

of mulberry blood and foam

by Raquel Mendes

A thesis exhibition presented to OCAD University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in Interdisciplinary Master's of Art Media and Design

Graduate Gallery, OCAD University, April 3rd to April 6th
Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 2024

“Help us to be the always hopeful
Gardeners of the spirit
Who know that without darkness
Nothing comes to birth
As without light
Nothing flowers.”

-May Sarton, *The Invocation to Kali*

abstract

I am enacting a ritual of connection between humanity and the sacred entity of nature by engaging in a cyclical process of soiling and cleansing. This ceremonial performance alludes to the conception of life and death as a continuum by referencing menstruation and its symbolic meanings. The setting of this performance is an installation composed as a ritual space presenting the mulberry plant which inspired the work in the form of planted seedlings, mulberry ink, firewood, ash, homemade soap, and poetry. The laundering apparatus and background choral music binds the ritual to autoethnographic research pertaining to my native country of Brazil and the history of patriarchal oppression in my family. I have grounded my research in personal and familial experiences, non-denominational spirituality, and situated feminist theories.

acknowledgments

I would never have gotten where I am without the unwavering love and support of my life partner Saulo. He has backed me up, inspired me, dreamt with me, cheered me on, contributed ideas, deepened my reflections, tolerated all the stress and manic excitement I have experienced through this journey, and is the most amazing co-parent I could wish for. He is my main source of confidence and faith, and I could never express the full extent of my gratitude toward him. He is as present in my work as in my life.

I want to acknowledge the contribution of my dear *mamãe* and of my sisters who contributed their voices to this project and make it more beautiful with their song. I want to honor all the ancestral women whose strength I carry with me, especially my *bisa* Maria and her daughters who fought so many hard battles for themselves, their sisters, and their children. I am grateful to be able to show some of the poetic words of my *vovô* in this thesis, who respected and honored his wife in a way few other men of his time have done. I want to especially acknowledge my *vovó*, one of the principal sources of inspiration for this work with her power and unrelenting strength. She turns 90 this year, and I have never appreciated her more than I do now. I hope even from far away and with fading memory she can feel my admiration in her heart. *Saudade*.

I am very fortunate to have incredible partners and friends who have contributed to my confidence and motivation every single day, each in their own way. Mira had faith in my artistic potential from the very start of our friendship, even while I had mostly given up on my creative pursuits, and I am forever grateful for his wisdom. The sparkle in Austin's eyes whenever I talk about my work reflects into a spark in my heart. Dansare's kind and nourishing voice is often in mind building me up. Mike has been a constant presence in my journey, always available to process, revise, and empower me to follow through and improve in each new attempt. Alberto, Deepikah and Hala have become significant connections and have made my experience at OCAD U all the more fun, enriching, and precious.

My advisors and professors have been incredibly valuable in both grounding and fueling me in this process. Anda Kubis made an instant connection with me and my work, despite our visual and material approaches being so drastically different. She has provided support of the highest order – I can only describe it as spiritual. We shared a faith in each other that was not built on time or concrete data but on true presence, genuine interest, and utmost respect. For that, I am indebted to her. I want to honor the poignant contributions so Jin Chun has made to this thesis. Her attention to detail and nuanced perspective of the themes here presented have been essential in reaching further into the concepts I wanted to articulate. Jay Irizawa must be one of the most compassionate and kind professors I've come across in my life and has offered me invaluable academic and personal support. I also acknowledge the important contributions of Maria-Belén Ordoñez, whose passion for knowledge was the spark that relit my temporarily dormant thirst for reading and theoretical research.

Further, I acknowledge the body, soul and spirit I carry with me, the channels through which I am being and currently exist in this world. I acknowledge the rich and diverse Land I grew up in and was influenced by in Brazil, beautiful and vibrant all while thoroughly marked by the most pervasive forms of violence and inequity. I carry its marks in my soul, light and dark. I also acknowledge the Land which now shelters me and lends its wisdom, though also marked by much violence and disturbance. I pray I can keep strengthening bonds and building community in favor of better and reciprocal relationship with the Land, wherever I am.

Lastly, I acknowledge the contribution of my daughters to this project. They have filled my womb and brought me through the portals of motherhood. They have drunk my milk and witnessed my blood. Every day we share in the beauty around us. They are everywhere in me and in my work.

table of contents

abstract	3
acknowledgments	4
table of contents	6
list of figures	7
introduction	8
chapter one	12
chapter two	17
chapter three	27
chapter four	36
chapter five	40
works cited	47

list of figures

Fig. 1: Canvas sheet used to catch mulberries, untitled photograph, 2021	9
Fig. 2: Natural stains and mold from the mulberries, untitled photograph, 2021	10
Fig. 3: of mulberry blood and foam, 2024, performance documentation	21
Fig. 4: Joseph Beuys, How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare, 1965	22
Fig. 5: Ana Mendieta, Untitled from Silueta Series in Mexico	23
Fig. 6: Mary Beth Edelson, Woman Rising / With Spirit, 1973	24
Fig. 7: Offering, performance and installation, 2022, photographed by Shannyn Porter	27
Fig. 8: Sketch of the installation plan, 2023	28
Fig. 9: Photo of my great grandmother Maria, family archive, date unknown	30
Fig. 10: of mulberry blood and foam, detail of installation	37
Fig. 11: of mulberry blood and foam, details of installation	37
Fig. 12: of mulberry blood and foam, performance documentation	38
Fig. 13: of mulberry blood and foam, performance documentation	39
Fig. 14: of mulberry blood and foam, performance documentation	39
Fig. 15: of mulberry blood and foam, performance documentation	40
Fig. 16: of mulberry blood and foam, performance documentation	40
Fig. 17: Shigeko Kubota - Vagina Painting, 1965	42
Fig. 18: Judy Chicago - Red Flag, 1971	42
Fig. 19: of mulberry blood and foam, performance documentation	46
Fig. 20: of mulberry blood and foam, performance documentation	46

**I carry
mulberry
ink in
the crevices
of my body.**

The berries since
ripe
flood the grass,
harass
the nose as they rot,
because I'm not
able to grasp.
No sheet contains,
the fabric stains,
the tree is wider.
I tire
from kneeling,
bending down,
from filling bowls
and bowls:
it's wholly
too much.
But the smell
of simmering fruit
makes it absolutely
worth it.
I pray I birth it,
this passion
in the crevices
of my body,
kneeling.

There is much to say about mulberries. Their abundance, their sweet nutrition. Their juice like blood, its stains. Their early pull toward rot. Seeds that quickly sprout and rise. There is much to say about the trees that birth them. Their bright orange roots, their reach. The gnarly bark, protruding. Their glossy leaves in varied shapes. There is much to say.

I had never seen a mulberry tree so tall and generous as the one in the backyard of the house I moved into in Canada, three years ago. Unlike the ones usually seen in urban settings, pruned down to be short and droopy, this tree was massive. I don't know how tall – I had no impulse to measure – but I could see the highest construction ladder would not reach the lowest of its main branches. When the pink clusters of fruit started accumulating, far in the distance above me, I could only stare in amazement – and plan.

My impulse was to make use of what was offered. Since I could not reach, I would capture. I bought the largest canvas sheet I could find. When the first spots of purple, deep, started showing and subsequently falling to the ground, I thought I was ready. The first stains in my fingers. The first taste. I thought I was ready.

The sheet was laid. The wind obliged. My bowl in hand, I surveyed the cotton map with its topography of the grass below. Tiny purple spots quickly appeared, as if from incantation (Fig. 1). I gathered for days, obsessively. Fresh mulberries. Mulberry jam. Syrup. Crumble. Pie. Mulberries frozen for later use. Fifteen kilos. *Amoras sem fim*.¹

I could not contain them, much as I tried. The sheet only collected a fraction, and even that was too much. The summer rain painted pictures: mulberry juice on canvas. Streaks of purple, pink, red, even blue, the rarest of colors (Fig. 2). Then they began to decay. Brown, black, and grey took over. Mold. The stench was impossible to ignore. Like a calling to honor death.



Fig. 1: Canvas sheet used to catch mulberries, untitled photograph, 2021

¹ Translated from Portuguese: Endless mulberries.



Fig. 2: Natural stains and mold from the mulberries, untitled photograph, 2021

There is much to say. But why?

When this tree first sprouted, there were no houses near it. No fences. The corner of the lot which it now occupies was not a corner, but open space. When its first mulberries fell to earth, there was no pavement to stain. No roof to invade with branches. No one to cut down, prune, contain, curse. Knowing how much the neighbours lobbied for its removal, abhorred it, I wonder if it's even still there now. Because it fruits. Because its fruited flesh leaves traces of its demise. Because death has lively companions to honor it – bugs, maggots, mold. Because its putrid stench takes over the fresh summer air.

I am the tree. My essence precedes the boundaries of men. I've been cornered against my will. The fruits of my desire are plentiful, more often seen as nuisance than as a blessing. I've been cut down, pruned, contained, cursed. My blood-womb drips and stains and is directed to hide, lest it call the companions that honor it. My stench reminds them of death, and death does not belong, unless by their own hand.

Resentment runs thick as my blood down to the earth, stains the fabric of existence. I want to wash it away, as my grandmother did her crisp white linens, and her mother before her. I want to bring back balance. I take vital water and blessed soap, made of ash and fat. I scrub the deep red-purples into faint blue-greens. My voice merges with the song of my mother and sisters. My daughters twirl and play in the sacred space around me. I call on holy sun to bring back light into the woven strands of matter, and it obliges. Everything falls into place. I am one with earth, blood, water, ash, womb, wind, fruit, and sun.

A terra mancha vida morta. O céu limpa morte viva.²

² Translated from Portuguese: Earth stains life dead. Heaven cleans death alive.

In this thesis paper, I present some of my research and reflection around themes embedded in my artwork. It is not an exhaustive text, but it includes the main relevant aspects of the art I am creating. There is no lack of contradiction, impulse, pride, pretence, short-sightedness, and ignorance. There is also plenty of effort, intuition, passion, perseverance, faith, and resolve. In any case, the attempt is to communicate the knowledge I have gathered during the development process as best I can.

In chapter one, I will begin to discuss the feminist underpinnings of my research, with particular attention to second-wave feminism and ecofeminism, by discussing a symbolic connection between nature and the feminine. In chapter two, I will offer some background into my personal perspective on spirituality and its role in the human world, referring to some contemporary authors that explore this theme in a resonant way. In chapter three, I will share some of the familial stories and cultural background which have informed the work I am presenting. In chapter four, I will describe and detail the visual and symbolic elements of my performance and installation piece. In chapter five, I will further explore feminist issues that are present in my work, specifically the debate on essentialism, and the relevance of engaging thematically with menstruation.

treat it
like you would
a fruit unknown
 dripping
 from my thighs
 taste another month
 of my freedom
 the iron
 the irony
 adoring the sheets
 the color of terror
 reimagined
 as sweet
 release

Within me exists a microcosm of the cycles of nature. The fertility and menstruation cycle enacts the continuum of life and death. Every month, a seed of life prepares itself to meet what may fertilize it. My womb creates a hospitable environment for a potential embryo to flourish. In the absence or failure of sperm, the seed expires, along with the domain it incited. My body sheds its convocation. The womb is washed out, and the blood reminds me of death as a gift. Every drop I bleed is a blessing. It is this voided womb which will now allow another call for life. The cycle begins again. It never ends though it may be interrupted.

In this chapter, I discuss the symbolic relationship I have drawn between my own experience as a woman, especially as it pertains to the cycles of my body, and the functioning of the cycles in nature, especially as it pertains to the mulberry tree and its expressions. This parallel alludes to a well-known narrative, which is that of an essential connection between the female bodily and psychological experience and the expressions of the earth. This association between nature and the feminine has been present in most traditional cultures all over the world (Merchant; Lauter). Many different authors and artists throughout history have delved into the theme, be it to favor, question or deny that symbolic connection. I will engage with some of their discussion in the text ahead, with particular attention to feminist authors of the twentieth and twenty-first century.

feminine and nature

In her book, *The Death of Nature*, Carolyn Merchant draws an important connection between the way humans conceptualize earth/nature and the way in which it is treated by them. Through an extensive study of European philosophy, literature, and art from the times of ancient Greece to after the industrial revolution, she demonstrates how these narratives around nature have developed over time and the effects they had on European societies' customs and behaviors toward the natural world.

Ancient European societies regarded nature both as a nurturing mother and as a wild and chaotic force, both being identified with the female sex. Merchant asserts that, for a long time, the concept of nature as nurturing mother served as a cultural constraint against the exploitation of nature, because of the ethical codes which would apply to the same relationship in humans (e.g., a good child would not intentionally harm or steal from their mother). She also shows that the often-simultaneous perception of nature as chaotic "called forth an important modern idea, that of power over nature" (2).

Different narratives about nature brought forth during the Scientific Revolution, such as the view of the earth as a mechanism rather than a living organism, and of matter as inert and passive rather than containing immanent force, contributed to a "subtle sanction of the exploitation and manipulation of nature and its resources" (Merchant 102-03). As European societies became gradually more disconnected with the idea of nature as an organism, they also became more inclined to perceive cultures which were more integrated with nature as less evolved. It is relevant to note that the cultural connection between nature and the feminine was sustained throughout the entire period. This is made evident by the fact that while these cultural narratives were being constructed and enforced about nature, they were also being perpetuated in regard to women – either as unstable, nurturing, passive or less evolved. It cannot be disregarded that the narratives which resulted in either idealization, respect, restraint, exploitation, devaluation, containment, or erasure of nature, had similar results on attitudes toward women and the framework of femininity in general.

The dysregulated relationship of contemporary human societies with both nature and the feminine is the main theme of authors and activists of the Ecofeminism movement. Françoise D'Eaubonne, in her book *Feminism or Death*, references an analysis by Wolfgang Lederer, in *The Fear of Women*, in which the advent of patriarchal oppression of women coincides with the moment in history when men took control of agriculture, previously maintained by women. She writes: "Having seized control of the soil (thus of fertility and later industry) and of women's womb (thus of fecundity), it was logical that the overexploitation of the one and the other would result in this double peril, menacing and parallel: overpopulation (a glut of births) and destruction of the environment (a glut of products)" (194). She then draws a direct parallel between the exploitation of the earth and the oppression of women, which persist under patriarchal systems both capitalist and socialist, and links the ecological cause with the struggle for women's liberation (208-09). This analysis echoes my own view that through a reconnection with and revaluation, by all humans, of the concerns relating to the female reproductive cycle (and its metaphoric link to the life and death cycles of nature) it would be possible to manifest a more harmonious and less exploitative relationship to the feminine and to nature.

In her essay *Sex and Violence or Nature and Art*, Camille Paglia argues that women's bodies are intrinsically connected to nature due to the mechanisms of their reproductive systems. She asserts that even in societies where a lot of value is given to individuality and personal autonomy, people with female reproductive systems struggle in enacting these concepts because their bodily mechanisms, particularly menstruation and pregnancy, impede them from having the freedom their male counterparts enjoy (27-28). She goes on to say that "Organically, [the female body] has one mission, pregnancy, which we may spend a lifetime staving off. Nature cares only for species, never individuals. The humiliating dimensions of this biological fact are most directly experienced by women, who probably have a greater realism and wisdom than men because of it" (28).

Though her views focus on heteronormative sexual behavior and cisnormative notions of identity, I find Paglia's argument interesting because it presents possible evidence as to why women and the feminine have historically been associated with nature, that evidence being what Nancy Chodorow called "women's biosexual experience," which reflects the larger cycles of nature (qtd. in Lauter 59). Estella Lauter approaches the same topic, the connection of women to nature, with a prudent skepticism Paglia evidently does not share. While discussing women artists and authors from the twentieth century and their approaches in associating the feminine experience with nature, the author wonders whether "women were predisposed to this vision by centuries of identification with nature," or whether it was "a strategy of survival to revalue the devalued world with which we have been compared for so long" (20).

What disturbs me about Paglia's approach is how readily she validates (celebrates!) the perceived separation of humanity, especially in its male-centric expressions, from nature, as if nature and culture (in this case patriarchal culture) could ever function well in opposition to each other. As Sardenberg points out, the very idea that the spheres of nature and culture are universally distinguishable from each other is highly questionable (331). By any logic, humanity is a product of nature and therefore a part of it, no matter what kind of body a single human is born with. Humanity may be distinguished from other natural elements, in the sense that it has its own unique expression of being, but the fact that it elaborates intricate cultural forms and advanced technologies doesn't mean it can ever fully separate itself from nature. A rock is nature just as well as a tree is nature, and the same can be said of a fungus or an ant, though they each exist and behave in completely different ways. It is easily identifiable throughout history, as Paglia affirms, that much of patriarchal imagination and cultural expression might have been attempts at distancing humanity from a nature (and the feminine as perceived extensions of it) that terrifies the masculine psyche. But I would argue that the logic through which men have historically demanded and enacted this separation from the earth, their symbolic mother, is exactly the reason why we are now as a society struggling to even exist in a way which does not undermine nature, and humanity as part of it.

In the preface to the second edition of her book of poetic prose *Woman and Nature*, Susan Griffin expresses this idea beautifully. She disagrees with the concept that women are closer to nature than men, regardless of whether the connection is perceived as negative (as a tool for the domination of women) or positive (at the example of feminist authors who even consider themselves superior to men because of it) (x). Griffin does concede, however, that women may be more aware of being part of nature than men, and that men often perceive themselves as apart from nature, distancing themselves from the processes of life as a result. But she considers both tendencies to be the result of cultural narratives rather than of genetic or otherwise physiological predisposition and goes on to associate these narratives with the dangerous delusion in which humans could erase nature and our intrinsic connection to it. She writes:

The association between women and nature has not only served to oppress women, it has also acted as a device for denial, a means to evade the simple truth that human existence is immersed in nature, dependent on nature, inseparable from it. By imagining women as closer to nature, it becomes possible to imagine men as farther away from nature. And in this way, both men and women can indulge in the fantasy that the human condition can be free of mortality, as well as the exigencies and needs of natural limitation. (x-xi)

In perpetuating cultural narratives which postulate a disconnection of men from the concerns of the earth and its nonhuman beings, while either associating women with nature or enlisting them in this disconnection, patriarchal Eurocentric societies have ushered in an era of accelerated depletion and destruction of the earth. This perceived disconnection, Griffin argues, is merely an illusion – a wrongful interpretation of our status as humans and the extent of our power in the world – which has severed our ability to maintain harmony with nature.

Psychoanalytic theory offers an interesting proposition as to why nature and the feminine might be connected and equally subjugated within European culture, among others. This correlation might derive from an inherent human struggle to reconcile “individuality within finitude” (Becker 26). In other words, our self-awareness and creative power, which sets humans apart from other living beings in nature, seems to be at odds with the inexorable demise of our fragile bodies, which confirms that we are a part of nature. According to this line of thought, from the very beginning of our lives we are faced with this paradox, and the clearest expression of our animality is visible in our mothers – our first contact with the feminine – whom we see breastfeeding, menstruating, gestating, and birthing (39–40). These and other bodily processes, most visibly expressed in women, are tangible proofs of our reality as biological creatures fated to die, in spite of our supposed self-importance. Thus, fear of death would be the psychological root of attempts, by all humans, to bypass this fate through the construction of narratives and cultural structures which at least partly repress the consciousness of our reality as part of nature.

changing the story

The power of these cultural myths can be confirmed when analysing some alternative narratives offered by other cultures. In *Braiding Sweetgrass*, Robin Wall Kimmerer makes a useful comparison between the creation myth in the Judeo-Christian tradition and the one told in various Indigenous traditions from North America, or Turtle Island, as it is called by them:

On one side of the world were people whose relationship with the living world was shaped by Skywoman, who created a garden for the well-being of all. On the other side was another woman with a garden and a tree. But for tasting its fruit, she was banished from the garden and the gates clanged shut behind her. (6–7)

These core cultural stories reveal completely different societal models of relationship to nature, and incidentally, to women. The characters, both female, attempt to connect to nature and do so with apparent ease, but Skywoman is celebrated for it while Eve is shunned, punished, and blamed for humanity's misfortunes. While these are just small examples of two much more ample mythologies within complex cultural systems, the societies descended from the narratives of the latter creation myth clearly show that they have failed in their antagonistic approach to nature, being arguably responsible not only for the environmental crisis in which we find ourselves, but also for the systematic invasion and debasement of other cultures who did not share their model of exploitative civilization.

Lauter attempts to describe a new way of relating to nature being proposed and developed within contemporary literature and visual art by artists like Remedios Varo and Diane Wakoski, among many others. She

presents the argument that "nature has a female form, but the human relationships with it need not be exploitative, if we regard it as equal to ourselves. We need not be overwhelmed by nature, nor should we put ourselves on a pedestal. We are akin to nature, not superior to it" (19-20). In developing this reconnection to nature through their creative labors, these artists' work is, according to Lauter, proposing a form of creativity that is a departure from the traditionally western and masculine concepts of individualistic motivation and genius. She elaborates that "the creativity encoded [by these women] involves a sense of being in tune with powerful nonhuman forces; of being fully conscious yet detached from the concerns of the ego; of acting spontaneously without self-consciousness" (16).

I would argue that what Lauter is describing here is an approach to creativity that is imbued with spirituality, though, like my own, not one necessarily associated with religion. As I understand it, spirituality is an essential element of the human experience, and, for many artists historically, its connection to art can prove incredibly fruitful. My own spiritual beliefs and practices are made evident in the overall structure and symbolism that compose the work I present here and I will further elaborate on these concepts in the next chapter.

and if you could

see

how it all fits

death, life

intermittently

embraced

as if lovers

figuring out

their rhythm

if you could see

my body

being

and find the beauty

though it rots

sometimes

you might breathe

a little easier

In the work presented here, I make visible some of the spiritual values I align with and practices I have developed to enact those values. As a self-proclaimed non-denominational pagan, not belonging to any specific community of congruent faith, I rely on fragments of acquired knowledge into different spiritual practices, allied with my intuitive perception and personal observations of natural occurrences and cycles. I do not claim ownership of any culturally specific ritual or practice, nor could I hope to thoroughly cite the knowledge I have acquired in my spiritual journey, as it amounts to an enmeshed collage of sacred particles gifted to me from multiple directions along the 36 years of my life. Where there is concrete recollection or reference to specific ideas or practices, I will cite the source as best I can.

In order to contextualize my practice, I will attempt to describe my general understanding of what spirituality is and offer an overview of its existence (or lack thereof) in the Eurocentric societies I have participated in, referring to authors who resonate with my perspective. Then, I will explore how my own spiritual journey relates to this context and its connection to my artistic practice. I will also reference artists who integrate ritual performance into their work, like Joseph Beuys, Mary-Beth Edelson and Ana Mendieta.

as above, so below

Spirituality is referred to here as the general belief that there exists more in our world than just physical or material phenomena, and that there is underlying order and meaning in the universe beyond what can be perceived through our senses or measured through our instruments. *Theos* (divinity) is united with chaos

(primordial substance) to form cosmos (order) (Blavastky 365–72). Every divisible unit that is manifested in physical form is connected to a unifying principle, the divine whole. We may each perceive, ignore, or challenge that connection at our own risk. Like cells within an organism, we exist within the context of a whole, and may function in harmony or disharmony with that whole. These broad concepts can be observed in most of the systems of spiritual belief I have encountered, though the way in which those ideas are formulated and enacted vary greatly.

Spiritual *practices* are ways through which one attempts to remind oneself of one's connection with a perceived unity and to live in harmony with divine will. They can take the form of rituals, ceremonies, prayer, celebrations, offerings, taboos, codes of conduct, or even general customs like diet and clothing. These practices can be devised and performed in individual or collective ways, in singular instances or following repetitive patterns. Some collective practices are relatively recent historically, while others go back so far in time, or are so enmeshed within secular culture, that it's hard to even determine their origin. Spiritual practices are often connected to specific religions, but they are not necessarily tied to religious institutions, and need not even be formally structured or repeated systematically.³ Though specific spiritual practices can vary greatly depending on dogma, culture, group or individual beliefs, their multiple forms enact the same core value – that we each must honor the larger context we belong to.

It is my view that spirituality is an essential aspect of the human experience, proven by the fact that spiritual concerns have always been a part of different cultures all around the world and across time. In many ancient civilizations, religion, as well as science, art, and even political structures were developed around nature and our relationship to it. Nature was generally seen as an expression of the divine order. Natural occurrences were interpreted and analysed as having meaning and purpose, potentially condemning or benefiting us as elements within a whole (Eliade). This spiritual conceptualization of nature prompted human societies to seek harmony with the divine will and its expressions by attempting to understand nature and to collaborate with it in various, though not always pragmatically sustainable, ways. Even at the height of the Scientific Revolution, and subsequent furthering of theoretical and empirical scientific development well into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, elaborate attempts were made to reconcile human relationship to nature through varying perspectives on philosophy and spirituality (Merchant; Harrison).⁴

It is known that materialism, as a collective guiding theoretical principle which denies the existence of anything beyond matter, is a relatively recent development of European philosophical thought (Harrison). In his essay "The sacred and the modern artist", Mircea Eliade points to the movement in Western society toward materialism, which, while concomitant with unprecedented advancements of modern science, promoted a shift in our relationship to nature. He proposes that "it is a result of this long process of the desacralization of Nature

³ The very concept of "religion" as a particular system of propositional beliefs and practices is surprisingly recent and thoroughly European, as the word was not used with that meaning before the 17th century (Harrison). The original latin word *religio* primarily referred to a virtue of inner devotion.

⁴ Differing views of scientists and philosophers developed into arguments for the conceptualization of nature as either organism or mechanism (or a combination) and connected those concepts to various notions and narratives related to spirituality, like cosmic significance, causal connections between matter and spirit, the moral dimensions of the study of natural sciences, and the role of the human in relation to God and the natural world.

that the Westerner has managed to see a natural object where his ancestors saw hierophanies, sacred presences" (84). Robin Wall Kimmerer describes the contrast between materialist and spiritual perspectives in a passage in which she compares the settler view of nature with the indigenous relationship to Land:

In the settler mind, land was property, real estate, capital, or natural resources. But to our people, it was everything: identity, the connection to our ancestors, the home of our nonhuman kinfolk, our pharmacy, our library, the source of all that sustained us. Our lands were where our responsibility to the world was enacted, sacred ground. (17)

By removing the status of nature as sacred and denying the idea of the natural environment as an expression of spiritual presence, materialism as a governing thought has elevated science, technology and production above spiritual views and practices, thereby contributing to and sanctioning the indiscriminate manipulation and exploitation of the earth. That reality, combined with a globalized market economy which centralizes profit and unlimited growth as objectives, has produced continued unsustainable practices which put our very existence in jeopardy.

The very fact that, within a global market society, decisions are made with the objective of unlimited linear growth and progress shows how far we've strayed from the truth offered by nature – that life happens in cycles, and generation and degeneration are intrinsically linked and need to be mutually balanced. As Susan Griffin describes it:

It is popular now to speak in glowing terms of free markets, as if the marketplace had no relationship to earthly necessity but were instead entirely conceptual and could thus grow as numbers grow, without boundaries and without end. This is the latest fantasy of dominion over the earth, as if through the power of will human beings can make natural resources multiply on demand (xi).

It can only be described as ironic that materialism, by overlooking the divine order of the universe, ignores the very nature of matter – that it is limited and therefore cannot be stretched to infinity to meet our interests and demands. As Byung-Chul Han puts it, in his book *The Disappearance of Rituals*, "the loss of forms of completion that accompanies overproduction and overconsumption leads to systemic collapse" (15).

a matter of life and death

Beyond the environmental crisis we find ourselves in on a global scale, we also face despair on an individual level, due to the lack of a sense of community which spirituality also offers. Even when one's spiritual beliefs and practices are enacted solely on an individual basis, the very notion of spirituality indicates a conceptual connection to a larger context, be it a specific cultural community, humanity, or Land/nature itself. Han argues that depression is most prevalent in societies in which spiritual rituals are not a part of daily life. He attributes this to an excess of attention to individuality as opposed to the community connection that rituals promote: "wholly incapable of leaving the self behind, of transcending ourselves and relating to the world, we withdraw into our shells. The world disappears. We circle around ourselves, tortured by feelings of emptiness" (14). Another author

who has written about the impact of materialism on culture, Mark C. Taylor, also comments on its effects on an individual level, stating that "this crisis of confidence plaguing individuals and institutions is a crisis of faith. We no longer know what to believe or whom to trust" (15).

With no stable and trustworthy spiritual touchpoint to fall back on, this was true for me personally, having suffered through existential crises and depression from a very early age and up until early adulthood. Now, having been exposed to and learned about spiritual practices from many different traditions – Catholicism, Protestantism, different forms of Buddhism, Hinduism, Spiritism, Paganism and Afro-Brazilian religions like Umbanda and Candomblé among others (albeit not all in the same level of depth) – as well as philosophy, esotericism, and theosophy, what I have come to understand is that nature is the most reliable source of faith. "We have no greater adviser" (Oliver 20). It is the eternal source, always accessible, continually conveying sacred truths about reality, existence, and even death, needing only appropriate interpretation.

The challenge in developing spiritual practices that are not connected to any specific tradition is exactly that process of interpretation, in which one can only depend on one's own perception, reason, and intuition. As Lauter points out, "without a tradition to serve as a reference point or, alternatively, a community to affirm our direction, we risk an unbearable degree of isolation" (205). One of the questions I have grappled with since the beginning of this research is whether it was possible to develop autonomous spiritual practices, without contact with a community of people with congruent perspectives and objectives. Even when the attempt is to perceive myself as a part of a larger whole and conduct myself in accordance with that notion, the risk is that isolation will poison the pursuit. Though it has not been easy, even while involving my immediate family in these practices, one of the answers I have come up with is that community is all around us, even when our beliefs and practices are not shared. We can readily access, interact and exchange with all the humans around us – be them family, friends, acquaintances, or strangers – through conversation, food, support, and presence. Further, nature itself also presents us with a community, and there are nonhuman beings all around we can engage with. The most relevant example in my case, and for the purposes of this thesis, are the mulberry trees. Through their existence and expression, they have offered me wisdom which can only be described as sacred, and I hold a gratitude and communion with them that permeates the work I present here. Nature need not confirm the legitimacy of the connection – the key is that no one is ever truly alone.

It is with this general understanding that I propose that spiritual practices have the potential to promote a better relationship between humans and the natural environment. If we understand ourselves as parts of a whole, the universe to which we belong, then the duty we hold to our environment and the human and nonhuman beings around us may be absorbed into our ethics. If we connect to the flow of nature, in which growth and decomposition happen both cyclically and simultaneously, merging into one another in perfect harmony, we may understand that death is just as valuable and important as life. If we perceive that the violence of a storm and the pleasure of a breeze all happen within the same realm of experience, we may accept the pains and joys of existence as complementary, rather than opposed. If we identify the graceful balance of an ecosystem in which every element promotes and maintains the existence of the other, we may embrace the unifying principle which binds us inextricably together. As Mary Oliver asks, "Do you think there is anything not attached by its unbreakable cord to everything else?" (5).

It is no easy feat, however, to maintain those perceptions within a materialistic and profit-driven society with little to no sense of community. As Han puts it, "the increasing atomization of society also takes hold of its emotional world. The formation of collective feelings becomes less frequent. Instead, fleeting affects and emotions, the states of isolated individuals, predominate" (11-12). One of the characteristics of our society of overproduction and overconsumption is its inability to reconcile itself with loss and death:

The society of production is dominated by the fear of death. Capital acts like a guarantee against death. It is imagined to be accumulated time because money allows you to have others work for you, that is, to buy time. Infinite capital creates the illusion of an infinite time. Capital works against death as absolute loss. It is meant to suspend the temporal limits of a life (50).

Han proposes that the best antidote to this are spiritual rituals in which there is a "symbolic exchange with death", an idea quoted from Baudrillard. He continues: "Archaic societies do not make a sharp distinction between life and death. Death is an aspect of life, and life is only possible in symbolic exchange with death. [...] The relationship between life and death is characterized by reciprocity" (51).



Fig. 3: of mulberry blood and foam, 2024, performance documentation

In the work presented here, I enact a ceremony in which life is in direct and symbolic exchange with death. The mulberry ink is used to stain pieces of natural fabric, which are then washed off with soap made from mulberry wood ash and hung to dry before the process begins again (Fig. 3). The blood suggested by the ink may allude to death, as it connects to both sacrifice and menstruation, and the clean cotton to life in its full expression. But the symbol reverses if we perceive living as the gesture that stains (birth also draws blood), and the washing as a cleansing process of death which brings renewal as it prepares the fabric for another cycle of use (our

decomposed bodies become purified matter which will sustain new life in other organisms). As I enact this ritual cycle, within an installation constructed to be a ceremonial space, the act becomes a symbolic embodiment of harmony between the individual and a cyclical universe. In that moment, everything is reconnected – the cycle of the mulberry tree, the cycle of the womb, humanity and nature, life and death.

concerning the ritual in art

Spirituality and art have a long common history, but art historians have for more than a century downplayed its significance in modern and contemporary art (Spretnak). The dominance of scientific methodologies and perspectives in the Humanities led to the inaccurate conclusion that religion was “the vestige of primitive or infantile mentality” and was “destined to disappear with the inevitable march of history” (Taylor 33). However, a very significant portion of modern and contemporary artists continued to integrate spirituality into their practice in various ways. More specifically, I want to acknowledge the work of artists who have utilized ritual performance in their oeuvre, like Joseph Beuys, Ana Mendieta and Mary-Beth Edelson.

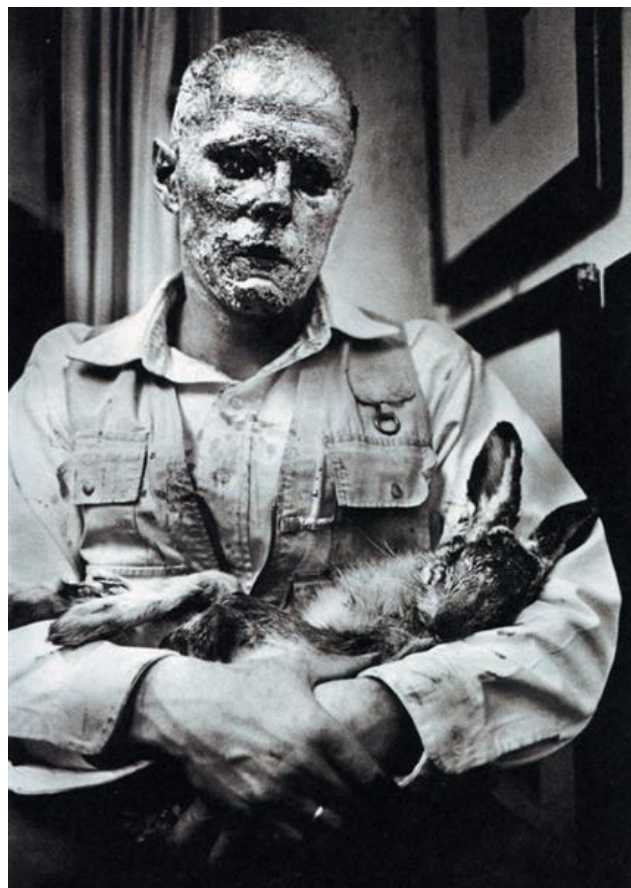


Fig. 4: Joseph Beuys, How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare, 1965

Joseph Beuys was majorly influenced by both Christian and Celtic iconography and practices, as well as shamanism, and the anthroposophical teachings of Rudolf Steiner (Taylor). He was particularly interested in

processes of rebirth, renewal, regeneration, and the cycles of organic life associated with these concepts. In his sculptures and performances, he used organic materials like wax, felt, fat, and on occasion dead or living animals (Fig. 4). Taylor comments on the spiritual approach Beuys takes with materials like fat, which, while appearing grotesque and abject, is a vital element that sustains life. He proposes that the “the transformational process through which material substance becomes the immaterial is the alchemy of life” (16). The use of organic materials, nonhuman beings and reference to concepts like regeneration in the context of ritual performance echoes my own work with the mulberry ink, mulberry tree seedlings, and the ritual enacting of the cycle of life and death.

Ana Mendieta, in turn, was inspired by Santeria practices, which combined elements of Catholicism with Afro-Cuban rituals (Creissels). Her performances embodied concepts like sacrifice, purification, transcendence, and integration with nature as a sacred entity. Particularly relevant to this thesis is the *Siluetas* series (Fig. 5), in which the artist realizes the literal surrender of the human body into nature, a clear “affirmation of power” (183). As Creissels poignantly points out, the danger in affirming oneself as a part of a whole, into which one surrenders, is the potential loss of one’s singular identification. In her view, “it implies the negation of the self as subject and a loss of one’s own identity” (184). Her analysis, though it pertains specifically to the loss of a woman’s identity to an ideal feminine essentially tied to nature, an idea clearly pertinent within Mendieta’s work, is also valid as it refers to any human in conceptually essential connection to a higher power.



Fig. 5: Ana Mendieta, Untitled from *Siluetas* Series in Mexico

That tension between the individual and the collective, the human and their place in the universe, has always been present in the quest for spirituality. How can one reconcile one's singular perspective with a universal understanding of the world? Is it necessary to sacrifice our individual perspective in order to honor the apparently universal divine will? One of the reasons I have struggled to commit to specific religions or spiritual belief systems I have been close to is precisely due to this unresolved dilemma – the notion that my individual identity would not be fully integrated into the collective. My work does not ignore this tension, but rather, attempts to harmonize it. It is through my own singular, individual and intuitive experience that I come to the ritual which places me in connection to the whole of nature. My womb connects to the womb of the world, and cosmic life is potentially gestated within or aborted from it. My body is the earth's body, and the universe exists in it. I do not sacrifice my identity to a higher power, but rather, I achieve connection to a higher power through my singular identity.



Fig. 6: Mary Beth Edelson, *Woman Rising / With Spirit*, 1973

Another artist who brilliantly explores this apparent dichotomy is Mary Beth Edelson. In her work *Woman Rising*, the artist's body becomes a site for the manifestation of the Goddess – as she understands it, the representation of a cosmic feminine power. The manipulated photographic images render visible Edelson's nude body and the energies surrounding it during one of her private rituals performed in nature (Fig. 6). When discussing the work, the artist explicitly declares the momentary surrender of her individuality by affirming the images as "not who I am but who we are" (Edelson, *Seven Cycles: Public Rituals*). At the same time, in connecting with a power beyond the individual, she also affirms herself as a singular channel through which the sacred is able to manifest itself. Within the ritual, her identity is not hidden, but validated and transcended. This is also made evident by Edelson's continuous practice of collaboration with friends, artists, and the public at large,

through which she attempted to convey the multiplicity of the experiences of women while also connecting them to a unifying principle. While discussing Edelson's use of ritual, Lucy R. Lippard elaborates on the tension between the individual and the collective and its potential developments within ceremonial practices:

When a ritual doesn't work it is a self-conscious act that isolates the performer as an exclusive object of attention. When it does work, the form's importance diminishes to become only one element in a communal impulse connecting all the participants and all the times this action has been performed in the past or will be performed in the future. (Edelson, *Seven Cycles: Public Rituals* 8)

In her interpretation, Lippard reveals the incredible potential of a ritual, not only in connecting the singular with the universal, but also the past with the future.

In the ritual I am devising, I similarly hope to present myself as an individual agent enacting a broader purpose, in such a way that the value of the ritual itself is as great as the specific artistic practice that generated it. The cyclical and repetitive nature of the performance brings attention to the symbolic elements themselves as much as to the person manipulating them. As there is nothing personal or highly technical about the way I am dealing with the materials, the importance lies not so much on my particular form of moving or performing, but in the cycle itself. I am the singular identity through which this ritual is made – it was derived from my values, perceptions, memories, symbolic references, and research – but its manifestation in the world expands beyond my control. Like the children born from my womb, what I create is not my own, and it runs free as it grows. I am the medium, but the message transcends me.

for the reappearance of rituals

Rituals and ceremonies have always been an important element in the context of spirituality, and some of the authors already mentioned denote their importance in manifesting not only our attention to the sacred, but also our sense of belonging. Kimmerer describes that the power of ceremony is that "it marries the mundane to the sacred," which illustrates exactly the kind of harmony in opposition I intend to bring into my own work (37). As mundane as the task of laundering may seem, in the context of a ceremony it implies spiritual cleansing or purification. The same author describes ceremony as a vehicle for belonging – an act of connection to "home". Similarly, Han defines rituals as "symbolic techniques of making oneself at home in the world" (2). Referencing Saint-Exupéry, he argues that "[rituals] are to time what a home is to space: they render time habitable. They even make it accessible, like a house. They structure time, furnish it". If understood in this way, it really is no wonder that so many people struggle with mental health issues in our current Eurocentric societies, which are generally so spiritually "homeless".

Another way of understanding the purpose of rituals and ceremonies is as a material enactment of abstract concepts. Just as Eliade understood to be the purpose of sacred artistic expression, a ceremony is a practice through which invisible ideas can be made visible (55). Many spiritual traditions understand rituals and ceremonies to have the potential to manifest divine will through symbolic acts like song, dance, the manipulation of objects, ingestion of foods and drinks, divination, sexual activity, etc. The ritual dance of the Guarani people in

South America, for example, was deemed to have a connection to prophecy. Chamorro explains that “this practice is rooted in a strong desire to see the manifestation of that which is symbolized and also in the fact that the symbolic act is thought to influence or hasten the manifestation of desire” (“Sua prática se enraíza num forte desejo de ver o cumprimento daquilo que é simbolizado e também no fato de se considerar que o ato simbólico influencia ou apressa o cumprimento do desejo”; my trans.; 102). By devising a ritual in which life and death are presented symbolically as equally sacred and intrinsically connected, I seek to manifest that concept into material existence, even if just for myself. I may amount to a small drop in the sea of humanity, but I too am the sea.

we choose death
every day
 to keep our life
 food, sleep, beauty
 but we forget it's there
 we know
 but don't feel it
 death feeds life
 and life can't help
 but to return
 home
 to its womb

The ritual came to me intuitively. Just a month before, I had performed a ritual of gratitude to the mulberry tree, wherein I revisited the experience of collecting the mulberries in my backyard in an exhibition space (Fig. 7). I was just beginning to think through the perceived connection between female experience and the expressions of nature. Around that same time, I had been hearing from my mother about her mother's state of health. *Nonó* was now forgetful, depressed, morose. She was put in an elderly home a few years back, forcefully and, in my opinion, prematurely, and her care has been continuously neglected by the responsible parties. My mother was legally powerless to stop it, but nevertheless kept fighting tooth and nail for her mother's well-being, at great physical and emotional expense to herself. As I would soon learn, these were just further imprints of longstanding patriarchal abuse in our family history.



Fig. 7: Offering, performance and installation, 2022, photographed by Shannyn Porter

I wondered if I would be able to see my grandmother again, and if I did, whether she would remember me. I wished I could take care of my mother as she battled to protect her own. I shed tears of contempt and despair. Soon after, lying in bed, I had the inner vision of a cycle of cleansing – a circular ritual of *mulberry blood and foam* (Fig. 8). I saw the aluminum basins my grandmother used to let her linens soak in while still in her home. I saw small pieces of rags being hung to dry. I saw myself performing a rite of perpetual continuity in honor of death and the life it brings.

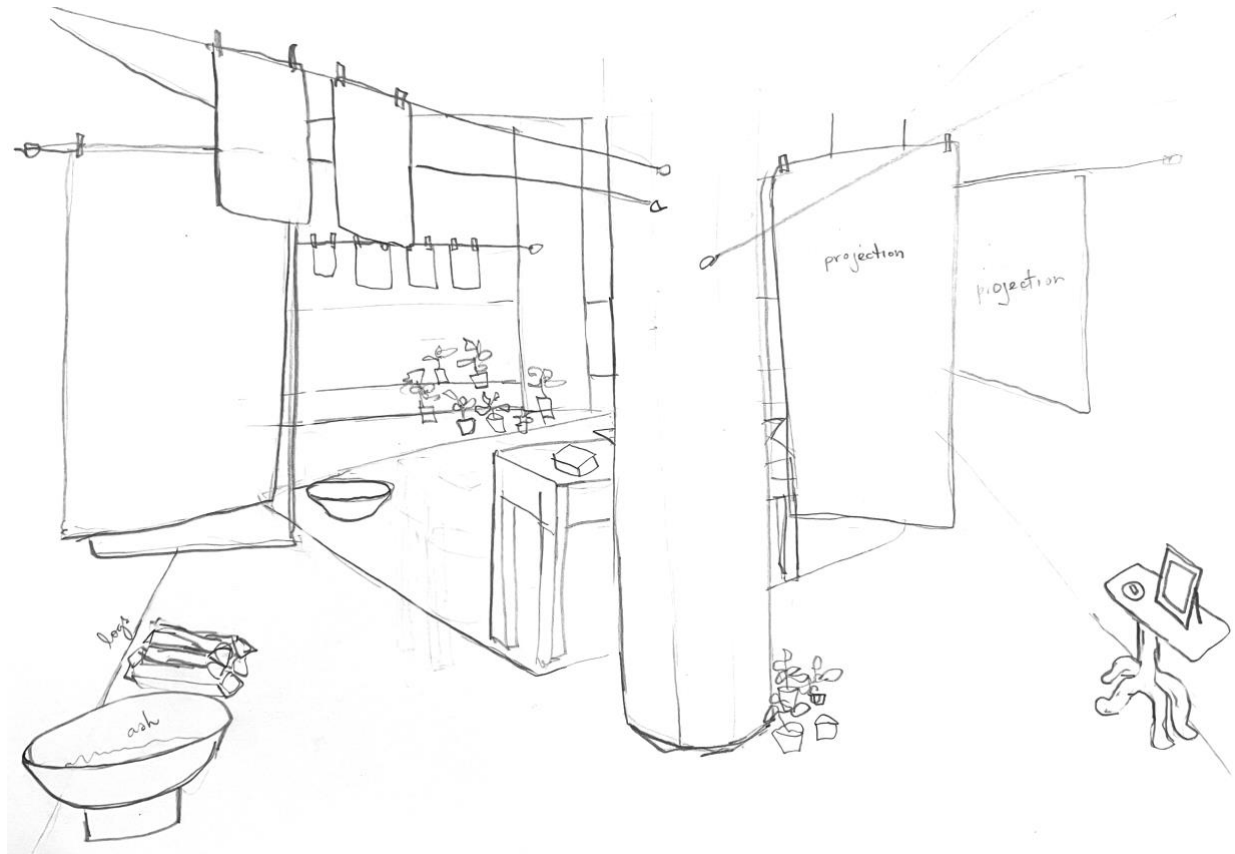


Fig. 8: Sketch of the installation plan, 2023

It was only after a slow and gradual process of absorbing that image that my rational mind would grasp the significance of all the elements pertaining to this vision. But initially, it only sparked a faint recollection of the fact that my great grandmother Maria, my *bisa*, had been a washerwoman (Fig. 9). I had to ask my mother for confirmation that I wasn't imagining things, as I hadn't heard anything about this fact in a very long time. She told me it was true, and that Maria was obliged to work largely due to the vices, neglect, and abuse of my great grandfather, Atilio. They had eight children together, and she needed to work to provide for them. Both have long been dead, but I was interested in knowing more about her situation, and that of my *vovó* as well. My mother sent me a poem her father wrote in 1991 about Maria, his mother-in-law, commemorating the occasion of her 83rd birthday. This excerpt, which I translated into English from Portuguese, provided me with an initial glimpse into her life:

*Sua família era pobre
E precisava trabalhar.
Escola não conheceu
E cresceu sem estudar.*

Her family was poor
And needed to work.
She never went to school
And grew up with no study.

*Ainda na adolescência,
Que não foi de brincadeira,
Foi empregada doméstica,
Pajem e até lavadeira*

Still in her teenage years,
With no time to play,
She worked as maid,
nanny, and even washerwoman.

[...]

[...]

*Pra tentar mudar de vida,
Muito jovem se casou
Com um formoso mancebo,
Que por ela se apaixonou.*

In an attempt to change her life,
She married very young
With a dashing youth,
Who fell in love with her.

*O nome dele era Atílio
Pedreiro sua profissão
Mas logo ela percebeu
Que só mudou de patrão*

His name was Atílio
He worked in construction
But she soon noticed
She had only a new boss.

I asked my mother to write all that she knew about their story, and she obliged. I read a myriad of stories of abuse by the men in my family I had no previous knowledge of, and the effect they had on my *bisa*, her daughters, and her granddaughters. I will focus here on the fact that Maria had to work as a washerwoman for a long time to provide her children with the bare minimum. In conversation with my *voová*, when asked if her mother enjoyed laundering, she replied: “my mother did everything. If she liked it or not, I can’t say. I just know she did everything” (“A minha mãe fazia de tudo, né? Se ela gostava ou não, eu não sei. Eu sei que ela fazia de tudo”; my trans.).

My grandmother carried on her mother’s meticulous methods of laundering, not as a means of sustenance, but as an integral part of her role as a wife and mother. I don’t remember ever hearing stories of her brilliance in school due to an exceptional intellect, or about her dreams of becoming a medical practitioner (eventually leading to a job as head nurse at the local hospital), but I do remember her making suds and sun bleaching linens in her backyard.

the *lavadeira* occupation

This connection with my family history brings with it references particular to the Brazilian context, such as the occupation of washerwoman, or as it is called in Portuguese, *lavadeira*, which has a particular set of social and aesthetic expressions. From the end of the 18th century in Brazil, women who had been newly emancipated

from slavery compulsorily resumed their tasks as laundresses and housemaids, in conditions not dissimilar to the ones before their emancipation (Monteleone). By the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century in Brazil, those occupations started to also be taken up by lower class immigrant women in the state of São Paulo (Fonseca Bazzo). This was the context in which my *bisa* Maria was born.



Fig. 9: Photo of my great grandmother Maria, family archive, date unknown

Maria's parents were Italian immigrants who arrived in the state of São Paulo around this time, a family of little means, as my grandfather points out in his poem. Around the time of their arrival, immigrants were being favored over the newly emancipated black and indigenous people of Brazil as laborers and domestic workers.⁵ Adverts for domestic labor positions often cited the preference for white immigrants, which were pouring in from Europe at the time due to racially informed incentives by the newly formed Brazilian republic toward a "whitening" of the nation (Matos). My *bisa* was still a child when she started working in what were traditionally women's occupations – as nanny, maid, and washerwoman. It is not lost on me that her European whiteness no doubt favored her among all the women engaged in the search for employment.

In his poem, my grandfather mentions a possible hope she might have had for a new life after marriage, since the traditional gender norms still implied that a husband would take up the role of provider, while the wife would take up the role of bearing children and maintaining the home. When my great grandfather Atílio surrendered his role of provider to vice, my *bisa* had to rely on her domestic labor skills once again in order to

⁵ The indigenous peoples of the territory now known as Brazil were systematically enslaved, murdered, abused, culturally and materially dispossessed, and forcefully assimilated throughout the entire period of Portuguese colonization and beyond. The black population of Brazil was constituted through the violent capture of millions of people from various African territories specifically for the purpose of enslavement over the course of some 300 years.

feed her eight children, among which was my grandmother. According to my mother, she also was made to start working as a maid from a very early age, in order to contribute to the household earnings. My grandmother's formal education only began at the age of 12, where eventually her intelligence, diligence, and most likely her white privilege, would earn her a scholarship at a nursing school, which she took despite her father's disapproval. He plainly deemed a "whore" any daughter of his who left their house before getting married and vowed he would never allow their return. Their father's misogynist views notwithstanding, two of my great aunts followed in *vovó's* footsteps and also left their parents' house to attend nursing school.

Eventually, when my grandmother got married and bore the children which she was expected to bear, she saw herself unable to reconcile her career as a nurse and the responsibilities of a wife and mother. The societal expectation was again that her husband would be the provider, and she would carry the domestic load. My mother interprets this turn of events as sadly misguided, as her father already had a life-long military pension which would contribute to the household and was more suited to childcare and domestic affairs than her mother, whose satisfaction was more connected to career than home – a fact which would lead her to a state of severe clinical depression. Her saving grace was a physician-prescribed return to work, by a professional who thankfully understood that her ignored vocation and compliance to traditional gender roles were what had brought my *vovó* to her depressive condition.

Growing up, I did not have these family stories in my radar. What I did have access to were my grandmother's attention to detail and technical prowess in all domestic tasks, from laundering to cooking and everything in between, undoubtedly inculcated in her from an early age. What I also observed were my mother's attempts to live up to those skills, the pressures of which caused her great anxiety and insecurity in her role as wife and mother. I am certain to have been affected not only by my direct perception, but also by all these unspoken family narratives, whose effects continue to trickle down into the lives of my relatives.

As for my *bisã's* work as a *lavadeira*, my research proposes not only to rescue familial narratives of women's underappreciated work and oppression, but also to emphasize the cultural significance of this specific occupation in Brazilian society. The *lavadeiras* were and still are culturally known in Brazil for their habit of singing songs while working – the rhythm of their music setting the pace for the washing, beating, and wringing of clothes (Matos). This is the context from which I derive the incorporation of vocal music into my work, in a style reminiscent to that of this traditional cultural expression.

A typical *lavadeira* song is usually sung by a group of women and includes an alternation between chorus and soloist. Often there is a repeating stanza, sung either in unison or in harmony by all the women, and any number of singular stanzas sung individually by one of them, or alternated between them. In my interpretation, this format emphasizes the collective unity of the women singing as they work next to each other, representative of a community of support through the toils of life, while also acknowledging each individual's singular contribution and experience. The themes of the songs are very commonly connected to different forms of suffering and a clinging to hope for a joy that will eventually come. An important trope often found in these songs is the casual dialogue with natural elements, like asking the wild flowers of their knowledge about a loved one's whereabouts, or confiding one's emotional torment to the river rocks (Rodrigues de Ataíde 60–62).

música de lavar / washing song

Inspired by this stylistic structure and the themes of my research, I composed a song to inhabit my performance and installation. I took direct inspiration from the song *Lavadeira*, in the public domain, as performed by Cantadeiras do Souza. My own song is voiced by myself and the women in my immediate family, and our voices are harmonized in the chorus with alternating solo stanzas. There is no instrumental accompaniment, as would be typical for a song sung during laundering activities. The lyrics in the chorus relate the activity of washing to the cycle of life and death. The lyrics in the stanzas refer to various themes, including washing techniques as metaphors for the dealings of life, allusions to the perspective of death personified as a wise advisor, and concerns relating to the oppression of women:

*[Eu vou pro rio ao norte
Fazer voltar a vida
Eu lavo embora a morte
Meu bem, minha querida]*

[To the river in the north
I will go to bring life back
To wash death away
My sweet, my dear]

*Bate a roupa com sabão
Bota no sol pra quarar
Se ela ainda não branqueia
Vai fazer de novo então*

Beat the clothes with soap
Lay them in the sun to bleach
If they're still not white enough
You will do it all again

*Tudo mundo me demanda
Sem nem quase perceber
Sua vida eu que sustento
Emprestando o meu poder*

Everyone demands me
Without even realizing
Your life I sustain
By lending my power

*Quando a dor é bem profunda
Gera a mancha mais tenaz
Deixa mais tempo de molho
E a amargura para trás*

When the pain is very deep
It creates a steadfast stain
Leave it soaking for longer
And resentment behind

*Tudo morre pra voltar
No meu ventre reviver
Só quem nunca ouviu minha voz
É que vai se estremecer*

Everything dies to come back
In my womb will live again
Those unfamiliar with my voice
Will be the only ones to tremble

*Quando a lua não se mostra
Vem meu sangue derramar
Mais um mês vou correr livre
Como um rio que vai pro mar*

When the moon takes to hiding
Is when my blood will spill
Another month running free
Like a river to the sea

*Tempo faz que estão assim
Só tentando me esquecer
Mas no fim do seu caminho
Você vai lembrar de mim*

So long you've been like this
Trying to forget about me
But at the end of your road
You will remember me

*A memória já se apaga
De um tempo sem doer
Logo volto para a terra
Vai limpar o meu sofrer*

Memories are long gone
Of a time with no pain
Soon enough the earth will take me
Wash my suffering away

*Quem me tem de companhia
Vive bem pra me encontrar
Faz o bem, não perde tempo
Seu legado vai durar*

Those who have me as companion
Do well in time to meet me
Make good, don't waste time
A legacy which will last

coconut and ash soap

Another element of the performance which relates to cultural and familial ties is the soapmaking process I've engaged in. The most traditional soap still largely used in Brazil is made from coconut. It is valued for being gentle on skin, having a pleasant smell and significant effectiveness in the whitening of fibers. From a technical standpoint, soapmaking involves a chemical process in which a type of fat, like coconut oil, is combined with a strong alkali base, commonly known as lye (usually sodium or potassium hydroxide). The unfolding chemical reaction results in the material we know as soap, which has foaming and cleansing properties. I decided to produce my own soap for this project because my grandmother used to make her own soap for laundering, a practice she most likely learned from my great grandmother. Since I couldn't learn from either of them, I had to find other sources.

During my research into soapmaking, I discovered that before commercial lye was available for purchase, it was made by leeching it with rainwater from the wood ash of cooking and heating fires. Accounts from the time of my great grandmother confirm this to also be true in Brazil, producing what was called *sabão de cinza* – ash soap (Matos). This discovery introduced a new layer into the ritual: the two main elements in soapmaking parallel the dichotomy of life and death. Fat, though having abject associations, is an element vital to life because its metabolization is necessary in the support of our bodily functions (Taylor, 2012). Ash is the result of the transmutation (in itself a concept related to death) of cadaverous bodies by fire, in this case mulberry wood. In this expression of the metaphor, the fat as symbol of life and the ash as symbol of death are harmoniously integrated into the stable substance of soap, a seemingly mundane material made sacred. I've combined methods of contemporary soapmaking practices with the traditional lye-leeching method using ash from mulberry wood to make my own *sabão de coco e cinza* – coconut and ash soap.

she makes nothing

Washing laundry is only one element in the category of housekeeping work that has historically fallen compulsorily on women. As was the case for my great grandmother, my grandmother, and still my mother after her (along with the housekeeping staff hired in the occasion of her higher economic standing), women have generally carried the load of cleaning duties in Brazilian society, an obvious heritage of patriarchal European societies. I will not attempt to structure a history of how or why this came to be, as it exceeds the scope of this thesis. I will, however, draw some parallels between the task of cleaning, clearly represented in my ritual, and other concepts within the work.

In her magnum opus *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir describes in great detail women's toiling relationship to cleaning while performing the role of wife. As the author discusses it, "woman" refers to the culturally constructed set of behaviors and norms the female human being must follow from birth in patriarchal society. As the home is made to be her entire universe, she structures her life in such a way as to skillfully maintain that universe, and a great part of that maintenance pertains to cleaning (450). In her account, Beauvoir likens the task of cleaning to that of the torture of Sisyphus: "the clean becomes soiled, the soiled is made clean, over and over, day after day. The housewife wears herself out marking time: *she makes nothing, simply perpetuates the present*" (451; emphasis added). The task is described as a negative one, in the sense that her actions only erase the marks of life as opposed to producing it – or anything at all. Her mission is not one of creating Good, but rather to fight a battle against Evil, one which never ceases. Her account goes as far as to note how the role of cleaning often develops into a neurosis in which the woman wishes to keep all life from entering the home so as to not generate more of the dirt she will ultimately be obligated to clean, a tendency I was easily inclined to associate with both my grandmother and my mother in relation to their homes.

The cycle of cleaning is as never-ending as the cycles of nature, and analogous to them in that they are conceptualized in terms of dualities. Pure and impure are analogous to life and death, which are also made into Good and Evil. Impurity or dirt requires cleaning, the act of which can be associated with processes of death, since it is only necessary due to the fact that dirt exists in the first place. But as Beauvoir poignantly points out when describing a woman's cleaning neurosis, what generates dirt is life itself. And, as we can observe in nature, only through decomposition can dead matter be made into more life. It is interesting how the author explicitly identifies the act of cleaning as one without a product, in which nothing is "made". Just as death sustains life with its negative processes (decomposition, deconstruction, breaking down of particles), cleaning sustains purity using the same basic principles of negativity (scrubbing off, removing, rinsing, draining). The very judgment value we give the words "positive" and "negative" are enough to express how our society relates emotionally with these processes. Creation, production, and life are perceived as objectives or blessings, and death, deconstruction, and decomposition as deviations or curses. This is also related to how menstruation is perceived, as I will develop further in chapter 5.

Why is our relationship to the task of cleaning often so torturous? Is it because it has no product, as Beauvoir suggests, directly associating that fact with a lack of self-realization and satisfaction? If so, the explanation may lie in the materialist logic of a society that values production above all else. Perhaps we have a difficult relationship with impurity itself, associated as it may be with death and Evil, and then we might blame a

general disconnection to nature and its cycles of balance. Is the function of cleaning devalued because of its cultural association with women in patriarchal societies, or were women devalued because their traditional functions were devalued in a capitalist and materialist society? Whatever the answers may be, I want to call attention to the fact that it is a task so essential to each of us as individuals and as a society as to require collective reappraisal.

As I will suggest later regarding the fertility cycle, the task of cleaning should be the concern of all humanity and be valued as such not because it creates a product, but because it creates negative space for life and creation to come through. Precisely due to its negative quality, it can be made contemplative and ritualized. Beauvoir intends to shed an unpleasant light on such processes when she writes that we are "bound to such rites until death" and that they "simply perpetuate the present". I contend she was right: cleaning is a continual ritual of presence and maintenance. How fortunate for anyone to be a part of it!

of mulberry blood and foam

my circle is made
 the stage is set
 the rules relayed
 I have come here
 to weep
 to reap
 what was sowed
 the stains are no longer hidden
 and I wash
 because I must
 like we all have done
 whatever our dreams
 the spirit flows
 through my hands
 splatters and seeps
 all over
 may we feel its
 warmth, chill
 within

The singing voices of the women in my family inhabit the ritual space, along with other sounds – of nature, of washing, of children. In one corner, white linens hang in wire lines, calling out for the sun’s cleansing touch (Fig. 10). A video projection lights up the linens: scenes of water, fire, plants, mulberry juice dripping, sky. There are objects all around the room, but plenty of empty space. By a pillar, a small altar stands with a single candle, incense, and other ceremonial objects. On the wall opposite the linens, there is a fire pit with ashes inside. Next to it is a basket with logs of mulberry wood which were cut for burning, and a metal bowl with soiled rags, and dried mulberry leaves (Fig. 11). All around are potted mulberry seedlings of varying sizes.

A large canvas sheet is spread out on the floor in the back end of the gallery, diagonally placed. One of the corners is anchored to the back wall, and its opposing corner extends toward the gallery entrance. An old wooden worktable is placed along one edge, with soap and two metal basins on top for washing. Next to the table, on the floor, are two metal buckets, one with clean water. Next to the other side of the table there is a half barrel containing wet soil. On a different edge of the canvas sheet, a small wooden pillar holds a dark vulva-shaped ceramic piece with mulberry ink inside. Next to it, there is a table with a small basin containing a small square piece of cotton fabric stained with mulberry ink. Over on another edge, there is a basket with a pile of clean pieces of fabric inside. Next to it, in connection to the adjacent wall, is a clothesline with pieces of fabric which were hung to dry after being washed, and a basket containing wooden clothespins (Fig. 12).



Fig. 10: of mulberry blood and foam, detail of installation



Fig. 11: of mulberry blood and foam, details of installation



Fig. 12: of mulberry blood and foam, performance documentation

I am performing the ritual. I have always been here, will always be here. The candles are lit, the incense perfumes the space. I am wearing a homemade ceremonial dress with a mulberry-dyed hem. I am standing in front of the wooden table. I take one of the fabrics submerged in the water of the larger basin, which has softened a dark stain. I take the soap and run it over the fabric. I forcefully scrub the fabric against itself, the foam reacting against the soiled fibers (Fig. 13). I submerge it in water to remove the soap and repeat the process as needed. I wring the fabric and submerge it in the water from the smaller basin on the table. I wring the fabric again. I walk over to the clothesline and hang the fabric on the wire using clothespins. I remove a piece of fabric from the other side of the wire, put away the clothespins, and place it under the pile of clean rags. I take another piece from the top. I bring it over to the basin with the stained rags and place it on top of the pile. I take the ceramic vulva from the nearby wooden pillar and pour the mulberry ink it contains over the fabric. The dark purple liquid seeps into the fibers. I place the ceramic back on the pillar. I take another soiled fabric from the bottom of the pile (Fig. 14). I walk over to the table and submerge the fabric in the larger basin of water. I discard some of the water from that basin into the soil of the barrel. I pour all the water from the smaller basin into the larger one (Fig. 15). I pour from the clean water buckets into the empty basin. The cycle begins again. It never ends though it may be interrupted.

While I perform the ritual, my two daughters are present, also dressed in ceremonial garb (Fig. 16). They interact with the space, with me, and with the people who have come to witness. They inhabit the sacred space with natural ease and simplicity. They too will perform the rite, in their own way, as they grow.

During and after the exhibition, the soil with soapy water will be used to feed the seedlings, which will later be transplanted into the ground in various places as an act of gratitude and reciprocity.

As I enact the full sequence of staining, washing, hanging to dry and starting over, inside a circle made up of common objects made ceremonial, I embrace the sacred life and the sacred death contained within my body and all around me. My actions become a symbolic embodiment of harmony between blood and foam, light and dark, death and life.



Fig. 13: of mulberry blood and foam, performance documentation



Fig. 14: of mulberry blood and foam, performance documentation



Fig. 15: of mulberry blood and foam, performance documentation



Fig. 16: of mulberry blood and foam, performance documentation

everywhere I die

everywhere I burn
 I quiver
 and turn
 every time I sigh
 and know how to be
 look
 and take me in
 and I'll begin
 to give back, intact
 once more

In this final chapter, I will discuss menstruation as an important theme and frame of reference in my work. I want to first acknowledge other artists who have engaged with the theme, and the discussions these works generated within the context of feminist debate around essentialism at the time. I will then relay some of my own experience and engage with broader anthropological analysis relating to menstruation to establish the continued relevance of the theme within knowledge-making and culture and to ground the symbolic meanings present in my work.

menstrual art and essentialism

During the second wave of feminism occurring in the 1960s and 70s, many artists approached themes pertaining to the experience of being a woman in their art. Having been concealed or silenced globally through hundreds of centuries of patriarchy, women's perspectives on femininity, mothering, sex, and their own bodies finally started being explicitly showcased in works of art often considered outrageous and scandalous by a male-dominated art world. The first women to be taken seriously in the gallery and museum system were mostly creating art works analogous with the works of men at the time, primarily working with abstraction. But though their differing perspectives could be said to be lurking just underneath the surface, that difference was not explicitly perceived or acknowledged by either men or women (In Lippard 218). Judy Chicago argues, in an interview with Lippard, that this attempt to please and fit into a patriarchal art world was holding women back as artists. She declares: "My investigation of women's art has led me to conclude that what has prevented women from being really great artists is the fact that we have been unable so far to transform our circumstances into our subject matter" (Lippard 230).

One of the themes many feminist artists fore-fronted during this time, which referenced their experience as women, was that of menstruation, or what can be designated as "gendered blood" (In Green-Cole, 2020). Some examples of these are Shigeko Kubota's *Vagina Painting* (1965) (Fig. 17), Chicago's *Red Flag* (1971) (Fig. 18) and *Menstruation Bathroom* (1971-1972), Caroline Schneemann's *BLOODWORK DIARY* (1972), Judy Clark's

Menstruation (1973) and arguably Ana Mendieta's *Body Tracks* (1974). As Ruth Green-Cole contends, feminist artists like the ones mentioned have played an important role in challenging representations of women's bodies and of menstrual blood as dirty, abject, and shameful. Many of these works play with the element of shock, as "critical interrogations of aesthetic authority and decorum" (787). However, they could also be interpreted as steps in a journey toward menstruating people's own acceptance of their bodies and the fluids they spontaneously generate (Røstvik).



Fig. 17: Shigeko Kubota - Vagina Painting, 1965



Fig. 18: Judy Chicago - Red Flag, 1971

A lot has been written about the contribution these works by second-wave feminists, and others which highlight the subjective experience of women, have given to feminist cause. As Julie Fields notes, "conflicting views about whether particular representations upheld or undermined feminist perspectives – especially those artworks referencing female sexuality and depicting the female body – became central to movement debates and art criticism" (10). The main critique of this type of work came primarily from authors involved in poststructuralist theory starting in the 1980s, which began questioning gender categories and the limitations of that language within oppositional strategies. This anti-essentialist argument posited that by dealing with themes that pertain to the subjective experiences of women, these artists were creating limiting frameworks around what it means to be a woman. However, as the debates progressed, it became evident that as long as the oppression of people perceived as women was a reality, some form of essentialism would inevitably be present in feminist discourse. As Diana Fuss explains, "while a constructionist might recognize that 'man' and 'woman' are produced across a spectrum of discourses, the categories 'man' and 'woman' remain constant and therefore are relied upon as essential terms of analysis" (qtd. in Fields 6). Gayatri Spivak dubbed this a "strategic employment of essentialism", to be understood not as a means of crystalizing the biological or cultural characteristics of women, but to unite them around the nature of their positionality in the world (qtd. in Fields 6).

I would argue, as others have done before me, that feminist artists from the 1970s did not necessarily choose themes pertaining to their own bodies in order to detach themselves from the male experience, but rather, as an attempt to make these themes relevant to the totality of the human experience. Quoting Judy Chicago's words, Lauter affirms that "in the process of addressing the issues of female experience, women are creating work that reveals 'the whole nature of the human condition'" (Lauter 133-34). This is the attempt of my own work, highlighted in my choice to showcase the fertility cycle as a symbol of the larger cycles of nature, as well as in the autoethnographic research pertaining to my ancestors in Brazil.

approaching menstruation

It is relevant to elaborate now on why the specific theme of menstruation would still be of interest in the contemporary context, when so many artists have treated the theme before me since the 1960s. One might also wonder in what ways my approach differs from the specific works I've discussed earlier. To validate this, I will further elaborate the autoethnographic aspect of my work.

When I was 12 years old in 1999, the year of my menarche, I perceived menstruation with a mix of curiosity and embarrassment. I knew it would come and what it meant in terms of my fertility, but when it did, I had little resources on how to manage it except for the pads my mother handed me without much more explanation. What I felt certain of, not knowing exactly why, was that the whole process needed to be hidden from sight – I could not be seen with a pad in hand, had to carefully manage the manner and frequency in which I changed them to avoid staining my clothes, and any evidence of its smell had to be eliminated, lest I face judgment and shame. Even the mention of menstruation had to be coded when in communication with my female peers, who created elusive euphemisms for the menstruating person like "being in the clouds" ("*estar nas nuvens*" in Portuguese).

To this day, not much has changed for most of the women in my family when it comes to their view of menstruation – it is seen now as it was then: a painful or disgusting inconvenience. In a recent interaction with my older sister, she very clearly expressed her distaste for the entire experience and rolled her eyes when I mentioned the possibility that one could feel differently about it. My younger sister by eleven years is an exception – she recently declared being fascinated by the process of menstruation in more ways than one – and perhaps not by coincidence, was also the first in our family to explicitly declare herself a feminist, when she was still a teenager.

Although my own personal experience, and that of the women in my family, cannot be counted as definitive evidence of the continued status of menstruation as abject in present-day North and South American societies, for the sake of brevity I will not expand on this specific argument. Suffice it to say that still today, at the age of 36, living in one of the most politically progressive countries in the world, I can still perceive the inability of most people, of any gender, to approach the topic without at least some level of discomfort. I do not exclude myself of this, especially within more conservative spaces of society. That to me is proof enough that the theme continues to be relevant in artmaking, knowledge making and casual discussion.

My approach of this topic, however, does not veer toward either literal imagery or limiting definitions of womanhood or femininity. I am using mulberry ink to allude to menstrual blood, which differs somewhat in color though still expressing some of the qualities of the substance it refers to in the way it behaves and stains fabric. I do not use explicit imagery of the menstruating body, or the hygienic materials used to contain it, like pads, tampons, or others. The pieces of fabric I use in my performance do allude to older methods of managing blood, which my grandmother used, but are not literal representations of it. I also do not literally represent other aspects of the fertility cycle, like ovulation, conception, or labor. The closest to a literal reference I make is the vulva-inspired ceramic container I created specifically for the performance which holds the mulberry ink liquid (Fig. 19). Although I appreciate the overtly literal approach as equally important, my more suggestive take is anchored in the intention to refer to the fertility cycle largely as an allegory.

It is also important to acknowledge that the experience of menstruation is not limited to women, nor is it correct to assume that all women have or will have the experience of menstruating. I am referring to the fertility cycle as a symbol, and though I do treat it generally as connected mostly to women's bodies, my hope is for it to be recognized for what it is – the generative cycle responsible for conceiving all human life. The fact that it is connected to the whole of humanity, in my view, should be enough to make it a significant symbol to the entire species, regardless of biological sex or gender. To that end, I will briefly present some relevant evidence of past and present symbolic meanings derived from anthropological research within the theme of menstruation and the fertility cycle.

menstruation as death

The symbolic meanings and practices associated with menstruation vary immensely across different cultures and historical moments (Buckley and Gottlieb). A fair constant (though not absolute) in many of the anthropological studies that have been conducted around the world concerning this theme, however, is the association of menstruation with power. This power has often been elaborated symbolically with a negative

valence, being potentially responsible for the destruction of crops, impairing a man's ability to hunt, bringing illness, spoiling food, causing spiritual contamination, and other perils. In other instances, menstruation has been perceived as carrying power of a positive valence, being associated with spiritual sensibility, sexual freedom, fertility, better cooking, female solidarity, synchronicity, cyclicity, and an essential connection to significant natural elements like the water and the moon, among other examples. Knight has even hypothesized that symbols often related to menstruation, like the snake, have been appropriated as symbols of power by men in patriarchal societies (251-55). Although most of these associations do not persist in contemporary late industrial societies, the medical conceptualization of premenstrual syndrome and its subsequent cultural encoding also imbues menstruating women with incredible power (though mostly negative) through heightened sensitivity and aggressive tendencies (161-81).

In my interpretation, the symbolic power linked to menstruation is almost always related to the concept of death, either as a force of evil or as a life-sustaining principle. A menstruating woman is momentarily unable to conceive life, and her blood is a signal of the absence of life in her womb. At the same time, her blood signals the forthcoming potential for bearing children,⁶ and a heightened sensitivity at this time can favor spiritual contemplation and creativity. Similarly, as much as death amounts to the expiry of life, so it is also a necessary event for the living, in the way of sustenance, protection, warmth, renewal of resources, and creative expression. I would argue that the relationship a society carries with menstruation is in many ways analogous to its relationship with death, both conceptually and pragmatically. If the idea/fact of death is surrounded with taboo, menstruation is also treated as such. If death is hidden and avoided at all costs, so will menstruation be an immense burden to carry and deal with, even though both are events that ultimately promote and sustain life.

I would also add to this argument that, though in many cultures menstrual blood is considered a pollutant, the very concept of pollution might have been distorted over time to carry a persistently bad valence, even if it does not necessarily imply that in an absolute sense. Mary Douglas has shown in her anthropological exploration of the concept of pollution that its anomalous power derives from its symbolic encoding as "matter out of place", which would imply danger to a social order (qtd. in Buckley and Gottlieb 26). As we now understand, "matter out of place" such as rot, mold, and pests, but also blood flowing outside of the body, can bring actual life-threatening danger to humans and their environments, and certain behaviors related to cleanliness can literally protect us from gratuitous death.⁷ In that sense, the sensorial inputs related to menstruation - the red blood, its possibly unpleasant smells - may have also contributed to its connection with death and its associated taboos.

On the other hand, if we were to celebrate, or at least accept the presence and even beauty of death, and by extension menstruation, inevitable as they are within the cycle of nature, we might, as I say in one of my poems, "breathe a little easier". To that end, Emily Martin points out that we already have practices of cyclicity in our society that model nature's functioning:

⁶ The Beng of Ivory Coast describe menstruation as a flower: "it must emerge before the fruit - the baby - can be born" (Buckley and Gottlieb 58).

⁷ It is ironic to realize that the cultural value placed on taboos associated with pollution, in the way of preserving life and "Good", are often held simultaneous with the undervaluing of the task of cleaning, as I've detailed in chapter 3.

Men and women alike in our society are familiar with one cycle, dictated by a complex interaction of biological and psychological factors, that happens in accord with cycles in the natural world: We all need to sleep part of every solar revolution, and we all recognize the disastrous consequences of being unable to sleep, as well as the rejuvenating results of being able to sleep (Buckley and Gottlieb 180).

Although not every human menstruates, this periodical event is part of the human experience, and for that, space and time should be carved out collectively for it to be perceived and treated as more than just an unfortunate burden, but instead as a blessing and a power, though often somewhat uncomfortable (as death itself may also be).



Fig. 19: of mulberry blood and foam, performance documentation



Fig. 20: of mulberry blood and foam, performance documentation

The burdens and delights of fertility are ours. The freedom and toil of an empty womb are ours. All becomes soiled, and by all our hands can be made clean. The dance of life and death is sacred, and we can engage with it in harmony. The dance never ends, though it may be interrupted. I pray it is not.

works cited

- Becker, Ernest. *The Denial of Death*. Free Press Paperbacks, 1973.
- Beuys, Joseph. *How To Explain Pictures To A Dead Hare*. Performance, 1965, www.wikiart.org/en/joseph-beuys/how-to-explain-pictures-to-a-dead-hare-1965-1.
- Blavastky, Helena Petrovna. *The Secret Doctrine: The Synthesis of Science, Religion, and Philosophy*. 3rd ed., vol. 1, The Theosophical Publishing House, 1893, www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/54824/pg54824-images.html.
- Buckley, Thomas, and Alma Gottlieb. *Blood Magic: The Anthropology of Menstruation*. University of California Press, 1988.
- Cantadeiras do Souza. *Lavadeira*. Tratore/Selo Cooperativa, 2007. *Spotify*, open.spotify.com/track/2aoUQC36HS719TqqU0bjHH?si=8e5aa98d30f149ef.
- Chamorro, Graciela. *Terra Madura, Yvy Araguayje: Fundamentos Da Palavra Guarani*. Editora UFGD, 2008.
- Chicago, Judy. *Red Flag, Artist Proof 4*. Photo-etching on paper, 1971, www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/chicago-red-flag-artist-proof-4-p15227.
- Creissels, Anne. "From Leda to Daphne: Sacrifice and Virginity in the Work of Ana Mendieta." *The Sacred and the Feminine*, I. B. Tauris, 2007, pp. 178–88.
- de Beauvoir, Simone. *The Second Sex*. Vintage Books, 1989.
- D'Eaubonne, Françoise. *Feminism or Death*. Verso 2022, 1974.
- Edelson, Mary Beth. *Seven Cycles: Public Rituals*. 1980.
- . *Women Rising / With Spirit*. Photograph, 1973, www.thefeministinstitute.org/images?id=490.

- Eliade, Mircea. *Symbolism, the Sacred and the Arts*. The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1990.
- Fields, Jill. "Frontiers in Feminist Art History." *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, vol. 33, no. 2, 2012, pp. 1-21.
- Fonseca Bazzo, Leda Maria. "Trabalhadoras Lavadeiras e a Literatura Científica - Séculos XIX, XX e XXI." *VIII Encontro Estadual de História ANPUH*, 2016, www.encontro2016.bahia.anpuh.org/resources/anais/49/1517263429_ARQUIVO_ArtigoLeda.pdf.
- Green-Cole, Ruth. "Painting Blood: Visualizing Menstrual Blood in Art." *The Palgrave Handbook of Critical Menstruation Studies*, Springer Nation, 2020, pp. 787-801, library.oapen.org/handle/20.500.12657/41299.
- Griffin, Susan. *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her*. 2nd ed., Sierra Club Books, San Francisco, 2000.
- Han, Byung-Chul. *The Disappearance of Rituals: A Topology of the Present*. Polity Press, 2020.
- Harrison, Peter. *The Territories of Science and Religion*. The University of Chicago Press, 2015.
- Kimmerer, Robin. *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*. Milkweed Editions, 2013.
- Kubota, Shigeko. *Vagina Painting*. 1965, www.moma.org/collection/works/126778?artist_id=3277.
- Lauter, Estella. *Women as Mythmakers: Poetry and Visual Art from the Twentieth Century*. Indiana University Press, 1984.
- Lippard, Lucy R. *From The Center: Feminist Essays on Women's Art*. E.P. Dutton & CO, Inc., 1976.
- Matos, Maria Izilda Santos. *Cotidiano e Cultura: História, Cidade e Trabalho*. 3rd ed., e-Manuscrito, 2019.

- Mendieta, Ana. *Untitled from Silueta Series in Mexico*. Photograph, 1976,
museums.fivecolleges.edu/detail.php?t=objects&type=ext&id_number=SC+2001.22.2.
- Merchant, Carolyn. *The Death of Nature*. HarperSanFrancisco, 1980.
- Monteleone, Joana de Moraes. "Dressmakers, Maids, Washerwomen and Saleswomen: Women's Work in The Nineteenth Century and the Care for Clothes (Rio de Janeiro, 1850-1920)." *Revista Estudos Feministas*, vol. 27, no. 1, 2019, doi.org/10.1590/1806-9584-2019v27n148913.
- Oliver, Mary. *Upstream*. Penguin Press, 2016.
- Paglia, Camille. "Sex and Violence, or Nature and Art." *Western Humanities Review; Salt Lake City*, vol. 42, no. 1, 1988, pp. 21-44.
- Rodrigues de Ataíde, Sâmara. *Confluências Do Passado e Do Presente: O Resgate Da Memória Em o Canto Das Lavadeiras*. 2008. UERJ, www.bdt.d.uerj.br/handle/1/6561.
- Røstvik, Camilla Mørk. "Blood Works: Judy Chicago and Menstrual Art Since 1970." *Oxford Art Journal*, vol. 42, no. 3, 2019, p. 335-353.
- Sardenberg, Cecilia. "De Sangrias, Tabus e Poderes: A Menstruação numa Perspectiva Sócio-antropológica." *Estudos Feministas*, vol. 2, no. 2, 1994, pp. 314-44.
- Spretnak, Charlene. *The Spiritual Dynamic in Modern Art*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.
- Taylor, Mark C. *Refiguring the Spiritual: Beuys, Barney, Turrell, Goldsworthy*. Columbia University Press, 2012, ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/oculocad-ebooks/detail.action?docID=909378.