

BEARING SOIL;
EARTH'S
PRECEDENCE IN A
BAG OF MEMORY

Artemis Mitsiou
 Rotterdam, April 2024

Graduation Thesis
 MIARD, Piet Zwart Institute

For my mother, Chrisa
 my grandmothers, Samia and Vasiliki

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my thesis supervisors, Golnar Abbasi and Kris Dittel, for their invaluable guidance, support, and encouragement throughout this research. Their insights and expertise have been instrumental in the completion of this work.

I am also thankful to Alex Augusto Suárez, Ephraim Joris, and Federico Martelli for their thoughtful feedback and constructive criticism, which helped refine my practice.

Special thanks to my MIARD colleagues and collaborators, including my partner, Bara Diop, for shaping clay with me, Emir Karyo (graphic design), Iliana Michali (photography), and Sanjay Soekhoe (photography), for their assistance and contributions to various aspects of this project.

I am deeply grateful to my family and friends for their unwavering support and understanding throughout this journey. Their love and encouragement have been a constant source of strength.

CONTENTS:

PREFACE	6
Origins of Personal Need for Connection with Earth	
INTRODUCTION	10
ONE	12
Archetypal Connection Between Women and Nature: Myths, Historical Narratives and the Separation of Gendered Roles	
TWO	18
Deconstructing the “Mother Nature” archetype: Ecofeminist Perspectives: Beyond Dualisms and Hierarchical Structures	
THREE	34
In the aftermath of post-war Greece: The Contribution of Female Farmers in Epirus Forgotten Embodied Knowledge through Soil Connection and Composting The Soil listens: Sung Lamentations absorbed by the Soil Reconciliation through Kinship with the Temporality of Earth	
FOUR	54
Moving with Soil: Ephemeral intra-actions of dirt	
REFERENCES and BIBLIOGRAPHY	64

When I need to expel my anxiousness, when stress has built up in every cell of my body, I look for soil. In Greece, the ideal location was often a deserted beach near my house or my grandmother’s remote mountain village. Contact with sand and soil feels like a ritual for me. Through this connection, I sense how the materials I interact with absorb whatever troubles me. It seems as though the earth, in response to my touch, imparts the strength my body craves. Perhaps my deep-rooted connection to the land, stemming from my family’s ties, explains my need for such contact. Growing up in a mountainous village in northwestern Greece, my childhood memories are infused with the hard work and resilience of my grandmother and other peasant women -in an area, rugged due to its morphological characteristics and entirely secluded from the fast pace of development. But even after leaving the village and the small provincial town where I grew up, relocating to Athens, and later to Rotterdam, this habit has not deserted me. I respond similarly here; I seek out a park, a tree, anything that brings me closer to a natural setting. I have to admit, I appreciate that in the Netherlands, the country in which I choose to reside, people have done an excellent job of allocating green spaces in cities, making access to them just as straightforward as returning to my job after completing my stress management dosage. In connecting with earth, in pausing and consciously making some space in my body for air to leave and enter, I sense how my internal landscape is in constant relation to the external state of the world. I see how this body, detached from this soil, is transformed into a movable part of a machine.

The therapeutic benefits of working with soil, gardening, or walking bare-foot on the ground are not a novel concept. However, I seek to understand this phenomenon on a personal level, as I actively pursue this form of communication. How is my body simultaneously an extension of the soil on which I lay and something entirely distinct from it? Is this distinction deriving from an enclosement of my body, the enclosement of the land, or the continuous enclosement of both? How has the feminine body been defined as comparable to the earth based on its association with the ability to give birth, and how has this perceived proximity led to the exploitation of both?

During the course of this research, I had the chance to explore more profoundly—something I plan to persist in—certain ideas and concerns that were lurking within me in a latent state. Now, gradually, I am realizing and confronting some truths that demand more analysis and exploration. Simultaneously, they fill me with emotions such as nostalgia and fear, empathy, and the responsibility that falls upon me in order to manage to communicate the integrated and interdisciplinary knowledge I am acquiring through my practice. Like a microorganism in the soil, I too have a mission: to leave a positive imprint on the soil. And by that, I don't just mean the decomposition of my body when I die.

Key words: soil, ecofeminism, ancestral knowledge, peasant women, process of naturalisation/ demonization of certain bodies, non-human agency, Western modernism, Cartesian dualism as fraud, spirituality and women, cure- enchantment, aesthesis/aesthetics, intra-actions, relational objects/design objects, spirit/matter, biodynamic agriculture, compost and decay, temporaneity/ contemporaneity, futurity.

This paper came to life due to my deep interest in the potentials and agencies of other-than-human entities. The binary distinction between the human body and the rest of the non-human bodies on Earth is based on Cartesianism -the philosophy of René Descartes, Francis Bacon, and other thinkers of the 16th and early 17th century.¹ The Cartesian idea starts from a worldview of stable matter, which is unable to think and should therefore be controlled by man.² This philosophy which has dominated European thinking, defines the human as a rational individual being who is in opposition to the material world, which can be mastered and exploited at will. However, this opposition of man-reason and nature simultaneously helped divide and hierarchize human relations as well, through the subjugation of social groups who came to be closely associated with nature—women, the working class, the colonised, and the indigenous among them.

In the first chapter of this thesis, the intricate relationship between women and nature is examined through the lens of archetypes, myths, and historical narratives. By introducing them, I seek to illuminate the evolution of human perception regarding nature, transitioning from the reverence of “Mother Nature” to the objectification of the “material world,” from the animate to the inanimate. Then, in the next chapter, the same archetype undergoes critical examination and deconstruction through feminist perspectives. In order to do that endeavor, I peel back the layers of ecofeminist theories, drawing inspiration from scholars such as Carol J. Adams, Stacy Alaimo, Val Plumwood, Donna Haraway and Vandana Shiva. Next, I trace the historical roots of patriarchal dominance, the power dynamics between genders, and the social construction of female submission, while I consequently try to explore the notion of the “monstrous” or “horrific” as a site of resistance and subversion against these entrenched power structures.

Through a synthesis of autoethnographic narratives from my place of origin in Greece, blended with historical and theoretical contexts, my aim in the third chapter is not only to comprehend the personal significance of my bond with the soil but also to unearth forgotten wisdom and traditional cultivation methods in order to contribute to a broader discourse that challenges modernism’s capabilities built within a linear temporality and rationality. Through material experiments with soil, I explore to what extent there is a potentiality for this autoethnographic research blended with feminist and new materialist theory to open up a larger transcultural dialogue in the context of visual arts and spatial practices.

The narratives of art, design, and architecture have all too often been subjected to the idea that the artist, designer, or architect creates by controlling matter. It also comes down to the same thing: that thinking belongs to us, which then gives us the power to control the rest of the world. Rather than maintaining an entitlement to superiority, we need to rethink humankind as an embodied part of the world. There is a need to rupture the linear logic of Western modernism, which is still dominating global art and architecture discourses and worldviews, and think about new forms of authorship in order to encounter and participate in the generation of more multifaceted, diverse, and interdependent perspectives in a world where many worlds fit.

¹ Marquardt, Sarah. *The Long Road to Peace: Descartes’ Modernization of Generosity in The Passions of the Soul (1649)*. *History of Political Thought*, 36(1), p. 53–83. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26226963>
² Marquardt, 2015, p. 53–83. See also: Robinson, Howard. *Dualism*, in *A Companion to the Philosophy of Mind*, edited by S. Guttenplan. Oxford: Blackwell, p. 265–267.

1. Archetypal Connection Between Women and Nature: Myths, Historical Narratives and the Separation of Gendered Roles



Archetype of the Great Mother, public domain image, original: Stockholm, J.H. Werner, 1712.

In this first chapter, my objective is to trace back archetypes to a time preceding the rational understanding of things, seeking to identify the shift in the perception of nature from the concept of “Mother Earth” to that of the “material world”. The shift in perception from the animate to the inanimate primarily occurred during the scientific revolution of the 16th and 17th centuries, when nature was seen as mathematics. The Cartesian adagio cogito ergo sum (“I think therefore I am” or “I doubt therefore I am”) situates the world of thought (res cogitans) in opposition to the material world (res extensa). The Cartesian world consists of two distinct parts: the mind and the material world. Of these two, only the man endowed with reason has value; everything else is just “material world” without meaning or logic. The material world includes nature, animals, and the human body, which is distinct from the soul. Therefore, nature becomes a mechanical entity, and man has the right to dominate and exploit it. The concept of man is not, however, understood as the totality of men and women. Because the main characteristic of women is emotion, not logic. Therefore, their classification among rational beings is disputed.³

Throughout the annals of human history, women have been revered as the life-givers, their bodies seen as vessels mirroring the fertility of the earth. In ancient mythologies, goddesses like Gaia represented the Earth’s immense creative potential. Gaia, the “Earth Mother” in Greek mythology, epitomised the nurturing aspect of the earth, illustrating its power to sustain life. However, there are also many other myths about monsters that have feminine qualities, live in the depths of the sea and the earth, anywhere far from civilization, and are responsible for many of the sufferings of humans. Other female divinities associated with free sexuality are presented as dark, demonic, hypocritical, and a threat to humanity (the Indian goddess Kali, Hekate, Lamia, the witch Medea, the mermaids, the sirens, etc.). Bare-breasted and free, they kill men and children, drink blood, live in forests, in lakes and glades, on shores, and in foaming waves. They are monsters that brave men seek to exterminate in the first place, for the young women to be “saved” before they abandon reproduction, their conjugal service, and the entire male sex.

³ Federici, Silvia. Caliban and the Witch, Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation. New York: Autonomedia, 2004, p.138–1511.

⁴ Federici, 2004, p. 61–63

⁵ Federici, 2004, p. 62–64

⁶ Federici, 2004, p. 68–75



Emblem of the Earth (1618), Earth and its significance in alchemical symbolism. Atalanta Fugiens. Taschen, 2007, Köln, p. 10. Public domain image.

The “wild” woman and “wildlife” have both been identified with the same distorted patterns associated with fear and threat. If we consider, for example, the witch hunt and the historical and social context in which it developed, we will see that it was an attack against women who gave a strong “presence” through the knowledge and power they drew from nature, their sexuality, reproductive control, and their ability to listen and heal. The replacement of witchcraft by the 18th century with a mustered biology and physiology to justify racial and gender hierarchies corresponded to the development of sexual and international divisions of labour.⁴ With the decline of feudalism in Europe, the body, viewed as fungible, clockable, and separated from ecology, operates as a morable component in the machinery of capitalism. The separation of the body from ecology was an organ for the system. The anatomy became the new fascination of a now exclusively male “healing class,” and the womb became the function of women, who were now relegated to the service of producing offspring for an expanding workforce. It was a moment that set up the moral and economic paradigms that would make capitalism and colonialism possible.⁵ This period, which solidified gender binary ideologies, was marked by land enclosures (privatization), widespread persecution, and the terror of witch hunts that targeted self-sufficient women, queer individuals, and practitioners of traditional healing.⁶



“Images of the Harpies, Furies & Lamias described as punishers, bringers of evil, monsters, prostitutes, evil flatterers, who first bring pleasure, then harm the soul, & body.”
Vincenzo Cartari, Public domain, Original: ‘Images Depicting the Gods of the Ancients’ first published in 1556 The engravings below are from a 1624 edition (in Italian)

Imagini dell' Arpie, Streghe, & Lamie, punitrici, & apportatrici di male, & monstri ancora spauenteuoli di Libia, significanti la finta & artificio della bellezza, & allettamenti delle meretrici, & le adulazioni de maluaggi adulatori, che apportan prima diletto, poi danno all' anima, & al corpo, all' honore, & alla vita.

The witch hunts systematically targeted those who, like “wild” nature, awakened a feeling of fear and were perceived as threats to the order established by the church and the state. They were hunted, tortured, and sentenced to death. Along with them, their wisdom, knowledge, and techniques were lost. I am convinced, however, that all this wisdom is still inherent somewhere in the collective unconscious and in each one of us, and one way to awaken it is to regain connection with the soil. A connection that runs deeper and relentlessly resists the shallow materialism of the ignorant modern world, which incessantly tries to erase ancestral memory—memory humbly speaking about interconnectedness.

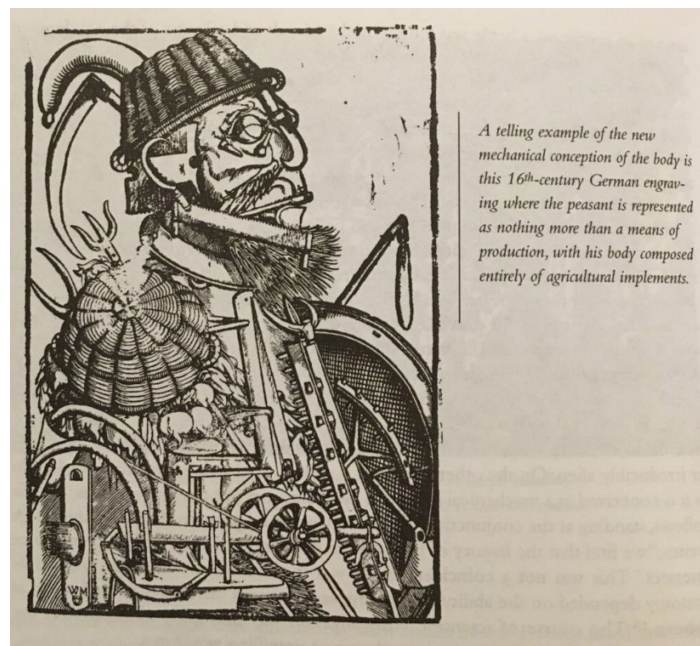
As Silvia Federici contends, capitalism was founded on the separation of people from communal land, with its primary aim being the detachment of labor from natural rhythms and the extension of the workday beyond the

limits of human endurance.⁷ The fixation of labour, space, and time are the most elementary and persistent techniques capitalism has used to take hold of the body. What we have not always seen is that this separation and fixation have “stripped of the powers that precapitalist populations attributed to it”.⁸ Perhaps by interconnecting with the earth, there is a hope of rediscovering the body’s capacity for resistance and celebration of its powers individually and collectively. Most probably, this resistance will seem monstrous and even create aversion to the overly sterilised world that modernism has shaped for us, but perhaps what a disconnected body would need to pursue is precisely that: to provoke fear in a system that wants us detached from each other and from the earth.

In the next chapter, I will explore how the “monstrous” or “horrific” can become a way of resistance through the lens of ecofeminist theory.



Reproduction of Calcutta Art Studio image of the four-armed Kali, wearing the mundamala garland of severed heads, standing on Shiva’s chest, ca. 1908. Public Domain.



A telling example of the new mechanical conception of the body is this 16th-century German engraving where the peasant is represented as nothing more than a means of production, with his body composed entirely of agricultural implements.

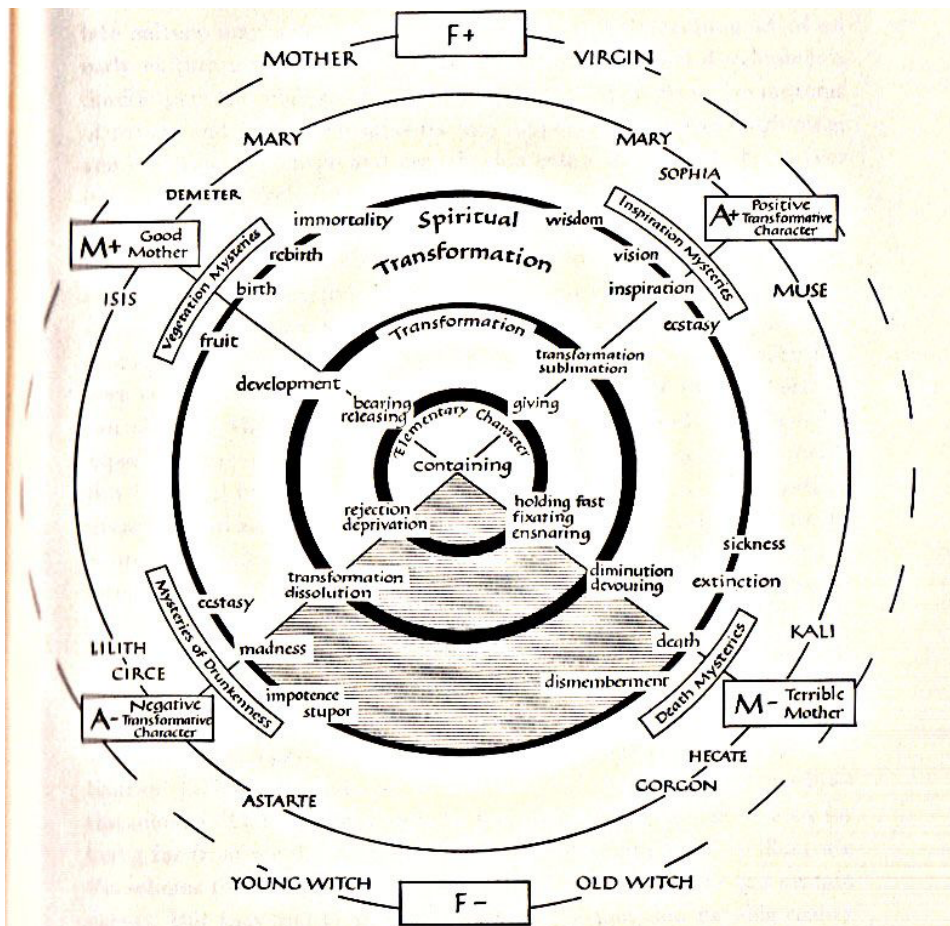
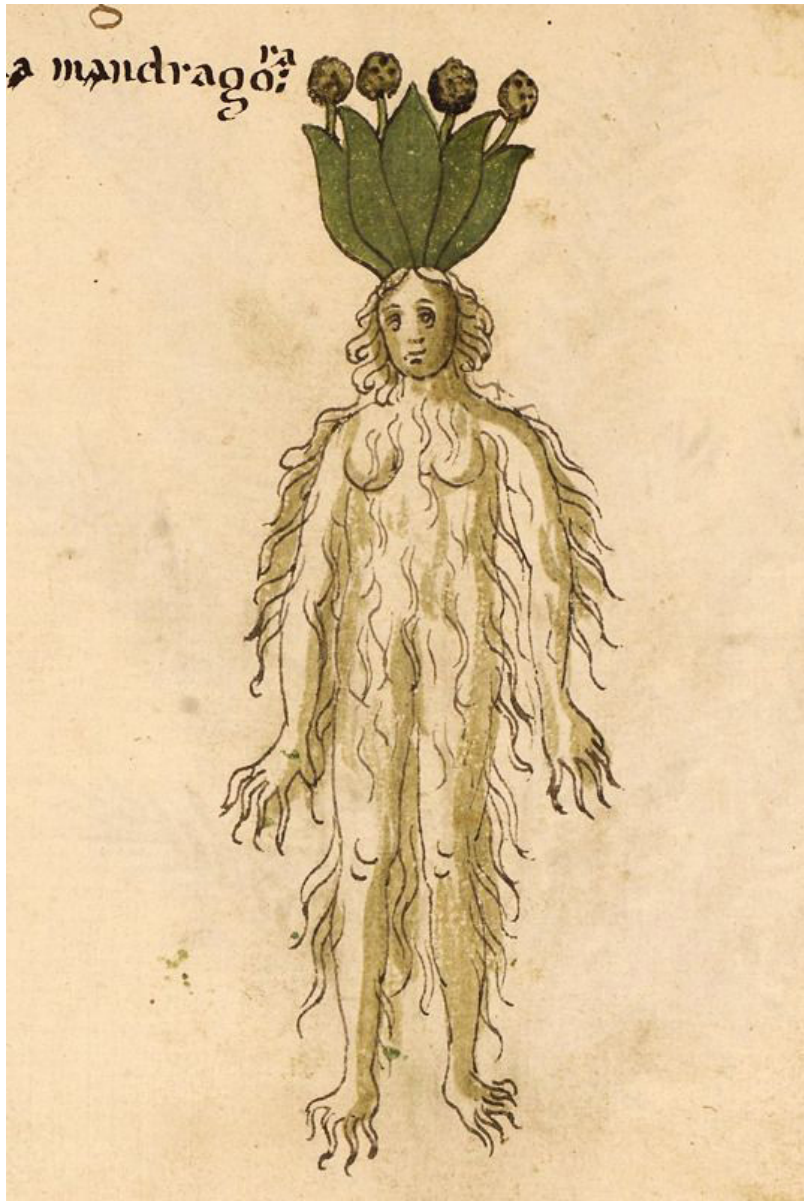
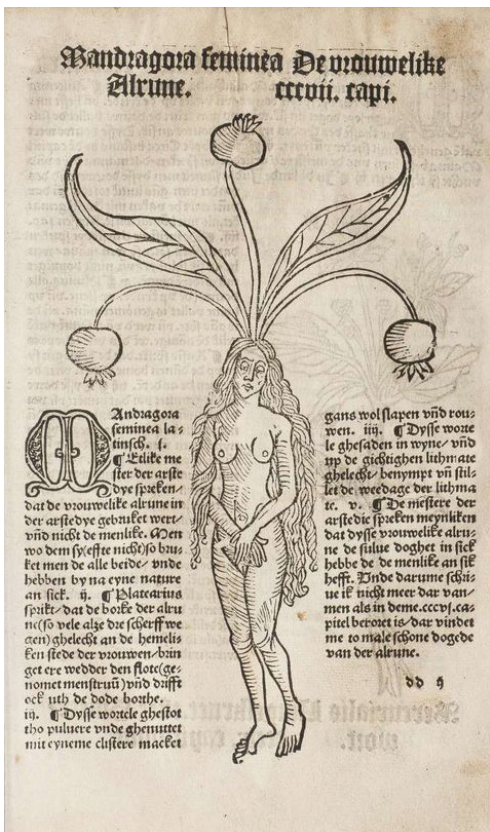
Machine Man, 16th Century German illustration
Description* German illustration of a nineteenth century worker by Henry Kamen (1972). It was extracted from Brazilian edition of Silvia Federici’s book “Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation”.



Mandrake (Mandradora officinarum) from Tacuinum Sanitatis manuscript (ca. 1390). Public Domain. Image credit: Wikimedia Commons (Hans Biedermann).

⁷ Federici, Silvia. *Beyond the Periphery of the Skin: Rethinking, Remaking, and Reclaiming the Body in Contemporary Capitalism*. PM Press, 2020, p. 120.

⁸ Federici, 2020, p. 120–121.



1: Mother Goddess German 19th century Prints engraving Indianapolis Museum of Art (no need to include both of them)

2: Sketch with Kali and a Young Boy, India (Punjab Hills, Kangra) ca. 1800. The Metropolitan Museum of Art. "Drawings from the Courts of North India: Sixteenth to Nineteenth Century," 2002. Public Domain.)

3: Mandrake (*Mandragora officinarum*) from Tacuinum Sanitatis manuscript (ca. 1390). Public Domain. Image credit: Wikimedia Commons (Hans Biedermann).

4: Hortus Sanitatis: mandrake, *Herbarius zu Teutsch*. Public Domain, , Original: Publication, Mainz : P. Schoeffer, 1485.

5: An Analysis of the Archetype: A Jungian Approach to the World of Mythology in the Aim to Establish an Overarching Cross-Cultural Archetype of the Great Mother. Book by Erich Neumann. (Image: A four-part chart in Erich Neumann's book of the Good Mother opposed to the Terrible Mother, and the Positive and Negative Anima.)

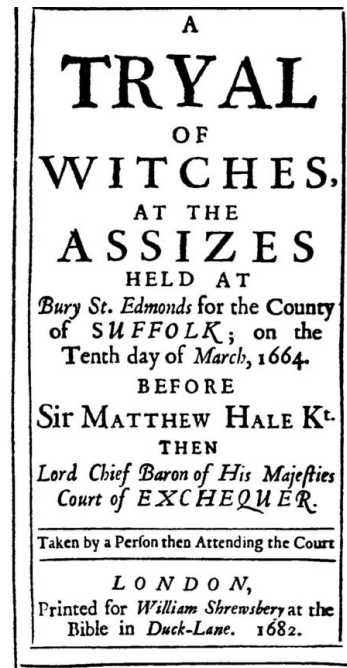
6: Gorgone (Image: Libero Andreotti. Gorgone, 1911. Public Domain)

7: Lamia: Libyan Queen who Turned to Child-Devouring Daemon (Image1: John William Waterhouse, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons, Image2: The History of Four-footed Beasts", 1607)

8: The Bury St Edmunds witch trials, a series of trials conducted intermittently between the years 1599 and 1694 in the town of Bury St Edmunds in Suffolk, England.

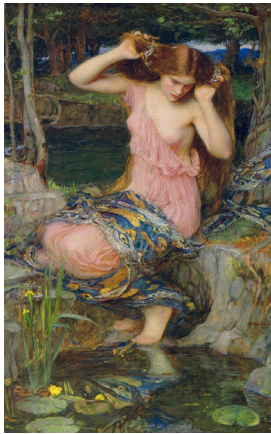
9: (Image: Gart der Gesundheit. Unknown author, 1485. Public Domain.)

Description* The Mandragora or Mandrake, due to its hypnotic properties and anthropomorphic root, has been described since ancient times with mysterious, supernatural and superstitious meanings. It was used as a talisman to protect against death and disease. It is said that the Odyssey's sorceress Circe used it both in her potions and to turn men into pigs.



2.

Deconstructing the “Mother Nature” Archetype
Ecofeminist Perspectives: Beyond Dualisms and Hierarchical Structures



Lamia: Libyan Queen who Turned to Child-Devouring Daemon (Image1: John William Waterhouse, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons, Image2: The History of Four-foot-ed Beasts",1607)

“We must identify the world of antagonistic policies and power relations by which our bodies are constituted and rethink the struggles that have taken place in opposition to the “norm” if we are to devise strategies for change.”
Silvia Federici, Beyond the Periphery of the Skin, p. 10.

As I argued in the previous chapter, the fundamental methods capitalism has employed to control the land and the body include the fixation of labor, space, and time. This began with the dissolution of communal ownership of the land and the transformation of machine-like workers.⁹ The attempt of the so-called Western civilization (or the so-called developed world) to place this “kingdom of necessity,” called “nature,” under strict human control is embedded in Western religion, science, and philosophy.¹⁰ Each of them argues that nature is a world separate from humanity, one which humans must control, order, understand, and ultimately overcome. In order to envision realities ‘beyond the binary’, it is vital to understand the economic and socio-political utility within particular systems of exploitation and struggle through which gender identities are transformed. Below, I will outline the primary theories I relied on in an attempt to understand the relations of power and exploitation that were justified through these dualities, in order to then try to dismantle the “Mother Nature” archetype.

Murray Bookchin, in his essay “Freedom and Necessity in Nature,” demonstrated that the Victorian notion of a strictly deterministic nature emerged from the dualism between nature and culture.¹¹ This underlying dualism has historically produced a constellation of other binary divisions corresponding to various forms of oppression, alienation, and dominance. These binary oppositions of man/nature, male/female, intellect/emotion, civilised/primitive, mind/body, and spiritual/physical have imposed dominance over nature, on women, on different races, and on different social classes as something “natural”.¹² Murray Bookchin’s study of social ecology shows that all beings within a community are interconnected.

⁹ Federici, Silvia. *Caliban and the Witch, Women, the Body, and Primitive Accumulation*. New York: Autonomedia, 2004, pp. 69–71.

¹⁰ The term ‘kingdom of necessity’ was used by Karl Marx to describe the realm in which nature is viewed as a source to be exploited. Marx, Karl. *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. by Ben Fowkes. Penguin Books, 1990, p. 56

¹¹ Bookchin, Murray. *The Ecology of Freedom: The Emergence and Dissolution of Hierarchy*. AK Press UK, 2005, p. 93.

¹² Bookchin, 2005, p. 144–152.

¹³ Globalization is establishing a system in which species have no freedom, farmers have no freedom, consumers have no freedom, and countries have no freedom. We are entering a system designed to ensure total control of corporations over the food system, which translates into food slavery. Shiva, Vandana. *The corporate control of life*. In *Biopiracy: The Plunder of Nature and Knowledge*, Boston: South End Press, 1997, p. 154.

¹⁴ Vazquez, Rolando. *Errant Journal: Learning from Ancestors*. Epistemic Restitution and Rematriation. *Errant Journal* # 5, 2022, p. 53– 62.



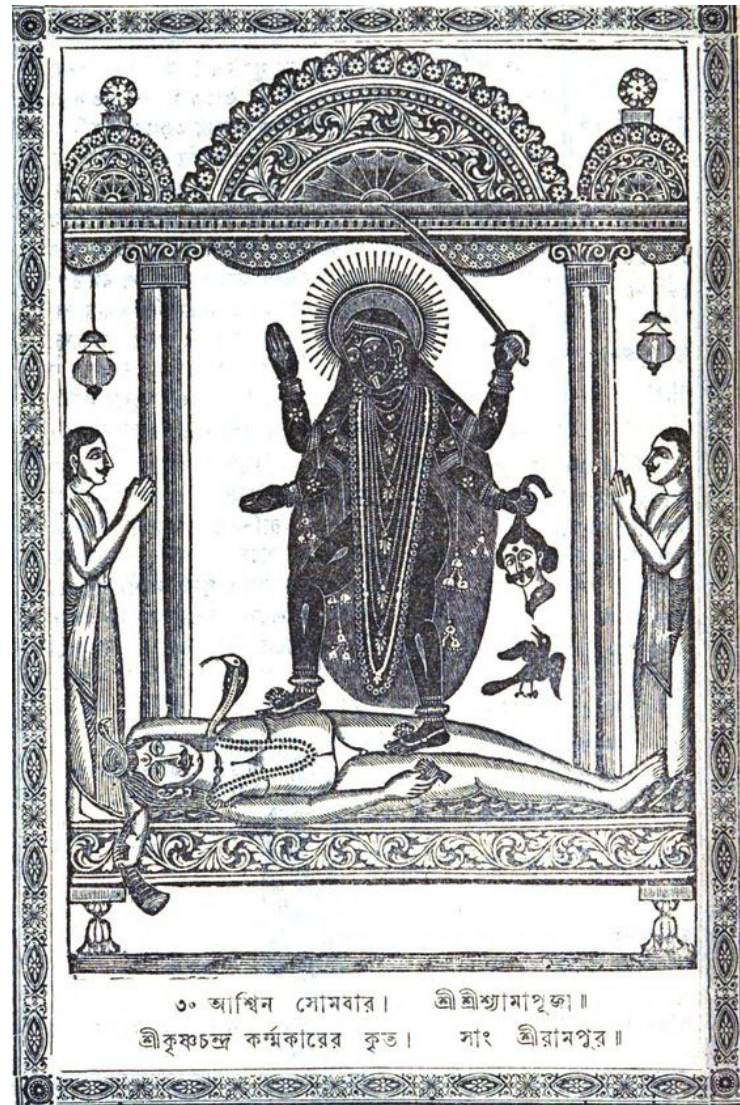
Diana efesina nella Teutsche Academie, public domain image, original: Joachim von Sandrart I (1606-1688).

When we acknowledge that we live in a world where all entities are always interconnected, the problem of “more” or “less” connection becomes illogical. The division and disconnection of nature and humans is a defining feature of paradigms resulting from the convergence of patriarchy and capitalism: initially, nature is detached from humanity, followed by the segregation of humans based on gender, religion, caste, and class. It is no coincidence that historical inequalities have intensified with the ascent of the corporate globalisation project.¹³ This very kind of dualistic and almost genetic way of thinking has fostered today’s ecological crisis. The problem lies in the fact that we simply do not think ecologically.

This logic of separation and classification of property and ownership is at odds with the ancestral weave in the “relational precedence” of nature, as Rolando Vázquez has discerned and expounded upon.¹⁴ This “relational precedence” refers to the primacy of relationships and interconnectedness within nature and human society and is in contrast with the modern logic of delineating boundaries, categorising things into discrete entities, and asserting ownership



Allá vá eso. (There it goes). (Image: " Francisco de Goya, 1796. Aquatint etching, part of the 'Los Caprichos' series. Located at Davison Art Center, Wesleyan University) Description* An aquatint etching by Francisco de Goya from 1796, titled “Allá vá eso. (There it goes).” It is part of the ‘Los Caprichos’ series and depicts a nude witch riding on top of a naked demon. The pair hold a broomstick above their heads where a snake wraps itself around the stick and a cat clings on to the broom bristles with its teeth.



Reproduction of Calcutta Art Studio image of the four-armed Kali, wearing the mundamala garland of severed heads, standing on Shiva's chest, ca. 1908. Public Domain.



Anneken Hendriks tied to a ladder, burned in Amsterdam (Image: Jan Luyken, 1685, Rijksmuseum)

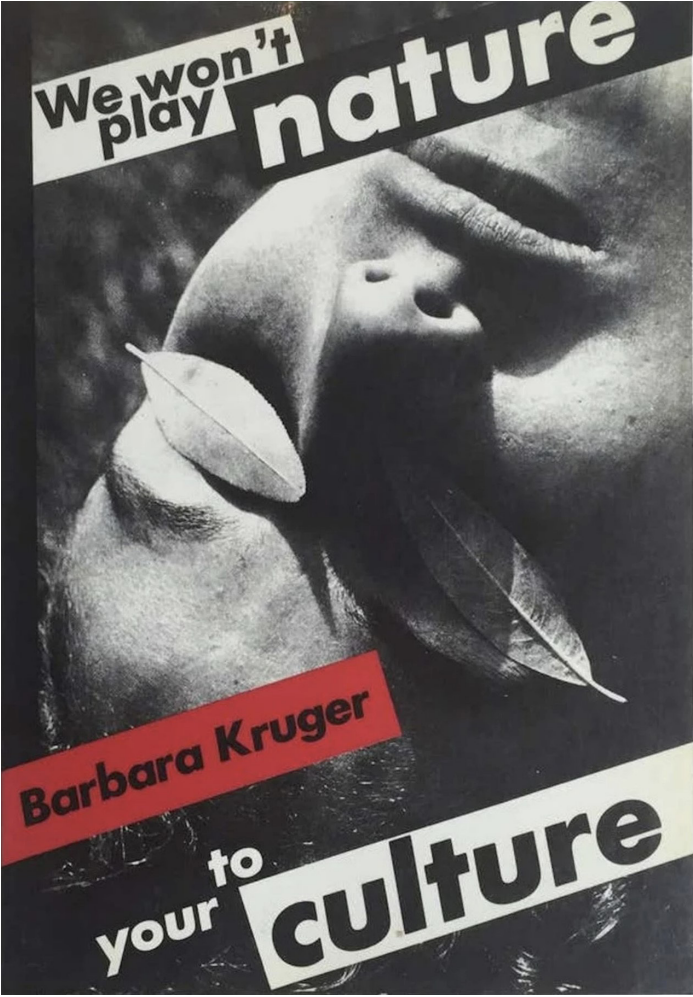
over resources.¹⁵ The intricate web of relationships and connections within the precedence of natural laws is not part of the superficial reality modernism has bestowed upon us.

Ecofeminist scholars have challenged archetypal associations of women with nature and argued that this equation reinforces environmental exploitation. Val Plumwood, in “Feminism and the Dominion of Nature,” criticizes the archetypal identification of woman with nature. Historically, women have been associated with natural elements, portrayed as caring, passive, and closer to the earth. While this association may seem harmless, it has reinforced gender stereotypes and perpetuated the subjugation of women.¹⁷ Such archetypes limit women’s roles and reinforce heteropatriarchal ideologies, suggesting that women’s destinies are intertwined with the natural world, thus limiting their agency and social mobility.¹⁸

Some ecofeminists, including Vandana Shiva, Carolyn Merchant, and Maria Mies, argue that linking women with nature has positive aspects, highlighting connections between the oppression of women and the exploitation of the natural world.¹⁹ They contend that patriarchal and capitalist systems have historically marginalised both women and nature, treating them as commodities to be dominated and exploited for economic gain. As a result, by emphasizing this parallelism, they challenge dominant power structures while advocating for social and environmental justice. However, others, including Susan Griffin, Val Plumwood, and Ariel Salleh, see this idea as regressive, reinforcing stereotypes of women as passive.²⁰ These ecofeminists caution against reducing women to passive symbols of nature and advocate for a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between gender and nature that acknowledges the complexities and intersections of social identities and power dynamics. While it is essential to acknowledge that ecofeminism is not homogeneous and contains, to varying degrees of development, different—and sometimes conflicting—positions and political attachments, one fundamental hypothetical assumption common to all ecofeminist positions is the rejection of the alleged inferiority of women and nature and the alleged superiority of logic, human existence, and culture.



The Witch Riding Backwards on a Goat c. 1500
(Image: A witch riding backwards on a goat, with four putti carrying an alchemist's pot, a thorn apple plant. c.1500, Engraving, Albert Dürer, Museum of New Zealand)



Barbara Kruger (“We won’t play nature to your culture”), 1983, Courtesy: Mary BooneGllery, New York

Stacy Alaimo argues that a feminist flight from nature fails to transform the terrain of struggle, leaving in place the very associations—with stasis, with passivity, with abject matter—that make nature a hazardous terrain for feminism.²¹ Postmodern feminisms and postmodern conceptions of nature offer a way out of this dilemma. Even though postmodern feminism works to denaturalize the concept of woman, it does not culminate in the separation of woman from nature. Such a refusal to “play nature” not only leaves the dichotomus nature/culture terrain intact but forecloses possibilities for subversive significations of “woman”. Judith Butler adds to this by emphasizing the importance of questioning traditional assumptions about women and their association with nature, as these assumptions have historically kept women in subordinate positions.²² Therefore, rather than taking flight from the idea of nature altogether, feminists should work to redefine and reconstruct this relationship in order to create more inclusive and empowering narratives. Feminist theories, politics, and fictions can travel beyond the false dichotomy of rejecting “nature” or valorizing the whole ideological package and can “play nature” with vengeance, by deploying discourses of women and nature in order to subvert them, destabilize the nature/culture divide, and construct feminist alliances with postmodern natures.²³

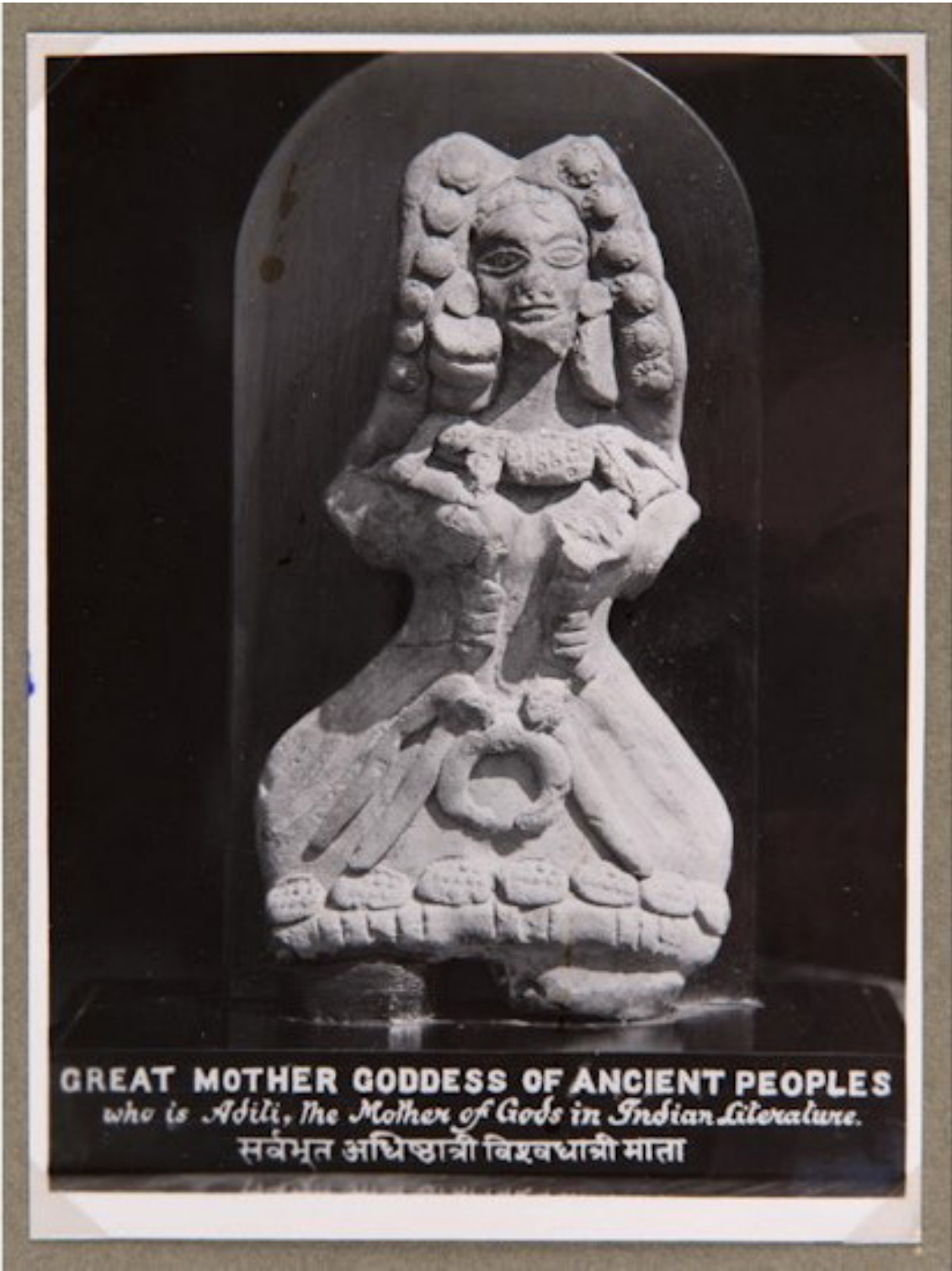
15 Vazquez, 2022, p. 62.
16 Plumwood, Val. *Feminism and the dominance of nature*. Routledge, 1993, p. 14
17 Plumwood, 1993, p. 18.
18 Plumwood, 1993, p. 18–19.
19 Mies, Maria. *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a VWorld Scale*. Zed Books, London, 1986, p. 35.
20 Warren, Karen. *The Power and the Promise of Ecological Feminism*. *Environmental Ethics* 12, no. 2, January 1, 1990, p. 46. <https://doi.org/10.5840/enviroethics199012221>.
21 Alaimo, Stacy. *Undomesticated Ground: Recasting Nature as a Feminist Space*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000, p. 135–136.
22 Butler, Judith. *Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of 'Postmodernism'*. ed. Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott, New York, 1992, p. 16.
23 Alaimo, Stacy. *Undomesticated Ground: Recasting Nature as a Feminist Space*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000, p. 136.



Artémis d'Éphèse, public domain image, original: Hugues Sambin, 1595

Traditionally, women are “the environment” — they provide the environment and the conditions in which male “achievement” takes place, but what the women themselves do is not considered an achievement.²⁴ The patriarchal treatment of nature and women-mothers has in common the notion that the mother is the unceasing provider. The one whose needs—if they exist at all—always come second. She is the one whose value is determined by the child she produces. It is she who is expected to provide work that remains invisible, and the one whose real skills, the importance of her work, and the difficulties she encounters are underestimated and defined as “natural”.²⁵ (This is the conception of motherhood that underlies many arguments against abortion.) The mother herself is defined in relation to her child or his father, just as nature is defined in relation to the human species as “the environment”.²⁶ This concept was notably used in the 17th century to describe monarchical power. Advocates of the monarch claimed that “the king’s power over his people was the same as the father’s power in his family” and that both were “sanctioned by God and nature”. The universality of sexual dominance, as a specific expression of “male privilege,” is so intense that it appears “natural” or “normal” and, therefore, is silenced and rendered invisible. It is widespread in culture and is part of individual socialisation, as it is sustained primarily by the family and continues with the child’s integration into society. It is reproduced and reinforced by education, literature, and religion to such an extent that—beyond a certain point—it becomes fully internalised.

It is customary for anything challenging the established norms to be branded as “unnatural” or “monstrous”. Similar to the witch hunts, which were an assault on women’s autonomy, originating from their access to common lands, control over their bodies, and reproduction. Their resistance to capitalism was deemed “monstrous,” and ultimately, their “taming” led to a regime that became the norm for women thereafter. Just as any body that is disconnected from the earth is considered the norm today, to the extent that, even those who persist in connecting with or trying to reconnect with it are considered abnormal.



Images from the Collective Unconscious by Olga Fröbe-Kapteyn and the Eranos Archive by Frederika Tevebring
3. photograph of Aditi statue, the Vedic personification of the infinite, ca. 200 BCE. The images were archived by Olga Fröbe-Kapteyn under “The Great Mother”
Source: <https://publicdomainreview.org/essay/images-from-the-collective-unconscious/#p-2-4>)

Description: In the 1930s, Olga Fröbe-Kapteyn, founder of the multidisciplinary Eranos forum, began compiling a diverse visual archive that would allow dreamers to cross-reference their visions with the entirety of cultural history. The research on Eranos is part of a larger project about how the theory of ancient matriarchies became a central idea for socialists, fascists, and feminists in the first decades of the twentieth century.



Images from the Collective Unconscious by Olga Fröbe-Kapteyn and the Eranos Archive by Frederika Tevebring
Photograph of a Greek vase, dated 5th century BCE, with hobnail texture from the Louvre’s collection.



Images from the Collective Unconscious by Olga Fröbe-Kapteyn and the Eranos Archive by Frederika Tevebring. Photograph of an Etruscan canopic urn, ca. 700 BCE, held by the Museo Civico in Chiari, Italy.

24 Mies, Maria. *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale*. London: Zed Books, 1986, p. 16.
25 Jaggar, Alison M., *Feminist Politics and Human Nature*. Harvester, 1983, p. 314.
26 Benjamin, Jessica. *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Problem of Domination*. Virago, London, 1988. See also Jaggar, Alison M., *Feminist Politics and Human Nature*, Harvester. Brighton, 1983, p. 314.
27 Alaimo, Stacy. *Undomesticated Ground: Recasting Nature as a Feminist Space*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000, p. 176.

“When “monsters signify,” they have the potential to signify in provocative and progressive ways. Despite the fact that the horrific often recontains challenges to the status quo by scaring people into submission and solidifying the boundaries of the “normal,” the horrific can also function as a site of resistance and subversion.”

Stacy Alaimo, Undomesticated ground, p. 176

Alaimo refers to the ability of the horrific or monstrous to function as means of resistance, of questioning and subversion of social norms and power structures.²⁷ Although horror often serves to reinforce existing structures of power and norms by instilling fear and maintaining the boundaries of the “normal,” it can also operate as a ground of resistance and upheaval. Just as monstrous or wild signify in provocative ways, so does restoring our connection to the soil signify a rebellion against the oppressive forces that seek to separate us from our natural essence. When the mechanised body of capitalism came to be seen as “natural” and acceptable, any other body that persists in remaining connected to the soil could be labelled as monstrous. However, the mechanised body is not solely a tool of oppression against which capitalism has been activated but can rather be seen as a potential “natural limit to exploitation.”²⁸ I paraphrase Federici here. There is something we have lost with our insistence that the body is socially constructed and performative.²⁹ The view of the body as a social production has hidden the fact that our bodies are receptors of energies, capacities, and resistances that have developed through a long process of coevolution with our natural environment, which are activated through connection with it.³⁰

The only limit I want my body to have from the soil is that of the “natural limit to exploitation.” Because the only resistance that capitalism incessantly seeks to disrupt is the reconnection with what lies “beyond the periphery of the skin”,³¹ We cannot liberate our bodies unless we change the material conditions of our lives and recognize that they are formed by our relationships with other people and the natural world.³² So, I contemplate my body in a very outward manner, functioning as a conduit of sensations, emotions, and knowledge activated through its connection with the soil.



²⁸ Federici, Silvia. *Beyond the Periphery of the Skin: Rethinking, Remaking, and Reclaiming the Body in Contemporary Capitalism*. PM Press, 2020, p. 119.

²⁹ Federici, 2020, p. 119–121.

³⁰ Silvia Federici is borrowing the concept of “socially constructed bodies” and the “performance” of genders introduced by Judith Butler. Federici, Silvia. *Beyond the Periphery of the Skin: Rethinking, Remaking, and Reclaiming the Body in Contemporary Capitalism*. PM Press, 2020, p. 119.

³¹ Federici, 2020, p. 119–121.

³² *Ibid.*

*“A revolution in today’s era doesn’t necessarily entail torrents of blood, nor the storming of the Bastille and the Winter Palaces, but rather the radical transformation of societal institutions. However, for a revolution in this sense to occur, changes must take place in the psycho-social organization, in our attitude towards life, in short, in our imagination.”*³³ The idea that the sole purpose of our lives is to produce and consume more—an irrational and demeaning notion—must be abandoned. The capitalist fantasy of pseudo-logical expansion, often portrayed as a rational pursuit, needs to be reevaluated, and there’s a need for a significant societal shift towards embracing change. This transition won’t be straightforward, as capitalism has long been deeply ingrained in our institutions, beliefs, and societal structures. In the future, as environmental challenges worsen and we inevitably reckon with nature’s consequences, we’ll all face the choice of where we stand. This is a moment to remember and reflect on the efforts of those who have advocated for alternative social structures in the past. My own commitment and direction to this cause are reflected in my own body and my belief in the genuine creative forces of all bodies on this planet.

Such a genuine case of creation, which has left a positive impact on the natural, social, and cultural environment of a specific region, is also the case of the women of my homeland, which I will delve into in the next chapter.

The story of the “body” must be narrated by intertwining the memory and stories of those whose bodies were turned into machines of labour, together with the history of capitalism from the perspective of the animal world, the lands, the seas, the forests.

³³ Castoriadis, Cornelius. *A Society Adrift*. Fordham University Press, 2010, p. 206.







3.

In the aftermath of post-war Greece:
The Contribution of Female Farmers in Epirus

Following the conclusion of World War II, rather than embarking on a path of reconstruction, Greece was embroiled in a civil war (1945- 1949), resulting in unprecedented devastation the country experienced in its recent history. Greece lay in ruins, with thousands of lives lost, while the scars of the civil conflict lingered on. A considerable segment of the rural populace migrated to urban centres in pursuit of employment opportunities. This period witnessed a proliferation of apartment complexes, indicative of a burgeoning but disorderly industrial development, primarily concentrated in the region of Athens. Concurrently, many thousands of Greeks migrated to Europe, America, Australia, and Africa in search of better prospects.

Within the framework of patriarchal ideology concerning the concept of nature and the categorization of women’s roles in my region of origin, this chapter will explore how the archetypal association of women with the earth becomes evident. The women I will address reside in one of these patriarchal environments where their lives were predetermined by their “masters” (αφέντες, aphēntēs) — fathers, husbands, brothers, mothers-in-law, etc. Nonetheless, they played a crucial role in preserving the familial, social, and cultural fabric of post-war Greece. Their experiences serve as an indicative case of the repetition of a pattern where specific social groups, primarily women in this instance, bear the burden of oppression and exploitation.



1950s, an old bus drives on the edge of a cliff in Epirus. Trying to reach the isolated mountain villages of Tzoumerka, crossing rough dirt roads with waterholes and landslides. The picture was taken by Andreas Oikonomou.



Family archive picture with my grandfather and other stonemasons while building a house (Family archive picture)

Leveraging firsthand narratives, I sought out my mother’s storytelling about her childhood in the village and diligently recorded her memories. She was born in 1966 in a mountainous village in Epirus at an altitude of 900 meters, and until the age of 12, she had not left the village. The bus journey to the nearest town, Arta, which lasted 2,5 hours, was, for the children of her time, a life-changing experience. There they saw multi-story buildings, storefronts, well-dressed women without headscarves, and tried ice cream and sweets that weren’t homemade for the first time. Although she is aware she might be romanticizing her memories, she reflects:

“Difficult years that I often reminisce about with great nostalgia. Certainly, people idealise the past, especially their childhood. However, I truly consider myself fortunate to have been born in a village. I played so much and ran even more on the dirt, in the grass, among the crags and streams. I climbed trees, either to compete with someone or to eat the first fig, the first apple, the first quince... I immersed myself deep in the forest to eat wild cherries and strawberries, to gather oregano and mountain tea.”



This is the last wall build by my grandfather, made without mortar to prevent soil erosion in our field. I took this picture in January 2024

In the 1960s, the area my mother refers to was, and still is, one of the poorest in Europe. Despite being mountainous and therefore unsuitable for cultivation, the locals, with the means provided by the environment, sowed and harvested seeds and crops that fed generations of pre- and post-war West Greece. One way to create arable land for cultivation was the use of stone, abundant in the region, in a manner that would prevent soil erosion. With the same stone, masons built houses, wells, bridges, alleys, and squares in the villages. In the 1970s, as part of the country's industrialization, the gradual depopulation of these areas essentially began. With internal migration to urban centers, traditional builders abandoned stone and soil, which had lost their value, to shelter with concrete the middle-class dreams of people torn between East and West.

Back in the village, children's work was a significant help for mothers who were left alone. *"Most of the time, playtime was a stolen luxury, only after we had finished our chores. The family needed extra hands, especially my mother, who, for most months, was alone without my father. He was away in Athens, constructing the apartment buildings that would shelter those who would gradually migrate in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s to find work in the factories and industries of the major cities."*



Picture by photographer Voula Papaioannou, Women transporting mud for the construction of a road. Sellades prefecture of Arta, 1946

I spent my early years in the mountain village of my mother in Epirus, and my grandmother played a significant role in my upbringing. As a farmer, she would spend hours in the vegetable garden next to the house, and I, up close, would observe and help as much as I could. There, I would listen to her for hours talking about the importance of placement of each vegetable and the significance of ash, clay, and sand in the soil depending on what we wanted to cultivate. Together, we carried the buried manure from the animal stable, and with our hands, having dug the first layer of soil, we scattered it from one end to the other in the field. Then, we divided the garden into plots, being careful not to step on the fluffy soil. Together, for hours, we selectively cleaned the seeds she had preserved from the previous year in bags with oregano and sowed them... If there was dryness, careful watering was necessary day by day. And then we waited... until the first “heads” timidly emerged.



My first anniversary in the village, with mom, great-grandmother, grandmother, and grandfather, 15 of May 1994 (Family archive picture)

“I remember your grandmother carefully selecting seeds from legume cereals that she would keep to sow again the following spring. She refused to plant different seeds. “My garden knows these,” she would say. In her mind, she carried knowledge passed down from her own mother, and her experience compelled her to share it with others.”

This obsession of my grandmother with preserving her own seeds reminded me of the words of Vandana Shiva, who often refers to the relationship between seed patenting, turning them into industrial commodities subject to individual property rights, and the overburdening of local farmers.³⁴ The need for cultivating traditional seeds, as well as the technique of crop rotation, which enriches the soil with nitrogen and organic matter, resulted from observation and empathy towards the soil.

³⁴ ROAR Magazine #7. Accessed [8/3/2024]. Available at: <http://roarmag.org>



Picture of the goat's shed taken by myself in January 2024



Me with our goats in their shed, September 1995 (Family archive picture)

The soil’s requirements for rest and diversity are knowledge based on the connection with the soil and the belief that this living organism is an extension of oneself, not needing to be tamed but rather feeling its needs and collaborating with it.³⁵ Rudolf Steiner addressed the necessity for a revitalised connection as early as 1924, during his course on the Spiritual Foundations for the Renewal of Agriculture. Emphasizing the importance of establishing a personal bond with every aspect of farming, particularly with different types of manure and the techniques used in handling them. While this might appear disagreeable, he stressed that without such a personal connection, success in farming would be unattainable. For farmers and gardeners to cultivate a genuine understanding and connection, a profound commitment to agriculture, composting, and the processes of life is essential. Within the theory of biodynamics, the gestures of composting³⁷ and crop rotation go beyond the utilitarian purposes of yields and waste management.³⁸ After constant attention, care, and the establishment of personal relationships in everything in farming, a compost yard begins to show itself as the outer expression of the inner gesture of the farmer.³⁹

Crop rotation is a process that my grandmother applied consistently. After tomatoes, she would plant beans or peas in the same spot, and when their green parts and roots rotted, she would mix them with the soil in which she would later sow corn, and the next crop would be beans, which eventually climbed on the corn stalk. After cabbage, she never sowed onions, nor after carrots and spinach, only beets. However, peppers did well with onions, and sweet corn went well with beets. But the greatest benefit of this crop rotation was the reduction of plant diseases. She would spread fireplace ash around the plants to repel snails and other insects, such as the ten-lined potato beetle, from the trees, as well as weeds and wild herbs. There, in the midst of decaying material—manure, moldy hay bales, piles of unwanted weeds, garden debris, and food scraps—lay the wellspring of our soil.

“In the spot where she planted beans one year, she would plant potatoes the next. ‘Tomatoes need a sloping area so that water doesn’t stand,’ she would tell me. She would sprinkle some sand in their soil. Throughout her vegetable garden, she would plant garlic everywhere, considering it the best medicine for plant diseases. And many more secrets that will be lost, because today we are so far away from all of this. Where would you lose her, where would you find her, in her garden, watering, tending early in the morning and late in the afternoon, humming, and literally talking to her plants. She would take pride in her harvest, and if someone from the city came to visit, they wouldn’t leave empty-handed. Now, at 90 years old, she has one sorrow: that she can’t live alone in the village. She withers away, just like her garden...”

35 Navdanya. “Living Soil.” Accessed [8/2/2024]. Available at: <http://www.navdanya.org/living-soil>

36 Steiner, Rudolf. 1993. “Spiritual Foundations for the Renewal of Agriculture.” Kimberton, PA.: Bio-Dynamic Farming and Gardening Assoc. Inc. p.23.

37 The act of composting is considered a gesture due to its symbolic significance in mirroring the natural process of organic matter decomposition, which sustains the soil ecosystem. Composting involves breaking down waste materials to create nutrient-rich soil amendments, which in turn support the growth of various microorganisms crucial for soil health. This process underscores the interconnectedness and interdependence within the soil community, where diverse organisms work together without hierarchical order to regenerate life.

38 Pfeiffer, Ehrenfried. 1983. “Bio-Dynamic Gardening and Farming, Vol. II.” Spring Valley, NY.: Mercury Press. p.15.

39 Lievegoed, Bernard. 1951. “The Working of the Planets and the Life Processes in Man and Earth.” The Experimental Circle of Anthroposophical Farmers and Gardeners. p.51.

Although the ancestral wisdom of cultivating methods was rooted in a deep connection to the land, industrial agriculture has strayed far from these principles. This shift towards mechanisation and chemical reliance has resulted in depleted soils and ecological imbalances. Industrial agriculture, driven by a mechanistic approach and reliance on fossil fuels, has led to a disregard for the intricate living processes that support healthy soil. Instead of nurturing the soil-food web, it prioritises chemical inputs and mechanisation, resulting in monocultures and a shift from biology to chemistry. This approach has led to degraded soils lacking organic matter, soil organisms, and water-holding capacity, contributing to famines and food crises, especially in the face of climate change. Industrial agriculture is a significant contributor to greenhouse gas emissions and is vulnerable to climate extremes. In contrast, organic farming, which focuses on returning organic matter to the soil, is shown to enhance carbon dioxide absorption, improve water retention, and mitigate floods and droughts.⁴⁰ Because organic farming is based on returning organic matter to the soil, it is the most effective means of removing excess carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, where it doesn't belong, and putting it back into the soil, where it belongs. Soil organic matter also enhances water retention capacity, simultaneously reducing the impacts of floods and droughts. We have a choice about how we relate to the soil: through the Law of Return⁴¹ or through the Law of Exploitation and Extraction.

While Greece's industrialization drew men to urban centers during the 1970s, the land deserted by male inhabitants awaited the hands of women to dig it, sow it, and harvest it. No one asked if they were capable or willing. They had to make ends meet and were compelled to endure because that was their destiny. Their labour in the fields was deemed "natural," a preordained role, a role these women had internalised without resistance. While they drew strength from the earth, they were "powerless" to challenge the perpetuation of patriarchal structures. However, with the nonexistent state assistance of the post-war period, the resilience of these women can hardly be characterised as anything but strong. Yet, their contributions went unrecognised, even by themselves.

The case of my mother's mother is indicative and reflects the lives of other women in the region. "Your grandmother, an illiterate woman born during the occupation (World War II), orphaned by her mother at the age of 7, became the homemaker of her paternal home, taking charge of the entire household and, along with it, the work in the fields and the flock. She married through an arranged marriage (love was a sin) at the age of 30, a relatively advanced age for a woman of that time. Her father would lose the hands that once cared for everything, especially after the departure of his sons to Germany. The marriage, for her, lifted the burden of being a spinster but didn't solve any of her

problems. On the contrary, it added more: her mother-in-law (to whom she should have been perfect in every way); her husband; and, of course, us three children, with our care and responsibilities. I remember her waking up at dawn to fetch a barrel of clean water from the well and two jugs in her hands from a steep and rugged downhill path. (Until I was six, there was no tap or electricity in the house)."

⁴⁰ Research by Navdanya has shown that organic farming has increased carbon dioxide absorption by 55%. International studies indicate that with 2 tons of soil organic matter (SOM) per acre, we can remove 10 gigatons of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, potentially reducing atmospheric carbon dioxide concentrations to pre-industrial levels of 350 ppm. Soil organic matter also enhances water retention capacity, simultaneously reducing the impacts of floods and droughts. A small increase of 1% in soil organic matter can raise the water retention capacity of the soil to 100,000 litres per acre. Navdanya, Living Soil. Accessed [8/2/2024]. Available at: <http://www.navdanya.org/living-soil>

⁴¹ The "law of return," often associated with permaculture, refers to the cyclical nature of systems where waste or byproducts are not seen as disposable but as resources to be returned to the soil through the inherent potential for decay to herald new beginnings and regeneration, perpetuating the rooted precedence in the cycle of life. Vandana Shiva delivered a speech at the European Parliament in Brussels on March 8, 2017 (International Women's Day), discussing the principles of the "law of return" in permaculture.



Picture of aunt and her children
going to their fields (Family archive picture)



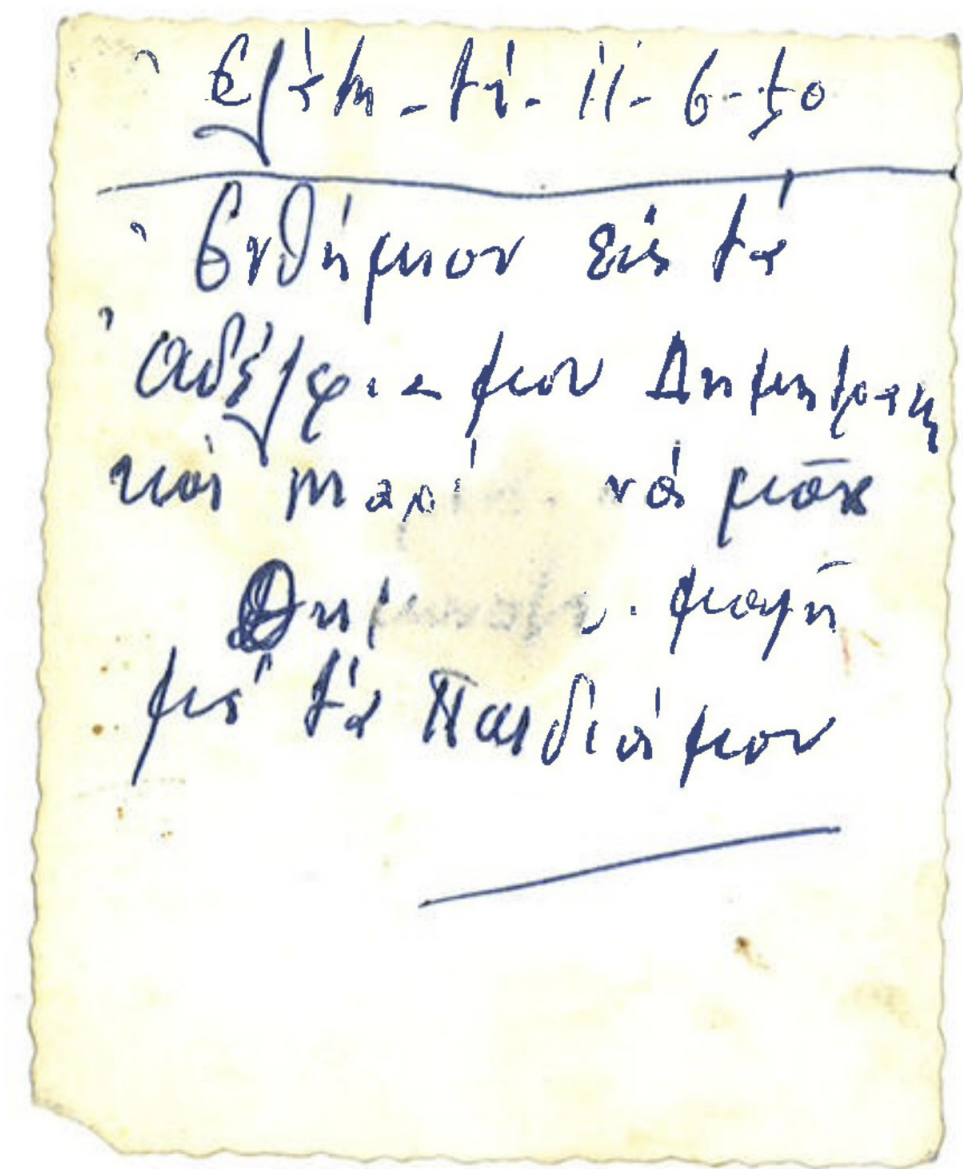
Picture of my grandfather, grandmother, mother,
aunt and uncle
(Family archive picture)



Picture of my father in his village also in Epirus, 1963 (Family archive picture)



Picture of grandmother with her daughters in the house (Family archive picture)



Picture of my grandmother with her kids, taken to be sent abroad to her brother in Germany, 11th of June 1970 (Family archive picture)



Family archive picture with my mother, aunt and uncle (Family archive picture)



Picture of my mom and aunts in the fields, Summer 1982 (Family archive picture)

Most of the activities of the residents of rural Greece, but mainly those of the women, were collective, with very close bonds. In the fields, they were not only connecting in order to work the land, but also to release the tensions of what they dared not in the sphere of the household, to cry and sing together, to help each other give birth.

It was common for them to give birth in the fields. And when it was time to cut the umbilical cord and bury the placenta in the soil, women shared this joy of a ritual that would protect the child throughout its life and would even signify its connection to that specific place and community.

“Depending on the season, your grandmother would connect with other women and head to either the fields or the vegetable garden next to our house. The labor there was genuinely demanding. She loaded the necessary tools onto the animals and took the tethered donkey and goats along for grazing and milking. Their milk served as nourishment for the children in the field. There was also a barrel of water and a bottle of “mango,” a concoction made by boiling poppies. Mothers would administer “mango” in drops to soothe and lull the lively and crying babies, ensuring they wouldn’t disrupt them during work. If slumber eluded them, a dose of “mango” was administered, and soon enough, they would be asleep. Many of us received a bit of “mango” when we were inconsolable.”

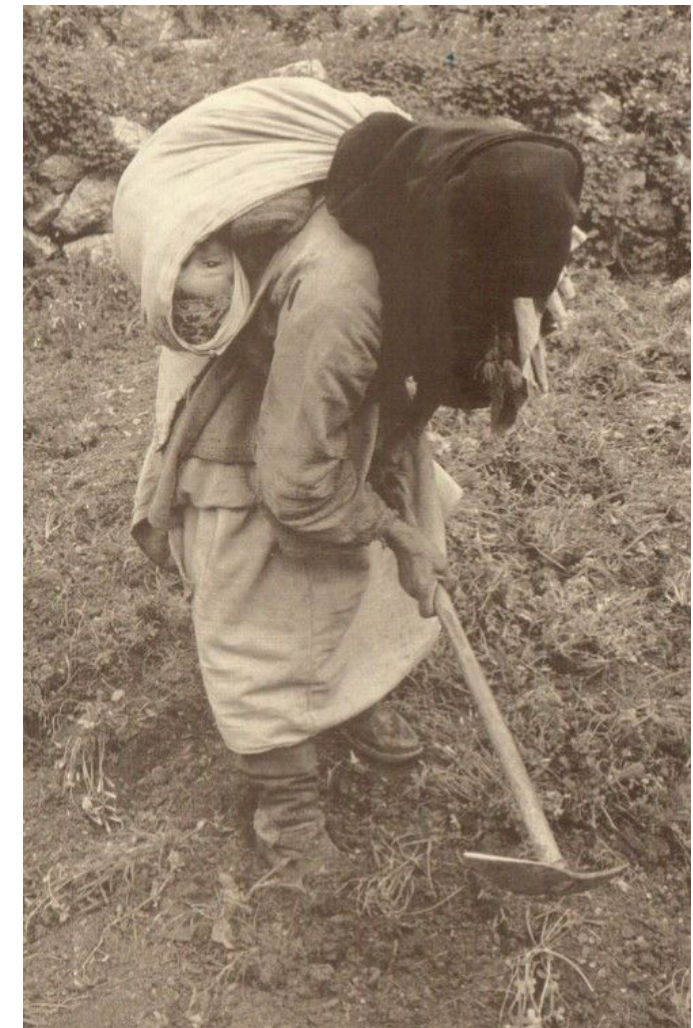


View from our house into the fields, picture taken by myself in January 2024

The Soil listens: Mirolloi Lamentations absorbed by the Soil

The mirolloi for Epirus is its very soul.
 Epirus is a mirolloi, a lament—sharp, deep, and mysterious.
 Rocks and stones are Epirus, mountains and hills, rivers, and cliffs.
 Every stone has been washed by tears, every field has borne fruit from blood.
 Epirus is a mirolloi.
 If you listen, traveler, you will feel it, you will live it.
 A lament for the dead and the living.
 For the near and far, for friends and foes, for expatriates and locals.
 A lament for the perpetual fate of the Epirot: emigration.
 The lament merges and becomes a voice, and the voice becomes many voices.
 Pain emerges and becomes a song, and the song seems to soothe the pain a little.
 Do not wonder where it comes from or where it goes, just listen to the earth's soft murmur.
 The earth laments its children.
 Mourns the ancestors forgotten, mourns the expatriates who never returned.
 There can be no joy without tears.
 And if ever one of them is lost, the other will be lost with it.

Working in the fields was undeniably strenuous, yet their resilience as they applied ancestral wisdom garnered from generations past buoyed a sense of togetherness and an unshakeable bond with the earth. As my grandmother once imparted, “The soil gave to us and bound us,” a sentiment epitomising the symbiotic relationship between these women and their natural surroundings. In the backdrop, the laughter of children and the singing of women toiling in the fields transcended mere labour, serving as an expression of both physical and emotional strains. The soil, witnessing this enduring connection, was nurtured through their sweat and toil. As if their expression of pain was embodied in the “Law of Return” and absorbed by the soil.



Picture of a woman in Epirus working while carrying her baby, (1962) photographer: Constantinos Manos, publication: 'A Greek Portfolio' first published in 1972
 source: Benaki Museum.

The cycle of joy and loss, of life and death, comes and comes back again in the songs of the inhabitants of Epirus—one of the regions most desiccated by emigration—like a spell for reconciliation. As an expression of pain or joy, the lament “mirolloi” (μυρολόι) offers a collective “catharsis” for singers and attendees. Starting from an individual, the mirolloi touches and becomes part of a broader whole, ultimately of the entire community. These lamentations of women have been sung in Greek-speaking cultures for thousands of years and were transformed into orchestral pieces and dances that are danced even today. They accompanied every departure, every migration, together with a bag of soil. For families with emigrants, it was uncertain when they would meet again; migration was a great loss, and the lament was there— a bond, an acceptance, a remembrance. Those who left took with them the mirolloi, the bag of soil, and perhaps never returned to the village. And those who stayed behind, especially the mother, kept the lament for solace. In the gardens and fields, in the ploughing, sowing, and harvesting, the lament was the companion of women. Their pain, their joy hung in the air, took shape through song, and were released through their work in the soil. Their voices blended, the pain became lighter, the joy became bigger, and they continued their humble contribution.

Mirolloi was a moment of free expression for these women, who appear to be liberated, gaining relative freedom within the framework of the ritual. While singing, they were throwing away their head scarves, freeing their hair. Their expressions, both physical and verbal, seemed to follow the disorder of the moment. The silent model, as defined by society, is overturned during this moment. Lamenting women as mediators become a bridge between the living and the dead, but also between men and women. However, laments were not only sung in times of loss but also during the formation of new family ties. The bride’s family dedicated a lament to her before her marriage, where she was advised to stay firm and “mute as the earth,” regardless of whether the marriage was by choice or arranged. In both cases, a mourning woman is a powerful symbol. Her words have power. Men remain silent during mourning, sung either because of loss or because of happiness. The social balance is disrupted by the disorder of the moment.

I vacillate between the idea of my ancestors enduring or simply being passive and accepting, and wonder about my own essence-aesthesis, gestures, and purpose in connecting with the land. But for me, one thing is certain: that the soil remembers and carries the communal gestures of these peasant women as an ancestral ontology of memory. Their give-and-take gestures carry a spiral, ancestral rhythm; they speak about life and death and connect ancestral memory with futurity. This concept of spiral time⁴² helps us recall and understand memory as a recreation of our lived experience and temporality, as something that transcends the linear logic of an “endless futurity” and the “infinite chronology” within contemporaneity.⁴³

“We are always in a sort of futurism of the now, a time that is always to come and that pretends to extend itself endlessly as an infinite chronology. This endless futural projection is unthinkable for thinkers with Earth, for First Nations and indigenous philosophies. It is unthinkable for the Earth, because the Earth is finite and not endless, and the Earth is ancestral and not limited to the superficial present.”
Rolando Vázquez. *Recalling Earth, Overcoming the Contemporary, Knowing Otherwise*, p. 59

As I navigate through this spiral-time of memories and interconnectedness, carrying like a bag of soil personal memories of my village, the memories of my mother and grandmother, I understand how memory becomes more than a mere recollection of the past; it is a living force that shapes our understanding of the world and our place within it. It is a composition of a decayed past, a temporarily not decayed present, and an ancestral future with the memory of Earth’s precedence. We have been, however, separated and uprooted from the soil and the communal in order to be at the service and the production of personhood and the self as an individual. In a now without memory, we too have become “amnesic” and “earthless”,⁴⁴ existing temporarily, mesmerised by an endless futural projection of the new. Is it even possible to imagine transitioning to a mindset that embraces ideas of ‘belonging to the soil’, a community, and the earth’s ancestry, where the significance of individual personhood is no longer needed? Maybe again, joy is a medium for resisting and overcoming the impoverished existence of a controlled and uprooted human body. Because there is joy available beyond the atomized self. And for me, the most radical thing we can be doing is just relating to the land and experiencing joy in the land.⁴⁵ We are always projected toward the future, whereas joy is already constructive in the present. I prefer to speak about joy rather than happiness because it is an active passion; it is not a stagnant state of being; not a satisfaction with things as they are.⁴⁶ As we have become “amnesic” of Earth’s precedence, we have also forgotten the joy and recreation that derive from mutual affection and responsibility. Joy experienced and shared within a community of ‘humans belonging to the soil’ can make us feel the warmth of solidarity and trust, seeing capacities growing in ourselves and the people around us. More and more people today see that we cannot place our goals into a future that is constantly receding. Obviously, our horizons must be broader, but setting goals that we can achieve is part of a present, which can not be superficial. Maybe one way to resignify the present and future within contemporaneity is to reconnect with the soil.

⁴² “Spiral time” as a concept acknowledges the repetition of patterns in history and personal experiences, as time does not move in a linear fashion but rather spirals or loops back on itself. It emphasizes the interconnectedness of all things across time and space and invites contemplation on the intricate rhythms of existence, where evolution and progression occur within cyclical patterns.
⁴³ Vazquez, Rolando. 2023. *Errant Journal: Learning From Ancestors. Epistemic Restitution and Rematriation. Errant Journal # 5*, p.53-62.

⁴⁴ Ibid.
⁴⁵ Carroll, Clint. Episode 299. *For the Wild Podcast*. Podcast audio, August 10, 2022. Accessed February 28, 2024. [<https://forthewild.world/listen/dr-clint-carroll-on-stewarding-homeland-299>]
⁴⁶ Federici, Silvia. *Beyond the Periphery of the Skin: Rethinking, Remaking, and Reclaiming the Body in Contemporary Capitalism*. PM Press, 2020, p. 125–127.

“The temporality of contemporaneity is at odds with the temporality of Earth.”
 Rolando Vázquez. *Recalling Earth, Overcoming the Contemporary, Knowing Otherwise* p.53- 62

Contemporality as an expression of modern aesthetics praises novelty, regulating our dwelling on Earth and our forms of world-making. As long as something meets the requirements of being something that has never been done before, it is validated as contemporary within the empty present of superficial reality and truth. However, the temporality of Earth cannot be limited by this reality—within a time of superficial present. Whereas the contemporary praises novelty, “Earth is ancestral and precedential”.⁴⁷ The projection of endless futurism as an chronology where the creation of novelty can reach the infinite is another characteristic of contemporaneity. This “endless infinite chronology” born in the superficial present, is a logic without death, pretending to extend itself endlessly, always affirming that there will be something new.⁴⁸ Within this logic of deathless futurity, there is no place for memory. The oddity lies in the fact that we design for an endless futurity on a finite Earth.

It is intriguing that previous generations, despite being more “traditional and less developed,” possessed a much greater understanding of the undeniable necessity of respecting and preserving the environment in which they resided. The same holds true for architecture. An inherent trait of architects is to construct and establish a new environment with each endeavour, yet without neglecting the fact that everything they create is (or should be) intertwined with the earth and the soil. It’s as though there exists an invisible umbilical cord that channels from the soil to the architecture all the energy and essence required for its existence within space and time.

⁴⁷ Vazquez, Rolando. *Errant Journal: Learning From Ancestors. Epistemic Restitution and Rematriation*. Errant Journal #5, p.53- 62.
⁴⁸ Ibid.

Moving with Soil: Ephemeral intra-actions of dirt

“My actual physical location became less and less important. All these spiritual energies were floating through my soul-body, like the Earth, where elements such as rare minerals are circulating through streams of global capitalism.”

Kristiina Kostentola, *Enfleshed Ecologies of Entities and Beings*, p. 20

Soil is in constant motion, whether naturally through air and water or “circulating through streams of global capitalism”. Matter, within its “migration” or movement through space and time, carries the potential to be activated as a political and ethical agent. Matter, in its essence, is not inert or static; it is shaped and transformed through dynamic relations. As elements interact and engage with one another, various phenomena emerge, leading to the establishment of boundaries through communication. Thus, matter manifests through these intricate relational dynamics. Karen Barad describes that intra-actions, unlike interactions, are dynamic forces that produce meanings and material beings simultaneously, excluding the production of “others”.⁴⁹ These intra-actions are onto-ethico-epistemological since they merge that which exists in the world (ontology) with that which we know in the world (epistemology) within the ethical concern of this union.⁵⁰

In Rotterdam, I stumbled upon a realization—I missed the dirt. It was not until I moved here that I realized how much I craved a connection with the soil, a simple desire for messiness, the sensory joy of getting dirty, and the difficulties of finding messy solace in a polluted city. The comforting delight of plunging my hands into the soil, a pleasure I once overlooked, transformed into a sincere longing. The need for connection with a new land led me to dig for subsoil and mold it with my hands, giving it a form that was neither representational nor served any aesthetic purpose. If I am to “play nature,” how can I shape matter without the production of “others”? How can the binary of subject and object dissolve during a creative process?

⁴⁹ Dolphuijn, Rick and Van der Tuin, Iris. Interview with Karen Barad, in *New Materialisms: Interviews & Cartographies*. London: Open Humanities Press, 2012, p.47- 70.

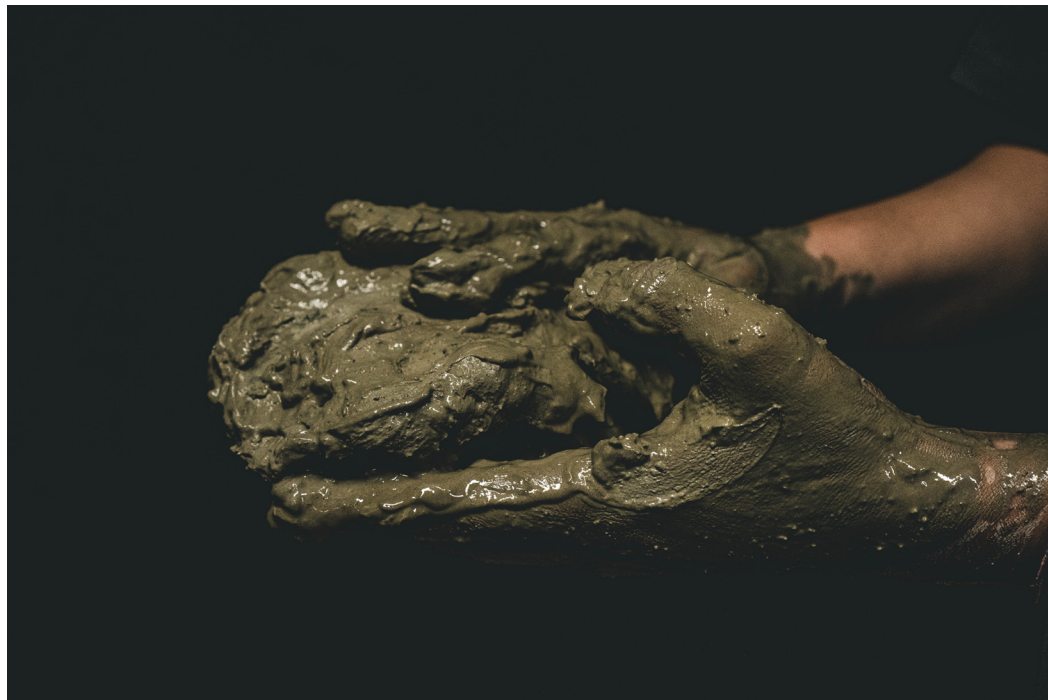
⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Vazquez, Rolando. *Errant Journal: Learning From Ancestors. Epistemic Restitution and Rematriation*. Errant Journal # 5, p.53-62.

⁵² A design object, according to Rolando Vazquez, is an anthropocentric object, resulting from human design, consuming matter to establish its form within the realm of representation, and transforming aesthetics as a principle of its validity. A design object is placed in a separation akin to the self, the production of personhood, and the individual, reflecting our disconnection as earthless individuals. These objects are uprooted and in need of epistemic and aesthetic restitution. They allow us to see how ignorant we have become of relational forms of living. Relations that sustain us nonetheless, but that we do not consider, that we have become ignorant of.”



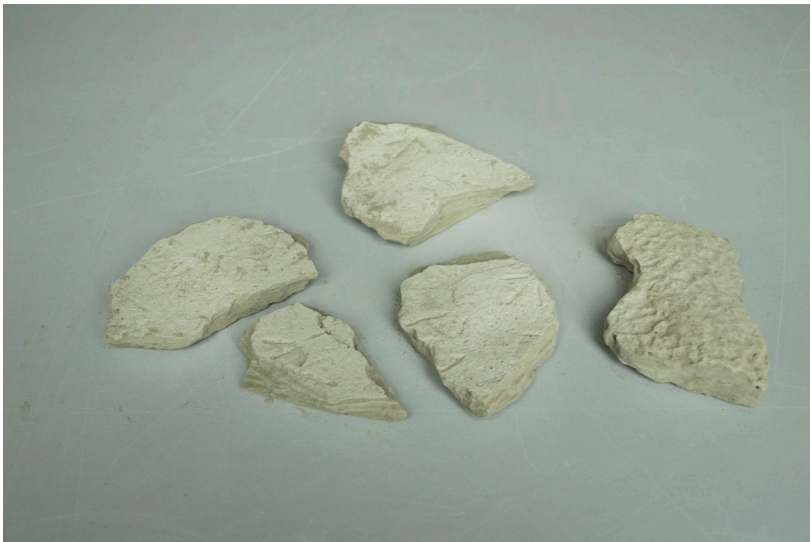
Ephemeral objects of dirt, clay harvested in Rotterdam on February 8, 2024



Shaping of ephemeral objects with Rotterdam harvested clay



Riverbed of Arachthos



Dry clay pieces (harvested in Arachthos:14th April 2024, migrated to Rotterdam:18th of April 2024)



Stones from the riverbed (harvested in Arachthos:15th April 2024, migrated to Rotterdam:18th of April 2024)



A piece of wood from the riverbed (harvested in Arachthos:16th April 2024, migrated to Rotterdam:18th of April 2024)

Relational objects, according to Rolando Vazquez, have come to form in the relation where human hands are part of that relation and at the service of the formation of that relational object,⁵¹ whereas the design object tends to seek a reason to justify its existence.⁵² I understand the idea of relational objects as creations that are still interconnected with their material memory, since the hands that took part in the process of shaping them gave time and space for intra-actions to occur simultaneously. Through the need for a more intimate, embodied, and embedded connection with the earth, I began to explore the boundaries of human rationalism, seeking a deeper relationship between material and spiritual worlds. In a dialogue with the “non-living” or “spectral,” I let the soil become an agent in forming “relational objects.” The experimentation involved several steps until I encountered the type of soil with enough plasticity to undergo transformations. Firstly, I dug in the subsoil of different areas around the city (areas I normally choose to relax), collected it, and carried it to my studio, where I let it dry. The next day, I ground it into powder and brushed this fine dust into a bucket with water, allowing the sedimentation process to occur for a day. Afterward, I removed the water and poured the dirt onto a piece of fabric, which I then tied tightly, hung, and let dry for another day. What remained in this bag of dirt was clay, a material that takes thousands of years to form naturally. With this clay, I shaped my relational objects, focusing not on the fact that this matter is most likely contaminated, but rather on its journey, trying to intra-act with it, not thinking about representational aesthetics. By working with soil that has been harvested, carried, filtered, and transformed through various elemental interactions in collaboration with the material world, I engaged in a dialogue with the agency of the soil itself. By allowing the earthly matter the time it needs to undergo its transformative journey, I appreciated its unique ephemerality and offered it the space to manifest its plasticity.

When a person from my motherland migrated out of necessity with a bag of soil in their hands, this bag contained not only soil from their homeland but also all the valuable meanings that defined them and connected their present with their ancestral memory. The distinction between the material and spiritual worlds becomes blurry and diminishes in this context. Although I was not given a bag of soil before migrating, I feel connected to the idea of moving with it.

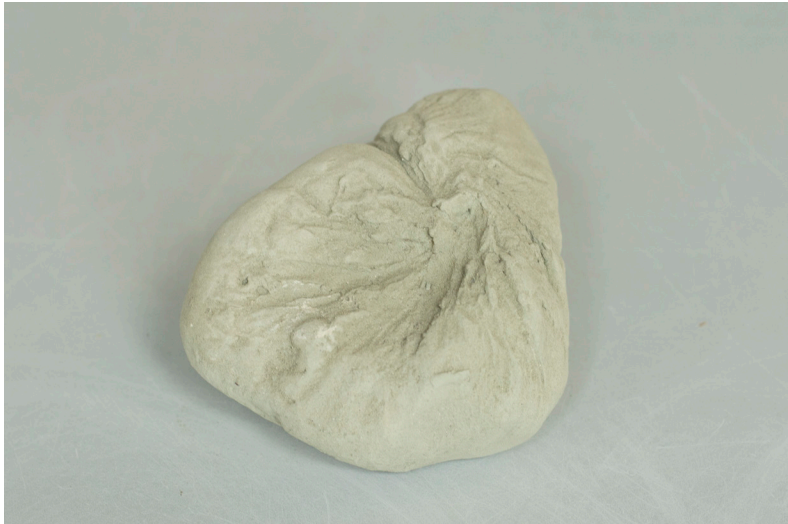
On my last visit back to my village, I walked along the riverbanks of Arachthos. I arrived at a point where the river did not flow with speed and force. The continuous flow of water drags and carries the soil, but when the water calms down, it reconciles with the soil, allowing it time to settle. And so the soil occupies the space until the waters become wild again, transporting it elsewhere. One of its streams, having dried up due to the lack of rain, poured its little water to a point very close to our ancestral home. Descending its accessible banks, I crossed the fragile dry bed of the stream, listening to its running waters gurgle. The waters that gently flowed allowed clay to settle on their banks. At this spot where streams run slowly, I stepped and temporarily disturbed the peace of the earth. I set the soil in motion again with my presence. It rolled over my hands and nestled in a piece of cloth. One part of it was carried and left under the sun to dry. When it hardened, I kept it with me for company on this journey from one home to another. In Rotterdam, water from a lake lets the bag of soil become again. Gentle sounds of disintegrating clay from home echo the mirolloi lamentations of my ancestors in this new land.

The river, in its continuous flow, carries soil that filters into clay while clay becomes an agent of navigation in space and time. Because clay travels. It does not belong to somebody; it belongs to everyone. When clay is collected from the bed of a river, time is also collected with it. This time is a slow ancestral time, not limited to the superficial present.

When a person from my motherland migrates out of necessity with a bag of soil in their hands, they also take with them the mirolloi, a lamentation sung in polyvocality. This communal gesture of singing a lament for the emigrant will be floating through their body-soul, reconnecting them with their ancestral memory.



“bag of soil” (harvested in Arachthos:15th April 2024, migrated to Rotterdam:18th of April 2024)





"Soil blanket" stitched together from pieces used to filter dirt into clay

Adams, Carol J., ed. *Ecofeminism and the Sacred*. New York, N.Y: Continuum, 1995.

Alaimo, Stacy. *Undomesticated Ground: Recasting Nature as Feminist Space*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 2000a.

---. *Undomesticated Ground: Recasting Nature as Feminist Space*. Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 2000b.

Amadiume, Ifi. *Re-Inventing Africa: Matriarchy, Religion and Culture*. 2nd impression. London: Zed Books, 2001.

Benjamin, Jessica. *The Bonds of Love Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Problem of Domination*. New York: Pantheon, n.d.

Bookchin, Murray. *The Ecology of Freedom: The Emergence and Disso- lution of Hierarchy*. Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2005.

Braidotti, Rosi. *Posthuman Feminism*. Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2022.

Dolphijn, Rick, Zoënie Deng, Stephan Dudeck, Christian Vagt, Jurij K. Ajvaseda, Taru Elfving, Giovanna Esposito Yussif, et al. *Enfleshed: Ecolo- gies of Entities and Beings*. Edited by Bo Wang, Kristiina Koskentola, and Marjolein van der Loo. Second edition. *Onomatopée* 241. Eindhoven: Onomatopée Projects, 2023.

Eaubonne, Françoise d’, Ruth A. Hottell, and Carolyn Merchant. *Femi- nism or Death*. London New York: Verso, 2022.

Federici, Silvia. *Beyond the Periphery of the Skin: Rethinking, Remaking and Reclaiming the Body in Contemporary Capitalism*. Kairos Books. Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2020.

---. *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumula- tion*. Penguin Modern Classics. London: Penguin Book, 2021.

Gaard, Greta Claire, ed. *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature. Ethics and Action*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993.

GOTBY, ALVA. *THEY CALL IT LOVE: The Politics of Emotional Life*. S.l.: VERSO BOOKS, 2024.

Griffin, Susan. *Woman and Nature: The Roaring inside Her*. Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2016.

Hamilton, Jennifer Mae, and Astrida Neimanis. “Composting Feminisms and Environmental Humanities.” *Environmental Humanities* 10, no. 2 (November 1, 2018): 501–27. <https://doi.org/10.1215/22011919-7156859>.

Haraway, Donna. *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. Reprinted. London: FAB, Free Association Books, 1998.

---. *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Un- abridged. Old Saybrook, Conn.: Tantor Media, 2017.

Hustvedt, Siri. *Mothers, Fathers, and Others: Essays*. First Simon&Schus- ter trade paperback edition. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster Paper- backs, 2022.

Kothari, Ashish, Ariel Salleh, Arturo Escobar, Federico Demaria, and Alberto Acosta, eds. *Pluriverse: A Post-Development Dictionary*. New Delhi: Tulika Books and Authorsupfront, 2019.

Kristeva, Julia, Leon S. Roudiez, and Julia Kristeva. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Nachdr. *European Perspectives*. New York, NY: Columbia Univ. Press, 2010.

Merchant, Carolyn. *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution*. New York: Harper & Row, 1989.

Neimanis, Astrida. *Bodies of Water: Posthuman Feminist Phenomenol- ogy*. *Environmental Cultures Series*. London ; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, an imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2017.

“No Future.” In *No Future*, 111–54. Duke University Press, 2004. [https:// doi.org/10.1215/9780822385981-004](https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822385981-004).

Piercy, Marge. *Woman on the Edge of Time*. London: Del Rey, 2019.

Place, Alison, ed. *Feminist Designer: On the Personal and the Political in Design*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2023.

Plumwood, Val. *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*. Transferred to digital print. *Opening out Feminism for Today*. London: Routledge, 2003.

Rasula, Jed. *This Compost: Ecological Imperatives in American Poetry*. Paperback edition. Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 2012.

Salcedo-La Viña, Celine, and Renée Giovarelli. “On Equal Ground: Prom- ising Practices for Realizing Women’s Rights in Collectively Held Lands.” World Resources Institute, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.46830/wrirpt.19.00007>.

Salleh, Ariel. *Ecofeminism as Politics: Nature, Marx, and the Postmod- ern*. London ; New York : New York: Zed Books ; distributed in the USA by St. Martin’s Press, 1997.

Silva, Corinne. *Garden State: The Politics of Planting in Israel/Palestine*. Cardiff: Fotogallery Wales Limited, 2016.

Therborn, Göran. *Between Sex and Power: Family in the World, 1900- 2000*. *International Library of Sociology*. London: Routledge, 2004.

Wilk, Elvia. *Death by Landscape: Essays*. First Soft Skull edition. New York: Soft Skull, 2022.

ActionAid (2014), ‘Climate Resilient Sustainable Agriculture Experiences from ActionAid and its partners’, <http://www.actionaid.org/publications/climate-resilient-sustainable-agriculture-experiences-actionaid-and-its-partners-o>

Climate Smart Agriculture Concerns (2014). ‘Corporate-Smart Green-wash: Why We Reject the Global Alliance on Climate-Smart Agriculture’, <http://www.climatesmartagconcerns.info/rejection-letter.html>.

Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), ‘Climate-Smart Agriculture’, <http://www.fao.org/climate-smart-agriculture/overview/en/>.

Gilbert, Natasha (2012). ‘One-Third of Our Greenhouse Gas Emissions Come from Agriculture’, Nature, <https://www.nature.com/news/one-third-of-our-greenhousegas-emissions-come-from-agriculture-1.11708>.

Granta. “Erotics of Rot.” Granta Magazine, <https://granta.com/erotics-of-rot/>

Monsanto (2017). ‘Driving Innovation in Modern Agriculture to Combat Climate pluriverse Change’, <https://monsanto.com/company/sustainability/articles/climate-smartagriculture-practices/>.

ScienceDirect (2014). ‘Sustainable intensification: What is its role in climate smart agriculture?’, <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1877343514000359>.

Yara, ‘Sustainability’, http://yara.com/sustainability/climate_smart_agriculture/.

