

**a complexity
approach to
decolonization
(and a decolonial
approach to complexity)**

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the University of Victoria on behalf
of the **Gesturing Towards
Decolonial Futures
Arts/Research Collective
(GTDF)**

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GTDF collective (decolonialfutures.net)

- GTDF overview + experiments
- All links: decolonialfutures.net/ciars



Affinity of inquiry approach: not seeking universal answers, hegemony, consensus or the “avant-garde”; foregrounding uncertainty, ambivalence, complexity and complicity; not afraid of paradoxes; committed to repurposing colonial institutions towards redistribution, reparations, restitution and regeneration and to working in service of the wider metabolism of the planet; inch wide, mile deep approach.

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GTDF collective (decolonialfutures.net)

- trans-disciplinary multi-generational collective of researchers, artists, educators, students and Indigenous and Afro-descendent knowledge keepers;
- works at the interface of questions related to historical, systemic and ongoing violence and questions related to the unsustainability of current modern/colonial systems;
- brings together concerns related to racism, colonialism, unsustainability, economic instability, wealth disparity, global mental health crises, climate and biodiversity catastrophes, intensifications of social and ecological violence and inequalities; and the likelihood of wider social and ecological collapse...

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GTDF collective (decolonialfutures.net)

- engaged in educational and artistic collaborative inquiry + experiments that build containers for the expansion of our collective capacity and stamina to face difficulty and pain and navigate complicity and complexity, without feeling overwhelmed, immobilized, demanding quick fixes or to be rescued from discomfort and without drowning in sadness, anger, frustration, guilt or shame;
- while it is recognized that vulnerabilities are unevenly distributed, no one is left off the hook (commitment to moving beyond essentialisms and idealization and to self-implicating critique, even if IBPOC/BIPOC);
- loop reciprocity: income generated from talks, workshops and courses redistributed to T5C network of Indigenous communities in Brazil and Peru who inspire and support this work.

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Chief Ninawa Inu Huni Kui
Acre, Amazon



Global advocate against the financialization of forests and carbon trading in the Amazon

Maria Jara Qquerar
Valle Sagrado, Peru



Community leader in protests against lithium mining in Indigenous territories

Mateus Tremembé
Ceará, Brazil



National leader against off-shore wind farms in Indigenous waters and food sovereignty advocate



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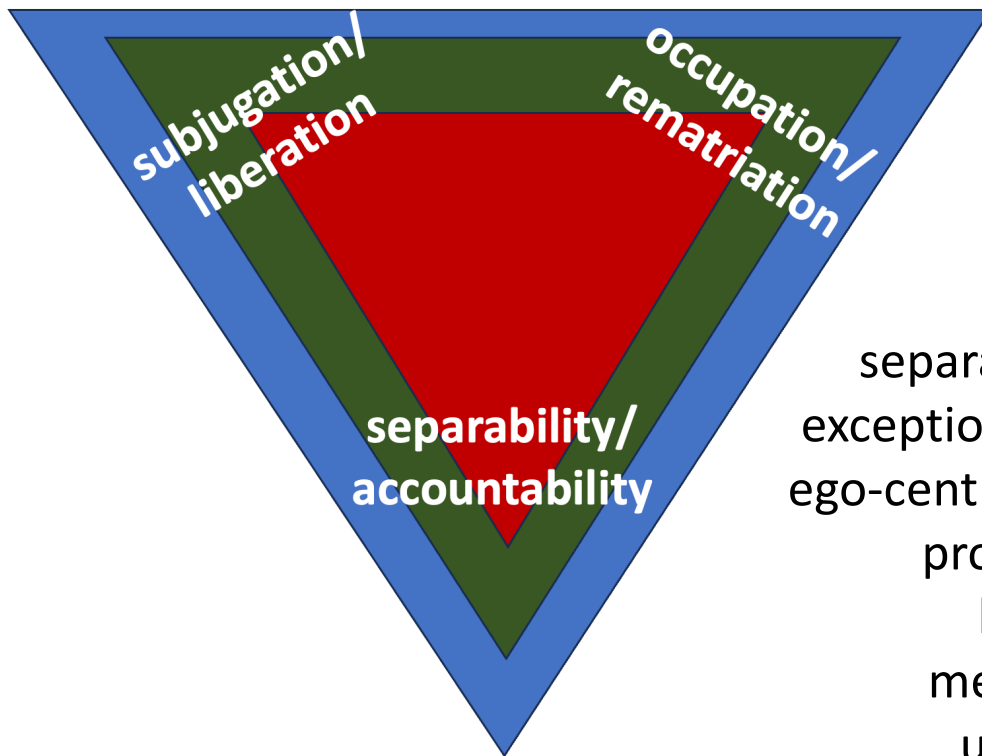
GTDF starting point

Colonialism as the onto-metaphysical imposed sense of separation between humans and the rest of nature, which creates hierarchies of value (domination/subjugation) and cognitive, affective and relational neurodegenerative impairments (e.g. land as property, occupation, exploitation, expropriation, genocides, ecocides...).

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GTDF inquiry overview

subjugation and occupation as symptoms of separability



separability manifests as human exceptionalism, anthropocentrism, ego-centrism, allochronism, land as property, cultural supremacy, human constructs as onto-metaphysics (ethnocentrism, universalism, logocentrism)

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4 socially sanctioned denials:

1. **the denial of systemic violence and complicity in harm:** the fact that our comforts, securities and enjoyments are subsidized by expropriation and exploitation (they happen at the expense of other people, species and land);
2. **the denial of the limits of the planet:** the fact that the planet cannot sustain exponential growth and consumption indefinitely;
3. **the denial of entanglement:** our insistence in seeing ourselves as separate from each other and the land, rather than “entangled” within a living wider metabolism that is bio-intelligent;
4. **the denial of the magnitude and complexity of the challenges we will need to face together:** the tendency to look for simplistic solutions that make us feel and look good and that may address symptoms, but not the root causes of our collective hyper-complex “wicked” predicament.

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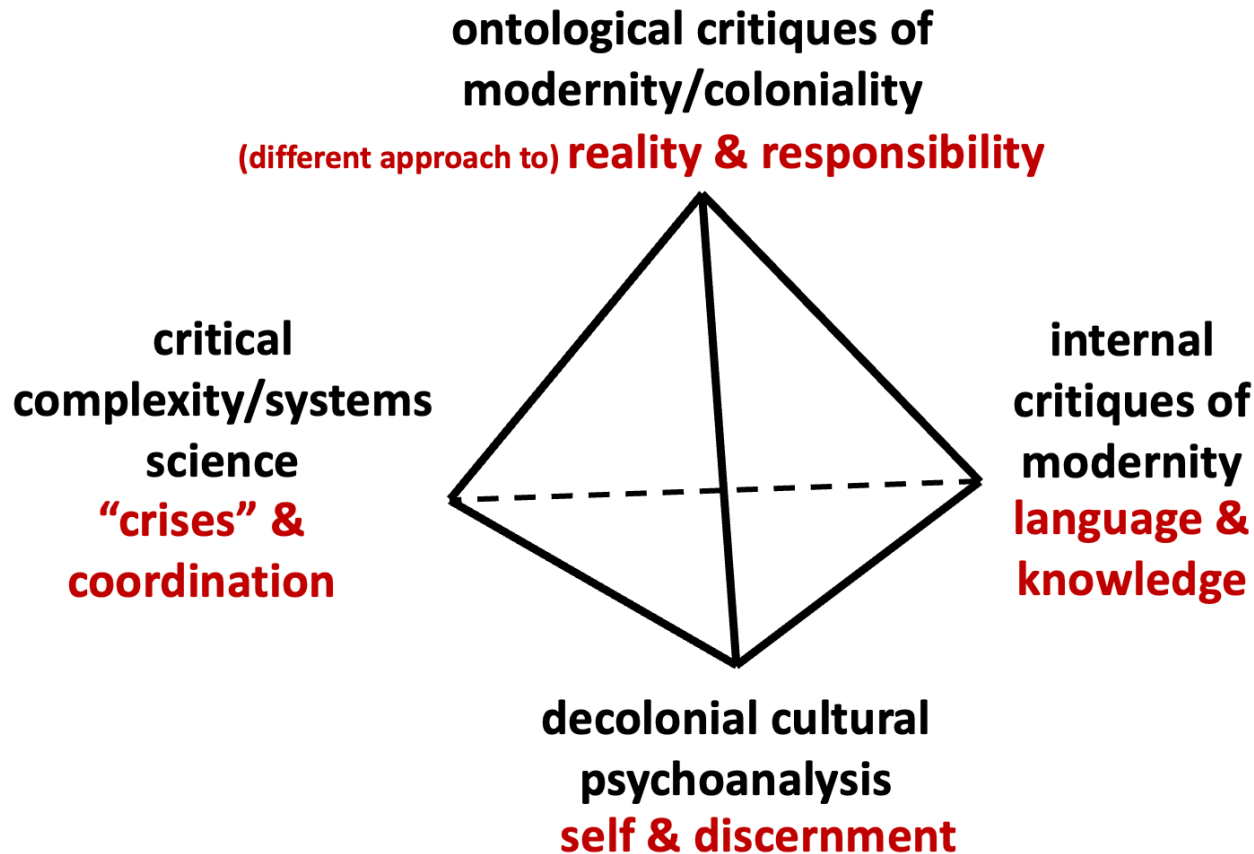
Decolonial analyses

About how modernity-coloniality:

- has kept us neuro-physiologically hooked to its promises and comforts;
- has limited the ways we can see, feel, relate, desire, heal and imagine;
- has led us to deny the violence and unsustainability that are required for it to exist, as well as our interdependence and the depth and magnitude of the mess we are in;
- has encouraged us to create delusions about our sense of self importance and our perceived entitlements, keeping us in an fragile and immature state that leaves us unequipped to face the challenges of our times;
- has untethered us from the realities of the planet, and the fact that our current mode of existence can cause our own extinction.

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GTDF inquiry influences (modes of critique)



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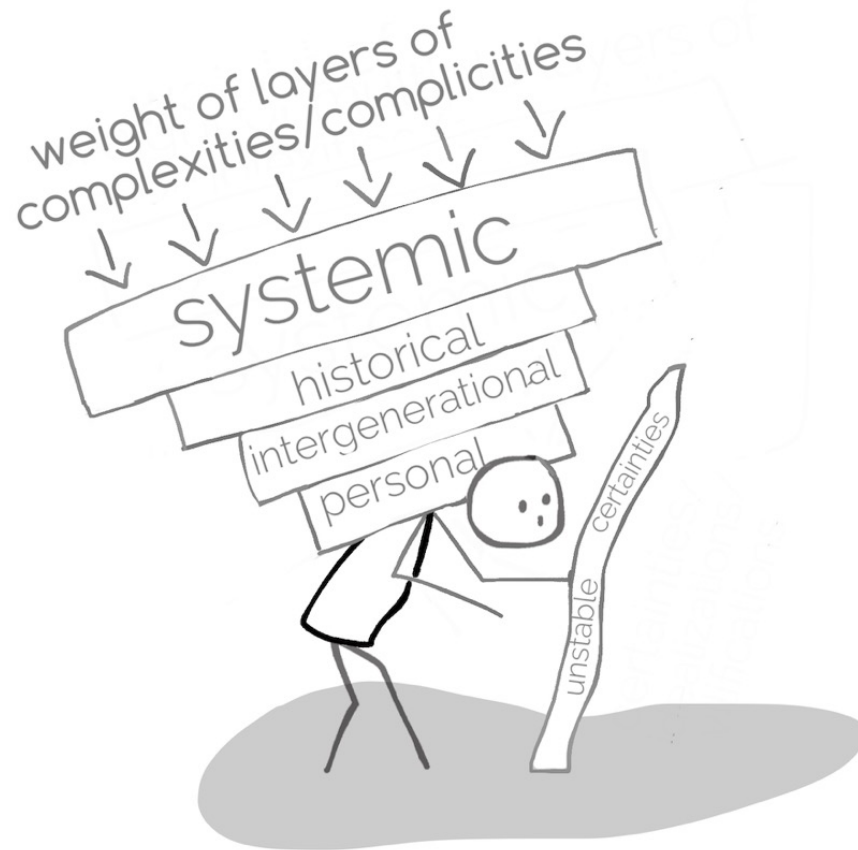
- **Internal critiques of modernity (poststructuralist, psychoanalytic, postcolonial - Derrida/Spivak/Bhabha/Fanon/Kapoor/Foucault/):** critiques of logocentrism, colonial power, cultural supremacy, conditioned colonial desires, libidinal attachments and benevolence, constitutive disavowals (foreclosures), representation, inclusion, performativity;
- **Ontological critiques of modernity/coloniality (Indigenous and Latin American decolonial critiques - Mika/Whyte/Hunt/Ahenakew, Mignolo/Dussel/Quijano/Walters/Cusicanqui/Ferreira da Silva):** critiques of Eurocentric critiques of Eurocentrism, modernity/coloniality nexus (how coloniality is constitutive of modernity); ontological analysis of colonialism as separability;
- **Decolonial cultural psychoanalysis (inspired by Indigenous/Black psycho-somatic practices):** practices that address the colonization of the unconscious and promote neuro-decolonization.

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GTDF analysis: social and educational context

1. Chaotic cacophony of perspectives
2. Reactive polarization
3. Semantic proliferation, word policing, discursive confusion
4. Multiple and multiplying moving layers of complexity
5. Unprocessed hyper-consumption
6. General lack of capacity to process complex emotions
7. Excess of (delicious) distractions, incentives for numbing
8. Echo-chamber/individual curation of reality (post-truth, deep fakes)
9. Wider intergenerational gaps (resentment and entrenchment)
10. Existential threats of climate and biodiversity catastrophes, unhinged AI, and war

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GTDF pedagogical inquiry

What if you knew (in our skin, flesh and bones, not just in the head) that major wider social and ecological collapse is inevitably in the horizon, and that in 10 to 20 years (or less) what is familiar today will no longer be viable?

What if we could collectively respond today from a cultural space of **emotional serenity, relational maturity, intellectual discernment** and **intergenerational responsibility** (SMDR)?

What would you/we be doing or advocating for then?

And when the children born today look back 30 years from now, what actions would they be grateful that we took right now?



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Technologies of inquiry: examples

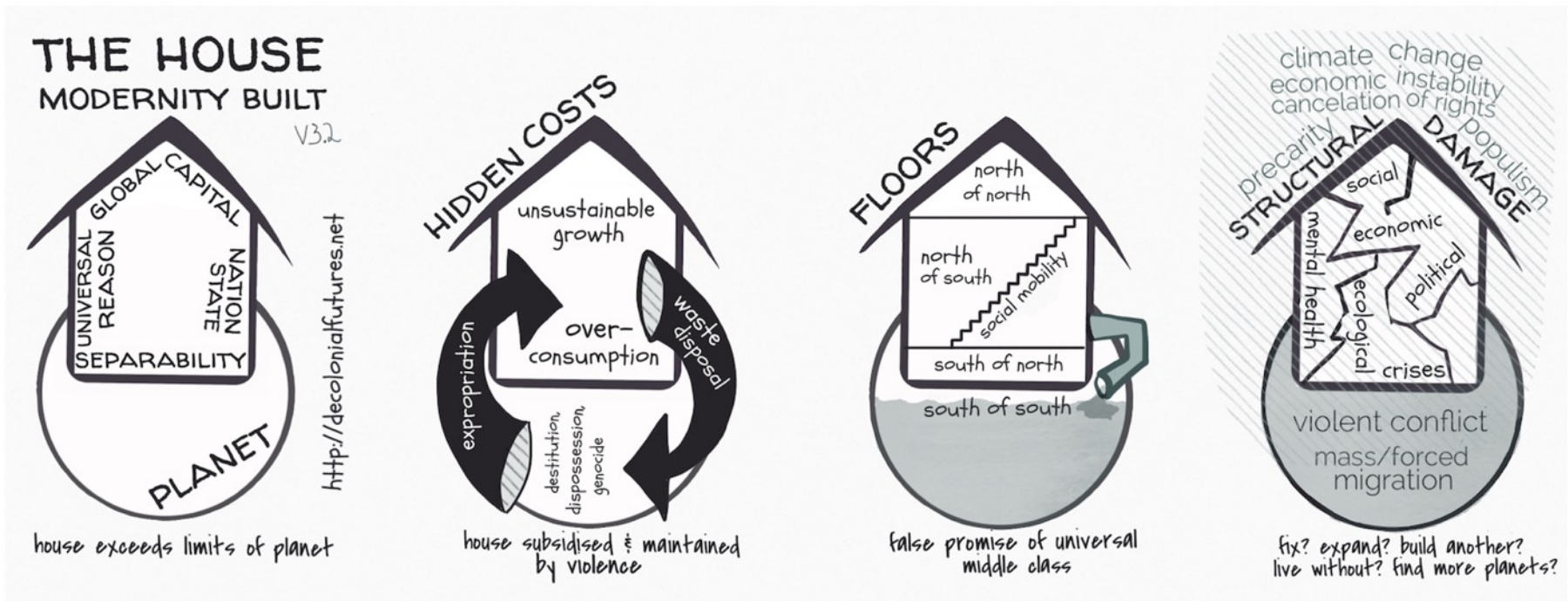
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Example 1: The Bus Within US (self-diffraction)



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Example 2: The House that Modernity Built



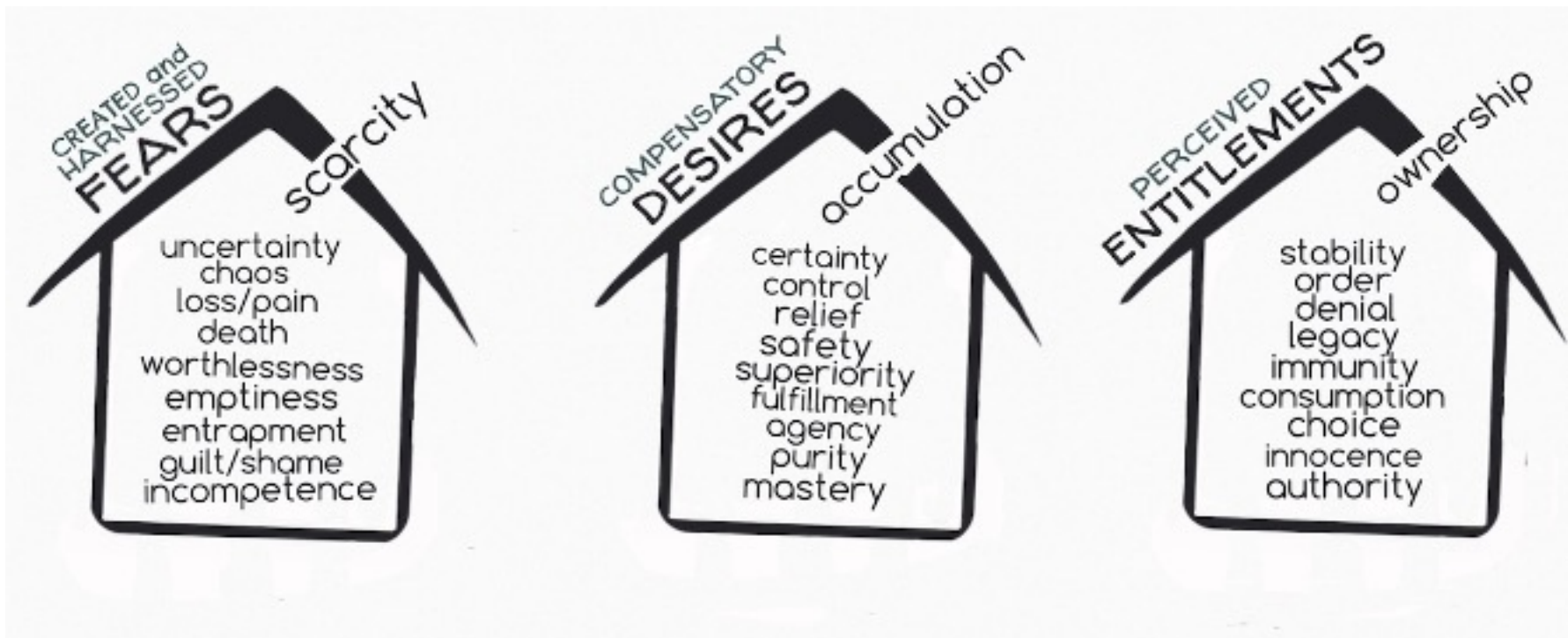
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Example 2: The House that Modernity Built

Soft reform of the house of modernity	Radical reform of the house of modernity	Beyond reform of the house of modernity
More modernity, same forward, same leadership, small changes.	More modernity, different leadership, larger changes.	More modernity not an option (given violence required + limits of the planet).
Same usual questions, same answers.	Same questions, different answers.	Different questions, different answers.

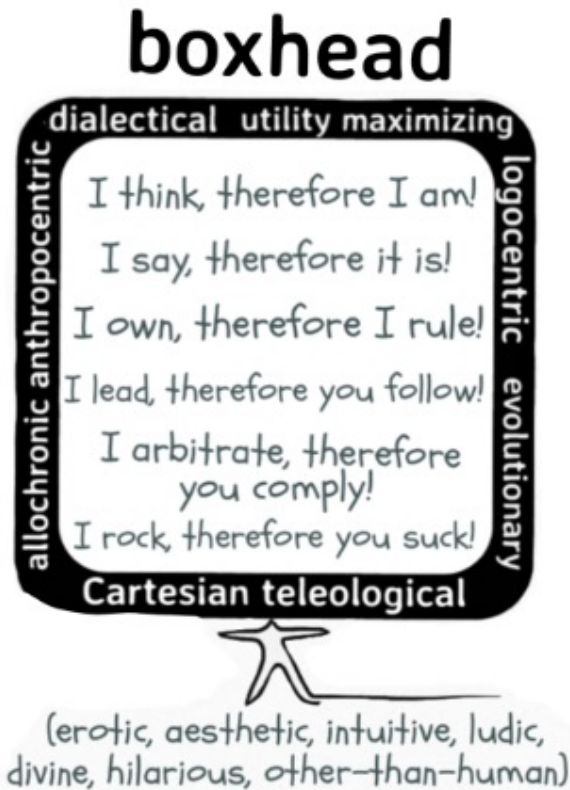
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Example 2: The House that Modernity Built



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Example 3: grammar of intelligibility (boxhead)



Fixated on synthesis, efficiency, certainty, coherence, control, predictability, “progress”

Seeking **5As** of: moral and epistemic authority, unaccountable and unrestricted autonomy, arbitration of justice and common sense; affirmation of innocence and purity; appropriation of assets

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Example 4: modern/colonial desires/investments (EPIC-A)

E exceptionalism, exaltedness, expansion of entitlements, externalization of culpability, escape from responsibility (most visible in political discourses)

P progress, prosperity, purity, (heroic) protagonism, potential, projective hope (most visible in orientations to development, social innovation, and sustainability)

I idealizations, innocence, immunity, indifference, indulgence (most visible in cross-cultural engagements and artistic practices)

C certainty, control, compulsive consumption, competitiveness, comfort/convenience, complacency (most visible in approaches to learning and the design of education)

A (epistemic and moral) authority, (unrestricted and unaccountable) autonomy, (justice and common sense) arbitration, (guilt) absolution, innocence and purity affirmation, the “avant-garde” (most visible in intellectual engagements and activism)

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Example 5: stacked weights



Unique challenges faced by IBPOC leaders

Lateral violence as we compete for crumbs from the table

Equity washing: transactional guilt-absolution and re-centering of white entitlements

Unchallenged normalization and naturalization of colonialism and white supremacy as “progress”

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Example 6: diversity stock markets



- **Transactional relationships:** Institutional investment in return for absolution of guilt/culpability
- Carrot/incentive (dopamine) and stick/threat (cortisol)
- **Market over-saturation:** eroding value, risk of dilution: moral high ground shifting too quickly due to high competition between diversity portfolios
- impossibility of institutional innocence prompting reduced investor appetite
- Diminishing returns and negative yield (burn out, impossibility of solidarity)

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Example 7: FEPHAC climateFRAUD

C – Carbon colonialism (CO2lonialism)

L – Land-grabbing

I – Indigenous cooptation

M – Mandatory growth and consumerism

A – Absurd promises of carbon sequestration

T – Toxic hope in the continuity of violent and unsustainable systems

E – Externalization of costs

F – Financialization of nature

R – Regulatory loopholes

A – Arrogant techno-solutionism and techno-salvationism

U – Ubiquitous greenwashing

D – Distorted narratives and deceptive claims

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Example 8: inquiry on neuro-decolonization

neuroCOLONIZATION: the systematic shaping, constraining, and impairment of our cognitive processes, affective responses, libidinal attachments and scope of relational possibilities by modern-colonial systems. It encompasses how our ways of thinking, acting, hoping, relating, imagining, and being are wired and limited within the context of modern-colonial structures. This includes the ways we seek and source pleasure and comfort and how we cope with trauma and the fears and insecurities that arise from these systems.

neuroDEcolonization: a non-coercive and intentional rearrangement of conditioned desires and behavioural patterns aimed at neurophysiological and epigenetic regeneration, oriented towards relational intelligence and accountable autonomy. This process involves facing complicities, navigating complexities, rewiring the unconscious, disinvesting in harm, mobilizing reparations, and activating exiled capacities for emotional sobriety, relational maturity, intellectual discernment, and intergenerational responsibility, summarized as **SMDR** (Sobriety, Maturity, Discernment, Responsibility).

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Example 8: SMDR compass

	Psycho-affective process		Neuro-physiological process	
	necessary disinvestments	(re)activations	necessary disinvestments	(re)activations
Emotional sobriety stamina to work through complicity, discomfort, volatility, uncertainty, complexity, ambiguity, paradoxes, tensions, conflicts and contradictions	entitlement to epistemic and moral authority, unrestricted and unaccountable autonomy, arbitration of truth, justice and common sense	raised capacity to face, feel and process the difficult and painful aspects of reality without feeling overwhelmed, immobilized or demanding quick fixes to be rescued from discomfort	responses from dorsal vagal (PNS: freeze, deny, dissociate) or hyper-aroused SNS (fight, flight, fix)	responding from ventral vagal PNS - wider bandwidth, calm, self-, co-, meta-regulation
Relational maturity Doing what is needed rather than what the ego demands, capacity for coordination, humility, boundary setting, being taught by mistakes	transactional, utility-maximizing relationship building grounded on certainty, predictability, imposed coherence, control	relationships and relationship building grounded on trust, respect, reciprocity, consent, accountability	oxytocin-driven belonging ("younering")	serotonin-based belonging ("eldering")



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Theory of change

not linear, dialectical, teleological or universalist (not the avant-garde; no system replacement with guarantees), but experimental and experiential co-inquiry into hospicing a dying system, within and around us, with integrity, and offering prenatal care (not birthing) to earth gestations that are potentially wiser, without suffocating embryonic possibilities with projections and idealizations, while learning to walk a tightrope between desperate hope and desolate hopelessness with honesty, humility, humour and hyper-self-reflexivity

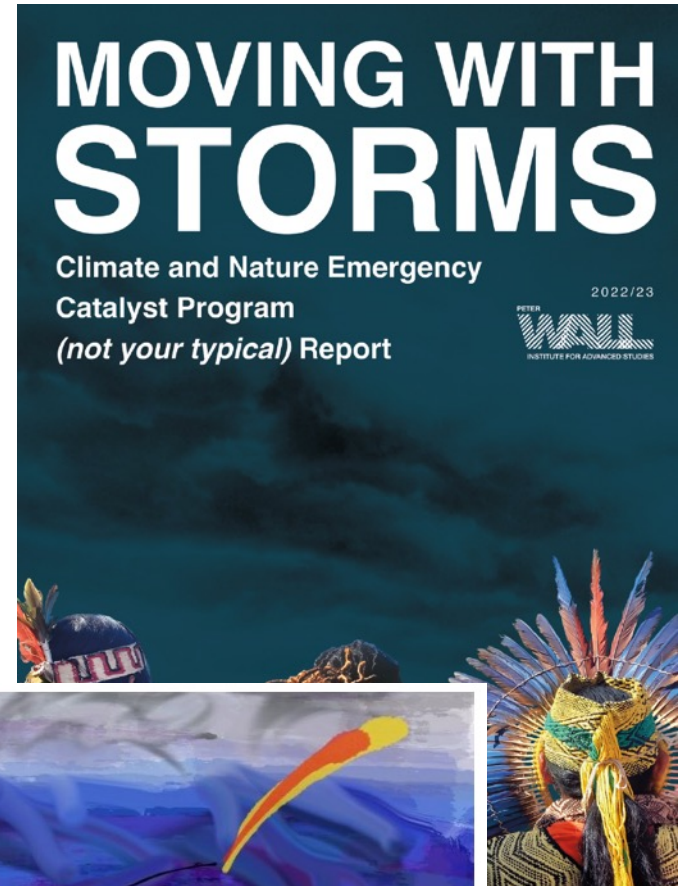
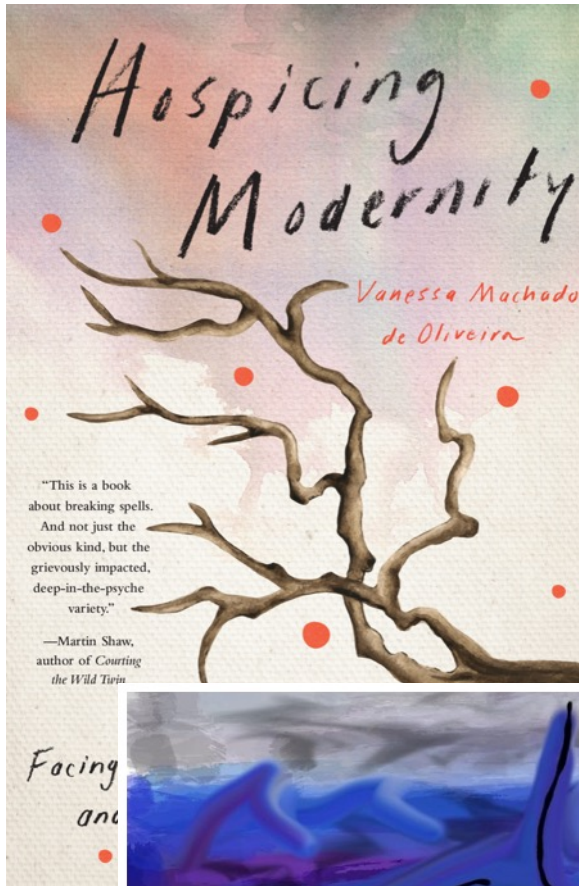
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Complexity approach to decolonization: lessons learned

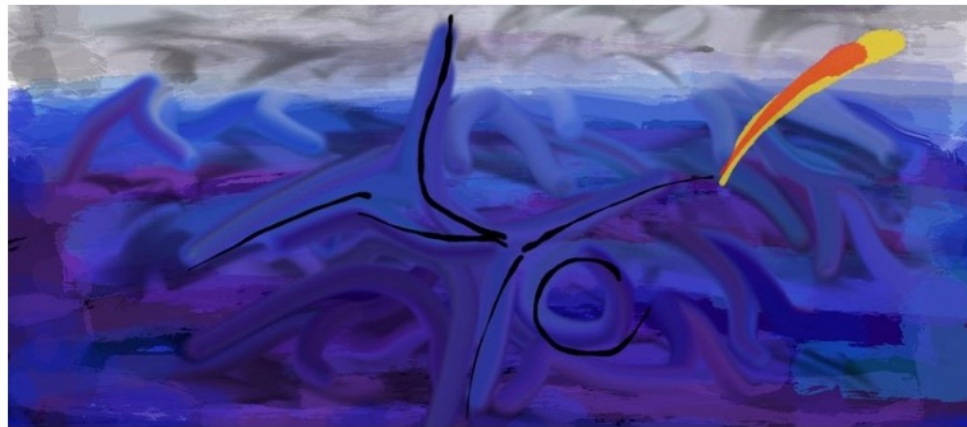
- Working with change as non-linear process, beyond dialectical progression (e.g. oppression vs. liberation)
- No simple, single or seamless stories, no universal answers, no quick fixes
- Addressing decolonization as “super-wicked” challenge
- More precise identification of leverage points
- Everything as “collective inquiry”: experimentation, collectively accountable learning from both success and failure
- Hyper-self-reflexivity: how am I implicated/complicit in the problem? How do I relate to/hold space for my own complexity? How can I self- and co-regulate?
- More flexibility, agility, adaptability, collaboration and stamina for the long-haul of this work

Thank you.

<https://decolonialfutures.net/hospicingmodernity/>



<https://blogs.ubc.ca/movingwithstorms/>



**Facing Human Wrongs:
Climate Complexity and Relational Accountability.**

<https://continuingstudies.uvic.ca/teaching-learning-and-development/courses/facing-human-wrongs-2-0-climate-complexity-and-relational-accountability/>