

Podcast: Lisa Taylor on the Affective Economies of the House Modernity Built and the Affective Possibilities of Mycelium

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I'm Lisa Taylor with Bishop's University and a long [sic] collaborator with Vanessa Andreotti. And I'm thinking and wanting to talk today about the house of modernity social cartography and the mycelium earthCARE social cartography.

So, I begin by recognising that as beings we exist in physical, emotional, social forms and lives and organise our lives in those material ways but that our existence also taps into these well springs of our inseparability with, you could call it the sacred, you could call it what are infinite or non-exhaustible gift economies of biogenesis.

One of the salient features of the house of modernity, for me, that I am thinking about, is the way in which capitalism functions by capturing our physical, psycho-emotional, social existence, encapsulating them in ways that block our perception and access of the infinite. And therefore, [capitalism] subject[s] those, encapsulate[s] and render[s] those forms of our existence within [the] logics of scarcity economies of value, as well as logics of the ego and what is material and tangible. So this blocking in a sense, restricting, blinding, numbing, controlling our access to these gift economies, can happen through property capitalism but I also want to think about Richard Tarnas's work (2006) "Cosmos and Psyche", and his understanding of the alienation from the living spiritual consciousness of cosmos that through [the] Enlightenment [situated] consciousness solely in human beings and in that alienation, unleashed a promethean explosion of productivity that we can see in the carbon economies, that we can see in scientific revolutions, that reify and commodify and therefore manipulate what has been designated as everything other than human consciousness [the mechanical universe], but that, that also affects a spiritual alienation.

So when I look at the frame of the fears, within the house cartography, I think about those fears as the experience of alienation from what is infinite and sacred, both within me and beyond me [(in fact, Marx's original conception of alienation was of populations from lived interdependent relations with nature based on his observations of rural mine workers in Germany)]. My alienation renders me illiterate to the patterns of biogenesis; that, renders me incapable of connecting or experiencing the infinite, the biogenetic forces that reproduce life as something that is unpredictable, something that I cannot control, that I cannot foresee, something [that], because it's dynamic and non-static, is impermanent. Secondly as something that I cannot affect, and is not subject to my will, (and sorry secondly). And then thirdly something that signifies in ways that are beyond my perception, is outside of what I can be in relation to. And I am thinking about the ways that life, I'm thinking about a dearly beloved who said, "I can face death but I need my life to mean something".

And so I think about meaning as something that emerges through action, through interaction, through relationality and that renders suffering and emptiness and pain sacred, that sacralizes a sacrifice in a sense. And it does it through natality, in Hannah Arendt's sense of natality it is, when my friend said "I need my life to mean something", or "my death to mean something, I need it to have an existence, in relation to, in relations that are beyond me", that's natality for me.

So what are the affects that are generated, and I am in staying in this house of harnessed fears that are inherent to life within global capitalism that understands material life as limited and subject to economies of scarcity and Freud said these are inherent, but they are inherent [to] that mode of being and what are the affects of that? What are the affects that I feel towards what I cannot know, I cannot control, and I don't have [or derive] meaning [from], [that aren't apparently] in meaningful relationship to [me]. Well one, in relationship to impermanence the affect is anxiety which is a form of self-aggression. In relationship to ineffectiveness or incompetence, what does, is not subject to my will, the affect is a will centered aggression. And in relationship to that who, generates meaning, in relational ways, the affect is loneliness. And so what needs are generated in relationship to those [fears?].

Moving on to the house of compensatory fixations (that within an economy of scarcity turn to accumulation as a compensatory fixation) the need for mastery is a need to consume through knowing, knowing alterity that I have rendered separate from me and that I have a reified, and so now I need to access it again through knowing. I need to know the grasping, (Levinas' grasping [epistemology]), a need to know the Other and that's a mastery. In terms of authority, I haven't thought through it fully and so I'm just going to call that, affectively, a need to assert a will over [to dominate]. And in relationship to validation as a response to loneliness I think that's the fixation of the [subject] now needing to consume through feeling, feeling the other, projective forms of empathy (Britzman), and yes that can be forms of validation. What kinds of affects can be generated in these? I think, within the fixation that reacts to impermanence, through the claims of autonomy, I think the affect is indifference: "I am separate, I am autonomous. That is the suffering of people landing on the shores of Lampedusa, that is not me". I think in relationship to ineffectiveness that generates a fixation on authority, I think the affect is anger. And in relationship to that loneliness, that seeks [to] feel the other, I think there can be vanity, righteousness and resentment.

So the cracking house of [modernity], I think that's a cracking house that is both promising the state and/or the market as the only purveyors and guarantors of what I [can] no longer access through [my connection to infinite gift economies of biogenesis] because I cannot perceive it, because my perception has been blocked, and so I [generate] compensatory fixations. I become my fixation is what Hudson and Riso argue in their work on the Enneagram: I become my fixations. So the house itself, is essential to global capitalism because the crisis of the structuring, I think renders us susceptible to investing in it and that [it] can be the state and the market.

So that's when there is a turn to stability and autonomy and that kind of belonging of either the autonomous individual or the belonging of the tribe or the clan of the nation. The turn to arbitration, I'm wondering whether that's arbitration of justice or whether that is just arbitration of the law, which can be guarantors of human rights, of citizenships, of property, or consumer rights, all of those. And then the guarantors of the systems, the institutions, I think--whether those are state or market institutions--that offer admiration or validation or recognition [that] are really the offer of guaranteed forms of recognisable status. And that can be certification and degrees, and I think that there is, or it also through, through paternalism or righteousness, offers that positionality that is recognisable within a system of status.

When I turn to the social cartography “In Earth’sCARE,” I also was thinking that I also aligned cognitive, affective and relational justice generated by the mycelium (the mycelium really doing the kind of the work of unblocking the blocking to the infinite of the sacred); I aligned those with the three fears, compensatory fixations and entitlements and so in relationship to (in the frame of fears in the house cartography), in relationship to impermanence, mastery, autonomy. The way that the mycelium does the work of communication within cognitive justice that allows us to re-enter into ecologies of knowing and unknowing and into again what Riso and Hudson talk about as sacred virtues and knowledge. So what I’ve talked about as the sense of wonder and beauty will play as an affect with those, those are ways of relating, not through knowledge, through the cognitive [but through aesthetic, pre-linguistic, pre-symbolic]. In terms of the fear of incompetence of authority and turning to the arbitration of the law, I think that relational justice is in terms of a redistribution of nutrients and nourishments and generating a habitus reciprocity that bypasses knowledge identity. A position that allows for radical tenderness. I think they also allow for affects of generosity gratitude that is not through choice and that, that is mycelial work that responds to the ways that the infinite is not subject to my will. And then affective justice, I think is doing the work of digesting those compensatory fixations that are generated through that alienation; and that alienation is not solely from global capitalism, that alienation was as Tarnas said, also part of an enlightenment project of unleashing a particular acting over everything that is non-human. And so again I’ve been working with affects [and affective orientations], that are associated with that, so I think of with, cognitive justice, I think of the affect of beauty, wonder, play, hilarity. With affective justice, I think of love, an overused word. And with relational justice, I think of faith as affects but also as active relationships.

So how pedagogy, a mycelial pedagogy, does kind of work of generating through communication, redistributing nutrients and digestion, I think that it, needs to involve experiential activities of embodying and experimenting with those relations (in ways that don’t demand that they happen in the other aspects of our being), so weaving a range of experimentations in those relations, and paying attention to the fears that are part of the habitus of the house of global capital[ist] modernity. Because I think that they, because we exist in these conditions, they continue to exist through us, so it’s only through watching those [fears] arise at the interface between gift economies and market economies that our bodies embed us in that we can do the slow work of developing a habitus of gratitude, generosity that are inherent to that double relationship of reciprocity. In terms of designing pedagogical experiential exercises, I think there needs to be a balance of experiential and observation. So to try and encapsulate some of what has been said so far, I think the experiential, what is key in terms of an experience, is recognising in your own response to a situation, to a dilemma, to a confrontation, that your response is generated within an economy of scarcity. And that, that economy of scarcity is itself a fixation, that is its own bio feedback loop, that will be self-sustaining, and be--in terms of Lauren Berlant’s work--it will have his own cruel optimism to it, because you are investing in your own becoming of your fixation . And I think that pedagogically you need it to have almost an iterative process of, “but this!” “But this!”, where you keep turning to different entitlements as grasping for [something], and that brings you to a moment of saying, “Grasping for what?” And only when you ask what you are grasping for, do you come back to the loneliness, or to the anxiety, or to the aggression that are your responses to the impermanence or ineffectiveness or insignificance that you are experiencing and that you are alienated from. And when you’re

able to articulate what am I alienated from, that I am deeply desiring [yearning for]--and again, I do this work in terms of what are the impulses to growth that underpin what we have come to instrumentalise and commodify [institutionally] as education whether it's innovation, intelligence, charity. But when we go, when we ask, "Where is the impulse or the yearning, that's underlying that?", then we might be ready for an experience of, of abundance. And that abundance might be through polarity, that abundance might be through love or radical tenderness. That abundance then can be experienced in a very small way but a way that lets us recognise, "Oh that isn't subject to the spinning of fixations of a scarcity economy, that actually is something that grows and that makes, in some ways meaningful or you could say sacred, the inevitable, inherent pain of the labour that also goes into our relationships, that's what I wanted to add.