Two crises to take care of:
Body and Earth read through
the Covid-19 pandemic and
the ecological crisis

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MA Thesis
Gender Studies
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November 2020

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Acknowledgements

Abstract

This thesis is a theoretical analysis which seeks to read together the Covid-19 pandemic and the ecological crisis. Indeed the thesis tries to answer these questions: What can we learn from the Covid-19 crisis in view of the ecological emergency we are getting into? How can the central role that care has played during the pandemic become a tool to understand the ecological crisis? In order to draw the connection between the two crisis this work deepen three aspects emerging in the pandemic that are good starting points to better understand the ecological crisis: these three aspects are the global scale of the crisis, the devaluation of care and the individualization of responsibility. The first chapter aims to deconstruct the human homogeneous subject underlying the rhetoric around the global scale of both the Covid-19 and the ecological crises. The second chapter discusses the crucial role played by care during the pandemic showing how care can be a fruitful tool to approach also some of our problems with attending to the ecological crisis. The third chapter deconstructs the narrative of individual responsibility mobilized to deal with these crises and proposes an alternative imaginary to rethink care in times of crisis.

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Introduction

I'm sitting on the floor of a spacious black room. In front of me, an immersive installation made of three video walls display images interwoven with words in Spanish, Catalan, and English. In the dark, a voice echoes "*Think yourself as a planet*". The exhibition, called *After the End of the World* is about Anthropocene and climate change, and to be honest I end up here totally by chance.

"50% of the DNA inside your body is not human DNA. Consider what that implies. It means you are a complex ecosystem like a forest or a marsh. You exist like jellyfish in the ocean: Earth washes in and out of you with every breath you take. So when you talk about your planet, you're talking about your body. And remember: a fever can kill you" says the voice.

I breathe in and breathe out those words trying to absorb it. Then, following the voice I hold my breath trying to perceive all the microorganisms that live in me, making my life possible. And vulnerable. I am already familiar with the idea of cohabiting my body with other beings. However, I never thought of myself, of my own body, as an ecosystem, or even, as a planet. And therefore I also never phrased before the planet as a body.
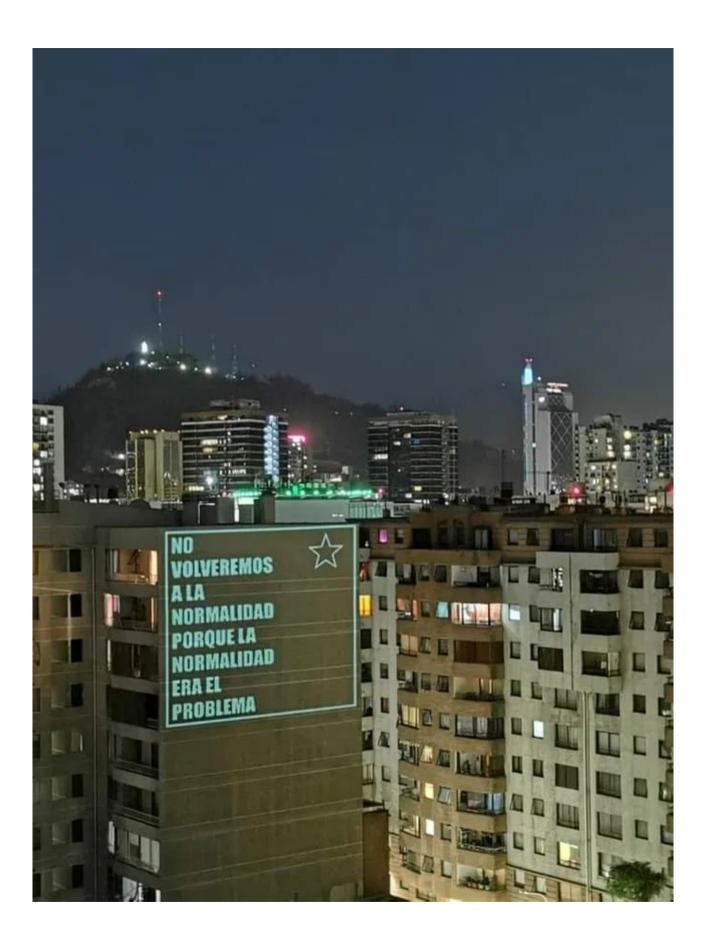
15 March 2019, climate strike

A sign: *"We don't want to save the planet, we are the planet saving itself"*

Times of crisis: natural crisis, careless times

It is the year 2020. It is March and I come back for a weekend in Italy to find my family. I am supposed to return to the Netherlands, where I live, on Tuesday March 10, but on the evening of March 9, the Italian prime minister Giuseppe Conte announces that due to the spread of Covid-19 virus, the lockdown measure, already effective in Lombardy, is extended to the entire country. Nobody can leave the country, except for work or "health reasons". No one can get out of the house without a self-declaration stating why. The only motivations allowed are: going to the hospital, going to work, or going to do the groceries. On March 11 the World Health Organization declares that Covid-19 is a pandemic. On March 19, Italy is the most affected country in the world when it comes to Covid-19 infections, surpassing China in the number of deaths of the Corona related illnesses.[1]

So, here I am, stuck in my mother's house, virtually connected, but physically isolated. And this is a shared condition: Everyone is stuck in the house, unable to do anything but sharing online feelings, impressions, and thoughts about this shocking, potentially lethal, terrifying experience we are all living. Even though it is scary and traumatic, this time seems to have infinite imaginative potential. While we are still looking forward to the return to our "normality" and refusing to acknowledge the rupture, our daily life vanishes, losing sense and meaning, feeling like a collective illusion. Indeed, as Arundhati Roy writes in her short reflection *"The pandemic is a portal"*: "Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next" (Roy, 2020). An image comes back to circulate online: it is the photo of a giant projection appeared on a building during the Chilean October 2019 protests. Projected on the building the sentence: "We won't return to normality because normality was the problem".

1   https://edition.cnn.com/2020/03/19/europe/italy-death-toll-intl/index.html

A couple of weeks after the start of the shutdown measures, everything is like frozen and the cities are empty. In this surreal landscape, unusual animals start to show up in the vicinity of urban areas (where they usually have been disappeared from). Videos of dolphins in Cagliari's port and peacocks dancing in Mumbai streets circulate on the Internet. Slogans such as "Without us, the Earth is healing" or "We are the virus" spread on social media. Indeed the immediate effects of the lockdown draw the attention of public opinion to the connection between the pandemic and the climate crisis on a mainstream level. In the meantime, Italy and US-based researchers start investigate the connection between Covid spread and air pollution[23]. Moreover, ecology activists and researchers point out how biodiversity loss and climate change affect the transmission of infectious diseases increasing both the chances of 'spillover' transmission (like Covid) and 'vector' transmission (like Malaria)[4]. None of these aspects are the immediate focus of my research in this thesis. However, I am starting my writing with these 'impressions', in order to show which input led me to me to research the possibilities for rethinking our "normality" offered by reading the ecological crisis and the pandemic together.

A stimulating debate around the connection between these two global crises developed both on social media and in the academic world and the perspectives to approach such connection are multiple and fruitful. The perspective from which this connection is analyzed in the thesis is marked by a specific way of understanding the "subject" in crisis. Indeed, I interpret the Covid 19 crisis as a crisis of the body and the body is the main "subject" into question when I am approaching the pandemic. Not only in fact obviously the virus affects the body, but also the body is at the core of the socio-political measures adopted to contrast this crisis: as Paul Preciado writes "epidemics, through the declaration of a state of exception, are great laboratories of social innovation, the occasion for the large-scale reconfiguration of body procedures and technologies of power". As far as the ecological crisis is concerned the main "subject" is the planet Earth. Both planet Earth and the body are iconic figures of what is traditionally understood as nature and therefore what above all these crises have in common is that they can be both understood as natural crises. Hence, the red thread of this thesis is that the current condition of extreme vulnerability inhabited by the body

2   http://www.simaonlus.it/wpsima/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/COVID19_Position-Paper_Relazione-circa-l%E2%80%99effetto-dell%E2%80%99inquinamento-da-particolato-atmosferico-e-la-diffusione-di-virus-nella-popolazione.pdf?fbclid=IwAR1ntcIS0NGLrnZbW2qWUM_n43DYfsYyMjWYydvdYetHsJ4CFqPWsNuC-Ns

3   https://projects.iq.harvard.edu/covid-pm?fbclid=IwAR3egF870YZgPHAbaYnokVer3d8wWDfQoHvl0U3OVzR33ivk6g6KLHUwAcI

4   I am mostly referring to a series of webinars in Italian. However, just to give some insights on the topic: https://www.nature.com/articles/nature09575

(namely the pandemic) provides a privileged standpoint from which to look into the current conditions of extreme vulnerability inhabited by planet Earth (namely the ecological crisis). As again Arundhati Roy argued on the pandemic: "The lockdown worked like a chemical experiment that suddenly illuminated hidden things" (Roy, 2020). Indeed, the current conditions of extreme vulnerability inhabited by the body shed light on the crucial role that care has in our lives and therefore in our society. Vulnerability and the need for care are in this thesis the entry point to explore contradictions and inadequacies of the neoliberal global governance. The neoliberal management of care during the Covid-19 crisis is indeed revealing the unsuitability and the unsustainability of such a socio-economic system in times of natural global crises. Hence, the pandemic can be seen as a test case for the capability of our society to deal with and to take care of a global crisis such as the ecological crisis we are getting into.

However my concern in this research is not only to point the systemic failures of the system but to make the most from the inherent creative potential of these crises. Indeed, the current conditions of extreme vulnerability inhabited by both the body and the Earth provide a privileged standpoint from which to rethink what we understand as nature which is my perspective the first step to reconsider the subject of politics and to reimagine our "normality": it is not only about approaching a reconceptualization of nature but also to see the political urgency of such a theoretical move.

Indeed reading together the two crises allows me to explore the creative potential of thinking the body as a planet and the planet as a body. "Think yourself as a planet" resonates now in my mind. Trying to recall how this idea initially has been generated, I recently rewatched the video which I saw in an exhibition in *CCCB* (Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona) before the pandemic started. Two aspects of it, which I did not pay much attention to before, impress me now in this weird time: The first is the accent on the body as something vulnerable: "*And remember: a fever can kill you*". The second aspect is that while portraying the planet as a body the author addresses the audience as *"the planet thinking"*. In this way, the video seems to point the human audience as the brain of that body-planet. While the first aspect positively stimulates me, the second does not convince me but at a first glance, when I rewatched the video I could not formulate why. This is one of the biggest questions I try implicitly to answer in this thesis: why portraying humanity as "the planet thinking" does not convince me anymore? Suffice it to say here, that interpreting the body as a planet and the planet as a body means in my work the endeavor to complicate humanity as a unitary homogeneous subject and consequently to rethink political agency decentering the human. Along with this endeavor, in this thesis I try to elaborate an understanding of the "other-than-human" that goes beyond simply considering the other living beings in a narrow sense such as animals and plants. Indeed, Earth read as a body ceases to be an environment or a

scenery surrounding 'us' as humans. It starts to be a living actor in itself. I want to offer a figuration to my reader in order to make clearer what I mean. Let's shift our perspective and consider the micro-organisms living "in" our bodies, but also making our lives in these bodies livable. How would our bones look to those micro-organisms? Dead or alive? Brute matter or conscious beings? How do the stones of a mountain look to our small human eyes? Dead or alive? Sentient beings or raw materials? Thinking of our bodies as planets and the planet Earth as a body leads to reconsider our understanding of what a "living being" means. This rethinking however is not and must not remain an interesting speculative game: it has strong political implications and it might provide fruitful tools to deal with both the pandemic and the ecological crisis. Far from seeking to exhaust such a vast subject, this work is meant to contribute and inspire a discussion that more than merely philosophical is politically urgent and needed.

Overview

The thesis tries to answer these questions: What can we learn from the Covid-19 crisis in view of the ecological emergency we are getting into? How can the central role that care has played during the pandemic become a tool to understand the ecological crisis?

In order to draw the connection between the two crises , this work deepens three aspects emerging within the pandemic. Indeed in my perspective these are good starting points to better understand the ecological crisis: the global scale, the devaluation of care and the individualization of responsibility. I devoted a chapter of this thesis to each of them. At the beginning of each chapter, I analyze the pandemic focusing on one of these three aspects. Then for each of them, I trace the genealogy, showing the contradictions and deconstructing the misleading representation that sustains it. At the end of each chapter, I show how the same kind of rhetoric and management is being adopted to talk about and to deal with the ecological crisis and I try to propose a different reading.

Aiming to answer the above-mentioned questions the first chapter starts from deconstructing the human homogeneous subject underlying the rhetoric around the global scale of both the Covid-19 and the ecological crises. In the first part of the chapter, I argue how the planetary scale of the pandemic draws attention to the fact that despite the rhetoric of "we are all in this together", the crisis intensified the dominant forms of necropolitical management already operating. Therefore I seek to complicate the idea of a unitary homogeneous human subject equally accountable and equally affect. In the second part of that chapter, I try to trace the genealogy of how the modern concept of humanity has been built severing its relation with materiality and nature. In the last part, argue that the Anthropocene theory reproduces both the understanding of humans as a

homogeneous group and of nature as passive and external.

In the second chapter I discuss how the crucial role played by care during the pandemic can be a fruitful tool to also approach some of our problems with attending to the ecological crisis. In the first part of this chapter, I describe the central role that care has played during the pandemic. In the second part, I deepen three aspects that help me to connect the problem of care in the contemporary pandemic situation to the ecological crisis. In this last part of the second chapter, I try to answer the question of why the matter of care is relevant in view of the ecological crisis focusing on "earthcare".

The third chapter starts from highlighting how the strategies adopted to deal with the pandemic are designed around the individual. In the first part of that chapter I argue that in the case of Covid-19 crisis the individualization of responsibility works as a diversion from the controversial priorities of neoliberal management of the pandemic while in the case of the ecological crisis this narrative is used to offer comfortable individual solutions without stopping the systemic ecological violence inherent to the capitalist mode of production.In the second part I deconstruct the rhetoric of individual responsibility drawing the attention on bodily interconnectedness. In the last part I propose an alternative narrative that leads to rethink care in times of crisis. Suggesting to read the planet as a body, I point out how care for the Earth and care for the body can be read as a form of resistance to the system that brought the planet into these global crises.

Chapter 1

***"We are all in this together":* the global scale and the human subject**

The aim of this thesis is to investigate what we can learn from the experience of the Covid-19 pandemic in view of the ecological crisis we are getting into: indeed Covid19 can be read as a test case for the capability of our society to deal with global crises. The experience of this pandemic and the way it has been managed illuminated contradictions and inadequacies of the neoliberal system revealing the unsustainability of such a socio-economic system. Given this concern, in this work, I will deepen three aspects that emerged in the Covid crisis that in my perspective are relevant to this purpose: the global scale of the crisis, the individualization of responsibility and the devaluation of care.

Before I start, I think it is to mark my own situatedness: I am writing this thesis during the summer of 2020 and therefore I am referring to the measures adopted until now. Moreover, as I wrote before, I spent the first lockdown (approximately March 2020 – June 2020) in Italy. Therefore, I have a clearer picture of how the crisis has been experienced and represented in Europe. I have more familiarity with the kind of social engineering that has been adopted in this part of the world. My experience necessarily informs the way I describe the Covid 19 crisis. Far from seeking for objectiveness or universality, I will try to offer a cross-section of the pandemic, both politically and geographically situated.

In this chapter, the focus is on the global scale of these two crises and on the human subject called to account and care for them. In the first part, I will argue how the planetary scale of the pandemic draws attention to the fact that despite the rhetoric of "we are all in this together", nations instead of collaborating to face the issue, continued competing on the global market even at the cost of their citizens' lives. Describing the dominant forms of necropolitical management of the pandemic, I seek to complicate the idea of a unitary homogeneous human subject equally accountable and equally affected by the crisis. In the second part of this chapter, in order to deconstruct the representation of the human that recurs in the political discourses regarding the pandemic and the ecological crisis, I will try to trace the genealogy of how the modern concept of humanity has been built severing its relation materiality. To do so, I will explore the alienation from the body in favor of the "mind" in modern philosophy highlighting the bond with the alienation from nature and Earth. In the third part will critically engage with the narratives around the ecological crisis and in particular with the theory of the Anthropocene: this theory stresses the weight that human activities had in the causes of the ecological crisis. However, it reproduces both the understanding of humans as a homogeneous group and of nature as passive and external.

Covid 19: disposable life on a planetary scale

Despite the initial tendency to downplay the extent of the Covid-19, when it reached Europe at the beginning of March 2020 the global scale of this phenomenon quickly became evident. Along with the realization of the planetary scale, emerged the rhetorical slogan "we are all in this together". Just to give an example, the italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte has often addressed Italian citizens stating "we are all on the same boat". These slogans are an expression of a widespread public representation that discourses around the ecological and the pandemic crisis have in common. In such a depiction the crisis is seen as coming from outside and humanity is the hero of the story: humanity is pictured as the subject that only by rediscovering its unity can act as such and avoid a catastrophe. The causes of the crisis are portrayed as an external enemy: regarding Covid-19, the virus is often described as an "invisible enemy". Although this imaginary is quite widespread even in some well-intentioned currents of thought of social and ecological movements, I will try to show in this section of the chapter how at least concerning the Covid-19 crisis such representation is totally misleading.

Despite the Covid crisis being mostly portrayed in the above-mentioned terms, national governments instead of collaborating to face an issue that was about to hit everybody, decided to not adopt a uniform strategy. As we could witness throughout the spring of 2020, most of the nations, in particular the the Western ones, chose to close their borders, and in the countries where the situation was not yet very critical politicians often denied the usefulness of containment measures while postponing taking action in their own territory. The same trend has been visible regarding the research around a vaccine, a trend that leads to the phenomenon so-called "vaccine nationalism[5]": it is called vaccine nationalism when a country secures doses of vaccines prioritizing its own citizens while the vaccine in other countries is not yet available at all. Although the Covid-19 vaccine is not yet available, this phenomenon can be observed in pre-purchase agreements between governments and vaccine producers and the tip of the iceberg of this tendency has been the news reported by a German media that US President Donald Trump offered already on the beginning of March 2020 to the Tübingen-based medical company CureVac "large sums of money" for exclusive access to a Covid-19 vaccine.[6]

On a national scale, in many countries such as Italy, Germany, or France, the Prime Minister's public speech has been adopted as a way to communicate to the citizens the taken measures. On 18th

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5   https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2020/09/03/why-coronavirus-vaccine-nationalism-is-winning/
6   https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/mar/15/trump-offers-large-sums-for-exclusive-access-to-coronavirus-vaccine

March 2020, Angela Merkel, chancellor of German, e.g. said: "Ich wende mich heute auf diesem ungewöhnlichen Weg an Sie" (*"I am addressing you today in this rather unusual manner"*) marking the exceptional nature of both this historic moment and the mode she chose to speak. Indeed, as we could learn from the international news, Merkel in her 15 years of being the chancellor of Germany never chose before the televised speech to address the nation. In a similar manner, also French President Emanuel Macron spoke on 16th March on all french networks declaring (he repeated the phrase for 7 times all over his speech) "Nous sommes en guerre" (*"We are at war"*). Some of the most recurring words were "guerre" (*war*) "compatriotes" (*compatriots*) "France" and "Français" (*French citizens*) and the speech ended with the exhortation "Vive la République! Vive la France!" (*"Long live to the Republic! Long live France!"*). Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte on his first speech portrayed the pandemic as "a challenge that must be won with everyone's commitment" (*"è una sfida che va vinta con l'impegno di tutti"*) and stressed on the idea that "we are all on the same boat" (*"siamo sulla stessa barca"*). Conte's speech's most frequent words are "dobbiamo" (*"we must"*) and "nostro" (*"our")* and in almost the entire speech he speaks as a "we" putting himself on the same level as the rest of the Italian citizens. What is important, however, none of the three speeches shortly mentioned here refers to Europe more than once and, at least as far as Conte's and Macron's words are concerned, the call for *national belonging and unity* was very explicit.

Despite the call for national belonging, the measures adopted did not affect everyone equally. For instance, the lockdown strategy, adopted in most of Europe and extended to the whole population, can be said to be designed for a very specific subject: the wealthy family. The *#stayhome[7]* approach required first of all to have a house and to be able to work from home. It implied to have a safe house, to have enough space and quiet to be able to focus on work or the study, to have a stable connection to video call, to have one or more technological devices. Spending quarantine in an overcrowded council house or in a house with a garden very much informed not only the material but also the psychological viability of such a strategy. Not to mention the homeless, jailed people, refugees in the camps, and so on. The crisis did not feel the same for everyone.

Moreover, elites of every country pushed for the restart of production in order to continue competing in the global market even at the cost of workers' lives. Workplaces at least in Italy became Covid outbreaks and the Italian Institute for Statistics reveals that even in Lombardy, the most affected region in Italy, during the lockdown more than 50% of the workers continued going

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7   The hashtag #stayhome not only was trending on various social media platforms but was also widespread in advertising campaigns, becoming a sort of mantra. In Italy, the government itself promoted in social media as well as in a televised advertisement the hashtag #iorestoacasa ("*#Istayhome"*), and the hashtag has been a trending topic on Twitter.

to their workplace. In Milan (Lombardy), the percentage of workers continuing to go to their workplace instead of working from home reaches 67% and in Lodi, which was the most affected area in Lombardy the percentage went up to as high as 73%. That means that the virus had more chances to spread among those who could not evade the imperative to go to work, among those who could not afford to lose their jobs, namely among the poorest working class. Therefore, the crisis did not only not feel the same for everyone, but in fact, it did not affect everyone equally.

The situation which I tried to describe until now can be read through the lenses of Roberto Esposito's "paradigm of immunity-community". The Italian philosopher analyzes the history of the notion of immunity finding its origin in the legal-political realm and connecting it to the notion of community. The two terms come from the Latin "munus" which has the "bivalent meaning of "law" and "gift" – and, more specifically, of the law of a unilateral gift to others" (Esposito, 2013, p.84). Community derives from "*cum*" (with*) - "munus"* while *immunitas* is a privative word meaning "without munus". This means, as Paul Preciado explains (in his discussion of Esposito's paradigm applied to the Covid crisis) that :

> "In Roman law, immunity was a privilege that released someone from the obligations shared by all. He who had been exempted was immunized. He who had been *de*-munized, conversely, had been stripped of all community privileges after having been deemed a threat to the community" (Preciado, 2020).

This paradigm is particularly relevant here because Covid-19 indeed shows how "[a]ll protective acts include an immunitary definition of community in which the collective grants itself the power to decide to sacrifice a part of the population in order to maintain its own sovereignty" (*ibid.*). In the Covid crisis, the maintenance of national economic sovereignty in the global market allowed to put in danger not only workers' life, but vulnerable lives in general. In fact, even though the virus was spread in the workplaces affecting the workers, the workers then carried it into their households and into the rest of the society. Given this stratified societal situation, I want to refer to this type of expression of sovereignty in Achille Mbembe's terminology of "necropolitics": indeed if necropolitical "sovereignty means the capacity to define who matters and who does not, who is disposable and who is not" (Mbembe, 2003, p.27) it is thus correct to speak of genuine necropolitical management of the Covid-19 crisis.

As I tried to show in the above, the management of the Covid 19 crisis contributes to the unequal distribution of the virus among the population that reflects the social inequalities. However, the virus not only:

> "allow[s] us to appreciate how the virus actually reproduces, materializes, widens, and intensifies (from the individual body to the population as a whole) the dominant forms of

biopolitical and necropolitical management that were already operating over sexual, racial, or migrant minorities" (Preciado, 2020)

but it also made visible how disposable lives coincide with vulnerable and unproductive ones. As Paul Preciado observed necropolitical management revealed accurate cartography of unproductive subject in the population:

"the elderly, in particular those who are institutionalized within the death industries known as nursing homes (…); people considered handicapped, in particular those institutionalized within the death industries known as homes for the disabled; criminalized and incarcerated people within the death industries known as prisons and detention centers, (...). Homeless bodies (...) are considered criminal by the very fact of eluding confinement and are secluded in detention centers that promise more contagion than cure" (*ibid.*).

Therefore Texas Governor Dan Patrick's statement that grandparent's lives should be sacrificed in the name of the economy was not a heinous phrase of a madman but the expression of a much larger problematic approach to the pandemic, an approach often covered by the rhetoric of "togetherness" mentioned at the beginning of this section.

To conclude, the pandemic imagined as a leveler that equalizes privileged and unprivileged lives is a misleading representation. 'We' are not all experiencing the same situation in the same way. 'We' are not all exposed to the virus in the same way and 'we' are not all affected by it in the same way. In short, 'we' are not all in this together. In addition to this, to stress on the management of the pandemic means to point out how Covid-19 became a crisis reflecting social and economical inequalities due to specific political choices. In this way, I am not trying to deny the seriousness, the virulence, and the agency of the virus itself but I am concerned in highlighting how this crisis can be read as a "man-made disaster" (Braidotti, 2020, p.1) as Rosi Braidotti suggested. Indeed the political choice to adopt social strategies that privilege the safety of the wealthier and the interests of the global economy was made by humans, not by the virus.

Nature and the body: matters of alienation

In the previous section I tried to complicate the idea of a unitary homogeneous human subject equally accountable and equally affected by the crisis in the context of the pandemic. The flipside of humanity represented as a homogeneous subject is the depiction of humanity as a separate entity from nature. In this section, I will trace the genealogy of the concept of humanity through the construction of its alterity, namely nature. As I explicited in the introduction of this work, the body is in my perspective the subject in crisis in this pandemic and the Earth is the subject in crisis in the ecological crisis. Both planet Earth and the body are iconic figures of what is traditionally

understood as nature and therefore both crises can be seen as "natural" crises. In order to connect them and to deconstruct the human subject called to account and care for them I will trace the genealogy of the concept of humanity. Starting from the dissociation from the body I will show how this dissociation is part of the enterprise of controlling "nature" and how this enterprise follows the same patterns when alienating the "mind" from the "body" and the "human" from "nature".

In the third chapter of "Caliban and the Witch", called "The Great Caliban – the struggle against the rebel body", Silvia Federici suggest how the disciplining of the body described by Michel Foucault can be read as an attempt to transform the body into a commodity to sell in the labor market. According to her, such disciplining consisted, on the ideological level, of the degradation of the body in favor of a new concept of the person coincident with the mental sphere. Hence, the philosophical concern on the conflict between the "Reason" and the "Passions of the Body" reflects quite evidently the endeavor of promoting an understanding of the person completely alienated from its own body. Indeed, as Federici argues, in 17th-century Western philosophy, "the body is conceived as brute matter, wholly divorced from any rational qualities: it does not know, does not want, does not feel" (Federici, 2004, p. 139). However, while being attacked as the source of all evils, the body is also in these years passionately studied in its faculties and abilities. The "mechanics of the body" are at the heart of the scientific revolution as much as the celestial mechanics and the mathematization of the world. The disciplining of the body, therefore, does not only involve the actual criminalization of "unproductive" forms of sexuality and sociality and the repression of desires and behaviors but also:

> "the development of new faculties in the individual that would appear as *other* with respect to the body itself, and become the agents of its transformation. The product of this alienation from the body, in other words, was the development of individual *identity*, conceived precisely as "otherness" from the body, and in perennial antagonism with it. The emergence of this *alter ego*, and the determination of a historic conflict between mind and body. represent the birth of the individual in capitalist society"(151).

According to Federici, both the mechanization of the body, namely the understanding of the body as brute matter or as a machine, and the conceiving of the person coincident with its "soul", "mind" or "reason" are part of a process of alienation from the body. As the scholar explains the alienation from the body is a distinguishing trait of the rising capitalist society and at the core of the bourgeois ethic. Since, as described by Marx, what characterizes capitalist work-relation is that the worker sells, instead of the product of his labor, "his" labor-power, the latter becomes the commodity that

the worker owns. This means that "[h]e must constantly look upon his labor-power" namely, his faculties, energies, or abilities "as his own property, his own commodity" (Marx, 1906, p.186). Therefore according to Federici, this "leads to a sense of dissociation from the body, which becomes reified, reduced to an object which the person ceases to be immediately identified" (Federici, 2004, p.135). Indeed the alienation from the body is functional to make acceptable wage labor in an era in which it did not yet constitute the normal work-relation. As Federici also points out: "The body, then, came to the foreground of social policies because it appeared not only as a beast inert to the stimuli of work, but also as the container of labor-power, a means of production, the primary work-machine" (137). The body is in fact the condition of existence of labor-power. This process of otherization and reification of the body is for Federici so crucial in the transition to capitalism that the author claims that instead of the steam engine or the clock, the body itself can be read as the machine developed by capitalism.

The aspect I find most important here is how the dissociation from the body is part of the enterprise of controlling and exploiting "nature" and how this enterprise follows the same patterns when alienating the "mind" from the "body" and the "human" from "nature". As described by Federici "Like the land, the body had to be cultivated and first of all broken up, so that it could relinquish its hidden treasures"(140). Cartesian dualism[8], that is Descartes's famous argument about the separation of mind and body, is at the root of both processes of alienation. As the Australian scholar Val Plumwood aptly describes in her work on *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, Cartesianism encouraged:

> "a strict and total division not only between mental and bodily activity, but between mind and nature and between human and animal. As mind becomes pure thought (…) body as its dualised other becomes pure matter, pure res extensa, materiality as lack. (…) The body and nature become the dualised other of the mind" (Plumwood, 2002, p. 115).

This philosophical enterprise does not only involve the cultural realm and it is deeply connected with the processes of scientific and economic transformation of that era, namely the rise of modern science and of capitalism. As the environmental historian Jason Moore suggested in *The Rise of Cheap Nature*[9], alienation from the body and nature can be read as the ideological support for turning "human activity into labor-power and land into property" and therefore part of the project of "putting the whole of nature to work for capital" (Moore, 2016, p.86). According to Moore,

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8   Even though the argument takes the name from the philosopher, bringing it into the discussion does not mean being particularly interested in Descartes's philosophy itself but rather in the scientific/ philosophical movement that he was part of and that he profoundly influenced.

9 The Rise of Cheap Nature is the third chapter of the book, edited by Jason Moore, *Anthropocene or   capitalocene?: Nature, history, and the crisis of capitalism*.

underlying the economical enterprise a mode of separation has worked as an ideological mechanism to legitimize the emerging capitalism. Indeed Cartisianism's mode of separation underlies the rise of the scientific method which is the basis of what is called modern sciences, and the birth modern sciences does not come separate from the historical colonial setting and the rise of the capitalistic economy in which it takes shape. Already from Francis Bacon's work, work that can be considered a precursor of the actual Galilean scientific method, one of the main features of scientific revolution is the shift from a contemplative observation of nature to an extractive, participant observation of it: through "vexation"[10] (Merchant, 2015), the aim of developing a new method of inquiry is to extract the secrets of nature for controlling it, predicting it, and exploiting it for the benefit of humankind. Therefore, since its beginning, the endeavor of modern science is not only to interpret the world but "to make ourselves as it were the masters and possessors of nature" (Descartes, 2006, p.51). As Jason Moore claims:

"the "new" imperialism of early modernity was impossible without a new way of seeing and ordering reality. One could conquer the globe only if one could see it. Here the early forms of external nature, abstract space, and abstract time enabled capitalists and empires to construct global webs of exploitation and appropriation, calculation and credit, property and profit, on an unprecedented scale" (Moore, 2016, p.109).

Mathematization and control over the world have been also made available by the invention and the spread of the clock and by new cartography which allowed new ways of mapping and calculating the world. On the one hand, linear time, counted and managed through the clock, has made possible the development of the industrial organization of the labor force. On the other hand, "space as pure quantity" (Biggs, 1999, p.377), namely abstract space made available by the development of cartography, have served to conquer and colonize the world. Therefore the emerging global economy has been made possible by a new conception of nature as severed from the human and by a new conception of time and space that allowed to conceive nature as a controllable and conquerable matter, a disposable background, and a profitable resource..

10   Bacon's project was to create a new method of inquiry that through "vexation", a term inherited from both alchemy and Inquisition, would extract the secrets of nature for controlling it, predicting it, exploit it for the benefit of humankind. The scholar Carolyn Merchant, in the book Autonomous Nature: Problems of Prediction and Control From Ancient Times to the Scientific Revolution, analyzing Bacon understanding of "vexation" writes: "Although Nature per se cannot speak, it is privy to the facts and knowledge (secrets) to be extracted. Nature must recognize the words of the questions put by the human examiner as written in"her" own language and must in turn give reliable, repeatable answers in that language. By analogy, the scientist designs an experiment in which nature is "put to the question" in a confined, controlled space in which the correct answers (secrets) can be extracted through inquisition"(Merchant, 2015). Hence, Bacon's work sets the stage for the experimental method. Shortly after Galilei will answer the question of the language of the emerging scientifical method as follows: 'The great book of nature,' he writes 'is written in mathematical language.' Simultaneously and mutually influenced, Descartes, along with the above-mentioned dualism, work on developing and purifying natural sciences method from ontological and logical "errors" and insist on the idea that it is not only about to interpret the world but "to make ourselves as it were the masters and possessors of nature".

As I mentioned at the beginning of this section the representation of the humans as the masters of nature and the consequent alienation of humanity from nature is intrinsically entagled to the representation of humanity as a homogeneous subject. As Rosi Braidotti highlights in her book *The Posthuman*, the notion of the Human that we use nowadays is a legacy of the Renaissance's Humanism and Cartesianism. The Cartesian subject of the cogito has bequeathed us an image of the Human as a universal model. However, this universal model is anything but universal. Since generated in the heart of Western culture, the model, emblematically represented in Leonardo da Vinci's Vitruvian Man, is a white, male, young, able body. As Braidotti points out: "The subject of Humanism makes an internally contradictory claim in order to support his sovereign position. He is simultaneously an abstract universal and very much the spokesman of an elite species" (Braidotti, 2013, p.67). Indeed, Humanism historically developed in the first wave of European colonialism and became the ideological support of mercantilism: Humanism developed as the civilizational model, which allowed European conquerors to portray themselves as the bearer of progress and the universal reason. According to Braidotti:

> "Central to this universalistic posture and its binary logic is the notion of 'difference' as pejoration. Subjectivity is equated with consciousness (...) whereas Otherness is defined as its negative and specular counterpart. In so far as difference spells inferiority, it acquires both essentialist and lethal connotations for people who get branded as 'others'. These are the sexualized, racialized, and naturalized others, who are reduced to the less than human status of disposable bodies."(15)

The notion of Human as the "rational animal", thus defined by the powers of his mind, fully alienated from his body, contradictory lies on a very specific body. Rationality is embodied by the white healthy man and every other subjectivity is constructed on a hierarchical scale as closer to brute matter and from Humanism on, to nature. All these others have been excluded by the notion of Humanity and therefore naturalized, reified, and perceived as part of that disposable "Nature" that needed to be studied in order to be put to work. It is symbolic of these processes of naturalization, the fact, reported by Moore, that the Spaniards' referred to Peru's indigenous peoples as "naturales".

To conclude this section, the representation of humanity as separated from the body and from nature and the representation of humanity as homogeneous are historically entangled and these entangled representation are the result of the birth of capitalist society. Through the Cartesian alienation of the body and modern science's "materialization" of nature the emerging capitalist society constructed a depiction of the human that worked as a ideological support for coloniazation, slavery and all the most brutal forms of exploitation and control over naturalized human and other-than-human beings.

Deconstructing the Anthropocene

In the previous section I traced the genealogy of the concept of humanity stressing on the connection between the representation of humanity as a homogeneous subject and the representation of humanity as separated from nature. In this section I will highlight how such problematic understanding of humanity also underlies the narratives around the ecological crisis. Indeed similarly to the pandemic, the ecological crisis also mobilizes a global subject. As in the discourses about the pandemic, in those concerning the ecological crisis humanity emerges as a "we" equally affected and equally responsible. The main "other" opposed to this "we" is in this case not an enemy to be fought, like in the case of the virus. It is a reified, external, and passive planet that needs to be paternalistically saved by humanity. While concerning the pandemic, the rhetorical call for human unity mainly works as a diversion from the unequal distribution of the crisis' impact among people , regarding the ecological crisis, the focus is until now more on the responsibilities that human activity has on the planet. Indeed the rhetoric of human unity is mainly mobilized to draw attention to human responsibilities. Hence, while the virus allows to point an external enemy and detract from the human culpability, in the case of the ecological crisis the causes of the problem are more evidently connected to human activity.

When it comes to human responsibility in the ecological crisis, the concept of the Anthropocene might be an interesting narrative to analyze. In the early 1980s, University of Michigan ecologist Eugene Stoermer coined the term combinating *anthropo-* from *anthropos* meaning in Ancient Greek "human" and *-cene* from *kainos* meaning in Ancient Greek "new" or "recent". The world Anthropocene however became famous when the Dutch Nobel Prize-winning atmospheric chemist Paul Crutzen joined Stoermer to propose it to designate a new geological era. Indeed the term means "the epoch of humanity" highlighting how human impact on Earth is so significant that can be seen as a geological force. According to the theory of the Anthropocene, the epoch that we exist in today is not anymore the Holocene, as currently accepted in the geology nomenclature, but the Anthropocene, the human epoch. The proposal to adopt the term has clear political implications and as soon as it reached popularity in the public debate outside the field of geology, the Anthropocene theory has been criticized from different points of view, opening de facto a debate about the human as a unitary homogeneous subject and as separated from nature.

Concerning the debate developed around the theory of the Anthropocene, one of the main criticisms of this theory consist of highlight how describing humanity as undifferentiated whole, the Anthropocene diverts the attention from political choices that have caused the ecological crisis. As the Métis anthropologist Zoe Todd and the scholar Heather Davis in their article "*On the Importance of a Date, or Decolonizing the Anthropocene*" write "the ecocidal logics that now

govern our world are not inevitable or 'human nature', but are the result of a series of decisions"
(Davis & Todd, 2017, p.763). According to them, such decisions have their origin in capitalism and
colonization and for this reason, in their article, Davis and Todd are concerned in suggesting the
start of colonization as the beginning of the Anthropocene in order to name colonialism as directly
responsible for the current environmental crisis. A similar claim is made by the environmental
historian Jason Moore, author of *Anthropocene or Capitalocene? Nature, History, and the Crisis of
Capitalism.* Moore has made famous the term Capitalocene, coined by Andreas Malm, pointing out
how "[i]nequality, commodification, imperialism, patriarchy, racism and much more – all have been
cleansed from 'Humanity', the Anthropocene's point of departure" (Moore, 2017, p.3-4) According
to Moore the idea that this epochal shift is driven by the Anthropos, namely by humanity as an
undifferentiated whole separate from nature, is a comforting story that detracts attention from the
historical process that caused the ecological crisis. The term Capitalocene is therefore meant to
"capture the basic historical pattern modern of world history as the "Age of Capital"—and the era
of capitalism as a world-ecology of power, capital, and nature"(Moore, 2016, p.6). This term has
also been taken up by the feminist philosopher Donna Haraway who in her book *Staying with the
Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* writes: "[I]f we could only have one word for these (...)
times, surely it must be the Capitalocene" (Haraway, 2016, p.47). However, Haraway observes that
Capitalocene, indicating capitalism as the source of the crisis and placing capital at the core of this
epochal shift, is strongly embedded with orthodox Marxist understanding of Modernity, Progress,
and History. Therefore while the term is extremely appropriate to condemn capitalism, it is for her
insufficient for the purpose of rethinking history beyond anthropocentrism. For this reason,
Haraway proposes another rewording[11]: the Chthulucene. Spelled Chthulu, instead of Cthulhu (H.
P. Lovecraft's misogynist racial monster) the Chthulucene takes its name from the spider *Pimoa
chthulhu* that inspired Haraway's 'tentacular thinking':

> "Unlike the dominant dramas of Anthropocene and Capitalocene discourse, human beings
> are not the only important actors in the Chthulucene, with all other beings able simply to
> react. The order is reknitted: human beings are with and of the earth, and the biotic and
> abiotic powers of this earth are the main story" (55).

To summarize all these critiques are meant to highlight the problematic narrative of humanity that
underlies the Anthropocene: David and Todd as well as Haraway and Moore indeed problematize
on the one hand the representation of humanity as homogeneous, without inequalities and power

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11   There are many rewording and reworking of the term Anthropocene. I am only exploring Capitalocene and
Chthulucene because they are more related to my topic. To explore further see: Anthrobscene (Parikka 2014),
Econocene (Norgaard 2013), Technocene (Hornborg 2015), Misanthropocene (Patel 2013), Manthropocene (Raworth
2014) Plantationcene (Haraway 2016). Eurocene (Grove 2016) White Supremacy Scene (Mirzoeff 2016).

relations and on the other the representation of humanity as separated from nature, and as the only agent of history. As I tried to show in the previous section of this chapter the representation of humanity as homogeneous and as separated from nature are historically entangled. However, these two aspects and their entanglement do not only concern the historical process through which the concept of humanity took shape but as tried to show, presenting the criticisms of Anthropocene, they inform the current narratives around the ecological crisis. What I want to add to these arguments now is how the separation from nature operationalizes inequalities in the current context. As the scholar Kathryn Yusoff in her "*A Bilion Black Anthropocene or none*" argues "the border in the division of materiality (and its subjects) as inhuman and human, and thus as inert or agentic matter, operationalizes race"[12] (Yusoff, 2018, p.14). Indeed as Yusoff explains, facilitating the separation between subjects as humans and subjects priced as flesh, the division between human and inhuman (or matter, or nature) underlies and materializes the categories of exclusion that are at the root of inequalities. Therefore Yussof states: "coloniality and anti-Blackness are materially inscribed into the Anthropocene" (29*)*.

Deconstructing the Anthropocene however leads to question what type of narratives are needed instead to tackle the ecological crisis. While this aspect will be deepened in the following chapters, the critical engagement with Anthropocene provide already some useful insights.As Davis and Todd note:

> "what settler colonialism, and its extensions into contemporary petrocapitalism, does is a severing of relations. It is a severing of relations between humans and the soil, between plants and animals, between minerals and our bones. This is the logic of the Anthropocene. This is the logic that has resulted in the amalgamation of conditions that ask us to consider what we are writing into the body of the earth"(Davis & Todd, 2017, p.770).

To conclude this section, if it is to rewrite narratives to tackle the ecological crisis, to critically engage with the concept of humanity and its exclusions is a good starting point but it is not sufficient. It is necessary to approach the Others of humanity, the body, and the earth, and rebuild these severed relations.

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12   "The human and its subcategory, the inhuman, are historically relational to a discourse of settler-colonial rights and the material practices of extraction, which is to say that the categorization of matter is a spatial execution, of place, land, and person cut from relation through geographic displacement (and relocation through forced settlement and transatlantic slavery). That is, racialization belongs to a material categorization of the division of matter (corporeal and mineralogical) intoactive and inert". (Yosuff, 2019)

Chapter 2

Care: essential, life-making, devalued

This research thesis inquires into the connection between the Covid-19 pandemic and the ecological crisis. While in the first chapter the focus was laid by me on the global scale of these crises, in this second chapter I will try to show how the crucial role played by care during the pandemic can be a fruitful tool to also approach some of our problems with attending to the ecological crisis. In the first part of this chapter, I will describe the central role that care has played globally during the pandemic: while being conventionally seen as part of the "low-skilled" activities, care-work emerged, during the pandemic, as essential to the reproduction of life, interrogating the legitimacy of that skills-hierarchy. In the second part, I will deepen three aspects that help me to connect the problem of care in the contemporary pandemic situation to the ecological crisis. The first is my own understanding of what care is; the second is the genealogy of the devaluation of care in the socio-political contexts we are living on a global scale; and the third is the connection between this genealogy to the historical process of dispossession of common land in the rise of the capitalistic system of production. In this last part, I will try to answer the question of why the matter of care is relevant in view of the ecological crisis: delving into the ecofeminist perspective, I will show how the comprehension of care can be further extended considering life and its reproduction beyond the human. Indeed, focusing on *earthcare*, I will explore what I will call "its double dimension": on the one the invisibilized and feminized care towards the Earth and on the other hand the essential role that Earth and ecosystems play in the reproduction and preservation of (not only) human life. In the end, I will point this double dimension as a useful tool to start rethinking ecology's narratives and strategies.

Covid-19: collective vulnerability and the crucial role of care

In 2013 Joan Tronto writes: "Let's face it: care no longer seems to be "at home"" (Tronto, 2013, p.1). Indeed, as Tronto observed, during the twentieth century care increasingly left the household (although never reaching the full form) and went through a process of professionalization[13]. This process of professionalization led to the establishment of many institutions outside the home meant to accomplish caring activities that used to be met in the home: hospices, schools, hospitals, nursing homes, care facilities for disabled people, and so on. During the Covid crisis and due to the containment measures this crisis brought to the fore, the reverse movement could be observed: care-

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13   However, it is important to notice how the conventional gendered connotation that characterizes care-work
     has not changed by professionalization. I will deepen this gendered connotation in the next section.

work came back to the house. One of the first measures adopted almost everywhere in the first wave was the closure of schools. Children and teenagers, who used to spend most of their time at school or outdoor with their peers, were forced to be all day in their house with their family. Their lessons were moved from the classroom's physical and shared space to online platforms where teachers continued the educational program on video-call. Such displacement caused first of all the intensification of social inequalities among young people: in fact, the access to education became dependent on the availability of technological devices, quiet spaces to study, and good connection. Even in the best-case scenarios, material childcare was fully entrusted to parents that in the meanwhile were expected to work from home. A similar process happened with regard to elderly people's care. Since they are the category at-risk par excellence, in many cases and mostly when they did not live in a hospice, families decided to reduce social contacts and asked part-time caregivers and cleaners to take the lockdown period as time off. That has led to the fact that the family had to replace this care-work. Moreover, since hospitals were full, authorities suggested to people affected by Covid to stay home for as long as they could. This meant that household members took up, in these cases, the caring for the quarantining person. In general, the amount of care-work needed in every house and entrusted to unpaid people increased because of these factors but also because the house became the main space where life endured. The return of care-work in the household during the pandemic tells us something crucial about care in general: domestic work is still invisible and devalued and the family is still understood as the social unit responsible for care.

On the flip side of this return of care-work to the "private" space of the house, a public figure emerged as crucial in the management of the crisis: the so-called "essential worker". Nurses, cleaners, carers, cookers, food deliveries, supermarket cashiers, agricultural workers, and so on became the heroes of the crisis. Conventionally seen as "low-skilled" (Bergfeld and Farris, 2020) activities, these jobs are often underpaid and reserved for racialized and disposable populations. Indeed, native-born workers do not want to engage in the DDD (Dirty, Dangerous and Demanding) and CCC (Caring, Cooking and Cleaning) activities because they are considered degrading, demeaning and they are usually low-paid (Bergfeld and Farris, 2020). However, during the pandemic, these professions all of a sudden turn into being seen as essential and into being surrounded by the rhetoric of heroism. Therefore, as Mark Bergfeld and Sara Farris observe in their article "The COVID-19 Crisis and the End of the "Low-skilled" Worker*", "this crisis is interrogating the legitimacy of that skills-hierarchy that places at the bottom all those skills and jobs that are necessary for the reproduction of life and society" (Bergfeld and Farris, 2020). As the scholars report in their study, the British ONS classifies skills-levels in terms of how long it takes to

develop the ability to perform a certain profession. Thus, the fact that those "essential jobs" are categorized as "low-skilled" means that interpersonal, relational, and care skills that are necessary for those sectors are understood as in no need of training, they are natural, everybody can do them apparently. This shows how these work forms are invisibilized and taken for granted. However, those professions or activities that I will call "life-making jobs[14]", following Tithi Bhattacharya's definition, are impossible to automate (at least in regard to care work). And, as emerged in the pandemic, "without them, the reproduction of life, simply stated, is not possible" (Bergfeld and Farris, 2020). Indeed, in daily life and even more so during our current pandemic global condition, everyone needs someone to clean the house (but also the workplaces, hospitals, and so on), to do the groceries but also to sell it, to prepare breakfast, lunch and dinner but also to prepare it and to deliver it, to clean clothes, to educate kids, to help elderly people, sick people, disabled people and whoever needs assistance.

Yet, even though a big part of care-work returned to the domestic space, understanding reproductive labor in a wider sense leads to notice that all care jobs were the ones who couldn't go online in the pandemic because they are, in our system, materially necessary for the reproduction and maintenance of embodied life and therefore of society. This material "essentiality" of life-making jobs, the societal reliance on these workers tells us something crucial about vulnerability and interdependence. During the Covid crisis, even the supposedly healthy, able-bodied, independent adult subject became vulnerable due to the constant possibility to contract the virus. Moreover, the pandemic brought to the fore how everyone is evidently reliant on life-making workers. As Naomi Klein phrased it in an interview when asked about the conditions of care during the covid-19 crisis: "The labor of care is so denigrated, devalued and trashed. We don't want to admit we are interdependent, we never want to admit our success is not only our own. Our interdependency is being made visible for better or worse" (Colón Núñez, 2020). Invisibilization and devaluation of care are indeed based on an understanding of self-reliance and health that can be seen as totally misleading. Indeed, as disability studies highlight the healthy able body is understood as the normalcy. Such a depiction produces an understanding of reliance (on others, on medications, on prosthetics, and so on) and of vulnerability as an exceptional status. As Johanna Hedva writes, in her "Sick Woman Theory", "conceiving of wellness as the default, as the standard mode of existence, (...) *invents illness as temporary"*(Hedva, 2016). And if vulnerability is framed as temporary, the need for care is portrayed as only required sometimes by specific subjects. Indeed according to Hedva "when being sick is an abhorrence to the norm, it *allows us to conceive of care and support in the same way"* (Hedva, 2016). In the context of the pandemic that implies, on the

14   https://www.plutobooks.com/blog/deepening-our-understanding-of-social-reproduction-theory/

one hand, that vulnerable subjects' care is not understood as a societal affair but as an individual (or familial) problem and it becomes as such because the most vulnerable people (or their families) are left with the individual (or familial) taking charge of it. On the other hand, everyone becomes evidently vulnerable and evidently interdependent. In a way, this tragic moment sheds light on the fact that "existence in a body (...) is primarily and always vulnerable" and "continuously reliant on infrastructures of support in order to endure" (Hedva, 2016). Therefore as such an approach to embodiment clearly states, the body is defined by its vulnerability, rather than being temporarily affected by it. This understanding shifts the focus from an understanding of vulnerability as "lack" (of health, of self-reliance) to the lacking assumption of responsibility for everyone's care by the neoliberal system. I am addressing specifically the neoliberal system because this misleading representation of vulnerability and consequent devaluation of social reproduction and care is not incidental. Rather it is a prerequisite of? the capitalistic system of production. As Bergfeld and Farris explain:

> "The current crisis has thus revealed the contradictory nature of so-called low-skilled and life-making work. Capitalism continuously seeks to devalue this type of work. However, as an economic and social system, capitalism depends on life-making both as a source of profit (as in the case of agribusiness) and as a source of nourishment and health for its workers (as in the case of food production/distribution and in that of care work)" (Bergfeld and Farris, 2020).

Framing the need for care as exceptional, enables the individualization of responsibility for care and the above-mentioned skill-hierarchy. Individualization and skill-hierarchy allow capital to pay as little as possible for care-work, while actually fully depending on it.

Devaluation of care-work: a Marxist feminist genealogy

In the following I want to deepen now three aspects that help me to connect the crucial role of care that emerged during the current global pandemic to what is called in this thesis "the ecological crisis". The first aspect I want to explicate is my own understanding of what is care, the second aspect of care is the genealogy of its devaluation, the third is the connection between this genealogy to the historical process of dispossession of common land in the rise of the capitalistic system of production.

The perspective from which I am approaching care is first of all the Marxist feminist one. Since the International Wages for Housework Campaign (IWFHC) started in the 1970s in the UK, Marxist feminist activists stress the crucial role of domestic labor in society. Claiming for recognition of housework as work and asking for a wage, they highlighted how Marxist traditional analyzes of

capital misses an account of how the capitalistic system of production depends on what they called "reproductive" labor. Marxism pointed out how capitalism works exploiting the labor force alienating the worker from the means of production and forcing to sell herself on the labor market. However, it underrated the way that the worker and her labor force is produced and maintained, namely reproduction (both in a narrow sense and in wider understanding). While "domestic labor" or "housework" are specifically referring to the reproductive labor carried out in the house, terms like "social reproduction" (or "reproductive labor") and "care" (or "care-work") allow taking into account not only the domestic sphere but also the infrastructures that maintain life and produces the workers outside the house. Indeed, as Bhattacharya highlights:

> "Labor power is not simply replenished at home, nor is it always reproduced generationally. The family may form the site of individual renewal of labor power, but that alone does not explain "the conditions under which, and . . . the habits and degree of comfort in which" the working class of any particular society has been produced" (Bhattacharya, 2017, p.7).

Indeed public education, healthcare systems, hospices, nursing homes, care facilities for disabled people, leisure facilities in the community, and so on contribute to maintaining life and produce the workforce. Although I think that social reproduction is a fruitful expression, between this term and "care" I decided to use mainly care in this thesis, because of two reasons: First, in Marx's own writing, the term social reproduction is most often used to designate the reproduction of the capitalist society as a whole. Even though Johanna Brenner and Barbara Laslett (Brenner and Lanslett, 1991) suggested a useful distinction between societal and social reproduction in order to discern these two meanings entangled in the term, I think that the most interesting aspect of "social reproduction" is precisely that it allows referring to both and their inextricable linkage. Keeping in mind this linkage it's part of my understanding: indeed reproduction of life is always in my perspective also reproduction of society as a whole. Yet the term is too vast and often it does not allow the precision needed. Secondly, care comes from the Latin *cura*. *Cura* in my own native language, Italian, means both cure and care, highlighting the essential entanglement between healing and support, and material life-making, between affective and emotional labor and material endurance and maintenance. This specific shade is also aptly described by Maria Puig de la Bellacasa when in *Matters of Care*, she describes the connection between the word "concern" and "care". Both coming from cura,

> "as affective states, concern, and care are related. But care has stronger affective and ethical connotations. We can think on the difference between affirming "I am concerned" and "I care." The first denotes worry and thoughtfulness about an issue as well as, though not necessarily, the fact of belonging to the collective of those concerned, "affected" by it; the second adds a

strong sense of attachment and commitment to something. Moreover, the quality of "care" is to be more easily turned into a verb: to care. One can make oneself concerned, but "to care" contains a notion of doing that concern lacks. (de La Bellacasa, 2017, p.42)

Indeed, as de la Bellacasa highlights, care is a material concrete doing that involves a strong affective connotation. This affective connotation can be both a capitalistic trap and a way out from capitalism. It is a trap because historically it allowed conceiving unwaged work as love duty for women. Already in the 1970s, Silvia Federici's *Wage against housework* showed that one of the pitfalls of 1970's Wages for Housework Campaign, starts with that "They say it is love. We say it is unwaged work" (Federici, 1975, p.15). Indeed, domestic work has been imposed on women with the subtle idea that caring for the family is an act of love, a natural attribute of the female body and personality. It has been naturalized transforming the marriage "for love" in the main female aspiration. Its confinement in the "private" space of the house, understood in opposition to the "public" space of the workplace, allowed to deny domestic labor as work and therefore to exploit it. Or as Bhattacharya explains:

"Capitalism, (...) acknowledges productive labor for the market as the sole form of legitimate "work," while the tremendous amount of familial as well as communitarian work that goes on to sustain and reproduce the worker, or more specifically her labor power, is naturalized into nonexistence" (Bhattacharya, 2017, p.2).

However, as I mentioned affective connotation offers also ways out from capitalistic commodification of life. Since, a big part of care-work is carried out in the "private" sphere, unlike the workers' in the "legitimate" workplace, care-workers' use of resources and time is not constantly monitored by managers or masters. This gives them that much extra leeway to experiment with new ways of being. Therefore, care-work

inspires a psycho-social investment that (...) contradicts and exceeds the discipline required to produce workers for capitalism. People's investment in meeting human need occurs on the individual level all the time. We sleep in, call in sick when we are not sick, have non-reproductive sex, teach our children to stand up to authority, and so on. But we also meet needs collectively, coming together to help each other, and to make demands on the state and capital for better access to the resources of life[15].

This aspect is one of the biggest reasons why I am so interested in care: on the one hand its historical gendered devaluation which led to classify this essential activity as "low-skilled" and which has made the demand for a domestic wage one of the main battlefield of 1970's feminist

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15   https://www.plutobooks.com/blog/deepening-our-understanding-of-social-reproduction-theory/

activists; on the other the creative potential that a collective undertaking of care seems to have, as these last quote explains.

In order to show the connection of care to the ecological crisis, I need to first briefly trace the genealogy of care's devaluation in its connection with land dispossession. In Europe, the phenomenon that was called by Marx "primitive accumulation" (Marx, 1906) and in particular the dispossession of common land, situated in the transition from Middle-age society (subsistence economy) to the capitalistic one (monetary economy), constitutes one of the major causes of the separation between workers and the means of production. And as Federici also highlights, also between workers and means of subsistence (Federici, 2004). Land privatization caused the pauperization of European peasantry who migrated to the cities and became the new working class. As Federici tells so clearly in her book *Caliban and the Witch*, this led to an important population decline that alerted the dominant classes and caused the intervention of the State in the reproduction of the labor force. The first main step of this intervention consists in the introduction of public assistance. As Federici writes, the introduction of public assistance "was the first recognition of the *unsustainability* of a capitalist system ruling exclusively by means of hunger and terror. It was also the first step in the reconstruction of the state as the guarantor of the class relation and as the chief supervisor of the reproduction and disciplining of the work-force" (Federici, 2004, p.84). The second main step of the intervention in the reproduction of life is what Federici calls a "true war against women" (88). According to her, the female body has been transformed into a machine for reproduction and maintenance of the labor-force through the convergence of several policies: the witch-hunting, the criminalization of contraception, abortion and prostitution, the feminization of care-work, and the definition of women as non-workers. Concerning the last aspect, Merry Wiesner tells in her book *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe* that the idea that women should not work outside the house, and should get involved in the production only to support their husbands was gaining ground in the law, tax records, and so on. Weisner also reports how any work that women did in their houses was considered "non-work" even when made for the market (Wiesner, 2019). The criminalization of prostitution and the expulsion of proletarian women from the legitimate workplace are therefore two sides of the same coin: they are both policies aimed to invent the full-time housewife as the female normality and to impose the family as the locus for the reproduction of life, namely the production of labor-force. It is important to explicit here that while the invention of the full-time housewife concern European women in general, the "expulsion" of women from the labor market and the criminalization of prostitution mainly concerns proletarian poor women. Indeed, poor women, dispossessed of the commons lands that ensured their subsistence during Middle-age, became proletarian, and, as well as proletarian men, they migrated

to cities in order to get a salary to survive. However, on the contrary of men, through several policies that I already mentioned, proletarian women have been expelled from the labor market, returning to workplaces as underpaid workers only at a later stage of capitalism.

As also Federici points out: "proletarian women became for male workers the substitute for the land lost to the enclosures, their most basic means of reproduction, and a communal good anyone could appropriate and use at will"(97). If in the Middle-age the access to common lands ensured poor people's survival providing them livelihood and food security, in the emergent capitalist society the only source that guarantees proletarians' suvival is the possibility to sell their own labor-force. Hence, the only "property" that the proletarians own is their own body. With the expulsion of women from labor-market, the work of production and the maintenance of labor-force has been fully entrusted to proletarian women. The result of this work of production, reproduction and maintenance has been appropriated by proletarian men as a natural resource substituting de facto the livelihood provided in the Middle-age by common lands. Indeed since "women's activities were defined as non-work, women's labor began to appear as a natural resource, available to all, no less than the air we breathe or the water we drink" (97).

 To conclude this short genealogy, I want to highlight two last aspects that in my opinion deserve further attention: First, it needs to be underlined that the fact that discriminating sexual division of labor existed even before the advent of capitalism, does not detract from Federici's genealogy of devaluation of feminized care-work in the transition from the Middle-age economy to the capitalistic one. Indeed, it is necessary to identify the fundamental difference between pre-capitalist and capitalist female subordination. The first existed, but it was consistently mitigated by the access to the "natural resources" and the commons; in the second phase women themselves became the "natural resources" and the commons. Second, I think it is important to remember that this connection between land (or "natural resources", or commons) dispossession and reduction of people (here specifically women) to "natural resource" does not only concern European proletarian women but it has also been the scourge of indigenous and enslaved people. However, the similarity of these processes does not mean similarity in the intensity of violence. Even though the subjugation of European proletarian women was due to witch-hunting anything but gentle and peaceful, the wider extent and intensity of colonization violence does not allow simplistic comparisons. Given that, modes of subjection of women and colonized people have not only the same roots and a similar structure, but they also share the ideological support that allowed such violence: indeed both colonized people and women had to be demonized and de-humanized in order to become natural resources to be exploited.

The double direction of Earthcare

In this section, I will finally try to answer the question of why the matter of care is relevant in view of the ecological crisis. As I explained in this chapter up to here, the choice of terms such as social reproduction and care already pinpoint to an understanding that goes beyond mere domestic labor. However, the comprehension of care can be further extended considering life and its reproduction beyond the human. As the works of feminist care-scholars such as Silvia Federici, Mariarosa Dalla Costa, and Carolyn Merchant highlight, the centrality of reproduction can also extend well beyond human care "to account for socio-ecological processes that make life possible" (Tola, 2016, p.117). Indeed care for the land, ecological conservation, and so on are essential to human and other-than-human life. Daily caring practices and life-making activities also involve what Merchant has called "earthcare" (Merchant, 1996). In her book *Earthcare: Women and the environment* Merchant underlines how such practices are once again mainly entrusted to women and colonized subjects. While capitalist extractivism destroys ecosystems, women and in particular "Women in the Third World are thus playing an essential role in conservation. (...) They are working to maintain their own life-support systems through forest and water conservation, to rebuild soil fertility, and to preserve ecological diversity" (Merchant, 1996, p.24). *Earthcare* contains numerous examples of the feminization of environmental care and women's involvement in ecological conservation processes and struggles. Like many ecofeminists, Merchant draws attention to the connection between women and nature, pointing that daily feminized caring practices involve an intimate knowledge and co-operation with nature. Therefore, she calls for tackling the ecological crisis by developing a "partnership ethic of earthcare" (Merchant, 1996) inspired by women's daily experience of care. Aware of the accusations of essentialism that have discredited ecofeminism, Merchant underlines how the relationship between women and nature she draw the attention on, is a socio-material one based on women's experience: "women's mothering and caregiving work mediates the relationship between people and nature and thereby engenders a caring stance towards nature" (Mac Gregor, 2011, p.4). Similar connections are drawn by other ecofeminist scholars: Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva (1993), Ariel Salleh (1997) Mary Mellor (1992, 1997, 2000) all call attention to women's caring practices and their fundamental contribution to environmental maintenance. As Sherylin Mac Gregor summarizes: "[E]ach of these writers presents a picture of ecofeminism that is built not on abstract theorizing but, rather, on what women do - indeed, have always done - to survive the vicissitudes of capitalist-patriarchal-colonial development" (Mac Gregor, 2011, p.4). I think that what is relevant here is that the socially assigned role of women as care-workers and therefore the feminization and devaluation of care-work does not only concern the reproduction of human life. Rather, since human life is interwoven in the web of life (human and

non-human), devalued life-making activities regard much more than the sole reproduction and maintenance of the life of the human species. Care concerns also all those activities of reproduction and maintenance of the web of life that make human life possible.

The traditional understanding of the term "earthcare" refers to the feminized care-work of preserving ecosystems: "earthcare" is conceived as the care that humans (mainly women and colonized people) do *for* and *towards* the earth. However, I want now to suggest here a bit of a wider understanding of earthcare as it indeed can be seen in a "double direction" or a "double dimension". Addressing this double direction what I try to point out is how it can not only be identified as a consistent part of care-work – care *for* the earth – , but also how the earth, understood not only as passive nature or matter but rather as a living being and as an agent, plays an important role in the reproduction of life. Indeed reproduction and mantainance of (human and other-than-human) life is impossible without the active process of material support and regenration that Earth *does towards life*. Therefore *earthcare* can be seen as a term that refers to a mutual relationship between caring human and more-than-human subjects. While despite the destroying logic of capitalism there are still humans preserving ecosystems, reproducing other-than-human life, and caring for the earth, it is essential to observe that ecosystems preserve and ensure human life as well. The ecofeminist endeavor to reclaim Gaia, Mother Earth, or the Andean deity Pachamama can be useful tools to displace the human subject in the eco-social process of reproduction of life. As Vandana Shiva[16] argues in the book *Earth Democracy* (2006), the Indian philosophy of Vasudhaiv Kutumbakam, the "Earth family" (which for her is the community of beings supported by "Mother Earth") is a fruitful narrative that allows to rethink Earth rather than as dead matter, as a living community that includes human beings. Indeed in the preface of the 2016 edition, Shiva reports the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother adopted in April 2010 by the World People's Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth, in Bolivia, which explicit very clearly the interpretation of Earth as a living and caring agent. Hence, Article 1 states: "1. Mother Earth is a living being. 2. Mother Earth is a unique indivisible, self-regulating community of interrelated beings that sustains, contains and reproduces all beings" (Shiva, 2016, p.xxvii) However, other feminist scholars highlighted many problematic aspects of the concept of "Mother Earth" and I want to briefly expose them now in order to clarify why I bring to the conversation this concept and what aspects are relevant to understand my perspective. Two criticisms of "Mother Earth" are thus relevant to this purpose. First, as Merchant observes "If Gaia is a self-regulating homeostatic system, then "she" can correct problems caused by humans or even find humans expendable" (Merchant, 1996, p.4). Second, the concept of Mother Earth, while pointing out the

16   Vandana Shiva is one of the most famous ecofeminist voices endorsing the concept of "Mother Earth".

invisible support that earth does for humans, uncritically ties care to motherhood and womanhood, reproducing and reinforcing the feminization of care that historically has served its devaluation. Therefore, due to those problematic aspects, I do not endorse the idea of the earth as a maternal whole. Nevertheless I think that the concept of "mother earth" draws attention to the caring nature of the earth. Moreover, concerning the second criticism ecofeminist feminization of earth is not unaware of the gendered history of care-work but rather it is precisely meant to indicate a significant aspect that earthcare and feminized care-work have in common: its devaluation. Indeed, as Dalla Costa writes not only women and racialized/colonized people but also the earth have been both "considered zero-cost natural resources, and treated as machines for the production of labour and food as commodities" (Dalla Costa, 2007, p.108).

Mirroring the understanding of the body and the earth as raw materials that I described in the first chapter, earthcare and care-work are invisibilized and rendered free of charge resources. The first step to disrupt this narrative is to consider the earth as a living being and the support to life that earth ensures as a caring activity, a living process. Ecofeminist reflections on *earthcare* and *Mother Earth* complicate the conventional understanding of care in this regard, allowing narratives that, despite their problem aspects, are forcing us to reconsider our interconnectedness and our role in the web of life. To conclude this chapter, if Covid-19 shed light on the crucial role of care for our lives, a further exploration of this role leads to rethink care beyond the human stimulating a different approach to tackle some of our problems with attending to the ecological crisis.

Chapter 3

Beyond the individual: more than human care in times of crisis

This chapter aims to deconstruct the narrative of individual responsibility mobilized to deal with both the ecological crisis and the pandemic and to propose an alternative imaginary to rethink care in times of crisis.

In the first section I deepen the narrative of individual responsibility and the pandemic and I show how such a narrative is the other side of the coin of the rhetoric of being *all together* in these crises. Regarding the pandemic, I argue how the call for individual responsibility works as a diversion from the controversial priorities of neoliberal management of this crisis. Concerning the ecological crisis I show how such call is used to offer comfortable individual solutions without stopping the systemic ecological violence inherent to the capitalist mode of production.

In the second section, in order to deconstruct the individual subject at the core of the narrative of individual responsibility, I expand on body vulnerability and interdependence highlighting how the body is continuously reliant on infrastructures of support in order to endure. Focusing then, on corporeal embeddedness with technology, I delve into more-than-human interconnectedness discussing an understanding of "more-than-human" that goes beyond what is conventionally understood as alive and natural.

In the third section, I propose an alternative narrative that leads to rethink the political praxis to tackle the ecological crisis. Indeed suggesting to read the planet as a body and the care of the body as a limit to exploitation, I point out how care for the Earth and care for the body can be read as a form of resistance to the system that brought the planet into these global crises.

Individual responsibility in the narrative around the pandemic and the ecological crisis

During the pandemic, as I explored in the second chapter, care has been perceived, despite the globality of the crisis, as an individual issue rather than a societal affair. In this section I will deepen this aspect showing how in the narratives around both Covid-19 and the ecological crises, the downside of the rhetoric of being *all together* is in fact the individualization of responsibility. Indeed the pandemic as well as the ecological crisis, together with the global human subject, mobilize the individual subject through the rhetoric of individual responsibility.

Concerning the pandemic, as Paul B. Preciado has observed in his article *Learning from the virus (2020)* there are mainly two different strategies that have been adopted by countries to confront the crisis. The first strategy - initially adopted in Wuhan, China, then in Italy, Spain, and France, and later in most European countries and the US - consisted of the home confinement of the citizens.

This "lockdown" strategy works by "strict spatial partitioning, the closing of towns and outlying districts, a prohibition against leaving the area. Everyone is ordered to stay indoors. If it is necessary to leave the house, it will be done by one person at a time, avoiding any meeting" (Preciado, 2020). According to Preciado's description, despite inequalities in the access to technology, the continuation of economic activities is guaranteed by technological devices and infrastructures. Indeed, the pervasiveness of information and communication technologies allows some people to work, to consume, to learn, to access entertainment, to maintain social relations, and so on without leaving their living-rooms. Since the problem was the physical contact between bodies, the lockdown strategy aimed to erase the encounter between bodies, seeking to move every social contact in the virtual space. The second strategy involved keeping track of the virus through medical and social surveillance and it was applied in Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Japan. As Preciado summarizes: "the emphasis here is on the individual detection of the viral load through the multiplication of tests and constant digital surveillance of patients through their mobile devices. Cell phones and credit cards become surveillance tools that allow close tracking of individual bodies that may be carrying the virus" (Preciado, 2020). Despite the differences between the two strategies, they are both designed around the individual. One the one hand, isolation as a protection strategy frames social contact as dangerous. This leads to the point of view that individual safety is guaranteed as much as a person avoids gathering with other people. Indeed, avoiding gathering is understood as an act of individual responsibility that it is needed to protect themselves and consequently the community. On the other hand, the second strategy is equally designed around the surveillance of the individual body. Even though a moral connotation is less marked than in the first strategy, the second strategy as much as the first is based on the individualization of responsibility.

As Henry A. Giroux observes in his analysis of the pandemic neoliberal governments and consequently media have "relentlessly insisted that all social problems are a matter of individual responsibility so as to depoliticize the public, rendering them indifferent to the politically and morally irresponsible claim that the government has no obligations to care for its citizens"(Evans, 2020, p.33). Indeed in the context of this crisis, the individualization of responsibility works as a diversion from the (necro)political choices and from the controversial priorities of neoliberal management of the pandemic. Translating systemic issues into private troubles, the neoliberal ideology suggests individual disciplining as the only way out to overcome the Covid catastrophe.

Individual responsibility has been called into account not only in the narrative around the pandemic but also around the ecological crisis. Concerning the latter, Sally Eden observes: "individual environmental responsibility has been used by business and government in promoting public

environmentalism through, for example, green consumerism, passive membership of environmental groups, and domestic recycling"(Eden, 1993 p.1743). According to Eden, both business' promotional advertisements and governments campaigns promote feelings of individual responsibility using a narrative that draws attention to the impact of individual behavior. This narrative incites people to seek the fulfillment of their environmental sympathies and responsibilities in individual practices and in purchasing, rather than in political collective acts (Eden, 1993). Far from denying the usefulness of practices such as recycling, going vegan, using reusable bottles instead of plastic ones and so on, what I try to point out here is how the individual approach divert attention from corporations' past and present impact on the planet, and, giving the feeling of innocence to individuals, act as a deterrent for collective grassroots political action. Therefore the call for individual responsibility is used to offer comfortable individual solutions without stopping the systemic ecological violence inherent to the capitalist mode of production.

While this section is already showing individual responsibility limitations and inadequacies to deal with both crises, it is not yet clear which narrative I am proposing instead. The next chapter, while deepening the deconstruction of the individual subject, lays the foundation for a new narrative.

More-than-human interconnectedness

Placing at the core of this analyzes the question of care, I seek to reframe the narrative and the political praxis mobilized to deal with the pandemic and the ecological crisis beyond individualization. Despite the call for individual responsibility, the coronavirus crisis sheds light on our interconnectedness and our dependence on care infrastructures. In this section "interconnectedness" is a key-concept that I want to briefly clarify before I delve into the analysis of it: I use the term interconnectedness to refer to mutual reliance on each other's care and support. As I stressed in the second chapter, our interdependency is made visible for better or worse in this situation. As George Yancy writes in *Body without edges: rethinking borders of invulnerability:* "The virus also belies our illusions of sovereignty, absolute self-control, unconditional autopoiesis, and pretensions of invulnerability. (…) The neoliberal fantasy of the self as atomic and self-sufficient is just that — a fantasy" (Evans, 2020, p.67). Indeed, despite the hegemonic endeavor of individualization of responsibility, everyone's reliance on life-making workers became evident. Even the supposedly healthy, able-bodied, independent adult subject became vulnerable due to the constant possibility to contract the virus. According to Yancy, the pandemic exposed the neoliberal failure to admit that "we are fundamentally relational beings, corporally intertwined *bodies without edges* and thereby fundamentally precarious or dependent, and sustained by others" (67). Hence, despite the rhetoric of private interest and self-mastery, the Covid-19 crisis is forcing us to rethink

our interconnectedness, our porosity, our mutual need for care. It is essential in my opinion to stress how this precarity and this dependence on others are not just a temporary condition. They are not part of an exceptional embodiment caused by the crisis that is going to be revoked after the end of the pandemic. On the contrary, my argumentative point here is that an exceptional condition such as a global pandemic has shed light on something that has always been there: our collective vulnerability, our collective and mutual need for care, our interdependence. Indeed, even before the crisis, the neoliberal myth of invulnerability has been exposed by disability studies. In *Compulsory Able-Bodiedness and Queer/Disabled Existence,* Marc McRuer analyzed the naturalization of able-bodiedness and stated "everyone is virtually disabled, both in the sense that able-bodied norms are "intrinsically impossible to embody" fully and in the sense that able-bodied status is always temporary, disability being the one identity category that all people will embody if they live long enough"(McRuer, 2010,p.95-96). Hence, McRuer identifies two senses to understand shared virtual disability: the first consist of the intrinsic impossibility to embody to the full able-bodiedness connected to everyone's reliance on infrastructures of care, reliance evidently brought to the fore by this pandemic; the second lies in the temporary nature of able-bodiedness related to the natural aging process of every body. Therefore, as McRuer argues "the ideal able-bodied identity can never, once and for all, be achieved"(93) both because the body's self-reliance once "reached" is bounded to be revoked by age and because material "self-reliance" is a myth in itself. A similar claim is made by Johanna Hedva's "Sick Woman Theory": joining McRuer's point of view Hedva stresses undermining sickness as a state of exception and defines "existence in a body as something that is primarily and always vulnerable" (Hedva, 2016). Therefore, according to Hedva, the body is defined by its vulnerability, not temporarily affected by it, and "it is continuously reliant on infrastructures of support in order to endure"(Hedva, 2016). It is at this point necessary to highlight how the claim that everyone is virtually disabled or sick is not meant to deny the reality of suffering and differences into positionality. It is not a claim for equality and equalization. Calling for an ill, dysfunctional subject, Hedva as well as McRuer endeavor to create strategic alliances and imaginaries to undercut the discourse that frames the need for support and care as a need to be fixed. Rather than seeking equality or relief, the aim is "to resist the notion that one needs to be legitimated by an institution, so that they can try to fix you." Indeed the point Hedva is making here is that "You don't need to be fixed, (…) it's the world that needs the fixing" (Hedva, 2016). This understanding of the body shifts the focus from vulnerability understood as "lack" to the lacking assumption of responsibility for everyone's care by the neoliberal system. Indeed, "when being sick is an abhorrence to the norm, it *allows us to conceive of care and support in the same way"*(Hedva, 2016). Hence, until vulnerability is framed as temporary, the need for care is portrayed as only

required sometimes by specific subjects. Therefore it is not understood as a societal affair but as an individual problem. On the other hand conceiving sickness, suffering, and vulnerability as non-exceptional and non-temporary leads to rethinking care and the need for support as non-individual and normal.

Why is this understanding of the body and the care for the body relevant to read the Covid-19 pandemic and the ecological crisis together? In my perspective this way of seeing body vulnerability is crucial to read these two crises together because as Brain Massumi points out in *The American virus "*The very origin of the virus is tied up in an ecological web: a multispecies route of transmission whose conditions were prepared by habitat destruction and global warming. It doesn't just take a village — it takes a planet. It takes care for each other, in consonance with care for the planet. It takes an embrace of our imbrication with each other in a more-than-human world" (Evans, 2020, p.44). Indeed, the pandemic while bringing to the fore "our imbrication with each other" lead to read this imbrication beyond the human, providing a fruitful narrative to tackle some of our problems with attending to the ecological crisis. If the Covid-19 crisis is forcing us to rethink our bodily interconnectedness and our mutual need for care and support, this reconsideration can not be restricted to the sole human interdependence.

More-than-human interdependence has been already partially approached in the last section of the second chapter: focusing on eco-social processes of reproduction of life, I already show how ecosystems preserve and ensure human life and how earthcare can be seen as a mutual relationship between caring human and more-than-human subjects. However the discussion around the body led me to take into consideration another facet of this more than human interconnectedness. Indeed an analysis of the body in 2020 can not ignore body embeddedness in technology and in my perspective this matter tells us something crucial about our more-than-human interconnectedness. Hence, an account of body entanglement in technology helps to better understand interconnectedness beyond the sole interdependence between living beings in a narrow sense. Contemporary relations between body and technology – aptly described as cyborg[17] by Donna

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17   In 1985 Donna J. Haraway published for the first time the "Cyborg Manifesto". Since then, Cyborg has become a fruitful figuration, as she defined it, to describe contemporary relations between body and technology. When one thinks about cyborgs, the first images that come to the mind are the fascinating bodies of science fiction films but, as Haraway claims, the cyborg is no longer a figure of science fiction but a social reality. Indeed, "a cyborg is a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction. (…) but the boundary between science fiction and social reality is an optical illusion" she claims. (Haraway 2006, 117). Contemporary medicine provides several examples of this social reality: artificial prosthesis, pacemakers, titanium bone augmentations, medically assisted procreation, dental implants, plastic surgery, and contact lenses are just the most obvious manifestations. In fact, in these cases devices or materials that are directly implanted in the body materially modify the body itself and its "abilities". However, following this understanding, is easy to see how drugs such as insulin injections, contraceptive pills, but even the most common painkiller can be read as body-technologies. Moreover, body-technologies do not need to be necessarily inside the body: it is undeniable that objects like a wheelchair or the glasses significantly modify what a body can do. Furthermore, even

Haraway – are decisive on the one hand to deconstruct the conventional understanding of the body as a "natural object" and on the other to complicate more-than-human agency. With regard to the first aspect, namely the deconstruction of the conventional understanding of the body as a "natural object", in 2004, as reported by Nikki Sullivan and Samantha Murray in the introduction of the book "*Somatechnics: Queering the technologisation of the body*", a group of scholars[18], coined the term "somatechnics". The term somatechnics was coined in order to underline the inextricability of soma (the body) and techné, (the techniques and the technologies through which corporealities are constructed and transformed). As Sullivan and Murray explain:

> "This term derived from the Greek sôma (body) and τέχνη (craftsmanship), supplants the logic of the 'and', suggesting that technés are not something we add or apply to the body, nor are they tools the embodied self employs to its own ends. Rather, technés are the dynamic means in and through which corporealities are crafted, that is, continuously engendered in relation to others and to a world" (Murray, 2016, p.3).

Therefore, according to this understanding, body embeddedness in technology can not be described as a relation simply prosthetic or as some sort of addition. What "somatechnics" highlight is how our bodies come into being through technology: there is not such an entity called "body" separated from the technological infrastructure that sustains it. What we understand as the body is experienced through technologies of visualization that continuously redefine the boundaries between its inside and its outside. The daily interaction of bodies with and within discursive and material technologies and techniques is just simply understood as part of the process of creation of each singular embodiment. In short, "bodily-being (...) is always already technologized, and technologies are always already enfleshed"(Sullivan, 2006).

Concerning the second aspect, namely more-than-human agency, as Haraway describes in the Cyborg Manifesto while 19th century's technologies and machines were not self-moving and to think otherwise would have been paranoid:

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though the entanglement of technology in contemporary corporeality can be inferred just by looking at bio-medicine, Haraway's Manifesto does not only refers to medical technology. As Rosi Braidotti explains "cyborgs include not only the glamorous bodies of high-tech, jet-fighter pilots, athletes or film stars, but also the anonymous masses of the underpaid, digital proletariat who fuel the technology-driven global economy without ever accessing it themselves" (Braidotti 2013, 90). Indeed, information and communication technologies inform and create our global social reality and individual everyday life. Haraway could already see that in the 1980s when she wrote the Cyborg Manifesto and now this is for everyone an unquestionable fact. The internet has taken a crucial role in social changes in recent years. Public, as well as private life, has been partially translated in the virtual world and the access to virtual reality is bound by material devices like computers, smartphones, tablets. The continuous interaction with these devices modifies bodily habits to the point that even mainstream online magazines started to realize it: for instance, many online contents refers to the smartphone as an artificial limb, as a prosthetic technology.

18   A group of scholars involved in the Body Modification: Changing Bodies, Changing Selves international conference (2003), and the Body Modification Mark II international conference (2005),

"Now we are not so sure. Late twentieth-century machines have made thoroughly ambiguous the difference between natural and artificial, mind and body, self-developing and externally designed, and many other distinctions that used to apply to organisms and machines. Our machines are disturbingly lively, and we ourselves frighteningly inert"(Haraway, 2006, p.120).

Indeed, the current pervasiveness of technology blurs the line between the human and the machine, and Haraway as well as many other scholars (see for instance Bruno Latour's works) started observing how objects and in particular technological ones have their own agency. According to Haraway, it is no longer clear "who makes and who is made in the relation between human and machine" (143).

While I can not here deepen further this understanding of technology, these two aspects are relevant to clarify my reading of more-than-human interconnectedness. More-than-human interdependence, especially when approached from an ecologist point of view, tends to be focused only on interconnectedness between living beings in a narrow sense, such as animals and plants. Indeed expressions like "more-than-human" or "other-than-human" are often used as synonyms of "multispecies". As I stressed in the last part of the second chapter, Earth can be seen as a caring and living actor too. Ecosystems, including rocks, soil, water, etc can be understood as caring agents and therefore as living beings too. Bringing into the discussion technology my aim is here to propose a reading of "more-than- human" interconnectedness both beyond what is conventionally understood as alive and beyond what is conventionally understood as natural. In perspective this facet is crucial because otherwise the endeavour of reading together Earth and the body risks to reinforce their naturalization. On the contrary, my argumentative point in this thesis is that nature is a construct functional to reification and alienation meant to sever our interconnectedness with naturalized others.

To conclude, looking into more-than-human interdependence steering clear of interconnectedness with naturalized others allows a better understanding of the latter blurring the borders of what is conventionally understood as nature and shedding light on (conventionally understood as) dead matter's agency.

Care as resistance

I want to conclude this work proposing in this last section an alternative imaginary, an alternative narrative to account for this more-than-human interconnectedness. I want to explore the creative potential of thinking the body as a planet and the planet as a body in regard of care. Our imbrication in a more-than-human world tells us that our need for each other support and care goes beyond the

human body. The care for the body is interconnected with more-than-human agents, that as I explained in chapter two, need care too. The Earth, humans included, needs care too. According to this alternative narrative the Earth is a vulnerable body that exactly as our bodies is constituted by multiple form of life and agency: just consider the micro-organisms living "in" our bodies, but also making our lives in these bodies livable; or consider our material exchange with the outside world; or consider our bodies' embeddedness with technology.

The first implication of this narrative is that, taken into account interconnectedness, care for the body cannot prescind from care for the Earth and vice versa. The second implication is more complex and concerns the way we read the pandemic and ecological crisis and the consequent political praxis mobilized to deal with them. If as suggested by Silvia Federici "For while the body is the condition of the existence of labor-power, it is also its limit, as the main element of resistance to its expenditure" (Federici, 2004, p.141) the need for care of the body can be read as the limit (or the resistance) to its endless exploitation under capitalism. Reading the Earth as a body, the need for care turns out to be a material limit to both earthly and bodily exploitation. This understanding of the need for care allows to question whether both the pandemic and the ecological crisis could be seen as forms of material resistance in response to a system that does not provide the care needed. Indeed the questions arise: can we interpret the planet crisis as a material resistance to earthly endless exploitation? Can we read the becoming crisis of the Covid-19 pandemic as a consequence of a society based on crossing the limit of the body? These questions arise in the endeavour to decenter the human from political agency and to develop an understanding more-than-human political praxis. As I explained in the second chapter, care-work, in contrast to legitimate productive work, is not and can not be constantly monitored by managers or masters allowing new forms of being that contradicts and exceeds the discipline required to produce life for the profit of capitalism. Therefore not only the need for care can be read as a limit to endless exploitation but care can be seen as a source for re-imaging resistance in times of crisis. As Johanna Hedva so poetically frames it in her *Sick Woman Theory*:

> "The most anti-capitalist protest is to care for another and to care for yourself. To take on the historically feminized and therefore invisible practice of nursing, nurturing, caring. To take seriously each other's vulnerability and fragility and precarity, and to support it, honor it, empower it. To protect each other, to enact and practice community. A radical kinship, an interdependent sociality, a politics of care. Because, once we are all ill and confined to the bed, sharing our stories of therapies and comforts, forming support groups, bearing witness to each other's tales of trauma, prioritizing the care and love of our sick, pained, expensive, sensitive, fantastic bodies, and there is no one left to

go to work, perhaps then, finally, capitalism will screech to its much-needed, long-overdue, and motherfucking glorious halt."(Hedva, 2016).

An account of more-than-human interconnectedness requires extending this form of anti-capitalist protest beyond the human body. Reading the planet as body and the body as a planet in time of ecological crisis lead to re-think care, care for the Earth and care for the body as forms of resistance. To conclude, if the Covid-19 brought to the fore the crucial role of care in our lives, this crucial role of care led to re-think the political praxis to tackle the ecological crisis. Indeed care for the body cannot prescind from care for the Earth (and vice versa) and this mutual care can be a starting point to re-imagine resistance to a system that brought the planet into these global crises.

Conclusion

In this thesis I seeked to deconstruct the narratives around both the ecological crisis and the covid-19 pandemic and to propose an alternative reading of care in times of crisis. In the first chapter I complicated the idea of a unitary homogeneous human subject underlying the rhetoric around the global scale of both these crises. Indeed I argued that the narrative of being "all in this together" is historically rooted in an understanding of the human subject that operationalizes inequalities and I showed how this narrative works as a diversion from the political decisions that caused the ecological crisis as well as the becoming crisis of the Covid-19 pandemic. In the second chapter, I discussed the crucial role played by care during the pandemic arguing that it can be a fruitful tool to also approach some of our problems with attending to the ecological crisis. Hence, while being conventionally seen as part of the "low-skilled" activities, care-work emerged, during the pandemic, as essential to the reproduction of life, interrogating the legitimacy of the skills-hierarchy and of care-work devaluation. The central role played by care during the pandemic allowed me to argue how its devaluation, it is not incidental, but rather it is a prerequisite of the capitalistic system of production. Tracing then the genealogy of the devaluation of care, I illustrated how its history is bound to the problematic understanding of the human that I exposed in the first chapter. In the end of the second chapter I tried to answer the question of why the matter of care is relevant in view of the ecological crisis. Setting the stage for the alternative narrative that I formulated in the last chapter, I extended the comprehension of care considering life and its reproduction beyond the human. Indeed on the one hand I drew attention to the invisible and devalued practices of land preservation, reading them as care for the Earth. On the other hand I argued that the reproduction and maintenance of human life is impossible without the active process of material support and regeneration that Earth *does towards life*. Finally in the third chapter I deconstructed the narrative of individual responsibility mobilized to deal with both the ecological crisis and the pandemic and I proposed an alternative imaginary to rethink care in times of crisis. Hence, in the first part of that chapter I argued that in the case of Covid-19 crisis the individualization of responsibility works as a diversion from the controversial priorities of neoliberal management of the pandemic while in the case of the ecological crisis this narrative is used to offer comfortable individual solutions without stopping the systemic ecological violence inherent to the capitalist mode of production. Exploring then an understanding of body vulnerability and interconnectedness that seeks to go beyond the human I showed how the body is continuously reliant on infrastructures of support in order to endure. Then I focused on corporeal embeddedness with technology. This matter allowed me to complicate my understanding of more-than-human

interconnectedness. Hence, on the one hand body reliance on technological infrastructures sheds light on how this interconnectedness can be extended beyond what is conventionally understood as nature. On the other hand, an account of technological object's agency blurs the line of what is understood as alive and therefore agent. Therefore I proposed a reading of more-than-human interdependence that goes beyond what is conventionally understood as alive and natural. In the last part I suggested an alternative narrative that leads to rethink care in times of crisis: reading the planet as a body and vice versa, I pointed out how the need for care can be read as a material limit to both earthly and bodily exploitation. Seeking to decenter the human from political agency and to develop an understanding more-than-human political praxis, I concluded arguing how care for the Earth and care for the body can be a form of resistance to the system that brought the planet into these global crises. If the most-anti capitalist protest is to care for each other,my argumentative point has been to propose a comprehension of this "each other" more than human. Interpreting care as more-than-human is not only a way to provide a more realistic representation of our eco-techno-social processes of reproduction of our bodies. It is to inspire new narratives to conceive a political praxis to get over a system that stands against the planet, humans included.

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