

Body of Land

FAIR 336B | Radical Feminist Imaginations of the Neoliberal Turn

Jessica Kristine Navedo

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Coatlicue is one of the powerful images, or “archetypes”, that inhabits, or passes through, my psyche. For me, *la Coatlicue* is the consuming internal whirlwind, the symbol of the underground aspects of the psyche. *Coatlicue* is the mountain, the Earth Mother who conceived all celestial beings out of her cavernous womb. Goddess of birth and death, *Coatlicue* gives and takes away life; she is the incarnation of cosmic processes.

by Gloria Anzaldua
Excerpt from *Borderlands* (1987)

I process information in abstract symbols. The landscape inside of me houses my experience. It is complex and intimate. I rely on retreating within and often discover there is some kind of process or event at work within me before I consciously realize the meaning of what I initially sense at play in my internal states.

Before Me the Land & Water Open

By Chrystos

From *Fugitive Colors* (1995)

their arms tender sisters who have kept my place
watched each spray of racing birds
woven them into the still air for me to catch
a shimmering glint
The blowsy pine grows tall
as the distant mountains we call home
Mischief of the eye is sweet
Silver slate the sound ruffles my hair
Roots I've packed for years settle in this meadow
delicate with brambles, broom
bright yellow suns I call beach daisies
These are the variations of green & gold
I keep deep within my hands
These never same astounding clouds drift through my eyes
in bleached conversations with strangers
These are the leaves & berries who marry me in delight
This is the earth I carry in a corn husk pouch
against the brutal light of clapping hands
Here in the path choked with driftwood I trace
to watch the sun go down over mountains whose wildflowers
have caught & pressed my heart

*Fly through these words sharp as
a deep blue & rust swallow
that wavering branch is
waiting for you*

Epecially for Barbara Cameron Nation Shield

I have always known I am an intricate part of the natural world. Being in nature is easy for me, fluid, seamless. I am the sapphire eye of the ibis and the wave crashing on the Lost Coast shore. Throughout my life, places I've found refuge have become parts of me. I've created a world inside using psychic tools like hypnotherapy and yoga nidra, creating with intention and necessity. I am filled with symbols and sites. I approach my outer world as if it is constructed in the same way - cathedrals and temples housing spirits of nature and liminal space.

*"...best beloved, whom we must all become ... Their names, selves,
faces feed me like corn before labor. I live each of them as a piece
of me... (Lorde, p. 255-256)"*

Over and over, my internal landscapes create a place to belong, landmarks to orient my internal North to. Over and over, I return to the external world and the seasons and cycles help me to ground my pulse in the flows of time. As my internal landscapes shift in their own ways, I watch the places around me become shaped by the people and dramatic weather moving over the land.

A history is recorded into the places we do the business of existing. Just as a body remembers the breaks and hemorrhages and traces of substances that moved through the blood, the land remembers what is done. Alexander, recounting the story of Ibo Landing in the southern US reminds us, "The live oaks will tell us these stories when we listen."

*"But the skin of the earth is seamless.
The sea cannot be fenced,
El mar does not stop at borders.
To show the white man what she thought of his
Arrogance,
Yemaya blew that wire fence down..."*

...The U.S.-Mexican border *es una herida abierta* where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country -- a border culture. (Anzaldúa, p. 25)

Anzaldua's intimacy with the boarder, and the pain of being unable to heal, digs deep into fissures creasing the facade of ecological confidence I attempt to present. I am concerned with maintaining our biosphere and conversations trying to get at this puzzle characterize my interactions. Ecological threat and a constant weight of grief weigh on me, always. This pain is deepened in the knowing that the fractured relationship of people with our planet, driven by the consumption of a scarcity story, bears even greater tragedies through the tyranny of State institutions as lives are shaped by patriarchal structures holding a pattern of disconnect in place.

Journal entry:

by Jessica Kristine Navedo
2019

Nebulous ... strings... everywhere,
tangled.

My emotions were difficult upon reading *Zami* this quarter. I recalled Cheokten saying their warriors wore flowers on their breast, flowers are medicine, flowers are powerful. His teachin's. I plucked a golden oregon grape stalk as I walked. *Protect me, make me strong, let me overcome this ailment.* I tied it in an electric blue yarn found tangled in my pocket. For several days, I meditated on these feelings: alienation, pain, grief, anger, hopelessness, & when it became time, I unraveled the flower. My power emerges from the center of the turmoil.

I have been struggling with cervical dysplasia for most of my life. Just before cancer. I have very bad endometriosis which causes internal bleeding every month, too. I was a teenager the first time a doctor talked to me about considering a hysterectomy. My womb space is a cave, a nest, an egg, a tree, a river, a crocus, a rose, a snake, a flame. So many of the books and authors we've read for this course have had some kind of intersection with cancer. I know my problems are proliferated through stress. Stress about money and custody court and not having enough time. Stress about the world and how much I can do to make an impact that gains some collective returns. We discuss the system in class, the deaths through illness and inadequate medical care and the impact of living in a mechanical ecology which doesn't

support health, the impact of terrorizing scared land. I had a surgery after my divorce was (finally!) finalized this quarter. A surgery on my cervix and uterus. It was all so very depressing and scary. I had a major medical event during a similar procedure nearly seven years ago. We weren't sure I could sustain another incident of that caliber.

Celebration 1982

By Terri Meyette
From *A Gathering of Spirits* (1988)

They say no one died.
Tiny desert flower
micro beetle bug
are they not life?
Their bag of bones
blown into the wind
captured in white dust storms
washed down polluted rivers
are they not dead?

They say no one died.
Scientist, unconscious
mushroom button pushers,
Secretary of Defense what's his name,
President what's his name
when will they be tried
for imposing fantasies and celebrations
on all life forms?

It wasn't enough
in "45"
Hiroshima and Hagasaki.

They say no one died.
Nevada desert
1000 miles into her bowels
earth melted.

radiation, radiation, radiation,
radiation.
oozed into blood

of Shoshone and Paiute.
The bomb lasted minutes
the intent lasts generations
in the womb of Creation, herself.

They say no one died.
closing their eye,
they dismissed death
dismissed life
became blinded
by white flash
their God.

They say no one died.
As thousands of beetles
fell through the sky
and rabbit hair turned into
fur coats protecting atoms
as they floated into water.
They won't look
they will just say
no one died.

My dad lived on a PG&E plant in the San Joaquin Valley when he was a teenager. He remembers the men cleaning the smokestacks next to the community pool on the compound, the kerchiefs tied around their faces deep red with their blood. My brother's insides are all coming undone. The land is an archive of what happened. Our bodies are an archive of what has been done. Our inheritance tells a story perhaps concealed under NDAs and time. It has struck me recently that my father, a gentle man who has broken a long chain of abuses in his lineage, not only sustained physical beatings at home but also experienced known contamination at the hands of his father's employers. My father is also the parent of mine who is Native American and Jewish. He calls himself white and he looks it. I hadn't thought of this correlation between ethnicity and his origin experiences before now.

Journal entry:

by Jessica Kristine Navedo
2019

My anger is catalyzing.
My anger comes from grief activated.
My anger is not "proper behavior".
My anger is righteous & rooted
& burning.
Fire kept within burns the self.
We die, poisoned.
What do we do with this anger?
What is the right thing to do?
What is the revolution
Which fosters life?

Sometimes, well, often, I have a lot of rage and big feelings in me. I'm engulfed in manic passion - regularly. It's exhausting and unsustainable. This course has been a series of triggers interacting with world events and personal struggles. I've struggled with bringing my energy down, discharging into the ground. I just feel like my head is going to explode. It makes me sick with migraine.

It took a long time for my words to flow. *They are lava!*

I made this collage around mid quarter and didn't understand what I was on about. It perplexed me. I explore the landscape manifest through the emergent process of collage. I observe the underground cavern in the stars and discover the mountain below. The mountain is a woman's body, contoured and rich, hot. Lava flows through her, through me, serpentine. Cotton goes to seed above her heart and tufts flit out into the wild skies. This collage holds a wealth of symbol, for me and for others. The old trees Alexander whispers the secrets of, Lorde's love "erupting into an electric storm", the underground Anzaldua descends into. This natural disaster of a woman, this volcano, transmutes. It is fire of Yemaya, the womb of Coatlicue.

Untitled

By Jessica Kristine Navedo

2019

*What do we do with the pain
From the fractured root, the bleeding vein?*

Send it through the red rock below,
Burn it underground in the lava flow.
Feed the fire red anger and shame.
Warm your blood with the witch's flame.

Understanding my body and the bodies of others as intricate parts of the natural world is a deeply primal way of knowing for me. It creates a powerful site of transmutation within and generates deeper understanding between people in how to develop profound and lasting community. This existence as nature brings me exaltation. It is imbued with the erotic Lorde was so possessed by in her truest knowing.

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by June Jordan
excerpt from Sea to Shining Sea (1982)

Sucked by the tongue and the lips
While the teeth release the succulence
Of all voluptuous disintegration

I am turning under the trees
I am trailing blood into the rivers
I am walking loud along the streets
I am digging my nails and my heels into the land
I am opening my mouth
I am just about to touch the pomegranates
Piled up precarious

This is a good time.
This is the best time.
This is the only time to come together

Fractionous
Kicking
Spilling
Burly
Whirling
Raucous
Messy

Free

Exploding like the seeds of a natural disorder.

In the physical relational and abstract metaphorical, we exist as aspects of Yemaya's body and soul. A robust and complex system of symbolic meaning communicates with our deepest knowing, prior to and outside of language, that useful and so limited form of expression the writerly among us love and hate and are still compelled to shape into our own imaginings of a thing worth saying to you, or you. Together and alone, we will explore our own symbol and secrets and psyche, diving over and over into the wreck of ourselves.

Diving into the Wreck

by Adrienne Rich
1973

First having read the book of myths,
and loaded the camera,
and checked the edge of the knife-blade,
I put on
the body-armor of black rubber
the absurd flippers
the grave and awkward mask.
I am having to do this
not like Cousteau with his
assiduous team
aboard the sun-flooded schooner
but here alone.

There is a ladder.
The ladder is always there
hanging innocently
close to the side of the schooner.
We know what it is for,
we who have used it.

Otherwise
it is a piece of maritime floss
some sundry equipment.

I go down.
Rung after rung and still
the oxygen immerses me
the blue light
the clear atoms
of our human air.
I go down.
My flippers cripple me,
I crawl like an insect down the ladder
and there is no one
to tell me when the ocean
will begin.

First the air is blue and then
it is bluer and then green and then
black I am blacking out and yet
my mask is powerful
it pumps my blood with power
the sea is another story
the sea is not a question of power
I have to learn alone
to turn my body without force
in the deep element.

And now: it is easy to forget
what I came for
among so many who have always
lived here
swaying their crenellated fans
between the reefs
and besides
you breathe differently down here.

I came to explore the wreck.
The words are purposes.
The words are maps.
I came to see the damage that was done
and the treasures that prevail.
I stroke the beam of my lamp
slowly along the flank
of something more permanent
than fish or weed

the thing I came for:
the wreck and not the story of the wreck
the thing itself and not the myth
the drowned face always staring
toward the sun
the evidence of damage
worn by salt and sway into this threadbare beauty
the ribs of the disaster
curving their assertion
among the tentative haunters.

This is the place.
And I am here, the mermaid whose dark hair
streams black, the merman in his armored body.
We circle silently
about the wreck
we dive into the hold.
I am she: I am he

whose drowned face sleeps with open eyes
whose breasts still bear the stress
whose silver, copper, vermeil cargo lies
obscurely inside barrels
half-wedged and left to rot
we are the half-destroyed instruments
that once held to a course
the water-eaten log
the fouled compass

We are, I am, you are
by cowardice or courage
the one who find our way
back to this scene
carrying a knife, a camera
a book of myths
in which
our names do not appear.

May 22, 1949

by Audre Lorde

poem from *Zami* (1985)

We did not weep for the thing that was once a child
did not weep for the thing that had been a child
did not weep for the thing that had been
nor for the deep dark silences
that ate of the so-young flesh.
But we wept at the sight of two men standing alone
flat on the sky, alone,
shoveling earth as a blanket
to keep the young blood down.
For we saw ourselves in the dark warm
mother-blanket
saw ourselves deep in the earth's breast-swelling--
no longer young--
and knew ourselves for the first time
dead and alone.
We did not weep for the thing--weep for the thing--
we did not weep for the thing that was
once a child.