

# **From the house that modernity built to healthy mycelium**

Vanessa Andreotti, Sharon Stein, Rene Susa with the Decolonial Futures Collective  
02.07.2018

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).

### ***(Imprinted) Reasoning***

The fifth frame, at the bottom, depicts how the house conditions our possibilities for experiencing the world by reducing being to knowing and life to meaning-making. This framework works like a grammar that defines what is intelligible, legitimate, viable and desirable within the house. The image of “Boxhead” a large square-headed being with a tiny (unfinished) outlined body has the referents that ascribe coherence to the project of modernity imprinted in its head: the modern dream of seamless progress, development and evolution carried out by human agency through the use of objective knowledge to control the environment and engineer a better society.

Boxhead ‘thinks, therefore he is’: his relationship with the world is mediated by his cognitive repertoire of meanings, rather than by his senses. Each referent enables a certain way of making meaning while bracketing all others, thereby buffering his sense of reality. Logocentrism compels him to believe that reality can be described in language in its totality. Universalism leads him to understand his interpretation of reality as objective and to project it as the only legitimate and valuable world view. Anthropocentric reasoning makes him see himself as separate from nature and having a mandate to manage, exploit and control it. Teleological thinking makes him want to plan for the engineering of a future that he can already imagine. Dialectical thinking traps him in a linear logic that is obsessed with consensus and resolutions and averse to paradoxes, complexities and contradictions. Allochronic and evolutionary thinking make him judge others according to a criteria where he is represented as being in the present of (linear) time, while others are in the past, and where he leads humanity in a single path of evolution (as the apex of civilization). This frame suggests that this drawing can be interrupted through sensual/emodied and aesthetic forces such as the erotic, the more-than-human, the divine and the hilarious.

### ***Harnessed Fears***

The sixth frame suggests that the house of modernity relates to existential fears created through the foundation of separability and its project of transcendence (of “nature”). Separability sustains the house: once we are no longer perceived as interwoven with the land, each other and the cosmos, and the land becomes “resource” or “property”, all other bodies (including human bodies) need to justify their existence by producing value in predetermined economies of worth. The project of transcending nature can take different forms, but is often characterized by an aversion to death, pain and loss, the overcoming of nature/flaws/material conditions/inter-dependence and control of a path that can secure the achievement

of a specific higher ideal (which may or not relate to a notion of God) (e.g. a better life, “greatness”, sovereignty, civilization, progress, development, evolution, etc., defined in multiple ways). The house modernity built constructs and harnesses certain fears to mobilize our motivation to invest in its reproduction and expansion. These fears become existential insecurities related to our vulnerability and lack of autonomy and self-insufficiency in the face of death, pain, “nature” and the universe at large. Our fears of scarcity, worthlessness, destitution, existential emptiness, loss, pain, death, impermanence, incompetence and insignificance are all mobilized in modern economies of value production where the intrinsic value of human and non-human life is denied.

### ***Compensatory Desires***

As we engage in the production of value for the validation and worth of our existence through intellectual, affective, and material economies established by modernity, our desires are allocated accordingly. For example, our harnessed fear of scarcity is turned into a “positive” desire for accumulation, our harnessed fear of impermanence becomes a desire for mastery, certainty, consensus, coherence and control. Our fear of incompetence becomes a desire for authority, and our fear of insignificance becomes a desire for external validation, community (on our terms) and universality/normalization.

### ***Perceived Entitlements***

Enacted within and dependent upon the continuity of the house, our compensatory desires become naturalized entitlements that mark and limit our ability to face and navigate the complexities of the social, economic, political and ecological crises that worsen as the house cracks. For example, the desire for accumulation is enacted as an entitlement to property, the desire for mastery is enacted as an entitlement to autonomy and stability, the desire for authority is enacted as an entitlement to the arbitration of justice, the desire for validation is enacted as an entitlement to admiration, innocence, virtue, exceptionalism, self-authorship (demanding that the world sees you as you see yourself) and leadership. These entitlements calibrate our hopes and fantasies sustaining colonial addictions and trapping human life-force within the collapsing house.

## **In Earth’s CARE**

The second social cartography is based on an analysis that posits that separability (the attempt to deny our entanglement with the earth, the cosmos and each other) is the root of the problems that we face in failing to imagine existence other than within the house of modernity. In this sense, the challenges we face are not related to a lack of information or strategy, but to a colonial habit of being. As a response, the cartography centers the invisibilized labor of the Earth in offering care, our responsibilities of reciprocity as part and parcel of its metabolism, and our accountability to future generations of human and non-human beings. A mycelium

analogy is used with reference to role of fungi in decomposition, regeneration, communication and distribution of nutrients within ecological systems. This analogy is also used to convey that ecological and economic justice (mushrooms) are not *viable* without cognitive, affective and relational justice (healthy mycelium). We work with *transformative* and *regenerative* (rather than liberal/representational) notions of justice-to-come.

**Ecological justice** is defined as “acting from and towards metabolic health and wellbeing” and economic justice is defined as “cooperating towards systemic (metabolic) balance”. Under the surface, the mycelium represents cognitive, affective and relational justice.

**Cognitive justice** refers to “nurturing encounters of knowledges and ignorances and recalibrating our relationship with language, meaning and knowledge (the known, the unknown and the unknowable)” – unlearning the imprinted legacy of the house of modernity on our reasoning.

**Affective justice** refers to “reconfiguring our neuro-biological connections (neuro-genesis) by digesting and composting our traumas, fears, denials and contradictions” – confronting our insecurities and re-allocating our desires away from modern-colonial investments and addictions.

**Relational justice** refers to “relating beyond knowledge, identity and understanding and enacting politics from a space of collective entanglement and radical tenderness” – embodying the existential conditions of responsibility before will, whereby generosity, humility and compassion are not enacted as intellectual choices but as a habitus that drives the emergence of new forms of relational politics.

**The wind** evokes the aspiration to move the setting of horizons of hope beyond the (end of the) house of modernity, in particular, its liberal conceptions of justice and rights. **The rain** represents lessons learned from racial, gender, class, queer, dis/ability and many other struggles for recognition, access, redistribution and political representation within the house, as well as Indigenous, anti-colonial, and abolitionist movements that have gestured outside of the house.

**The sun-dog** (rainbow around the sun) represents many Indigenous prophecies of humanity coming-of-age: better days to come for “all our relations”.

**“EarthCARE”** is an acronym for Ecological (“Earth”), Cognitive, Affective, Relational and Economic orientations of transformative and regenerative justice-to-come.