

From the house that modernity built to healthy mycelium

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This mini-zine is used in the “Gesturing towards decolonial futures” arts/education collective (see <http://decolonialfutures.net>). It is an educational experiment and pedagogical tool that invites conversations about our collective existence in a planet facing unprecedented crises. These conversations change the zine as well, therefore there are many different versions of it (like a palimpsest). We are interested in the conversations that are mobilized by the mini-zine rather than in getting the descriptions/representations right. What we present is one of many possible diagnoses and propositions.

The mini-zine presents two cartographies that comprise a theory-of-change. Every theory of change is made up of a diagnosis of the present, and a proposition about a horizon for change. On one side of this mini-zine there is a diagnosis (the house), on the other side, the proposition for a horizon and for a way of moving together (mushrooms and mycelium).

Each side of the zine presents a different social cartography. On one side, the social cartography “The House Modernity Built” offers a diagnosis of the present focusing on a modern/colonial global imaginary in which being is reduced to knowing, profits take precedent over people, the earth is treated as a resource rather than a living relation, and the shiny promises of states, markets, and Western reason are subsidized by the disavowed harms of impoverishment, genocide, and environmental destruction. On the other side of the zine, the social cartography “In Earth’s CARE” invites conversations about the possibility of setting horizons of hope beyond the house that modernity built. Through an earth centered metaphor, it proposes that ecological and economic justice (mushrooms) are not viable without cognitive, affective and relational justice (healthy mycelium). Together the social cartographies point to the need for a different kind of education where we see ourselves as part of a wider metabolism and where we learn to hospice modernity, learning from its recurrent mistakes, in order to open our imaginaries and make only new mistakes as we assist with the birth of something new, undefined, and potentially, but not necessarily, wiser.

The house modernity built

The social cartography “The house modernity built” was inspired by Audre Lorde’s famous insight that

“... the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change.”

The first four frames at the top of the cartography present a brief analysis of contemporary social structures and institutions facing social, political, ecological and economic crises. The four frames at the bottom of the cartography offer an analysis of how modernity affects our reasoning, our sense of self and reality, our desires, and our perceived entitlements, impairing our capacity to feel, to hope, to relate, and to be and imagine differently.

This cartography synthesizes critiques of modernity that have been mobilized in Indigenous, Black, Decolonial, Post-development, Post-colonial studies, and (different forms of) Psychoanalysis, through the works of scholars like Gayatri Spivak, Frantz Fanon, Denise Ferreira da Silva, Nelson Maldonado-Torres, Fred Moten, Arturo Escobar, Vandana Shiva, Boaventura de Souza Santos, Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, Sylvia Wynter, Glen Coulthard, Michalinos Zembylas, Ilan Kapoor, Sara Ahmed, Leela Gandhi, David Scott, M. Jacqui Alexander, and many others. A description of the house was first published in Stein and Andreotti (2017), and subsequently further developed in Stein, Hunt, Susa and Andreotti (2017), and Andreotti, Stein, Sutherland, Pashby, Susa, and Amsler (2018).

The house and the planet

The first frame of the zine presents a house built by modernity that is exceeding the limits of the planet. This house consists of:

- a foundation of separability (separations between humans and the earth, and hierarchies of human value)
- a carrying wall of universal reason based on Enlightenment humanism
- a carrying wall of the modern nation states grounded on principles of liberal rights and justice
- a (current) roof of global capital representing shareholder financial capitalism that has replaced roofs of industrial capitalism and socialism in different contexts

Hidden costs

The second frame draws attention to the externalized and invisibilized costs of building and maintaining the house through historical and on-going expropriation, land-theft, exploitation, destitution, dispossession and epistemicides, ecocides, and genocides (as these manifest contemporarily in e.g. extraction of blood minerals, arms trade, the denial of Indigenous peoples' treaty rights, violent policing both at and within the borders of the house, the poisoning of lands and waters through resource extraction, human trafficking, preventable famines and malnutrition, racialized incarceration, the testing of new drugs and treatments on vulnerable populations, interference in foreign elections, etc). One arrow points to the extraction of resources from the planet to the house, another shows the house dumping its sewage system and waste disposal on the planet.

Floors

The third frame complexifies the divisions within the house and problematizes desires related to the promise of social mobility for all. The top level of the house is presented as the “north-of-the north”: those who have accumulated the most wealth and power in the house and who have secured and stabilized their position as legitimate producers of value and heirs of the house. In the second level, the “north-of-the-south” is invested in climbing the stairs of social mobility in an effort to reach the bar established by the “north-of the-north”. The basement is the place of the “south-of-the-north” where people who have been exploited and marginalized within the house and who dis-identify with the aspirations of the second and top floors build their community. Outside of the house is the “south-of-the-south”, those who live without the securities that the house affords, who subsidize the existence of the house, paying the highest price for its maintenance, and who fight to protect alternatives to life inside the house.

This frame also identifies two types of struggle: high-intensity struggle for those who have been constantly at the receiving end of the house’s violences and fought for alternative ways of surviving at the basement or outside the house; and those engaged in low-intensity struggle for inclusion and opportunities within the house.

Structural Damage

The fourth frame shows the house cracking below a water-damaged roof collapsing under the weight of social, ecological, economic and political crises, including unsustainable growth, overconsumption, a surplus labour force, mental health crises, and cancelation of welfare and rights. The frame invites the questions: should we fix the house? Expand it? Build another house? Or create other types of shelter? In many conversations about this frame, it became important to mention the differences between different roofs, including industrial capitalism and different types of socialism. The shift from industrial capitalism to shareholder financial capitalism is extremely important in this frame as it changes the façade of modernity in relation to the role of the state.

Many critical scholars have pointed out that the modern nation state was designed to protect property (and property owners). They argue that human and civil rights have been granted only when there was interest convergence between the protection of people and the protection of capital, often within the context of the cold war (when capitalism needed to be seen as a better alternative to other – also imperial – socialist movements). Since these movements are no longer perceived to pose a threat to capitalism the façade is no longer necessary and convergences are much rarer. In the industrial form of capitalism, factory owners were publicly known, they were often directly involved in the management of production, they held a level of social and legal accountability for their workforce and they were perceived to be responsible for the impact of their activities in national contexts. With the demise of socialist alternatives and technological and structural changes in the globalized economy industrial capitalism shifted into shareholder financial capitalism. These changes were related to automation, information technology, liberalization of trade and capital flows, normalized debt, driven

speculative investment, the expansion of desire-driven consumer culture and other factors. Unlike industrial capitalism, shareholder financial capitalism is anonymised (no accountability), distributed (ordinary people are also – often oblivious – shareholders as pension funds, for example, are dependent on financial returns) and solely focused on the pressure of maximization of shareholders' returns (i.e. short-term profit).