

THE HOUSE MODERNITY BUILT

An invitation to re-imagine the architecture of modernity: the walls of nation-states and universal reason, the roof of capitalism, and the foundation of separability.



How do we collectively build alternative modes of existence on a planet facing unprecedented crises?

"The House Modernity Built" is a metaphor that invites conversation around the 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 an evening in the Clockhouse OtherWisers gathered to use the metaphor of a house and explored modernities' architecture through a listening meditation. We began decorating the house in groups that imagines alternative modes of existence in a context where the house appears to be crumbling, and, indeed, has always been a fantasy.

Lets see what each group has to say...

The Wall of Nation-State

"Team Nation-states?" "Yes. Border was a big one to think about. Whether it's a country, or Schengen, or something like this, having the separation between the in-group and the out-group, however nuanced that is." "I think for us also that being European citizens gave us a feeling of security. It gives you privilege, it gives you a social system around you that you can rely on. But it's also really observing and protecting of uncertainty, but from what even? It's just unclear everything, like there's no cue? you're protected from." "I guess we also had the mirror as a form of self-reflection. We talked a lot about our privileges and how to deal with it, and what you can do. So like, 'Them' and 'Us', the othering between different sides of the border, and to sort of connect with other people, you first have to take a look at yourself in the mirror, because with this little heart you also gotta love yourself before you can love other people. So yeah, you just gotta... I don't know, there's a lot. It's hard to do something sometimes, but it starts with caring for others around you. So yeah, take a look at what you have, and reflect upon that, and it's easier to also see where other people are coming from, to see what unites us rather than what separates us. That's the key."

"What about the little person, the one in black?" "This one? He's the watchman. He's been given money, and he's decided to tell the people who are desperate, 'No, you can't come in'. That's what he decided. That's what all police and security do. That one looks a little bit more docile, but closer to the wall is a fully armed person, ready to protect the state if it needs to be, or if he's paid enough."

The Wall of Nation-State

"That should demonstrate again the overly secure concept of... maybe fear, maybe realism of whatever... I don't know, a not very rosy environment, because this here it's pretty grey, it's pretty stoic, it's not very inviting, I would say."

"I have a question. It feels like you're describing more the current wall, like how it is. Do you have ideas of stuff to add for the future of nation-states? It's a difficult question. I don't have any answers." "For a theatrical moment." (*person rips measure band-made-border of the house*) "That was powerful." "Oh my god, the borders are broken! Next, we remove the barbed wire! The spikes!" "I mean, I think it was the self-reflection as well, that sort of the solution, at least sort of the start of taking away the borders, is seeing that your culture, for example, what it's like being typical Dutch is sort of an imaginary thing to make you feel secure. Just start reflecting upon that and think what does it actually mean to be Dutch or from another culture? Does it make sense? Yeah. That's a good start, I guess." "It's a good question." "Thanks group nation-state. Who wants to go next? Team Roof of Capitalism?"

The Roof of Capitalism

"Is this a real strawberry?" "So, we had a lot of discussions about the roof, the shape of the roof, who put the roof there, who's inside, who's outside. Should we expand the roof so that more people can get in? But that is based on, you know, very unfair ways of making the roof itself. So, what we tried was to make the roof be kind of a redistribution system. So, use all the goods that are there to actually then be redistributed. So, what if it collects the water?" "The little jewels of the water?" "So, the idea is basically, what if we can use what is on the roof to be redistributed?" "Yeah, so we had a few different ideas. One was that the roof can support not only human but also non-human life forms. So then this represents plants and other things that can grow on it, moss, things like that. And also, I think in the bathtub there's a rat and... You know. Multi-species coexistence. And also to add like solar panels and rainwater collection systems and things like that and then redistribute it across the house and different parts of the house as a way of sharing the resources that it produces because otherwise capitalism tends to not do that." "Since the resources tend to accumulate on top, what if we imagine this as a redistribution system that then, for example, the heat raises up and then there is a system that pulls it down or the water comes up and what if that then redistributes it? That's the idea. So, tax the rich." "I think it's also interesting that the whole support of capitalism is like the trickle-down economy. In another way you can see the same... How do you redistribute in a way that it's not a trickle-down economy?"

The Roof of Capitalism

"Green capitalism, right?" "The thing with trickle-down is that it's not redistribution. It's just hoping that stuff will just redistribute itself." "That's why, for example, tax the rich, because what if exactly the benefit is there but then there needs to be formal structures that actually..." "We were thinking more like a socialist roof". "It should be called chop and drop. Just cut off the head of the rich and fertilize the ground. Chop and drop instead of trickle. That's a tree management term from permaculture." "Before we got here, we discussed a lot of different kind of roof options, about what if there are many smaller roofs instead of one big roof. Then we were discussing if there's one big roof but the house might not support that giant roof." "We were talking about how right now the roof is trying to expand infinitely. Because capitalism is trying to grow and grow forever. But then the walls fall apart. The idea is that the roof shouldn't just try and expand. Because right now it's like expanding but not covering anyone more right now. It's the roof that doesn't actually help people be protected against the rain." "But also one thing. Acknowledging that the roof is already there. It's very hard to dismantle because there are a lot of physical and non-physical infrastructures. How can we work in a way acknowledging that it's already there? We're making examples of these pigeons or other animals that occupy the roofs already in buildings. Learning from these urban animals how to find life within what is already there." "And removing the roof might cause more damage rather than good at this point." "When is it more costly to actually destroy everything than rebuild, but actually repurpose what is already there."

The Wall of Universal Reason

"Love that." "Thanks! Let's go to the other side of the wall."
"We had a lot of interesting conversations I feel. There's only one thing that we discussed that sort of made it onto this wall. The only thing that we imagined is that the wall of universal reason could be replaced by a glass wall. The glass wall sort of allows for any knowledge and any types of knowledge and wherever they may be situated to come through depending on how the sun stands. The little glass thingies should be different rays of sun that come through the glass depending on what knowledge the people inside the house need or rely on. And it can vary. There's no one reoccurring pattern of the knowledge but it changes any time." "Beautiful." "The whole point of discussion was against the traditional popular view of the scientific method and how that acts as to only consider some knowledge as knowledge and other knowledge as wisdom or spiritual experience. But by replacing the wall with the glass it allows us to not only see what other forms of knowledge are but also not dismantling the wall which would probably collapse the rest of the house because it might be considered one of the most important walls on which the entirety of our current society is built. By replacing it with the wall we just allow other forms of thinking to coexist." "Beautiful." "I love that there was enough space for us as a foundation of people to also include our ideas. Thank you." "You can take over then, the foundation of separability."

The Foundation of Separability

"First I wanted to share a little comic strip or drawing to see it as a process because we discussed in our group that foundation is the foundation, it's the basis and it's on separability, and so first of all everything is interconnected. All these issues, all these different parts of the house are interconnected and they're all connected by the foundation. So the way that we saw it was that capitalism and modernity is already crumbling so the foundation is crumbling and new seeds, old seeds soften the foundation and take root, making the foundation permeable, allowing life to flow organically. So you can see the birds, they bring the seeds to these new places and instead of a hard foundation the roots reconnect us, anchoring us to the living world and the miracle that is life. If we can live that if we can know that experience, we hope that we can have this house that is not static but rather is this living being that can have branches growing out of it like these flowers coming out of the top of the building. It's kind of like when a house hasn't been cared for the plants and things take over, like this rewilding process of this place and having the trees growing across and being able to build bridges across other houses and other ways of being and seeing the interconnectedness of that plurality." "So we made roots out of these wire ribbons to show that the roots are also kind of getting through the cracks of the cement of the house that we built for modernity. And we also put soft materials around because we wanted to talk about softness and how softness makes its way or erodes through the sort of hard foundations that we built on.

The Foundation of Separability

Yeah I think a lot of the discussion was talking about the cement that was in the listening meditation, how we built the cement and how that is impermeable and it's very strong so if you want to do something completely different you need softness. And we were also talking a lot about do we reform or do we demolish and rebuild the house of modernity? And at the end we realized that there's no way we can reform the house. If we reform the house we have to keep the foundation intact there's no way we can do that so then we said okay let's be completely different." "So beautiful. Thank you. Thanks all for sharing."