# UNEARTHING MEMORIES FEEDING PRACTICES FOR PLURAL KNOWLEDGES AND BEINGS

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How might collaborative forms of art-making create fertile vocabularies and ways of storytelling to transform paradigms that are shaped through oppositional dichotomies and excluding frontiers?

How to reimagine human and more-than-human relationalities to respond to the current socio ecological crisis?

## UNEARTHING MEMORIES, FEEDING PRACTICES FOR PLURAL KNOWLEDGES AND BEINGS

A project by Imayna Caceres, Nuno Cassola, Eliana Otta and Vasilikí Sifostratoudaki

## **SCOPE**

Decolonization movements, in activist and academic fields, have continued to expose the colonial, rationalistic, and ecocidal effects of modern narratives, which still impact our imaginations and lives. Being constituted by a plurality of modernity-exceeding worlds, and aware of our modern inheritances, our motivation is to collectively engage in explorations that seek to cultivate plural value-ecologies of living with others on Earth. As Peruvians, Greek and Portuguese artists creating at the intersections between curatorship and activism, we want^å to investigate how dialogs between "global south" agents can enrich our diving into the stories we stem from.

We expand a concerns previously proposed at IMPACT by Eliana Otta's Community of Mediums' project, such as the creation of survival and empathic tools for intra species conviviality, translations between past, present and possible worlds, understanding our bodies and languages as vehicles for messages from different realities.

Through our artistic research, we address modes of living, doing, thinking, which deviate from hegemonic Western forms of knowledge production, collectively exploring alternative means to relate to history, desire and the future.

## **RESULTS:**

— We expanded our understanding regarding practices of care and alternative ways of addressing history, welcoming unforeseen paths for our process through the online meetings with the other research teams.
—Otta look^å to sides of the world without divisions between individuals, communities, humans, no humans, the earth and the cosmos. She tries to open paths to those almost extinct, magic, struggling, vulnerable worlds within this one, through an approach that is affective, informed by embodied knowledge, intuition and spirituality.
—We deepened our connections with subjects and communities who have for long engaged with knowledge produced by other than humans, from learnings and encounters with plants.
—Caceres exploreå our relationality to plants, referring to the teachings of earth beings through her upbringing in mestizo-Indigenous worlds and practices of care that stem from Amazonian and Andean worlds.
—We accompanied each other in processes of commitment with archaeologies of family history.
—Sifostratoudaki look^å into the healing and nursing practices of women from Anatolia who came to Greece through the exchange of population in 1920, through the lives of her aunt (a midwife) and her grandmother. A series of dialogical gestures &^ juxtaposed to literary works of the time and will foster a recovery of healing methods, recipes and the stories of immigration carried by particular objects.
—We addressed memories and narratives regarding traumatic phenomena such as migration and colonial complicity.
—Cassola research^å Portugal's colonial past through family stories that were never shared (elaborated). Stories never told but felt, about family members fighting on the portuguese side against the independence war in Guiné, and the mythologies impregnating the reflection of Portugal's past.
—We are working on the most coherent languages to ground our shared research, according to its ethics and politics (possibly through video, installations, writing, drawings and pedagogical projects).
—We are devising how to expand the collectivizing spirit of our endeavour, translating it into practices of care such as workshops, dinners and rituals

### STEPS TAKEN

- —Sharing the state of our research themes, making explicit the meeting points between them, ` ^ identifa a the dimensions where collaboration and exchange would be more fertile.
- —Periods of immersion in each topic Ecombined with continual feedback in order to collectively shape the possible results, help^å each other through the creation of texts, videos, scores and participatory activities.
- —Trips to Portugal (Aveiro) and Turkey (Aivali and Istanbul), ^\^\(\hat{A}\) æ\^, to deepen the correlations between micro and macro stories.
- —Our final outcomes & stories of unearthed memories and revalorized knowledge, as well as offerings and homages to practices that regenerate life, building up welcoming and collective gestures and languages.
- —These results will be shown to our expanded communities, to amplify the reverberations of our exchanges, and allow us to point towards the continuation of our collaborations.

More on the participants and previous collaborations imaynacaceres.com eliana-otta.com / bisagra.org vasilikisifostratoudaki.gr / yellowbrick.gr nunocassola.com / khora-athens.org/ wordingthetrouble.org instagram.com/capacete athens/

### THE GROUP

Eliana Otta, Imayna Caceres, Vasiliki Sifostratoudaki, Nuno Cassola are Peruvians, Greek and Portuguese artists, who want to investigate how dialogs between "global south" agents can enrich our diving into the stories we stem from. Our artistic research addresses modes of living, doing, thinking, which deviate from hegemonic Western forms of knowledge production, collectively exploring alternative means to relate to history, desire and the future. We expand on previously proposed concerns from Eliana Otta's Community of Mediums' project, such as the creation of survival and empathic tools for intra species conviviality, translations between past, present and possible worlds, understanding our bodies and languages as vehicles for messages from different realities.

## Imayna Caceres

(Callao, 1979) Artist and researcher that works with communities that exceed the human, futuristic ancestral heritages, and practices of regeneration and kinship. My work includes relational and ritual practices, projects in public space, video and digital and analogical drawing. Candidate to the Doctorate in Philosophy by the Akademie der bildenden Künste. MA. in Fine Arts as well as in Artistic and Cultural Science, Graduate in Sociology and Communication Sciences. I am part of the female collectives Trenza and Anticolonial Interventions in Vienna, with which we organize around ecopolitical matters. www.imaynacaceres.com

## Vasiliki Sifostratoudaki

(Athens, 1979) is a visual artist, graphic designer and educator. She holds a degree from the Athens School of Fine Arts and a MA in Fine Arts from Piet Zwart Institute, Willem de Kooning Academy. Her artistic practice initiates "mechanisms of curiosity" through spatial and performative interventions. Fluid materialities, poetic improvisations and choreographies along with interdisciplinary tools from anthropology, architecture and philosophy are used to create event clusters, trigger energetic processes and actuate polyphonic projects that expand and complement (her) aesthetic and political perspectives. www.vasilikisifostratoudaki.gr | www.yellowbrick.gr

## Eliana Otta Vildoso

(Lima, 1981) is an artist with a Master in Cultural Studies by the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, and currently Candidate for the Phd in Practice Program at the Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna with the project Lost & Shared: A laboratory for collective mourning, towards affective and transformative politics. She has exhibited in cities such as: Madrid, Berlin, New York, London, Barcelona, Porto Alegre, Cali, Cusco. She co-founded the artists run space Bisagra (www. bisagra.org), and coordinated the Curatorial Team for the permanent exhibition at Lugar de la Memoria, Lima, Perú. She has taught in the Art Faculty, Universidad Católica del Perú and in Corriente Alterna.

## Nuno Cassola

(Aveiro, 1984) graduated from the Faculty of Fine Arts of the University of Porto and completed a Masters degree in Contemporary Artistic Practices at the same institution. Onboard the Grande Francia freighter, I crossed the imaginary Ecuador Line in May 2012, where I could see everything from its bridge, through a small gray device. In 2018, I crossed Jordan by foot, north to south. In 2019, I co-imagined, co-curated a film festival in the Jordanian desert of Wadi Rum. In 2016, I co-founded Khora Athens, a community centre in Athens, Greece. In parallel to my practical activism and intercrossing/intermingling with theme and content, I continue working as a filmmaker and cinematographer. https://www.nunocassola.com/

Modes of living, doing, thinking, which excede hegemonic Western forms of knowledge production. Collectively exploring alternative means to relate to history, desire and the future.

## TEACHINGS FROM THE WORLDS OF PLANTS FLUID AESTHETICS AND CARE PRACTICES FROM AMAZONIAN AND ANDEAN WORLDS

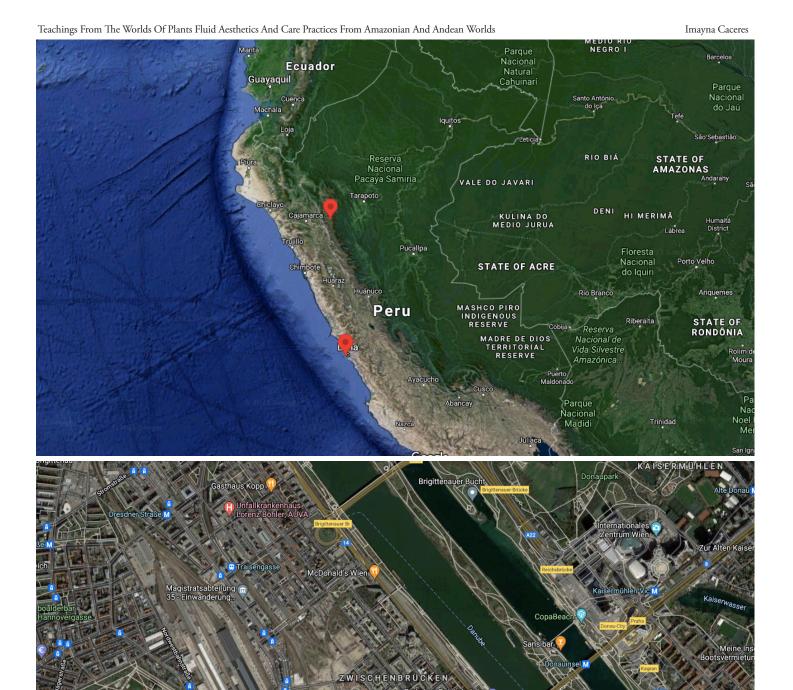
Imayna Caceres

My unearthing of memories follows the migration of the practices of care and living that are carried in my family from the amazonian Andes in Uchumarca to Celendin, Chachapoyas, Lima, and now Vienna, and which includes stories of events and situations that I have never encountered recorded as human experience or knowledge.

Working methodologically with the autohistoria method from border feminist thought (Gloria Anzaldua) my attempt is to give an account of the personal and the collective in its interdisciplinary, political, spiritual and activist modes. I am working with co-laborative thinking (as analysis, intuition, poem and song) to emphasize that I work with the teachings of non-human beings and that our individual realizations are co-productions with other humans and other-than-humans. I plan to connect this to aesthetic practices of Latin American collectives in Vienna, as well to the relationalities that are reproduced through ritual and ecofeminist activism, themes that are central focus in my research project for the doctorate in philosophy.

## A TRAVELING AESTHETICS THROUGH COSMOS AND SOIL

Unearthing memories contributes to filling the gaps of the dominant narratives we have inherited, and to recover the complexity of the realities we live. In this pursue and along writing, I employ drawing as a research method. My drawings mimic roots growing on the soil of black earth-paper, luminously black as the cosmos and the underground, connecting between worlds. Drawing lines that weave and create rivers of meaning, of cosmos and soil.



Taborstraße M

Amazonian Andes Montane Forrests

Dessertic Valley on the Pacific Ocean

Danubian area

Wasserspielplat Donauinse

ALLIEDVIERTEL

VOLKERTVIERTEL

## LESSON FROM PLANTS IN MY OWN MIGRATION HISTORY: GOOD ROOTS ARE NEEDED TO GROW AND THRIVE

Rooting as establishing one's place, taking roots, making an enriching life with dignity even if amidst hardship, and sharing and expanding knowledge of the many naturescultures that inhabit us. This can be difficult when the experience of rooting is of rejection through the institutional processes that regulate migratory controls in the borders. But rooting is needed to thrive. It is needed not to feel lost. Even though, not all rootings are the same, and not all soils are the same.

I sought to capture these lessons when invited by Eliana Otta to develop a definition on roots for her Vital Vocabularies. There I write in the entry of Roots: "Entangler of the underground, making worlds of sustenance, breaking way for life to happen. Anchor and storage, support and endurance. Breaker of concrete and asphalt, holder of soil. Not all roots are the same and not all soils are the same. Roots that connect us to a soil and that grounds us as cords to the belly of the land. The world of the ancestors which are our roots, beyond our species. Our connection to all that exists across the universe. The paths that lead to us, the roots that keep us up. Taking root, establishing one's place, making an enriching life through drought and abundance. Expanding knowledge of the worlds in which we live. Rooting to thrive, to not feel lost. Rooting through a connection to lands and waters and to local healing plants aids. Roots that resemble rivers, veins and thunders; as a language in which life speaks."

Developing a connection to the land and to local healing plants helps to establish this rooting. I finally felt at home in Vienna, once I developed a connection to the beings that inhabit Vienna.

I draw this process in "Cosmovisions Linked by the Identical Pace of Our Livingness. (2019)" (see the following page) where I depict meaningful plants (palta/ avocado, white choclo / corn, calabaza / pumpkin, cacao, ají / chili, chirimoya, frejoles / beans, mani / peanut) from home to which countless stories are attached, plants from my childhood like llantén/ breitwegerich, and plants with which I developed a relationship in Austria, such as Rosmarin / rosmary, Lavendel / lavender, Salbei / sage, Marjoran / marjoram, Hagebutte / dog-rose.

Unsurprisingly, in my mother stories about Uchumarca ,all these beings and relationalities featured prominently. The knowledge of farming and cultivation, care, recollection and storage which the plants had to be put through for its consumption.



## IN THE FOOTPRINTS OF LLANTÉN / BREITWEGERICH

Plantago major Llantén Breitwegerich White-man's footprint

Rethinking the role of plants in my historia moved me to notice that when I left Peru, I found myself experiencing a great longing for the food, and the vocabulary of flavors I was familiar with. This also meant missing vegetables and fruits and the plants that had fed throughout my life but also the plants that were citizens and connationals and known to me, that been there present in most of my memories.

The first time I realized that there was llantén in Austria was a joyous and memorious occasion. A healer plant I grew up knowing as llantén, and that I was often asked as a child to bring home to deal with different malaise: most frequently against the pain and swollenness caused by the blunt impact of a fall. I have many memories of looking to gather a handful of leaves this plant, which then will be washed and warmed up with warm to hot water. Easily softened, the leaves became readily a poultice that could be then directly applied to the skin. I was not aware of that realization then but it was a lesson to understand that something that was so 'pedestrian' and common as llantén could have such a meaningful role when the time called for it. Without wording it in this way, the plant, through the practices of care of my mother, was teaching me that even in that which we may take for granted there is value.

I encountered other perspectives of llantén while reading indigenous writings from Turtle Island. These had early come to describe llantén as the "white-man's footprint" because of how it appeared behind the steps of buildings and roads almost as a companion of the mandate of modernity and progress. Botanical studies confirm the plant is medicinal and nutritional, as her leaves and roots as edible. They also confirm the plants behavior of growing in disturbed soil, in urbanized areas, along the road and how it endures frequent trampling.

And yet, one can also imagine llantén as a decayer of the world of concrete. A healer plant that appears were soil is intervened by concrete, in the border of two worlds that impact each other.

## RETHINKING THE INDIVIDUAL/PLURAL WITH LICHENS

## Xanthoria Parietina

Originally believed to be one entity, lichens came soon to be described as the collaboration or the symbiosis between two beings (algae, fungi, bacteria). In this small ecosystem, the algae provide sugars through photosynthesis and the fungi fixes the lichen to the substrate, getting water and minerals from the atmosphere in the surrounding environment. In 2016, this was complicated by the alteration of this formula so that more than two beings interexist in a lichen as a kind of micro ayllu where every being has a role. Two beings, became three beings, and became four beings with the possibility of more. This of course, complicated its taxonomy as to how to classify lichens. What should one employ for its classification criteria? the alga, the fungi or the bacteria? Also worth of notice is that of the world's roughly 25,000 lichen species, only a couple can live as a fungus sans its partner. Once a lichen is broken into its constituent parts in the lab, they can't be reunited. And this might have to do with the role of bacteria. It is possible that bacteria are essential to lichens' existence, making lichens more like an ecosystem than just a two-party party. The existence of lichens thus became a reminder of the plural composite which beings are, and of the non-essential aspect of 'identity', as well as the tricky notion of 'species'.

They grow on rock, walls, gravestones, roofs, exposed soil surfaces, rubber, bones, and in the soil as part of biological soil crusts. There are about 20,000 known species of lichens.

Xanthoria parietina was shining so bright on a tree trunk that I searched for *their* name, reading everything I could find in the way. Soon I found they were called commonly Gewöhnliche gelbflechte and that they prefer to inhabit deciduous trees with nutrient-rich bark. A lichen which is common in Europe (although not in the extreme north) and rare in the Mediterranean region. They are certainly present in almost every tree of my neighbor park.

Symbiosis transforms the classical concept of insular individuality. Lichens are no insular individuality, but relationships among species that blur the boundaries of the organism and obscures the notion of essential identity. At the same time, they also function as a mesure of time: the long life-span and slow and regular growth rate of some lichens can be used to date events (lichenometry).

## A TRAVELLING AESTHETICS FROM UCHUMARCA

My mother grew living every day in the fields, with others whose main occupation was to work with the soil, and with plants, collaborating with animals and beings who were able to live at that altitude (like quinua, amaranth, ulluco, mashua, caigua, and maize, bean, wheat, barley, peas, lentils and some forty types of potatoes). These worlds traveled in her preparation of vegetables, grain and food. Her cacao was made from handcrafted cacao sold in molds and chancaca, as the locally produced raw sugar. This early nutrition grammar remains with me and to this day hot cacao evokes the rich, bitter and oily essence of cacao brought up by boiling water —without milk. Cacao beans skins, toasted peanuts, dry orange peels, machka (toasted maize flour), chankaka (raw cane sugar), and boiled quinua.

Weekend breakfasts with a warm cup of boiled quinua with milk were a delight. In those times quinua was not consumed by anybody but provincial migrants and had a derogatory association, as a colonial heritage which coupled what indigenous people cultivated and ate as of lesser nutritional and health-realted value.

## SOME SUMMARY LEARNINGS FROM PLANTS

- -All plants teach us lessons if we pay attention
- -Master plants have better faculties at helping us understand what they know
- –Life is not aimed towards harmony. All relations are social and include struggles for power. As when a plant, weakened or killed other plants. And where the personalities of each being was particular and varied.
- -Plants speak to us if we talk to them.



## Plantago major

Llantén Breitwegerich White-man's footprint

Grows in disturbed soil, in urbanized areas, along the road. It endures frequent trampling.

Leaves and roots are edible. Medicinal and nutritional.

Poultice against swollenness and sores.



## **Chenopodium quinoa**Kinwa / Quinua Quinoa

Montane forests
Colonial prohibition
Food of 'Indians'
Mother of grains / Spiritual
Sacrilegious, uncivilized
NASA scientific validation



Xanthoria parietina
Gewohnliches Gelbflechte
Common orange lichen

A collective of organisms. Microcooperative of fungi, algae, bacteria and more.

Human bodies – relations of cooperation to bacteria to function and more

All beings are small ecosystems that are intra and interconnected to each other

Identity ≠ individual, fixed nor essential