

Opuntia's Ubiquity

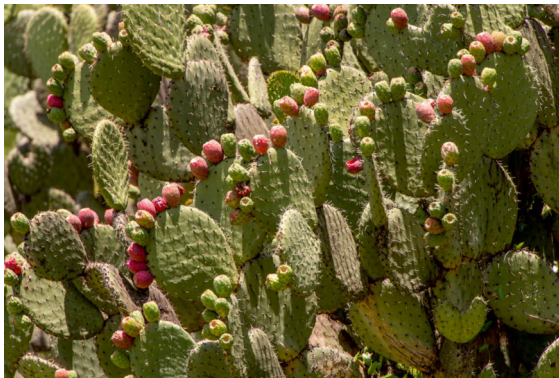
Learning Situatedness from Artists

Thomas Laval

“The plant will have nourished
the mind which contemplates the
blooming of its flower.”

*Luce Irigaray, Elemental Passions (Lon-
don: Athlone Press, 1992), p. 6*

Fig. 1: Opuntia cactus



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The relationship we, as human beings, have with nature has been set as a major theme investigated by contemporary artists. If the background of this interest must lie in the forever more acute climate crisis we are living through, the multiplicity of approaches led to an extensive body of works not only scrutinizing what is vanishing under human threat but also what is still flourishing, and the way we integrate it in our lives. In Michael Marder's delineations of vegetal ontology for the conceptualization of plant-thinking, our social integration of plants would refer to *the human thinking about plants*.¹ Whether we think of Taryn Simon, who questions the innocence and political significance of flowers in masterly bouquets displayed at major international political meetings, or conversely of Lois Weinberger, who, in his installations in public spaces, accords a place of choice to ruderal herbs, each one of them singularly nuances and complexifies the understanding of our relationship to the botanical world.² Acknowledging this growing interest from contemporary artists during these last twenty years, numerous publications have highlighted the intertwinement between visual arts and plants, targeting precise angles of approach in order to analyse how artists have been looking at it and what kind of use they make of plants in their works.³ In this article we propose to unfold some ways of thinking about plants by providing a closer attention to a cactus used by two contemporary artists, Fareed Armaly and Mariana Castillo Deball. In one of their projects each one of them specifically articulates the opuntia – a variety of cactus also called nopal in Spanish, prickly-pear cactus in English and Sabra cactus in Palestine and Israel – in relation to two very different contexts. The ultimate goal of this article is to unfold the plural and complementary relevance of situated research in art as a fruitful artistic strategy to be taught.

Artist and curator Fareed Armaly, born in the United States in 1957 of Lebanese-Palestinian descent, and artist Mariana Castillo Deball, born in Mexico City in 1975, have nothing in common, except for two details. They do not belong to the same generation, they grew up in different geographical, artistic, and political contexts and their practice is fundamentally distinct from one another, in form as in content. The only arc allowing to link their respective work is that they are both

artists-researchers, which we can define as follows: an artist-researcher combines creative art practices with research methods and approaches to investigate, explore, and produce new knowledge or understanding within their field of interest. This approach integrates artistic production and critical reflection and often involves collaboration with other disciplines and actors. Artistic research interweaves the practical and experimental aspects of art-making with critical analysis, inquiry, and research methodologies.⁴ The aim of artistic research is not only to create innovative works of art, but also to contribute to the advancement of knowledge and understanding of the artistic, cultural, and social issues. Research-based art can take many forms, from visual arts, music, performance, theater, film, and media arts to interdisciplinary fields such as design, architecture, and urban planning. In general, the goal is to create new knowledge and insights, not only for the art world but also for society as a whole.⁵

The second and more crucial common point between the two artists on which we will elaborate in this article is their singular use of the opuntia cactus in one of their works: in *From/to* (2002) by Fareed Armaly and *The painter's garden* (2018) by Mariana Castillo Deball in collaboration with Tatiana Falcón. We will first introduce the two projects to highlight the way in which the opuntia is mobilized in relation to a particular context and use. The specific relationship of the plant with the milieu in which it grows will lead us to draw a parallel with local knowledge and its traveling ability, as a means to position oneself in art-making. Finally, we will conclude with the complementarity of artistic voices enabled by the intersubjective character of situated knowledges and will open the debate on how to escape the anthropocentric token when art-making relies on the botanical world.

From/to

Fareed Armaly, takes the history of Palestine as the subject of his project *From/To*, first presented in 1999 at the Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art (now Kunstinstituut Melly) in Rotterdam and in a new form on

the occasion of the eleventh edition of Documenta in 2002, directed by Okwui Enwezor.⁶ For this project, the surface of a stone is digitized to be considered as a symbol of the world, of architecture and of weapons – in reference to the First Intifada known as the Stone war (1987–1993) – and the stone motif is projected in its vectorized form onto the first floor of the Documenta Halle.⁷ It forms a grid bridging the different spaces of the installation, a schematic map on which are inscribed the names of Palestinian camps and territories. Visitors would walk on this map therefore establishing a parallel with the displacement of populations from camp to camp. As a curator more than an artist, Armaly collaborates with designers, architects, historians, geographers, photographers, and filmmakers – in particular Palestinian filmmaker Rashid Masharawi (born in 1962 and raised in the Shati refugee camp) – allowing him to link different types of knowledge attached to the question of Palestine to reveal the subjective and incarnated mediation of their respective conditions.

The *From/To* installation is composed of four sections, divided in four rooms, and bearing the following titles: *Waiting*, *Checkpoint*, *Home Movie*, and *Media-Geography*.⁸ Besides Masharawi's film in the *Waiting* section, visitors could encounter an opuntia, the Sabra Cactus, which sat potted in front of the introductory text to this part of the installation. The opuntia is considered as an actor and a witness of the shape-shifting ideological forces associated with Palestine and Israel: in the presentation text, Armaly draws on scholar Carol Bardenstein's article where she analyses how the opuntia, among other products of the flora in the region, serves to anchor narratives of cultural identities in dissonance, as differently shaped for Israelis and Palestinians.⁹ In the article, Bardenstein points out how the sabra cactus first serves as a geographical marker for the Palestinian populations expelled at the creation of the State of Israel. The plant, still present on the outskirts of Palestinian homes that were destroyed, acts as a witness to the past, a vestige that now borders an empty space.¹⁰ At the same time, the opuntia is instrumentalized as a symbol of Israeli autochthony. Since the 1930s, the plant has been used as a symbol to designate a Jewish person born in Palestine, later Israel, and the traits of its character: hard and thorny on the outside, but soft and sweet on the inside.¹¹ Consequently, whether it is the only trace allow-

ing the memory of a past associated with a definitively modified place or whether it serves as a support for projections related to an identity discourse, the opuntia as mobilized in *From/to* silently testifies to the divergent memorial and cultural negotiations associated with the same geographical territory that finds embodiment in a plant: at the same spatial scale, two imbrications of a fundamentally different nature-culture relationship and projection are associated with this cactus.

In Tlilli In Tlapalli

Relative to a very different context, Mariana Castillo Deball also convokes the opuntia, in a work that takes the form of a garden. It was set up in 2018 in the courtyard of the Amparo Museum in Puebla, Mexico, on the occasion of the exhibition *In Tlilli in Tlapalli, Imágenes de la nueva tierra: identidad indígena después de la conquista* [which would translate as *In Tlilli in Tlapalli. Images of the New Land: Indigenous Identity After the Conquest*].¹² Conceived by historian Diana Magaloni and Mariana Castillo Deball, the exhibition consisted of an intervention on the origins of Mexican history based on pre-Hispanic documents, some of which were presented in the exhibition in their original form and others in a facsimile form. At the center of the exhibition is the question of the status and content of these indigenous documents, the majority of which are kept in European libraries and remain inaccessible to the majority of the population, and to the Mexicans in the first place, who are their heirs. Within this framework, the constitution, use and history of pre-Hispanic colours was a special focus. Colour samples were recreated from the chemical analysis of the pigment as well as from their recipe and description indicated in the Florentine codex: an ethnographic research study also known as the *General History of Things in New Spain* written by the Franciscan friar Bernardino de Sahagún in the sixteenth century. The historical documents presented and the work on the history of colours formed the basis for Mariana Castillo Deball's interventions, in drawings, paintings and sculptures in the exhibition. To offer a different translation of this work on pre-Hispanic documents and colours Mariana Castillo Deball

designed the *The painter's garden* in collaboration with Historian Tatiana Falcón.¹³ The garden consisted of a collection of trees, wild plants from the rainforest, shrubs, lichens and insects, all of which serve to make pigments and dyes. To organize and give shape to the garden, Mariana Castillo Deball and Tatiana Falcón classified the plants according to the colour they produced, following the colour orientation of the four directions of the universe described in the first page of another codex, the Fejérváry-Mayer codex, which represents a *Tonalpohualli*, a ritual Aztec calendar of 260 days formed by the combination of twenty names of days (veintenas) and thirteen numbers of days (treceñas).¹⁴

There we find the opuntia, the scene of a symbiosis with a parasitic insect, the *Dactylopius coccus*, better known under the name of superfamily Coccoidea or Cochineal, from the Spanish “cochinilla”. The cochineal lodges on the racket-shaped sides of the opuntia, called cladodes, forming small whitish clusters. After three to four months, only the female insects are harvested to be dried and ground. The powdered cochineal is then mixed with a binder to make the famous carmine red color, in variations that range from vermilion to purple, to be used to dye fabrics and carpets. In an article that contextualizes the presentation of the garden, Tatiana Falcón relies on the description of the commercial importance of the cochineal Bernardino de Sahagún made in the Fejérváry-Mayer codex: “It is the fine red (grana); this red is very well known in this country and beyond, and there is a great trade in it as far as China and Turkey. Almost all over the world it is esteemed and highly valued.”¹⁵ However ancient, the way in which the opuntia and the cochineal nesting on it are used today is the same as the one attested in the codex. In the same article, Tatiana Falcón makes a tribute to master colourist Manuela Cecilia Lino Bello (1943–2017), whom she had met a few years before the exhibition in Hueyapan, in the forest of the Sierra Madre Oriental in Mexico. During their encounter, Lino Bello showed her the different traditional dyeing techniques she had been using for a long time already. Among them is the making of different shades of reds in the same process described by Sahagún half a millennium ago. Besides the time bridge regarding the technique in use, we should here note the know-how associated with the opuntia and the cochineal which

is still evident today in Hueyapan, Mexico, providing the cactus with a specific situatedness.

Situating knowledge in art as positioning oneself

Whether in Palestine or in Mexico, an opuntia is irreducibly always different in its form and biologically identical. The cultural meanings assigned to the plant are above all contextual, in other words, situated. In the first case the cactus serves as an identity marker for a conflicted territory, and in the second it serves as a host for a parasite from which a pigment is produced according to an ancestral know-how still evident today in rural Mexico. The very different understandings of the opuntia reveal the material and historical setting, and associated social interests, which enter into the very lineaments of knowledge-making surrounding the plant. Doing so, the opuntia highlights the equation of local knowledge in which it is caught up. As coined by the English philosopher Gilbert Ryle and popularized by the American anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1983), the notion of local knowledge refers to the twofold idea that all knowledge is geographically and historically delimited, and that the local conditions of its production affect the nature of the knowledge produced.¹⁶ In this sense, in both cases the cactus serves quite different purposes, each corresponding to the issues specific to the context in which the plant is seen growing. In this perspective, knowledge is not freely floating above one's head, neither does it come from heavenly inspiration, but from engaging in particular kinds of perceptions and practices that are historically and geographically grounded. With this in mind, this acceptance of knowledge is close to Donna Haraway's situated knowledges in which she counterpoints the impossible "god trick" performance of traditional sciences that would guarantee a neutral objectivity, against an omniscient vision constructed from absent referents, deferred signifieds, and duplicated subjects. The overlap of these two projects with Haraway's theory is nonetheless limited as her approach is shaped by a feminist endeavour to knowledge making, in her own words corresponding to "a doctrine of embodied objectivity

that accommodates paradoxical and critical feminist science projects".¹⁷ However locally coined, knowledge travels, taken in complex circuits of exchange, transfer and accumulation. As a consequence, knowledge performs its locatedness elsewhere than where it originates from, in our cases in the exhibition space of the documenta Halle and the Amparo Museum. This phenomenon of decentering, which could be compared to what Deleuze and Guatarri have called *deterritorialization*, does not, on the other hand, cancel the situated character of knowledge.¹⁸ Both local and situated knowledges are defined with a common characteristic of being always marked by the situations in which they were crafted – even when travelling to different contexts.¹⁹

This contextuality of travelling attached to the cactus invites focusing on the perspective of situating knowledge in art making, in a pedagogical approach. First, we should leave behind the disarray situated and local knowledges suffer from in the context of the Humanities. Sociologist Julie Patarin-Jossec notes how in abandoning a universalist methodology, discourse and ambition, some scholars find such situated approaches in danger of drowning in particularisms, making any transcendental research endeavour impossible.²⁰ This quite debatable stance ultimately reflects the eternal questioning between universalism and relativism inherent to the sciences aiming at the understanding of human-kind and society. Nonetheless, this invalidation hardly applies regarding the epistemological constitution of the artistic field. Approaches, methods, and concepts pertaining to academic disciplines in the Humanities, even if sometimes mobilized by contemporary artists, are not governed by the same parameters once placed in the field of the arts, understood as an open-ended interdisciplinary practice-based area. And if some authors find the use of methodologies and the research conducted by artists dangerous both for the arts and academia, it is, to say the least, vain to discriminate such endeavours as the arts are not constituted as an academic discipline, nor are they calibrated by the same epistemic parameters.²¹

On the contrary, instead of a limiting or even dangerous device, we should consider the possibilities offered by situating research in the process of art making. If we take the example of Fareed Armaly, born in

the United States in 1957 of Palestinian descent, theoretical discourses and literature on identity politics in the 1980s in the United States, especially via Edward Said, “felt more than just ‘new’, and were significant” for him.²² Said would be the one to problematize and analyse the complex issues of identities related to diaspora and local politics in Palestine, following the creation of the State of Israel. He would then be a figure unfolding the questions related to the historical, political and cultural heritage of the artist. Therefore, Armaly’s collaborative *From/to* project for the documenta inherits from the impact such postcolonial theoretical discourses had on him and translates the positioning of the artist in relation to the diasporic status of his family as an incarnated investigation on the theme of Palestine, and that can be traced in the opuntia. In the case of Mariana Castillo Deball, the opuntia is used to situate a dyeing know-how still in use today within Mexican rural communities. In doing so, the artist anchors the discourse to a local scale and a specific use, as a counterpoint to a wider understanding of the opuntia, commonly taken as a national emblem in Mexico, among other uses.²³ Both cases illustrate the articulation of knowledge orchestrated by the artists to contextualize and situate their position and choices embedded in their works, visible through their mobilization of the opuntia. Stating the importance of situating one’s approach in the process of art making therefore allows clarifying the assumptions from which discourses are elaborated about the subject matter at hand. In this perspective, when working on the elaboration of an artistic project, one could and certainly should ask the following questions: where am I culturally and socially speaking from in relation to the topic I am tackling? How does this position inform and permeate my approach to making? How can my artistic proposition be interpreted in relation to dominant or hegemonic discourses?²⁴

Intersubjectivity as complementarity, towards plant-thinking

These questions invite reflection on how one can choose a position, in the process of articulating knowledge, to practice refining the tools, language, forms, and concepts which will constitute the aesthetico-epis-

temic rhizome to be found *in fine*, in the work. These choices rest on the eminently subjective character of *making* in a creative practice, and the intersubjectivity that characterizes local and situated knowledge allows the coercion of both.²⁵ Rather than a brake on the value of the scientific discourse that would lose an alleged universalist objectivity, the intersubjective character of situated epistemologies allows the articulation of the artist's subjectivity in practice, enabling a particular crafting of his or her vision and positioning. To come back one last time to our cases studies, the two uses of the opuntia in these projects end up being complementary: Castillo Deball's project allows tracing over a longer period of time the use of the cactus for dyeing purposes, from the moment when it began to be exported worldwide, when the repercussions of this use and export, although mute in Armaly's project, are nevertheless what allowed, centuries later, the opuntia to be found in the conflictual relationship highlighted by the artist.²⁶ The situatedness of the two projects, by the intersubjective dimension that characterizes them, leaves the door open to the complementarity of the artistic voices. The perspective proposed by the artists on the opuntia constitutes a piece of the gigantic puzzle of the social relationship we have come to establish with this plant, thus allowing the terrestrial and artistic ubiquity of this cactus. It then takes a revealing aspect of the nature-culture relationship humankind have been forging with it for decades and centuries. This cactus is a witness but also an actor of the negotiations we operate with nature in a relationship revealing its anthropocentric mediation. The thorny snowshoes of the opuntia refer to the needs and traditions of human beings in certain places, as much as to the way in which knowledge was established around this plant. The question to be asked with a reflective pedagogical aim following our reflection remains: how to invite a terrestrial plant into an artistic process without it being confined to a utilitarian role?

As introduced at the beginning of the article, the analytical path we proposed through the projects of these two artists is inscribed in a human-plant relationship corresponding to what Michael Marder simply names *humans thinking about plants*. This thought configuration seems the most obvious possible given its anthropocentric essence. Neverthe-

less, in an enterprise of deconstruction of western metaphysics, it is to be placed in a wider ontology of plant-thinking which, according to Marder, consists of three other modes of thought:

- (1) the non-cognitive, non-ideational, and non-imagistic mode of thinking proper to plants (what he calls “thinking without the head;”)
- (2) the human thinking about plants;
- (3) how human thinking is, to some extent, de-humanized and rendered plant-like, altered by its encounter with the vegetal world; and finally,
- (4) the ongoing symbiotic relation between this transfigured thinking and the existence of plants.²⁷

As a conclusion, this categorical delimitation invites us to take a step back. Our framework of *thinking about plants* – which, as we have seen, enables the articulation of a local or situated knowledge in which the artist's singularity and positioning are combined – must also invite other modes of thinking, following the delineations described by Marder. What the plant reveals first and foremost when *thinking about plants* is the contextual imbrications, we confer upon them and that manifest themselves in the discourse we have on them. Plants, in this anthropocentric acceptance, tell us more about ourselves as socially and culturally determined individuals than they do about the nature of the plant itself, understood in the full breadth of its ontology. In consequence, to complexify and nuance our relationship with the botanical world in a strategic pedagogical aim, we need to embark and engage in an adventure into the unknown, leaving aside our own metaphysics in an attempt not only to *think about plants*, but create enabling conditions of a *non-cognitive, non-ideational, and non-imagistic mode of thinking proper to plants*.

Notes

- 1 Marder, Michael. *Plant-thinking, A Philosophy of Vegetal Life*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2013, 10.
- 2 Taryn Simon's work on flowers is compiled in Simon, Taryn. *Paperwork and the Will of Capital*. Berlin: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2016. Lois Weinberger's exploration of ruderal herbs commonly called "weeds" is at the origin of a rich body of works comprising drawings, photographs, text objects, films, organic works in permanent evolution and installations in the public space, notably: *Portable garden*, 1994; *Cut*, 1999; or *Spur*, 2015.
- 3 We will note in particular the work of Giovanni Aloï, founder in 2006 of the scientific journal *Antennae: The Journal of Nature in Visual Culture*, notably numbers 17 and 18 of 2011 dedicated specifically to plants. And from the same author, Aloï, Giovanni. *Botanical Speculations: Plants in Contemporary Art*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2018; Aloï, Giovanni. *Why Look at Plants? The Botanical Emergence in Contemporary Art*. Leyden: Brill, 2018 and Aloï, Giovanni, and Michael Marder, eds. *Vegetal Entwinements in Philosophy and Art, a reader*. Cambridge: the MIT Press, 2023.
- 4 In that respect both Armaly and Castillo Deball have shown dedication to knowledge-making and -sharing through editorial endeavours throughout their career. One example for Fareed Armaly is his exhibition *Brea-kd-own* held at the Palais des Beaux Arts in Brussels in 1993, and especially his work for the exhibition catalogue that functions as a theoretical and visual essay. Based on interviews with local political and cultural actors, journalistic and administrative archival documents and theoretical notions and concepts, he proposed various essays that punctuated the sections of the exhibition and engaged with the history and functions of the Palais des Beaux Arts. As for Mariana Castillo Deball, she is the founder and editor of the journal *Ixiptla*, relying on a strong anthropological inflection and published in the context of exhibitions or artistic event by Berlin based publishing house Bom dia, boa tarde, boa noite.

- Most often it comprises essays by anthropologists, archaeologists, historians, artists and writers.
- 5 For extensive studies on artistic research see Borgdorff, Henk. *The Conflict of the Faculties: Perspectives on Artistic Research and Academia*. Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2012; Schwab, Michael, ed. *Transpositions. Aesthetico-Epistemic Operators in Artistic Research*. Leuven: Orpheus Institute Series, Leuven University Press, 2018 and Bauer, Ute Meta, Florian, Dombois, Claudia, Mareis, and Michael, Schwab. *Intellectual Birdhouse. Artistic Practice as Research*. London: Koenig, 2012.
 - 6 Extensive documentation of Fareed Armaly's the *From/to* project in its documenta iteration is available at <http://fromto.withthis.net/>, a website created and administered by the artist and serving as a digital archive.
 - 7 For further details on the stone symbol associated with the first Palestinian Intifada see David A. McDonald's chapter titled *The First Intifada and the Generation of Stones (1987–2000)* in his book: McDonald, David A. *My Voice Is My Weapon: Music, Nationalism, and the Poetics of Palestinian Resistance*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2013.
 - 8 The space of the documenta Halle in which *From/to* was presented in 2002 was divided into four sections, each bearing the title of the film commissioned to Rashid Masharawi it contained. The *Waiting* section included a film by Rashid Masharawi, as well as the *Sabra Cactus* sub-section with an introductory text behind it. Along the space of this chapter were three rooms in which the other three sections of the installation were located: *Checkpoint*, *Home Movie*, and *Media-Geography*. *Checkpoint* comprised Masharawi's film, depicting a crowd of Palestinians and their cars, suddenly blocked at the Qalandia checkpoint, and two essays on the subject of mapping were presented: *Charting Palestinian Territories and Power: FROM land control TO flows control* by sociologist Sylvie Fouet and *Israel/Palestine: Cartographic Manipulations* by cartographer and geographer Philippe Rekacewicz. The *Home Movie* section included Masharawi's film, in which a Palestinian couple share, aloud, their memories over the announcement of the invasion of Beirut in 1982.

It also comprised an installation gathering plenty of old postcards from Palestine entitled *Dealing with the Past, Creating a Presence: Picture Postcards of Palestine* by Arnelies Moors and Stevan Wachlin, as well as an essay entitled *A Guiding Thread* by anthropologist Stephanie Latte Abdallah. The *Media-Geography* section included two films intended to dialogue with one another: *Journey through Palestine* from 1897 by the Lumière brothers of and *The Dupes* from 1972 by Tewfik Saleh.

- 9 Bardenstein, Carol. "Threads of Memory and Discourses of Rootedness: Of Trees, Oranges and the Prickly-Pear Cactus in Israel/Palestine." *Edebiyat: Journal of Middle Eastern Literatures*, no. 8 (1998): 1–36.
- 10 *Ibid.*, 11.
- 11 *Ibid.*, 14.
- 12 *In tlilli* means black, and *In tlapalli* means red, in the Nahuatl language; *In tlilli* also means black ink, and *In tlapalli*, red paint; and together *In tlilli in tlapalli* is a metaphor for ancient writings and paintings, such as codices and as indicated by the *Online Nahuatl Dictionary*, Stephanie Wood, ed. (Eugene, Ore.: Wired Humanities Projects, College of Education, University of Oregon, ©2000–present): <https://nahuatl.uoregon.edu/content/tlilli-tlapalli>. Accessed November 28, 2022. The introduction to the exhibition as well as documentation and photographs are available on the Museo Amparo website at: <https://museoamparo.com/exposiciones/piezas/188/in-tlilli-in-tlapalli-ima-genes-de-la-nueva-tierra-id-entidad-indi-gena-despue-s-de-la-conquista>. Accessed November 28, 2022.
- 13 This garden has since been presented again, identically, on the occasion of the artist's monographic exhibition at the Museo Universitario de Arte Contemporáneo (MUAC) in Mexico City from October, 16 2021 to May, 1 2022.
- 14 "The first page of the Fejérváry-Mayer Codex represents, in the center, Xiuhtecuhtli, the fire god with red skin, from which four jets of blood or lava flow. The colors indicate the four cardinal points, yellow representing the north. Each quarter is composed of

- a tree, a bird and two deities." León-Portilla, Miguel. "El tonalámatl de los Pochtecas (código Fejérváry-Mayer)." *Arqueología Mexicana*, no. 18 (1998): 18–107. As the *Online Nahuatl Dictionary* states, the *Tonalpohualli* corresponds to: a count of days, a Mesoamerican calendar (to use European labels); tonalpohualli is the term used in association with the count of 260 days; the 365-day count was the cempollapohualli. *Online Nahuatl Dictionary*, Stephanie Wood, ed. (Eugene, Ore.: Wired Humanities Projects, College of Education, University of Oregon, ©2000–present). <https://nahuatl.wired-humanities.org/content/tonalpohualli>. Accessed November 28, 2022.
- 15 Falcón, Tatiana. "El jardín del pintor/The painter's garden." In *Amarantus*, edited by Castillo Deball, Mariana, 150–204. Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México/Museo Universitario de Arte Contemporáneo/RM, 2021.
- 16 Geertz, Clifford. *Local Knowledge, Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology*. New York: BasicBooks, 1983.
- 17 Haraway, Donna. "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective." *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (1988): 575–599.
- 18 The concept of deterritorialization is here understood in the sense given by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in *Anti-Œdipus*, first published in French in 1972, and from which it was applied to the displacement of social, cultural, economic and political practices, as well as of persons, objects, languages, traditions and beliefs in relation to their originating bodies, and even understood literally, for geographical territories and their respective relations. Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari. 1972. *Anti-Œdipus*. Trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane. London and New York: Continuum, 2004. Vol. 1 of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. 2 vols. 1972–1980. Trans. of *L'Anti-Œdipe*. Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit.
- 19 Gregory, Derek, Ron, Johnston, Geraldine, Pratt, Michael, Watts, and Sarah Whatmore, eds. *The Dictionary of Human Geography*. Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009: 422 and 684.

- 20 Patarin-Jossec, Julie. “Comment ne pas construire un discours scientifique. Note exploratoire sur les *épistémologies féministes* du point de vue.” *Zilsel* (December 2015). <https://doi.org/10.58079/vds1>
- 21 As an example, philosopher Carole Talon Hugon has recently published an essay in which she attacks artistic research denouncing the alleged danger that research-based art would have for the academic disciplines as for the art itself, see: Talon Hugon, Carole. *L'artiste en habits de chercheur*. Paris: PUF, 2021.
- 22 Correspondence with the artist on June 8, 2021.
- 23 According to the founding myth of Mexico-Tenochtitlan, an eagle perched on a nopal cactus or opuntia to devour a snake which led the deity Huitzilopochtli to instruct the Mexica to establish their city where this scene took place, the actual location of Mexico City. The representation of this myth is depicted on the national coat of arms and found on the Mexican flag. For an expanded survey on Mexican symbols see: López de Escalera, Juan. *Diccionario Biográfico y de Historia de México*. Mexico City: Editorial del Magisterio, 1964. In addition, the nopal cactus is widely used in food, livestock, art, construction, science, which gives this plant a transversal impact on the Mexican population.
- 24 Questions along those lines within a pedagogical framework can be found in Paul Thek's teaching notes during his teaching at the Cooper Union in the late 1970s and early 1980s, where he pushed his students to take the measure of their cultural and social positioning. See: Paul Thek's *Teaching Notes*, a questionnaire created by the American artist Paul Thek to teach the 4-Dimensional Design Class under his charge at Cooper Union in New York between 1978 and 1981. <http://classes.dma.ucla.edu/Fall16/173/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Thek-Teaching-Notes.pdf>. Accessed November 28, 2022.
- 25 Patarin-Jossec, Julie. *Ibid.*
- 26 For the economic importance and manufacture of cochineal throughout centuries see: Achim, Miruna. “COCHINEAL.” In *New World Objects of Knowledge: A Cabinet of Curiosities* edited by Thurner, Mark, and Juan Pimentel, 177–182. London: Institute of Latin American Studies, University of London Press, 2021. For an

account of the importance of cochineal in art history see: Phipps, Elena. "Cochineal Red: The Art History of a Color." *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, Vol. 67, no. 3 (2010): 4–48.

27 Marder, Michael. *Ibid*, 10.

