

Maiolino's Earthen Work or Enfooled Art

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Anna Maria, why are you so upset, why don't you lose yourself in clay...
--Victor Grippo, 1989

The water that previously joined the ink invading the sheet of paper and drawing on the whiteness of the paper is now a milk of coagulating plaster ready to petrify and register the marks that the clay has left in the mould.
--Anna Maria Maiolino, 1989

At the end of the 1980s, out of love and fury, Anna Maria Maiolino begins to move from paper to bas-relief. Her gesturing hand connects drawing and sculpting in what is to become a vivid interaction rather than the drawing being only in a preparatory relation on paper. Emerging from the conquest of the tactile in the moist masses of clay, her early sculptural wall objects that constitute the New Landscape series (1989–1990) resemble relief maps. Although the contact of the hand with the clay is very sensual, the touch overwhelms Maiolino with another strong sense, that of being inside the solid — a handhold as it were. Hence, in her own hands, she discovers a new landscape, a new language, and a new soil...

Dealing with the wounding difficulties a migrant inevitably encounters — one mouth too many and incomprehensible speech—Maiolino's work, from the very beginning, relates landscape to food to language and language to food to landscape. Attached to a vanished space and always feeling elsewhere, she belongs nowhere, except at the nexus of two othernesses, the having been and the endlessly deferred. This diagonal structure in her work can be read as what we can imagine as a chiasm, in which there is a repetition starting at the outside and moving to the intersection.¹ It seems the artist's life is filled with a resonance and reasoning cut off from the body's bittersweet memory of childhood in another land: the mother's tongue and breast. In order to be perfectly assimilated within the language of others, Maiolino is prepared for utmost effort and apprenticeship, asserting herself in, and through, hard labour — most apparent in her earthen work. According to Julia Kristeva, the foreigner is hardworking, "as if work were the chosen soil, the only source of possible success, and above all the personal, steadfast, nontransferable quality, but fit to be moved beyond borders and properties."²

While childhood in her native Scalea (Calabria, Italy) leaves after-images on the retina of her memory, it is in Rio that Maiolino perceptively moves into experimental propositions that go to the heart of many pressing issues of contemporary art: space/time, the environment, the body, movement, the relation of the visual to the other senses, the status of the art object, the relation of the artist to the audience, and authorship. In 1967, she participates in the New Brazilian Objectivity exhibition organized by Helio Oiticica, which included works by Lygia Clark and Lygia Pape, among others. Like these artists, Maiolino proposed a non-objective art within a participatory relationship of the audience aimed at the collective, and challenging ethical, social, and political determination. Resisting the military dictatorship that ruled the country from 1964 to 1984, many artists attempted to outwit censorship. During this period of brutal repression, Maiolino remains compelled by the way in which a freedom of expression, so critical of convention, is experimented with, and significantly persisted in Brazil. At the same time, desperately needing to establish herself in a definite place, she is drawn to these artists' vivid experiences of the sensorial body in relation to the work of art. She eventually comes to identify with the new country's culture and art.

Maiolino's encounters with Oiticica, and even more so with Clark, have an impact on the development of her work. As co-founders of the Neo-Concrete movement (1959–1961), they proposed in the Manifesto Neoconcreto "to look for an equivalent to the work of art, not in the machine, or even the object as such, but...in living organisms."³ In the first stages of her oeuvre, Clark holds to some Constructivist principles, such as the importance given to the material's properties and the perception of structures generated through their action. In *The Inside is the Outside* (1963), Clark's proposal of the "organic" is concerned with the fusing of opposites—inside and outside, the subjective and the objective, the erotic and the ascetic—and is marked by the rebellion against the dissociating experience of what she calls the "empty-full" in subjectivity. This dialectics of division that usually governs all thought of inside and outside, positive and negative, black and white, runs through Maiolino's work but rather as chiasmic entity swirling from and to another being. For her, these qualities now suggest existence of fullness in the empty.

Maiolino's exploring of paper and clay and their corporeity situates the work very close to Neo-Concrete practices, giving greater attention to the process of constructing than to what is constructed. Although her interest is similarly directed

towards both the immediacy of the operation and the inevitable bodily connotation, she also tries to dissolve oppositions between subject and object, artist and spectator, nature and culture. Equally important as the exterior space is what Clark describes as “the feeling of a deep space inside ourselves”—the relation of a real outside space to an imaginary interior one. It is within the trivial tasks in every home that Maiolino finds a way to draw forth her moulded earthen work and to connect the subject with our primitive memory.

In a landscape of the quotidian

But it is the clay itself that showed me the method by which it should be worked. The archaic system of so-called little rolls [rolinhos] or little coils [cobrinhos], used by ceramists down through time, is imposed on the hand by the clay, as are the primary actions of ordering the matter, such as kneading, stretching, cutting, rolling, and pressing. From these actions come the basic forms: the little rolls, the little balls. These forms began to incorporate my language and later my discourse.

--Anna Maria Maiolino

Maiolino's clay sculptures result from gestures that are repeated over and over each day, without our being aware of them, in the preparation of food, driven by primordial impulses and vital actions in the process of life. Initially, her sculptural process follows the familiar method of casting, developing in three phases: the object is moulded in clay (a positive) to execute the mould (a negative) of the final form cast in plaster or cement (a positive). Shaped through this process, the Others series (1990–1995) and the Codicilli series (1993–2000) assemble signs of a new language just as they resemble food displayed on a tray—in this, reminiscent of Piero Manzoni's Achromes (1961–1962) with bread rolls and kaolin on canvas. Maiolino's moulding gestures, paralleling the tasks of “la cucina italiana,” increasingly come to manipulate the earth as dough. In her body of work, form is at once dynamically affirmed and annulled, as she writes, “in search for an identification that never ends, thereby necessitating the action of another gesture to sustain desire.” It is within this action of the hand that positive and negative collapse into one another. Seeking confirmation of a subjectivity within a multiplication of clay forms, the artist, in an endless proliferation of drives, now invades the museum space with an installation of which each piece is made from one and another mould: One, None, One Hundred Thousand (1993).

During the 1990s, as the banal evidence of the doing hand in daily life moulds the clay, the working process itself seems to bifurcate, taking Maiolino's sculpture along two parallel paths. One leads to works that find their final shapes in the arrest of the casting procedure at the second phase in the execution of the mould. The work is the retrieved negative itself in The Shadow of the Other no. I series (1993), The Absentees (1993–1996), It's What's Missing series (1995–2001), and In & Out series (1995). As Maiolino describes, “The titles of these works refer to the existence of the opposite, the absent positive that has been separated from the negative. They form only one body at a given moment during the process of making the moulded sculpture. Thus, the process of those works incorporates the nostalgia for the matrix.” The mould, usually forgotten and discarded, she continues, “is endowed with new value by the emphasis given to its generative properties, to the vacant space, in which the memory of the other exists in its not being there: the positive-present in absence.”⁴ Like in her Print Objects and Drawing Objects (1974–76), Maiolino repeats the attempt to make the reverse side of the paper, the negative, active and participatory.

As to the second path, it leads to works that assimilate the first and third phases of the casting procedure consisting only of the hand-made positive forms, all the same and different, paradoxically propagating like pre-industrial craft objects on an assembly line. In Many (1995) and More than One Thousand (1995) from the installation series Terra Modelada/Moulded Earth, the clay is worked on site and left to dry without any mould. This series first starts with a large-scale installation at the Beguinage of Kortrijk in Belgium.⁵ As Maiolino writes, “The work is the basis of these works. I would say that all of them really are part of one work. They change depending on the spaces where they are made and where they are deposited with their balls and rolls of clay. These basic shapes result from the few basic ways that hands can perform.”⁶ The cumulative process allows her to knead a larger amount of matter in a shorter period of time; but the time consumed in the elaboration of tons of clay remains contingent upon the factual accretion of the moulded forms in space, since the sculpture can grow as long as it continues to store shapes of the gesture at any moment and place in time, there being no prediction for its final configuration.

In chiasmic lines, Maiolino aligns her daily gestures of preparing food in her earthen work with the gestures of the potter or ceramist arranging rolls and circling coils of clay to create the earthenware, which will then in turn come to hold the food and drinks. Obversely, when it is used, each bowl can circle back to the earthen floor on which it once sat. When encountering the sculpturally held in Maiolino's works, the eye seems to meet the hand and to reawaken our body's own

living chiasm of hand and eye. But more significantly, the mouth along with the “alimentary” or food-oriented body is brought fully into this tactility. According to Samuel Mallin, when considering prehistoric pottery, like a Minoan bowl, “we can sense how the dark colour on the inside of the bowl continues over the upper lip and, as such, helps to dissolve the distinction between outside and inside...The shape seems to give us a hold in order that we can join a line of alimentary being-in-the-world that runs through both us and nature in a unifying way. On the one hand, this line extends swirlingly through the bowl into the natural world and its nourishments that [the earth] holds up towards us. On the other hand, it swirls back intensively, and enlivening ourselves by means of our action of taking up the bowl and holding its hold. All the while, the eye and hand can dance and leap in and around it, both helping to direct, and rejoicing in, all these chiasmic interchanges, including that of passing it around communally.”⁷

Turned around by the potter and then mediating between the food that the bowl holds round, and the artist drawing it forth, and the viewer eventually taking it in, Maiolino’s art introduces one of the ways for our bending to nature through ingestion and digestion. With our tools and institutions food—literal or spiritual—is drawn forth, and hence our current inability to sense nature within our food can be considered. Because of our current calculated and aggressive production and distribution of food, and its final superficial consumption, the relation to our equipment for preparing and serving a meal is closely connected to our era’s uncommon use of any functional tool to create art.⁸ Consequently, Maiolino leads us to a new way of understanding art and how “we are bound in living chiasms (non-reductive crisscrossing influences) to one another, but also to non-human, natural or technical beings, which similarly are bound back into this same deepening-deep.”⁹ Ultimately, the artist undoes divisions into simple diametrical oppositions that can result in alienation and aggression, while she merges opposites in crosswise diagonal arrangements so that they constitute a reversal of parallels. This is how in becomes out, and negative becomes positive, and vice versa... Rooted in a profundity of being, the gestures of the artist, particularly in her inversion of the perspective on outside and inside (in the same way, for example, as the printing process generates a reversal of the image in the engraving), make us conscious of our continual hesitation between security “in here” or freedom “out there.”

From bowl to bowel

The alimentary is a region of our existence that most philosophers and even Merleau-Ponty missed and is one that wonderfully integrates the fourfold particularities of our earths, skies, communities, and eras. We sense here how we can relate to nature with our eating, but also how fully allied and unalienated eating can become to building, art-making and even thinking, for we guide and steer this alimentary line of nature with human drawings of every kind which turn round it throughout its whole course.

Furthermore, it becomes progressively clearer here how lineate our lives are, as we draw round everything we encounter, use, take in, give out, love or fear; for example by cutting, carving, twining, thatching, weaving, coiling, forging, nurturing, caring, reasoning, constructing, planning, writing, and computing.

--Samuel B. Mallin, Art Line Thought

Born during the chaos and terror of World War II, Maiolino considers it her task to challenge and disarm the modern subject as fascistic subject.¹⁰ As an artist, she celebrates precisely the “dark” forces that most frighten it: sexuality, jouissance, the unconscious, surrendering it to detachment and fragmentation. She proceeds by drawing in, out and forth, and sculpting abject subject matter—like the domestic and the scatological deemed inappropriate by conservative culture—or by performing and filming (often feminine) body parts mocking the ideal of plenitude. In her intriguing super-8 film *In-Out, Antropofagia* (1973), which has no linear narrative but has a montage of all the “ingredients” characteristic of Maiolino’s art, the scene features the in and out movement, the open and closed mouth, the red of the lips, the thread of chiasmic drawn and spoken lines, and... the egg. The first appearance of the egg in her film work is linked to ideas of fertility and sustenance. In the 1920s, both principles had been advanced by artist Tarsila do Amaral and writer Oswald de Andrade as crucial to forging a future Brazil. In meshing modernist movements, first Futurism and later Primitivism, with their country’s African heritage, the couple formulated the modern Brazilian theory of a cultural melting pot: *Antropofagia* (Cannibalism). Amaral, in her paintings *Urubu* (1928) and *Antropofagia* (1929), and Andrade, in his *Manifesto Antropofago* (1928), where he declared “Only Cannibalism unites us,” searched for a hybrid national culture in which spiritual, native, African and European elements were brought together. Andrade’s manifesto became the textbook of twentieth-century art in Brazil, including the Neo-Concretist movement and the social relevance of its art.

In the 1970s, Maiolino developed strategies from Neo-Concretism that, for a while, paralleled those of Clark’s, concerning modern art being faced with one of its most pressing issues: the reconnection of art and life—a connection believed to

have been ruptured. Their aim is “liberating the artistic object from its formalist inertia and its mythifying aura by creating ‘living objects’ in which could be glimpsed the forces, the endless process, the vital strength that stirs in everything...freeing the spectator from his or her soporific inertia.”¹¹ Touching upon the theory of Antropofagia and reclaiming access to the body as a hybrid site of a permanent reinvention of existence, Clark increasingly explores the therapeutic potential of her artistic proposition through her “relational objects,” while Maiolino promotes subjectivity as relational, constituted from the vibrant dynamic of moulding oneself in an encounter with the other through the pulsing and chiasmic life in all daily things and events.

Insisting on the idea of “living organisms” in regards to art, Maiolino took part in the exhibition Vagrant Myths in 1978 with two radical projects: Monument to Hunger consisting of two sacks, one of white rice and one of black beans,¹² tied together with a ribbon and placed on a table in a square; and Scatological State featuring various types of toilet paper mounted on a street wall. The works evidence of activity at both opposite ends of the alimentary canal that flows as an imaginary line of transformation between them. In their relation with the vital process, these works do not propose mimesis or an expression of life in its constituted organic forms, but the incarnation, within the work, of life as a creating impulse. Maiolino’s search to reintegrate life and art through food and faeces is rooted in materialism, in George Bataille’s base materialism, as well as in Deleuzian vitalism. Distinguished from its evolutionist and mechanistic forms that turn into ideas of necessity and finality, this vitalism is based on the notion of life’s creativity, the permanent genesis of the world, and productivity.¹³

By exhibiting these two projects together—one work about the basic foods of Brazil, the other about the basic necessity of defecation—Maiolino connects what goes in and out of every body. In Scatological State, where the materials range from the most expensive toilet paper to the cheapest, from newspaper to plant leaves, she points to the state of equality among us all, even if the State and its systems continuously try to institute hierarchy. The work deals ironically with the pretensions of the rich consumer and with the market, which strives to confer status and differentiation through the most common bodily denominator. The digestive tract, that lies between in and out, and its transforming capacity can be likened to the artistic trajectory, and its unforeseeable becomings, as a commonality, equal and accessible among us all. Here art is not about an image or sense of the world expressed by the artist as the transference of myths, but about the power of permanent creation in the sensing of self and the earth, which every person, as a living being, eventually possesses. The dual works presented in the Vagrant Myths exhibition, invoking oral and anal somatic processes, were crucial to Maiolino’s approach to the body, exemplifying its ability to create through its orifices onto paper. From the very beginning, the early painted high-relief and woodcut of the same title, Glu.. Glu.. Glu..., picture this idea in what can be considered as a chiasmic scene. Depicted in the upper part is a bust with its mouth wide open in front of food, and in the lower part an alimentary canal (in the high-relief) and a toilet (in the woodcut). Between the Two from the Constructed Projects series with its formalist paper structure, and Untitled (1981) from the Primers series with its representation of a water closet, anticipate the explicit materialization in later works of her purpose to awaken the perception of the transformative vitality in all, and not only in the artist.

From relief to relief

The topological accumulation of these same/different forms, like the sight of a tilled field with its imprints of man and cultivation, is moving. The clay is shown to be fulfilling the material destinies ordained for it. It transforms with dehydration, dries on exposure to the air, turns into stone, and cracks. It is in a state of surrender to what the future holds for it. Beyond doubt, one day it will return to dust. And once more, when blended with water, it will add new forms to the physical processing of matter, sustaining my desire.

--Anna Maria Maiolino, “Works in Processes,” unpublished text, March 1, 1997.

The artist identifies herself as the ploughwoman of language, the cultivator who steadily and laboriously cleaves, cuts, lifts, and turns over the soil to prepare a seedbed and infuse the earth with a faecal fertilizer. The discharge in her earthen work is, in fact, a matter of uprooting oneself from that clinging “remnant of earth,” that “Erdenrest” to which Goethe refers at the end of the second Faust: “Earth remnants molest us / To bear them is toil / Were they asbestos / They still would soil.”¹⁴ Whether praised or condemned, every time shit erupts in human history, rehearsing the ambivalent condition of the Erdenrest, woman and man are revealed in their earthiness as eternally, hopelessly soiled.¹⁵ Henceforth loose, without casts, Maiolino’s elemental clods or excremental forms in the Terra Modelada/Moulded Earth series multiply and accumulate in heaps proliferating into space like an eruption out of a mysterious geological time. Her immediate affinity with moist clay translates into sculpture that recalls remnants of unpredictable and cataclysmic upheavals of the earth’s surface. But even more so, as mentioned above, her earthen work with its rolls and coils alludes

to earthenware, by which we draw food to ourselves and which completes “the process of drawing it from the earth and sky by means of drawing lines in the world at each step with ploughs, irrigation channels, fences, shelters, fish nets, and so on.”¹⁶ Food is drawn out from the earth and by means of earthenware brought up to humans. Sustaining the relation of the clay to the elements of earth, water, air, and fire, Maiolino materializes their chiasmic lines in her large clay installations. With caring gestures, she tenderly tends to the lines coming forth and brings them into sinuous relations with the human body and needs.

Referring to the earth’s power—eschatological and scatological—to suddenly shift, split, and excrete, Maiolino’s work also establishes a connection to language and its subversion. Conflating the “highest” forms of consciousness with the “basest” of human products (most explicitly in *Scatological State*), she hands excrement back to the fields of cultural production and consumption whose proper operation depends on its repression. As the artist maps the construction of the “I” across private and public spheres, she realizes that the policing of language and the politics of shit converge. This occurs in such a way that sometimes the history of faecal matter can be said to offer a detailed history of institutional efforts shaping an official language, “focusing on the instrumental role of a streamlined and rationalized language in the construction of a centralized capitalist state.”¹⁷ If language is cleansed and exquisite, it must be because city and speech have been expurgated to confer upon them order and beauty. Purified, language becomes the site of law, of translation, and of commercial exchange, and the State, as the Sewer, turns into the signifier of pure order. The more the State institutionalizes cleanliness and order, the more totalitarian it becomes. Thus it is apparent “that socialization is regularly subverted by the politics of waste. In many ways, the history of shit becomes the history of subjectivity, since the formation of the subject relates to language, as well as to the ‘abject’ that designates what has been expelled from the body, discharged as excrement, literally rendered ‘other.’ It appears as an expulsion of alien elements, but the alien is effectively established through this expulsion. The construction of the ‘not-me’ as the abject establishes the boundaries of the body which are also the first contours of the subject.”¹⁸

We make our way into nature, history and society through drawing lines. Maiolino draws ever more reflexive lines from and around the results of the lines of work done in the field, forest, plain and river, by means of the shape delineations in her earthen work. Depending on the size of Maiolino’s sculptural installation, the methodical arrangement of informe forms and minimal clots often resembles the storing of paste on trays in a domestic cupboard or industrial baking oven. Besides the reference to the manufacturing of earthenware, the analogy substantially covers the food cycle from bread and pasta to faeces as the “basest” human product.¹⁹ In this digestive excursus from the nutritive to the excremental, the artist as moulding is the medium and nexus between what goes in and out of the body. The palm of Maiolino’s hand is the casting mould doing what her will and the “will” of the material together indicate. In the repetition of these parallel moves lies her art as chiasm of bodily in-coiling and out-curling swirling lines—an art that not only turns around other lines but that is sinuous and reflexive about itself. Around and around it turns, questioning and celebrating its own making because it is made in an intense bodily way. It thus also allows an entry into human reflexivity...

Aroundness and matrix

When we are hardly outside of being, we always have to go back into it. Thus, in being, everything is circuitous, roundabout, recurrent, so much talk...a refrain with endless verses.

--Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*

Slowly and steadily, it becomes apparent that the forked path in the development of Maiolino’s late 1990s sculptural work, which consists of both the negative matrix (taken from the second casting phase) and the positive forms without moulds (taken from the coalescence of the first and third phases), is in fact one and the same path leading to the presentation of the casting mould as the actual work of art. If the matrix is manifestly visible in the former series, it is less conspicuous in the latter series, because it is the artist herself who is now the mould. In the process of her pleasurable labour, the execution of this corporeal mould is, at the same time, an accomplishment and an annihilation, because the art, once on view, is the absent “matrixial” body in the presence of its moulded remnants. Like the rejected mould, which was once the generative and uniting matrix, Maiolino’s body mediating between positive and negative, in and out, chaos and system, is at this stage outcast.

Her affirmation and abjection within the same motion externalize the inner process of intestinal moulding as a semiotic activity of creation. This othering of the self, this internal splitting, again suggests that Maiolino evolves at a nexus around which a hybrid subjectivity is formed along parallels as in a chiasm. In this movement of negotiation, the artist is able to establish the moulding of the self as a present positive by othering of the self as an absent negative. The flexible

interaction between being both inside and outside allows, on this line of mutation, for the co-emerging of self and Other in a fusion that synthesizes the permanent task of reinventing subjectivity and its mode of existence. In embodying that nexus itself, Maiolino eventually succeeds not only in linking separate parts of self and Other that were abjected, but also in reconnecting art and life.

In contrast to Clark's "relational objects," Maiolino's most recent clay objects cannot be manipulated by the audience, unless they participate in the production process itself or acknowledge their own daily gestures. The creative force of these transient, dough-like forms lies in their capacity to convey a transformational corporeality as objects that are relational in their merging of "inner" and "outer." In this sense Maiolino is trying to reformulate the relation between the subject and its other. She wonders what precedes this encounter while making primary memory tangible. As the past continues to haunt the present, she lays bare traces of early infancy in her droppings of ink and clay, materializing essential drives which Sigmund Freud equated with creative vitality: "Inter urinas and faeces nascimur." In between the passages of relief of base materials, being comes into existence. If that which enters is expelled, the artist traces its circuitous path in the repetitive act imbued with life. Always made within repetition, Maiolino's late series of drawings and sculptures, oscillating between the tautological and the corporeal definition of art, have a continuity that remains unfinished and unresolved. As if hinging on the practices of the Italian Neo-avant-garde (in particular Manzoni) and the Brazilian Neo-Concrete movement (in particular Clark), Maiolino introduces a "vitalism-in formalism." In her aesthetics, considering the relation between subject and object, she defines entities as "absence-in-presence" and "distance-in-proximity." In other words, she acknowledges the transmutation of the artwork into a self-referential entity, while maintaining, even if latent, the artist's self-referentiality as corporeal individuality. It results in a reconnection of art and life, a fusion, so to say, in the form of a chiasm.

In the most recent series of sculptures and drawings, Maiolino accomplishes a resolved, matured, perhaps digested, fusion of separate and opposed parts by linking positive and negative forms within one object, while storing their differentiation in the material itself. In this way the dialectics of division is restored. *One & Other* (2000–2001) is a series of bas-reliefs made of the cement matrix that holds, inside its holes, the forms of small, kneaded rolls and balls of clay used for casting. The artist secures the moment in which they formed one "matrixial" body during the casting process. *Indexes* (2000–2001) is a series of drawings made with a needle and sewing thread that pierce the sheet of paper in a double movement to and fro both sides, creating a continuous yet different pattern as it appears positive and negative on recto and verso. Confounding the common metaphors of spatial distinction between inside and outside, Maiolino uses these linguistic terms to circulate a set of fantasies, feared and desired.

According to Judith Butler: "What constitutes through division the 'inner' and 'outer' worlds of the subject is a border and boundary tenuously maintained for the purposes of social regulation and control. The boundary between inner and outer is confounded by those excremental passages in which the inner effectively becomes outer, and this excreting function becomes, as it were, the model by which other forms of identity formation are accomplished. In effect, this is the mode by which the Others become shit."²⁰ Questioning a binary distinction that consolidates the coherent subject, Maiolino mediates to blur the borderline by visualizing these excremental passages as transformational links between food and faeces, inner and outer, positive and negative, black and white, empty and full, conceiving of creativity in the relation between self and Other. In a poststructuralist manner, she problematizes the attempt to think difference as opposition, to oppose inside and outside, subject and its other. Consequently, in chiasmic terms, she moves us with her art into new perceptions of borderspaces between in and out, as much as earthenware does in its connectedness to the surrounding world.

It's what is missing

Artworks are like fountains of light that are meant to shine on and disclose not themselves, but some essential features of the world that happen to be around them.

--Martin Heidegger, The Origin of the Work of Art

Critical of an exhausted institutional modernism and suggesting alternative models, Maiolino focuses on the formalist and vital values of art without neglecting its historical determinations and transformational possibilities. Her career reveals itself as rigorous and consistent. This consistency is most noticeable in the language of the wonderfully concise titles throughout her oeuvre: for example, the title of the video *What is Left Over* (1974) finds a resonance in the title of the sculpture series *It's What's Missing* (1995). Early on, Maiolino's art evolves in chiasmic lines, in the sense that it is motivated by the awareness that placing elements crosswise in a diagonal arrangement concerns a structural repetition

of similar ideas in a reverse sequence in order to emphasize their relation rather than their separation. As such the dialectics of empty/full and in/out are resolved, constantly reversed and incorporated into existence. To be lived and produced her work asserts itself within the continuous challenge of subjectivity's reinvention.

In terms of a socio-political analysis of compulsory behaviour, Maiolino continues to question the construction of the binary as hierarchical and opposite by making us aware that "the boundary of the body as well as the distinction between internal and external is established through the ejection and transvaluation of something originally part of identity into a defiling otherness;" and consequently, she has us understand that, similarly, "sexism, homophobia, and racism, the repudiation of bodies for their sex, sexuality, and/or color is an 'expulsion' followed by a 'repulsion' that founds and consolidates culturally hegemonic identities along sex/race/sexuality axes of differentiation."²¹ From the point of gender and race as enacted, Maiolino investigates the fixity of gender and ethnic identity as an interior depth, said to be externalized in various forms of "expression." In her urge to reunite the divided in a linked, though nonunifiable space, she increasingly takes on a strategy of blurring the boundaries between self and Other, so that separation dissolves when subverted by the work's disintegration and return of matter to chaos. In her desire to reconnect life and art, she has recourse to the daily, the primal, and the abject as that, which does not respect borders, positions, and rules. Moreover, she considers that the diagonal, the diametrical and dialectical are relational and generative as in a chiasmic lecture of life.

More and more, the "in-between" as ambivalent and composite space becomes Maiolino's working area. Relating psychoanalytic ideas of the "visceral unconscious," the "bodily ego," and "base materialism," she criticizes dominant concepts of the mind/body duality and social taboo through her investigation of degraded elements. Although the concept of abjection has always been latent in modernism, it has been a central theoretical impulse in the art of the 1990s, which Maiolino has anticipated in her work of the 1970s-80s and is now interrogating and challenging. She clarifies that there is no ontological foundation of the subject; quite the contrary, there is a disruptive potential in every body through the repetitive, everyday deed of self-moulding, a subjectivity not as pre-discursive but as displaced and relational, creating the space of a new reality. This is what Maiolino has shown and written all along... *The Before Is the After, The Inside Is the Outside, One & Other, Secret Poem [me + thou]...*

In Maiolino's oeuvre, her earthen work is crucial in materializing our connection to life and to the earth. Her primal sculptural works seem to embody a kind of ecofeminism descending from prehistoric times as well as anticipating our future that is to come. The work asks us to be attentive to the sinuous lines of connection and involvement to the earth, if we are to survive this century. It has this urgency to it. This notion of art as nonconceptual reflexion and as access to human reflexivity allows us to conceive of, and to give attention to, the relational nature of things. And our flexuousness becomes part of an imaginary line, a life line, that stretches itself to the world intensively and extendingly through her enfolded art. When Vandana Shiva argues that "the marginalization of women and the destruction of biodiversity go hand in hand"²² she points to the commonality of gendered and environmental oppression but also to the particular connection women have to the health and knowledge of the earth.

Through her work Maiolino demonstrates that it should be the domestic task of every human being to care and be a custodian of our natural resources and the heterogeneity of life. The earth is abundant in supply but we need to respect it. In order to sustain our communities, this recognition of the reproductive cycles of the earth is required. Interdependence is key, and all separations and fragmentations to fulfil the demands of capitalism have to be questioned and undone. In this way, Shiva states, "ecological stability, sustainability, and productivity under resource-scarce conditions are maintained."²³ I believe that, in this struggle today, women have taken the forefront and feel the final responsibility to be on their shoulders, many having as their purpose that ecological destruction be halted and the laying waste to the earth be averted. Through chiasm as relationship in her earthen work Maiolino shows us too that life cycles repeat themselves and renew hopes: in entropy and telluric epiphany, in the turning of the seasons and the turning of the earth, the planet, the earth beneath the plough, and the earth, the clay, we hold simply, and mould in our hands. Ultimately, her art is a guide to our understanding how aroundness and flexuousness is simultaneously a reflexion into the self.

- 1 Literally, chiasm means “placing crosswise, diagonal arrangement.” This structural arrangement concerns the
- 2 Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*. Translated by Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 18.
- 3 *Manifesto Neoconcreto*, reproduced in Ronaldo Brito, *Neo-concretismo, Vertice e Ruptura*, (Rio de Janeiro: Funarte, 1985), 12-13.
- 4 Esther Emilio Carlos, “The Memory of the Other,” in Anna Maria Maiolino: *Vida Afora/A Life Line*, ed. Catherine de Zegher (The Drawing Center, New York) 2002, 276.
- 5 Curated by the author, the series *Terra Modelada / Moulded Earth* was first conceived, performed and shown at the *Beguinaage* in Kortrijk (Kanaal Art Foundation) in 1995 and became part of the exhibition *Inside the Visible. An Elliptical Traverse of 20th-century Art in, of, and from the Feminine*, which toured to ICA Boston; The Whitechapel, London; The Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington; and The Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth in 1995-96.
- 6 Anna Maria Maiolino in a letter to the author.
- 7 Samuel B. Mallin, *Art Line Thought* (Kluwer Academic Publishers: Dordrecht, Boston, London) 1996, 147.
- 8 *Ibidem*, 150.
- 9 *Ibidem*, 17.
- 10 Even if Lacan does not specify his theory of the subject as historical, it can be argued that such a “traumatized, armored, and aggressive subject is not just any being across history and culture: it is a theory of the modern subject as fascistic subject.” See Hal Foster, “Postmodernism in Parallax,” *October* 63 (1993), 8.
- 11 Suely Rolnik, “Moulding a Contemporary Soul: The Empty-Full of Lygia Clark,” 60.
- 12 Later there is also her installation *Rice and Beans* (1979) for which she filled plates laid out on a table for a meal with soil, in which rice and beans germinated during the exhibition.
- 13 Suely Rolnik, “Moulding a Contemporary Soul: The Empty-Full of Lygia Clark,” 71
- 14 Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Faust*, trans. Walter Arndt (W. W. Norton & Co.: New York, 1976), 303, lines 11, 954 - 11, 957. Cited from Dominique Laporte, *History of Shit*, trans. Nadia Benabid and Rodolphe el-Khoury (Cambridge, Mass. and London, England: The MIT Press, 2000), pp. 9, 149-150.
- 15 Laporte, *History of Shit*, 34.
- 16 Samuel B. Mallin, *Art Line Thought* (Kluwer Academic Publishers: Dordrecht, Boston, London) 1996, 150.
- 17 Laporte, *History of Shit*, viii, 7.
- 18 *Ibid.*, 29.
- 19 Whitfield, “Handling Space,” 35: “Years before, Fontana had likened one of his terracotta tablets to bread (with good reason: the work has a remarkable resemblance to a slab of Italian ‘focaccia’).”
- 20 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), 134.
- 21 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), 133.

22 Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies, *Ecofeminism* (London: Zed Books), 2014, 164.

23 *Ibidem*, 167.