

Capital World

In 1927, Tom Seidmann-Freud (1892-1930) published the children's book *Das Wunderhaus* [The House of Wonders], an adaptation of three stories by the Grimm Brothers and one by Hans Christian Andersen on the subject of the house. Born in Vienna as Martha Gertrude Freud, Tom—Sigmund's niece—was fond of cross dressing. That and other interesting abnormalities took the form, in her work, of ambiguity, eccentricity, and perversion, each one delicately concealed. Influenced by Constructivism, Cubism, illustrations in *Das Wunderhaus* incite the classic tension between geometric rigor and sensual excess, which in this beautiful book is complicated by a graphic device: a cut-out grid that requires a selective reading of the book's contents.

In her diptych *The Wonderful World*, Mónica replicates in full detail that grid as well as the page layout, but she changes the object: instead of the wonderful house, the wonderful world. It is widely known that the tradition that transforms, via metaphor, the world into house and/or the house into world is longstanding and common to a number of fields and genres (philosophy, architecture, poetry, memoirs, the novel...).

Mónica brings something of her own ambiguity and perversion to that tradition. First, she invites the adult reader to read contents for adults as if a school-aged child. Second, she gathers, selects, and synthesizes forms of discourse and interpretations of data taken from the internet related to four socioeconomic issues pertinent to the globalized world (population, land use, distribution of territory, and migratory movements) in which we often read the word "capital." For instance:

The total capital we can hope to make sustainable from one generation to the next consists of diverse and discrete elements: natural capital of the land and of all the living animals (water, air, genetic matter, ecosystems); human capital (culture and knowledge, science, health,

nutrition, belief); social capital (democracy, civil rights, good government, fairness, love, social harmony).

The economic slant of that discourse, unbearable to anyone who does not subscribe to the economic reduction of the world, is at once akin to and at odd with the children's cut-out book. It contrasts with the attributes of childhood, unanimously perceived as noble throughout history, but sympathizes with what is done with childhood, turning it into object of pedagogy just as the student is turned into object of an ideological standardization and the public of the media's normalization. We say "capital" from the time we learn how to speak and, in that sense, "house" and "world" are the objects of the same logic of investment, profit, and exploitation.

After the first version of *The Wonderful World*—the one I have just described—was completed, it was reinterpreted in two ways. The first makes use of the same three sheets of particle board (the diptych and the cut-out sheet), but with the terms from the economics-business lexicon erased from the texts. The second reinterpretation is a video of the same name where the erasure in the texts is replaced by sound overlay (the different voices reading the texts are superimposed in the editing process).

The video, though, makes use of the logics and affects of childhood in the figure of the girl and of the adolescent who hold, move, and rotate the cut-out sheet, and even in the figures of some of the readers of the texts, who are also adolescents and children. Nonetheless, unlike the child readers of *Das Wunderhaus*, who see in the cut-out grid, the illustrations, and the overall layout of the book the complex process by which the house and, by extension, the world is built (the vision is rational, even if Tom/Martha's drawings, happily, twist

it a little), the adult readers of the video *The Wonderful World* experience a clash. They are confronted with, on the one hand, the apparent order of the “pedagogical sheets” and the placid world represented by the park and, on the other, the only partly comprehensible text read and the absurd details of the kraft paper hoods on the heads of participants and that bird-like whistle that interferes with the supposed communication every now and then.

Experiencing a language that does not touch ground with any referent at all, we are faced—no matter how soothing the images may be—with the torment of communication that does not communicate. Even though everything seems to have been put before us for our amusement, the sentences break up and all we can make out are isolated words “capital,” “population,” “Earth,” “capital,” “migration,” “capital”...or phrases whose meaning in no way multiples through resonance but is, rather, lost through tears and volatilization.

Language, it seems, has gone completely mad: it does not express, question, communicate, address, or name. It is beyond all that. It is mad and talks to itself. And it is mad because it no longer has a body. Because there is nothing in what is said that corresponds to anything we can feel.

When Bifo maintains that language is captured by financial capital,¹ he does not mean simply that there are specific fields of production that operate according

to those terms, but rather that all forms of making and doing, all forms of conversation and writing are afflicted by a word without body. Because for the brain to be exploited by immaterial work, the body must succumb, must cease to resist with its heterogeneity. And that is done through a call to silence, to desensitizing.

In *The Wonderful World*, we no longer hear the poetic word released from imposed meaning, but rather meaning dissolved by a word captured by that specific logical of capital. And talking to itself in the mouth of man, the word generates reality. A monstrous reality not always in plain view.

Thus, what in the video had begun as an almost sweet irony (the “wonderful” in the title) becomes subtle but dogged perversion that, after a while, is perceived as aggression. That is why, Mónica would say, the body must once again be interrogated.

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Translated from spanish by Jane Brodie.

Nota:

(1) Cf. Berardi, Franco “Bifo”. *The Uprising. Poetry and Finance*. Los Angeles: semiotext(e), 2012.