Lugones 2006, 76). This underscores the importance of the *materiality* of complex communicative encounters, that is, the importance of encountering others *in the flesh*, as they are, not as they have been imagined, anticipated, or spoken of; or, as Lugones

sometimes puts it, the importance of letting ourselves be interpellated by the face of the other, of *speaking face to face/hablando cara a cara*.

In the third place, complex communication requires "an openness to learn each other's meanings," "meanings that did not precede the encounter, ways of life that transcend nationalisms, root identities, and other simplifications of our imaginations" (Lugones 2006, 84). Lugones emphasizes that the recognition of "liminality in others and in ourselves" and the recognition of "a need for company and for coalition" among liminal subjects are the grounds on which "we can decide to enter into a conversation with other liminals that is not a liberal conversation" (ibid.)—by which she means a conversation that is not reductive and monological. Because "we know that liminal lives are led and created against the grain," in complex communication "we have good reasons not to assimilate what we hear and see to the oppressor's meaning or to our own" (ibid.). And note that what needs to be resisted here is *any* form of semantic assimilation or appropriation, not only to mainstream meanings and hegemonic frameworks of intelligibility but also to non-mainstream and non-hegemonic ones. This is one of the reasons why opacity is a central and non-eliminable feature of complex communication: "Complex communication thrives on recognition of opacity and on reading opacity, not through assimilating the text of others to our own" (ibid.).

Finally, in the fourth place, the openness to radically new (unassimilable) meanings is intimately connected with another key ingredient of complex communication: the openness to self-transformation. The "transgressive hearing from within other transgressive enclaves" (82) of complex communication requires an openness to be affected by each other's experiences and histories, by each other's meanings and memories. There is no complex communication if the communicators come out of the encounter untouched, with their subjectivity unaltered. Complex communication requires an openness to be transformed by the other: "in complex communication we create and cement relational identities" (ibid.). Complex communication is necessarily transformative: "it is enacted through a change in one's own vocabulary, one's sense of self, one's way of living, in the extension of one's collective memory" (ibid.).

Recent discussions in social and political epistemology have addressed both the positive and the negative insights that are part of this complex communication across liminal sites. In particular, recent *epistemologies of ignorance* (Sullivan and Tuana 2007) and discussions of *epistemic injustice*

(Fricker 2007; Medina 2013) have offered accounts of the epistemic harms and communicative dysfunctions created by distorting ideologies (such as racism and sexism), and they have underscored the need to resist oppressive frameworks of intelligibility, to cultivate new forms of communicative dynamics and to develop new communicative sensibilities. But these bodies of literature tend to be heavily focused on the cognitive side of epistemic oppression and epistemic liberation, without giving center stage to the role played by emotions and the imagination. And this is precisely where Lugones's account of complex communication across liminal sites has a lot of offer to discussions of epistemic oppression. For the kind of challenge that complex communication poses is not only a cognitive challenge, but also and fundamentally an emotional and imaginative challenge. Lugones's account of complex communication can enrich current discussions in political epistemology by shedding light on the role that subversive affectivity and creativity can play in the coalitional resistance against epistemic oppression. For the remainder of this section, I will elucidate the role of affect in complex communication across liminal sites and in forging deep coalitions. In the next section, I will elucidate how resistant imaginations operate in complex communication and the role of creativity, focusing especially on political art and subversive epistemic practices that can be both world-shattering and world-constituting, which I will describe as practices of *epistemic activism*.

Being attuned to the emotional side of communication is always important, but it is even more crucial when communication takes place under conditions of *epistemic injustice*, that is, among those who have been excluded or marginalized in meaning-making and knowledge-sharing practices. It is impossible to overemphasize the importance of emotional expressivity under conditions of epistemic oppression and marginalization, when there is a scarcity of expressive and interpretative resources and the ones that exist are reductive or distorting, when there is a loss of intelligibility and severe difficulties in securing proper uptake. Emotional expressivity is particularly apt to identify and communicate what Audre Lorde and María Lugones call "the walls of meaning," the limits of interpretative horizons and worlds of intelligibility. There are specific emotional reactions that signal the loss of intelligibility and give expression to the experiences of not being heard or not being understood appropriately and fairly, that is, experiences of testimonial and hermeneutical injustices. But interestingly, with the exception of Alison Bailey's forthcoming essay on anger, robust

discussions of the role of emotion and the affective side of communication are lacking in the literature on epistemic injustice.

Denouncing the absence of anger in this literature, Alison Bailey provocatively asks: "[I]f anger is the emotion of injustice, and if injustices have a prominent epistemic dimension, where is the anger in epistemic injustice?" (forthcoming, 1). In her powerful analysis of the role of anger in epistemic injustice, Bailey emphasizes how the misattribution of anger to marginalized subjects as well as the unwelcoming receptivity to their expressed anger trigger a form of tone policing—she calls it *tone vigilance*—which can lead to preemptive silencing and what she describes as *affective testimonial smothering*, that is, "a form of self-tone-policing that happens when the speaker recognizes that her audience lacks either the empathy or the affective competence to make sense of her anger as *she* experiences it" (7). But even when this lack of receptivity to affectively charged communication does not lead to smothering and anger is expressed, affect-based epistemic injustices are perpetrated in what Bailey calls "*anger-silencing spirals*," which she describes as "closed hermeneutical systems in which the speaker suffers a double epistemic injury—neither her testimony nor her anger get uptake, and she is left with a dense, hot, swelling rage in her chest" (4). But suffocating as they may be, subjects may find a way out of these anger-silencing spirals. Following Lugones's pluralistic account of anger, Bailey argues "that a particular texture of anger—a *knowing resistant anger*—offers marginalized knowers a powerful resource for countering epistemic injustice" (1). As Bailey puts it, resistant anger "prompts us to seek out resistant epistemic communities and new worlds of sense where our epistemic confidence can be restored" (2).

Following Lugones, Bailey emphasizes that resistant anger is *hard to handle* "in the sense that it is messy, disorderly, complex, and difficult to manage. It resists being well-ordered, controlled, disciplined, and tidy" (9). Resistant anger is opaque and resists assimilation to established frameworks of intelligibility; it defies transparency. The liberatory potential of resistant anger in fact resides in its capacity to travels across worlds of sense and to retain vivid memories of its struggles across these worlds. As Bailey explains it, "[A]ngry selves have the capacity to remember those 'worlds' where our anger is intelligible and those 'worlds' where it is not"—hence the subversive and emancipatory potential of resistant anger, since "resisting silencing practices requires that, when we are in dominant 'worlds,' we never forget those 'worlds' where our anger at injustice makes perfect

sense" (ibid.). And of course the resistant work of anger across worlds of sense is not just a subjective achievement, but an intersubjective achievement. Bailey rightly underscores the communal aspect of resistant anger: "Our angers are never fully our own. They are partially formed by the 'world'-dependent *affective ancestries* of marginalized social groups. [. . .] Members of oppressed/silenced⇔resisting/angry communities have collective memories of their suffering, and historical trauma and pain shape the contours of their collective anger" (10). As Bailey underscores, both at the personal and at the communal level, it is crucial that we adopt a pluralistic perspective on resistant anger and we talk about "plural angry selves" and about "plural oppressed/silenced⇔resisting/angry communities." For, as José Muñoz points out, "[V]arious historically coherent groups 'feel differently' and navigate the material world on a different emotional register" (as quoted by Bailey in ibid.). But whereas Bailey pays close attention to the pluralistic and communal aspects of anger, she does not explicitly address the *coalitional* potential of resistant anger. This can be brought to the fore if we elucidate the role that resistant anger can play in metacommunication across liminal sites. In what follows I will go beyond Bailey's account of the liberatory uses of anger in affective communication by connecting Lugones's concept of "hard-to-handle anger" with her concept of complex communication and by elucidating how *second-order anger* functions within complex communication.

In her account of "hard-to-handle anger," Lugones draws a crucial distinction between *first-order* and *second-order* anger. Lugones describes first-order anger as "anger that has a communicative intent and does or does not succeed in getting 'uptake' within a particular world of sense" (2003, 108). First-order anger seeks to make itself intelligible within the world of sense in which it is expressed; it aims at expanding a given framework of intelligibility, adding a domain of sense that was not recognized before. By contrast, second-order angers do not have communicative intent within established or normalized worlds of sense: "They presuppose worlds of sense against which the anger constitutes an indictment or a rebellion, worlds of sense from which one needs to separate" (104). Second-order anger has a separatist motivation with respect to dominant (or mainstream) worlds of sense, but it gestures toward other worlds of sense. Second-order anger contains a communicative gesture that can be used in metacommunication across liminal worlds. As Lugones puts it, second-order anger is "anger across worlds of sense,"

"anger that contains a recognition that there is more than one world of sense;" and it contains "a communicative intent of a very different, non-cognitive sort, without itself being devoid of cognitive content" (110–11). Lugones distinguishes between the non-communicative dimension and the communicative dimension of second-order anger. In what she calls its non-communicative dimension, second-order anger "decries the sense of the world that erases it... It recognizes this world's walls. It pushes against them rather than making claims within them" (111). In its communicative dimension, second-order anger "*echoes or reverberates* across worlds" (ibid.; my emphasis). Lugones writes:

> Anger creates an environment, a context, a tone, and it *echoes*. (105; my emphasis)

> This anger speaks its sense within the official world of sense in enraged tones without the intention to make sense to those within it. Its harshness attests to the hardness of the walls against which and over which it echoes. Its intimidating power indicates that it does echo. Its inspiring power indicates that it does echo. This is separatist anger. (111–12)

Second-order anger is a key component in metacommunication across worlds of sense; it is the affective side of that metacommunication and Lugones explains it brilliantly using the notion of *emotional echoing* that she borrows from Claudia Card. As Card puts it, emotional echoing consists in "picking up and feeling in oneself the joy, or sadness of others surrounding us, without any perception of the basis of these feelings, or even awareness that what we are doing is reproducing the feeling of others;" (1990, 152) the "underlying reasons are not communicated with the feeling" (166). But this is not to say that emotional echoing is mere contagion or mimicry; it is a more complex kind of affective communication. As I understand Lugones's account of the emotional echoing of hard-to-handle anger, what is communicated in this emotional echoing is not a cognitive content, but a *cognitive task*: "The fact that the cognitive content of across-worlds anger is not understood does not mean that the anger is cognitively empty or expressed as cognitively empty. It means, rather, that it cannot be intended across worlds as cognitively straightforward, and as we saw, some across-worlds anger is precisely about lack of across-worlds intelligibility" (2003, 116–17).

When hard-to-handle anger is expressed, it issues a cognitive task, an invitation or a provocation. Lugones emphasizes that hard-to-handle anger "depends on emotional echoing to communicate the need for understanding" (2003, 117). The emotional echoing of hard-to-handle anger calls upon us to recognize the failures of intelligibility within existing worlds of sense and to engage in the collaborative construction of new worlds of sense. It invites us to feel estranged from a world of sense that has failed us; and this estrangement from the world that is echoed in hard-to-handle anger also involves estrangement from ourselves and from each other, so that we look not only at the world anew, but we also look at ourselves, at our own identities, with fresh eyes. The world-making impetus of hard-to-handle anger involves an impetus toward *self-transformation*: "This anger recognizes more than one world and recognizes the need for creating not just a different speech but a different self" (114). Sometimes, Lugones points out, we can witness self-transformation in front of our eyes when hard-to-handle anger is expressed. She illustrates this by recounting her conversations with a northern New Mexican Chicano and witnessing his "personality change" when she asked him "what knowledge he had gained from his oppressed condition;" and he went—she tells us—from being "at a loss for words, confused," to becoming "self-possessed in anger: clear-headed, no nonsense, going to the core of the racist matter, immovable, determined, his muscles and his voice tense, backing up his words" (112).

Lugones rightly emphasizes that the most interesting and productive part of hard-to-handle anger is to be found in second-order anger which, unlike first-order anger, is not backward looking and focused on the worlds we find ourselves in, but rather, is forward looking and focused on worlds to be constructed. According to Lugones, exemplary descriptions of this "future-looking second-order anger" can be found in Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987) and in Audre Lorde's "Uses of Anger" (1996). We will come back to Anzaldúa in the next section, but let's conclude this one by calling attention to the convergence between Lugones's and Lorde's accounts of a particular kind of creative and productive anger and its potential for forging coalitions. This is a "constructive anger between peers" that Lorde described as "a grief of distortions between peers" and contrasted with the anger that keeps peers separate. Lorde emphasizes that this constructive anger based on a shared "grief of distortion" requires "peers meeting upon a common basis to examine

difference, and to alter those distortions which history has created around our difference" (1996, 129–mk0-,30). This constructive anger can bring oppressed subjects together; it has coalitional force.

The creative impetus of this resistant anger is not only identity-shaping, but also community-building. Through emotional echoing, hard-to-handle anger can be part of a process of complex communication that connects resistant agency across multiple liminal worlds. As Lugones puts it, "this is anger that echoes across different [resistant] worlds of sense;" (2003, 115) and thus it is world-creating and self-creating across multiple liminal worlds, facilitating solidarity and political transformation. Focusing on artistic practices such as storytelling and public visual art, I will try to briefly elucidate the crucial role that creativity and the exercise of resistant imaginations have in liberatory forms of complex communication that forge deep coalitions.

Resistant Imaginations and The Creative Side of Complex Communication: Art and Epistemic Activism

How do we get to the limen? In considering this question there are two key points to ponder. In the first place, the limen is not a *given* place that we simply find, but something to be created, the product of our creative agency. It is in this sense that Lugones emphasizes that "the limen is wrought from [our] hands, from a deep creative impulse," "a poiesis that is against the grain" (2006, 80)—and she draws from Humberto Maturana's notion of *autopoiesis* to shed light on the kind of creative agency out of which liminal worlds are made. You will not find yourself in the limen without your creative agency having been actively implicated in the process of disclosing such a place/world of sense. But, in the second place, another key point to keep in mind is that the limen is not a *single* place. There are indefinitely many concrete journeys into the limen: "our journeys to the limen are different, often at odds, often in great tension;" (77) and, in fact, we should understand the expression "the limen" as a shorthand for multiple, heterogeneous liminal sites or worlds. As Lugones puts it: "there is not one limen where we get to meet as a matter of course as we resist oppression. Rather, the different journeys that we have taken to liminal sites have constituted each limen as a different way of life, not reducible to other resistant, contestatory ways of life" (83).

How do we connect these liminal sites? How do coalitions across liminal sites get forged? Lugones observes that the creation and inhabitation of a liminal world do not guarantee a meta-level consciousness of liminality that can be sustained across liminal sites, the kind of *meta-lucidity*[2] produced in complex communication and needed for deep coalitions: "That we 'world'-travel does not guarantee that we have a meta-level of consciousness of inhabiting the limen. [...] All of this, so far, is not about coalition but about reconstituting oneself as active" (2006, 79). It is in this sense that Lugones points out that "the inhabitation of the limen is not a revolutionary move, it is rather a preparation, a creative preparation" (ibid.). This creative preparation has to be continued with sustained creative efforts at complex communication, for it is only in complex communication that coalitional gestures can be expressed and can receive proper uptake, it is only in complex communication that "we create and cement relational identities" (84).

Lugones identifies Gloria Anzaldúa's storytelling as a prime exemplar of the kind of creative agency in complex communication that can lead to deep coalitions. But, of course, the creative complex communication that can be mutually transformative and conducive to deep coalitions can take a multiplicity of shapes and forms depending on the communicative media and styles that are used. In what follows I will first focus on Gloria Anzaldúa's storytelling as a paradigm of complex communication through written language, as elucidated by Lugones. Secondly, I will expand on Lugones's account by elucidating Doris Salcedo's public installations as a paradigm of complex communication through visual art. Whether through verbal or through visual communication, writers and visual artists can instigate transformative processes of complex communication and performatively issue coalitional gestures and provocations. As instigators and provocateurs of this sort, I will describe artists such as Anzaldúa or Salcedo—and any participant in deeply transformative artistic practice, whether professional artist or not—as *epistemic activists*, that is, as guerrilla fighters for the liberation of oppressed epistemic sensibilities and producers of epistemic friction between sensibilities for the sake of their mutual transformation and enrichment. As I have explained elsewhere (2018 and forthcoming), *epistemic activism* is the practice of staging critical interventions that facilitate openness to new perspectives and perspective-shifts, the practice of setting up subversive communicative dynamics in which epistemic friction is produced and exploited for the liberation of marginalized perspectives. Understood as forms of epistemic activism, artistic practices

can be thought of as opportunities for resistant imaginations to become entangled with each other, trying to touch and move each other, trying to forge coalitional ties and to trigger processes of mutual transformation. As I hope my brief elucidations of Anzaldúa's storytelling and Salcedo's public installations will show, artistic practices offer paradigm cases of complex communicative activities that can be used for self-transformation, mutual transformation, and the forging of deep coalitions.

As Lugones emphasizes, Anzaldúa does not simply *describe* her journey to her own liminal world, the borderlands, she *dramatizes* it for us, she performatively *enacts* it, inviting us to witness a process of self-transformation that offers, through coalitional gestures, transformative possibilities for the readers as well. In sharp contrast to representational and spectatorial conceptions of writing and reading that create a distance between depicted objects and contemplative subjects, for Anzaldúa, writing and reading are engaged and deeply self-involved creative activities in which we reconstitute ourselves and the worlds of sense in which we live. As Lugones puts it in her elucidation of Anzaldúa's storytelling:

> It is a writing of stories that are not textual. They are acts encapsulated in time. She writes not in the sense of interpreting or representing the world. Rather, [...] she enacts, performs, lively creations and re-creations, re-creations of her own self. These are in the world, but they are in the liminal world, the space in between structural descriptions. [...] Her storytelling is the mechanism to enter the borderlands. (2006, 80)

For Anzaldúa, storytelling is not about describing past events; it is about making and remaking memories, making and remaking a world of sense. Offering these memories to the reader is a way of performatively expressing her openness to complex communication with the *atravezados/as* and a way of inviting them to cultivate such openness as well. As Lugones brilliantly explains, this performatively expressed openness to complex communication contains a coalitional gesture and can be the entry point into a joint journey in which we keep each other company across liminal worlds. This is how Lugones puts it:

> The particular openness is expressed as a willingness to traverse each other's collective memories as not quite separate from each other and as containing the stuff that she may incorporate into her own

> recreation. The new mestiza is a scavenger of collective memories, memories that she does not see as completely discontinuous with her own. This to me is a very important ingredient of Anzaldúa's story. It is the coalitional gesture; it begins to provide an understanding of complex communication. (2006, 80–81)

By making her memories cognitively and affectively available in performative ways, by reenacting them with us, for us, Anzaldúa's storytelling contains a crucial coalitional gesture, the gesture of inviting us to witness her self-transformation and to respond to it: "She metamorphoses in front of our very eyes [...] asking for a response" (2006, 81). This coalitional gesture in Anzaldúa's storytelling is also the gesture of inviting us to be transformed by her self-writing and her recreated memories, to *share* them with her in a deep-coalitional sense, that is, in the sense of accepting and meeting the cognitive and affective challenge of finding our own meaning in them, without translation or assimilation, finding ways in which one's journey can be meaningfully affected by the identity-shaping memories of other travelers. This complex communication requires being willing and able "to traverse each other's memories" and to use this expanded body of collective memories as the ground for our resistance and the exercise of our resistant imaginations. It is not that Anzaldúa's writing *by itself*, or our reading of that writing *by itself*, is going to establish automatically a deep coalition between us, but the self-writing issues a coalitional gesture that can be followed with creative and complex communicative efforts, the beginning of a mutual self-entanglement, the beginning of a process of complex communication in which the coalition can be forged and maintained as an always precarious achievement, a fragile bond always in the making that can only be sustained by complex communication that needs to keep flowing. This is how Lugones described the beginning of a process of complex communication prompted by Anzaldúa's storytelling:

> The communication is complex since in asking for a response, it does rule out reduction, translation, and assimilation. Understanding her journey requires a significant extension of my own intercultural journey. I see then a coalitional gesture in her story and in her openness to collective memories that back and form the ground for our resistance. (Ibid.)

Coalitional gestures that can prompt complex communication across liminal sites and the forging of deep coalitions can be performatively issued and followed up in other ways and in other communicative media, for example, in visual media and visual communication. The visual art of the Colombian artist Doris Salcedo has aimed at instigating complex communication of a similar kind, prompting subjects and communities to deeply interrogate how their identities and histories relate to other identities and histories, and to dwell on experiences of estrangement and mutual entanglement. Salcedo's most notorious installations are interventions in public spaces that make these familiar places appear unfamiliar or uncanny, planting carefully crafted material provocations in these spaces that call for the sharing of memories and the mutual entanglement of collective memories. Salcedo's powerful works address the importance of remembrance and mourning in relation to issues of violence, displacement and colonial oppression. She composes her pieces with everyday objects—such as chairs, desks, shoes, dresses, etc.—which are reminiscent of the lost lives that passed through them. Some of Salcedo's pieces are public performances of mourning which echo experiences of violence without representing them (and underscoring the impossibility of their representation), and reenact ways of resisting the oblivion of traumatic events.[3]

Salcedo's provocative visual installations alter public spaces dramatically but in such a way that the alteration blends into the space and can remain unnoticed. On the surface, they can appear inconspicuous; but upon being noticed, they become disorienting, mesmerizing, hypnotic; we are drawn to them and they provoke in us experiences of the uncanny, defamiliarizing familiar spaces we pass by and interrogating our perspective and positionality in those spaces. The understated appearance of some of her works belies the complexity of their provocation. These qualities are perfectly displayed by the untitled installation that Salcedo produced for the 8th International Istanbul Biennial. For this installation Salcedo chose a vacant lot in downtown Istanbul in which she crammed 1,550 wooden chairs stacked between two buildings, calling attention to the complex history of forced migration and displacement in the city. This piece has a complex emotional texture and it intimates experiences of being suffocated, of being stuck, of being entangled, of being pushed down by the weight of the lives of others, and of being forgotten. It brings to the fore in a vivid and dramatic way the close relationship between place and displacement, between the history of a place and histories of being displaced; and it invites us to

interrogate our own positionality with respect to that place and the multiple forms of displacement that have shaped it, offering opportunities to connect our ordinary experiences of inhabiting a place with the experiences of multiple displaced others and to become critically transformed and affected by those experiences.

Another example of decolonial public art that prompts complex communication and the entanglement of marginalized perspectives can be found in Salcedo's *Shibboleth* (2007–8), a provocative installation that calls attention to the fact that the very ground on which we stand is shaped by complex histories of colonial domination and exclusion that remain invisible unless we look down and inspect the cracks of the ground on which we walk, decentering our perspective and taking into account the perspectives of others who may have fallen between those cracks. This installation is an enormous (548-foot-long) crack that Salcedo and her team created in the floor of the Turbine Hall at the Tate Modern in London, in order to call attention to the colonial and postcolonial fissures in society that still persist today. The crack is not only long and imposing, but also deep and richly textured inside, enticing people's imaginations about possible underworlds beneath them and inviting them to kneel down and inspect what might be hidden underneath. The term "shibboleth" that Salcedo used as a title for this installation comes from a story in the Bible in which invaders used the pronunciation of this word to identify and execute Ephraimites, whose dialect used a differently sounding first consonant. As the title suggests, the installation aims at provoking reflections about how cultural differences have been used to separate, exclude and stigmatize groups, and how stigmatization and cultural violence can become constitutive of one's world and part of the very ground on which we stand.[4] The installation also has a complex emotional texture, making us feel the disorientation of standing over a ground that opens up into the abyss, the vertigo of looking down between the cracks, the fear of not knowing what is beneath us, supporting our weight, enabling us to stand and walk. This is how Salcedo explains what the piece tries to express and create:

> It represents borders, the experience of immigrants, the experience of segregation, the experience of racial hatred. It is the experience of a Third World person coming into the heart of Europe. For example, the space which illegal immigrants occupy is a negative space. And so this piece is a negative space.[5]

What is remarkable about Salcedo's installations is that, rather than telling us a story, they stage uncanny scenarios for sharing experiences from eccentric, non-dominant perspectives. In other words, they invite complex communication across liminal sites; they usher us into liminal sites and invite us to explore liminal worlds of experiences and memories from multiple perspectives. In this sense, Salcedo's visual artwork is exemplary of how public art can be viewed as a form of *epistemic activism*, that is, as a critical intervention in a public space designed to produced epistemic friction between different sensibilities and to produce complex communication through coalitional gestures. Of course, Salcedo's installations cannot guarantee that the publics that interact with them will in fact engage in complex communication that will produce beneficial epistemic friction and mutual transformations (no artwork can ever guarantee that); but they offer *coalitional gestures* (just as Anzaldúa's storytelling does in a different medium of artistic expression): they stage spaces of decentered interaction that facilitate meta-reflection across perspectives and communicative processes of estrangement and mutual transformation, of becoming transformed and affected by each other's experiences and memories. Deep coalitions may or may not emerge from encounters with political art of this kind, but the coalitional gesture is expressed in and through the art; and whether or not that gesture will lead to the forging of a deep coalition will depend on the processes of complex communication we are interpellated to cultivate through the provocation of the artist. In the epistemic activism of Anzaldúa's storytelling and of Salcedo's installations we see a creative practice of opening people's eyes and hearts to liminal worlds, of staging meetings across liminal sites that are not aimed at straightforward understanding, but at appreciating our own opacity[6] and that of others and cultivating bonds of solidarity through emotional echoing. For, as Mariana Ortega puts it, coalitional politics—in the sense of *deep coalition* espoused by Lugones—aims at a "*becoming-with* that involves not just understanding others but being transformed by them and with them" (2016, 155).

There are three aspects of opacity that Anzaldúa's storytelling and Salcedo's public installations bring to the fore and that, as a way of concluding this essay, I want to highlight as key aspects of complex communication where the potential for deep coalitions reside: elusiveness or openness; multiplicity of mediations; and transformative agential involvement. In the first place, liminal encounters (through story-telling, through visual art, or in

other ways) are irreducibly opaque in the sense that they are forever elusive: they are characterized by their openness, the impossibility of pinning down the voices and perspectives of participants in these encounters, their resistance to being reductively defined or assimilated to established frameworks of intelligibility. This is one of the ways in which complex communication defies transparency. In the second place, liminal encounters are opaque because they are multiply mediated, and the possible mediations they admit remain forever open, so that they cannot be fully captured and understood according to a single logic, horizon of understanding or framework of intelligibility. Opaque experiences of encountering and missing each other in liminal sites are—as Bailey says it of hard-to-handle angers—"messy, disorderly, complex, and difficult to manage;" they resist "being well-ordered, controlled, disciplined, and tidy" (forthcoming, 9). In the third place, the opacity of complex communication in liminal encounters also resides in the fact that subjects cannot participate in it as mere spectators who take distance from a secure subject position. There is no distance between subjects and no fixed and clearly identifiable subject positions. Participants are actively involved and their active involvement has the potential to transform who they are and how they occupy fluid subject positions.

As we saw above in the discussion of hard-to-handle anger, what explains the opacity of complex communication is the lack of a straightforward communicative intent or a straightforward communicative receptivity: participants in it do not simply produce and receive messages that can be straightforwardly understood and reacted to; they produce and receive complex *tasks*—complex cognitive, emotional, and agential challenges that are predicated on the failure of straightforward understanding within a world of sense. The three aspects of opacity I have emphasized in complex communication—its elusiveness or openness, multiplicity of mediations, and transformative agential involvement—can be understood in terms of communicative tasks or challenges that *echo*, reverberate, or evoke across worlds of sense, and lead to the entanglement and mutual transformations of perspectives. As we saw in section 1, the emotional echoing that is distinctive of the affective side of complex communication captures well these three features: its productive elusiveness, its way of connecting mediations and worlds of sense in open and uncontrollable ways, and its capacity to get us involved through tasks (i.e. challenges, invitations or provocations) that call upon us to recognize the failures of intelligibility within existing worlds of sense and to engage in the collaborative construction of new worlds of

sense. As underscored in this section, this emotional echoing is well illustrated by the complex emotional texture and the capacity to issue coalitional gestures in Anzaldúa's storytelling and in Salcedo's visual art.

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NOTES

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1. For an account of disidentification and its subversive possibilities, see José E. Muñoz's *Disidentifications* (1999) and José Medina's "Identity Trouble" (2003).
2. For an account of "meta-lucidity," see chapter 5 of Medina (2013).
3. For a lucid analysis of Salcedo's piece *Noviembre 6–7* (2002) in Bogota, Colombia, and how this piece performs mourning and resistance to oblivion, see Acosta López (2014, 2016).
4. Interestingly, although the crack was filled in after the exhibit ended in April 2008, a visible line in the floor remains, *as a scar*, reminding us of the forgotten and invisibilized underworlds we walk on. As the Tate director, Sir Nicholas Serota, stated during the exhibit: "There is a crack, there is a line, and eventually there will be a scar. It will remain as a memory of the work and also as a memorial to the issues Doris touches on" ("Welcome to Tate Modern's Floor Show—It's 548 Foot Long and Is Called Shibboleth," *The Times*, 9 October 2007)
5. Salcedo quoted in ibid.
6. Salcedo's artwork fits in well with the decolonial, transformative art described by Susan Best as the art that rejects "the postcolonial demand to answer back to the empire" and aims at revisiting and critically inhabiting "*missed* encounters" that "preserve the *opacity* of identity" (Best 2016, 95; my emphasis).

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