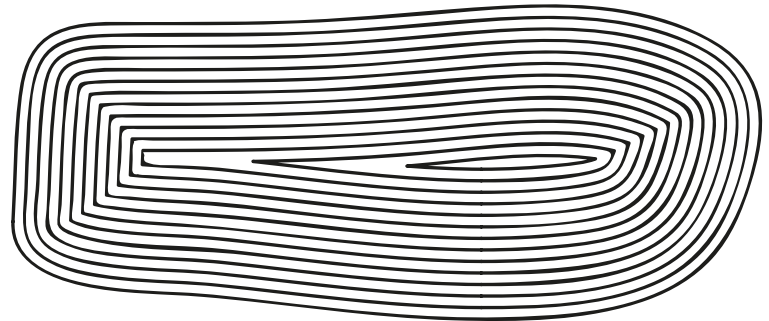


Extract from the book

HOSPICING MODERNITY

by: Vanessa Machado de Oliveira



Modernity/Coloniality

This term functions as a reminder that the benefits we associate with modernity are created and maintained by historical, systemic, and ongoing processes that are inherently violent and unsustainable. In other words, this term underscores the fact that modernity cannot exist without expropriation, extraction, exploitation, militarization, dispossession, destitution, genocides, and ecocides. This is substantiated by economic, political, and historical data, but, like climate crisis data, this data is deemed "too hard to deal with," and largely ignored or reframed as something else. For example, in many stories of modernity these effects are considered the collateral damage of modernity rather than the necessary preconditions for modernity to exist.

While colonialism is often presented as the formal occupation and administration of lands and the subjugation of the original peoples of these lands, coloniality refers to the enduring manifestations of colonial relations, logic, and situations—even after the official decolonization of formal structures of governance. In this sense, coloniality represents a global hegemonic form of power that organizes bodies, time, knowledge, relationships, labor, and space according to economic parameters (i.e., exchange value) and to the benefit of particular groups of people, with or without formal colonization.

Constitutive Denials

What modernity/coloniality disavows can be thought of as constitutive denials: what we need to (be made to) forget in order to believe what

modernity/coloniality wants us to believe in, and to desire what modernity/coloniality wants us to desire. There are at least four main constitutive denials sanctioned within modernity/coloniality that severely restrict our capacity to sense, relate, and imagine otherwise:

- the denial of systemic, historical, and ongoing violence and of complicity in harm (the fact that our comforts, securities, and enjoyments are subsidized by expropriation and exploitation elsewhere);
- the denial of the limits of the planet and of the unsustainability of modernity/coloniality (the fact that the finite earth-metabolism cannot sustain exponential growth, consumption, extraction, exploitation, and expropriation indefinitely);
- the denial of entanglement (our insistence in seeing ourselves as separate from each other and the land, rather than "entangled" within a wider living

metabolism that is bio-intelligent); and

- the denial of the magnitude and complexity of the problems we 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 complex predicament).

Confronting and wrestling with these denials are part and parcel of the invitation to hospice modernity

Modernity Is Faster than Thought

Modernity predetermines what can be heard; what can be deemed real and possible; what can be imagined as desirable and ideal; and how we are supposed to feel, behave, and communicate within these parameters. This conditioning is precognitive—it is faster than thought itself as it

structures our unconscious. But don't take my word for it; let's try an experiment. Sharon Stein created an exercise called CIRCULAR that identifies eight expected intellectual, affective, and performative dispositional patterns that modernity has imprinted in our unconscious and that it rewards. These patterns may prevent us from sensing, relating, and imagining otherwise, but since they are perceived as normal and natural, there is virtually no incentive to notice them or to interrupt them. In fact, for you to be functional and intelligible within modernity, you have to use them.

Within modernity's framework of legibility, it is difficult to invite people to see the problems with these patterns. That is because generally, in order to get people's attention, we must present problematic patterns as obstacles to modernity's progress. However, when we do this, there is a tendency to respond by trying to transcend these patterns in

search of moral purity, political authority, or (collective or individual) advancement—each of which is deeply rooted in modernity's frames. That is not what this exercise is about. If we try to mobilize interest in noticing and interrupting these patterns in this way, that would defeat the entire purpose of this exercise. Instead, you are invited to view the difficulties of confronting these patterns as teachers that can show us something very important (about modernity and about ourselves) that we generally would rather deny.

CIRCULAR

Continuity: Seeking the perpetuation (and perhaps expansion) of the existing system and its promised securities, certainties, and entitlements. This pattern leads people to approach change in conditional ways wherein they calculate the

perceived benefits of change against potential losses, and generally do not make choices (or renounce choice in ways) that compromise their own futurity or position of advantage (e.g., "I want to transcend colonialism without giving anything up.").

Innocence: Positioning oneself outside complicity in violence, often because of one's stated commitment to be against violence. This pattern erases how our implication in harm is largely the product of our structural positions within harmful systems and of our learned, unconscious habits of being, rather than a product of active intellectual choices to hurt others (e.g., "Because I say that I am against violent systems, that means I am no longer complicit in them.").

Recentering: Privileging the feelings, experiences, and perspectives of oneself and/or the majority group/nation/etc. rather than looking at systemic dynamics of inequality and violence, and discerning

from there the actions needed to work toward developing healthier possibilities for coexistence (e.g., "How will this change affect me/make me feel?").

Certainty: Desiring (and demanding) fixed, totalizing knowledge, simple and guaranteed answers to complex problems, and predetermined outcomes before taking action. This pattern denies that all knowledge is situated and contextually (rather than universally) relevant, and that all solutions are partial, imperfect, and may either reproduce the problems they seek to address or create new ones (e.g., "I deserve to know exactly what is going to happen, when, where, and how.").

Unrestricted autonomy: Placing primacy on one's free choice and independence at the expense of honoring interdependence and responsibility. Further, this pattern envisions responsibility as an intellectual choice, often based on a cost-benefit,

utility-maximizing analysis rather than a visceral pull to do what is needed in order to maintain respectful, reciprocal relationships based on trust and consent (e.g., "I am not accountable to anyone but myself, unless I choose to be.").

Leadership: Framing oneself, or another person or community, as uniquely worthy and deserving of the power to determine the type, mode, and direction of change. This pattern positions the exceptional person or group above critique and outside of complicity, thereby imposing unrealistic expectations that make it difficult to acknowledge the complexities and the good, the bad, the ugly, and the broken in everyone (e.g., "Either I, or the person or group I designate, is exceptionally qualified and entitled to direct and determine the character of change.").

Authority: Appointing oneself (or a designated person) as the moral and political authority with the right to arbitrate justice, or an epistemological

authority with the right to adjudicate the truth and the most desirable path toward change. Generally, this pattern re-silences those who are systemically ignored, and imposes one's own desires and expectations onto others' existence (e.g., "I should be the one to determine who and what is valuable and deserving of which rights, privileges, and punishments.").

Recognition: Seeking affirmation of one's righteousness, redemption, and exceptionalism (often to justify one's merit and the enjoyment of privileges). Often, recognition is sought by curating (and trying to control) one's public image and attempting to ensure that one is seen and heard as being and doing "good." This circular pattern serves as a distraction from focusing on the work necessary to interrupt harmful systemic behaviors and desires in oneself and others (e.g., "But don't you see that I'm one of the 'good' ones?").

Exercise

The exercise invites you to do three things:

- **Spot** these patterns as they pop up unannounced in your responses to this text and to things going on in your life during the next seven days. You can also spot them around you, in the responses of others. You could create a bingo game with the patterns as well—lighten it up; otherwise you risk using this exercise for virtue-signaling.
- **Observe** the reward mechanisms that exist for these patterns, and how you and other people derive pleasure and satisfaction from them. Reflect on the depth of the challenge of trying to change these patterns in a whole culture (but don't despair).
- As you **spot and observe**, you are invited to sit with what is in front of you, with self-compassion,

without praising or condemning, without investing or trying to solve it as a problem. The idea is for you to build stamina to hold space for difficult and painful things without feeling overwhelmed, immobilized, or wanting to be rescued from the discomfort (e.g., by focusing on solutions, or seeking affirmation or innocence).

The intention is not to use this exercise to overcome these patterns or to establish a moral high ground—actually, quite the opposite. This exercise is about expanding capacity for the **"4 Hs": humility, honesty, humor, and hyper-self-reflexivity.**

This gives you a glimpse of the work of hospicing modernity that the rest of this book will invite you to do.

This chapter is prep work for hospicing modernity. Like training for a marathon, this process requires us to use muscles that most of us have neglected—and in some cases, that we don't even know we have. The

next chapter continues the prep work. It will give you an idea of the types of stories you will find in the rest of the book, and the profile of those who will benefit the most from reading them. It will also ask you to make an informed decision about whether you should read this book..

