

flying ointment

material memory of an epistemicide?

aniara rodado – November 9, 2023

colonization • chemistry • ecology • humanities • history • living matter • history • memory • performance • visual anthropology • shamanism • feminism
• transhackfeminism • epistemology • drugs • plants • epistemology • witchcraft

The concept of epistemicide—Boaventura de Sousa Santos created the idea, while Sueli Carneiro examined its links to white supremacy—describes the systematic eradication of “Third World” knowledge by Western science. Epistemicide and genocide are two fundamental and inseparable elements of the colonial process. Europe has not been spared such a disaster: witch-hunting also decimated complex knowledge systems.

Witches’ flying ointment—often cited in European witchcraft trials—was a preparation intended for application to the mucous membranes of the rectum or vagina to generate altered states of consciousness.

In the scientific debates around this ointment, a number of authors discredit the presence of pre-Christian shamanic cultures in 15th-century Europe (Clifton 2019, Ostling 2016). Historians and botanists confirm that *Datura*—native to the Americas, whose name comes from the Sanskrit *dhattūra* and whose flower is associated with Shiva—is listed in many ointment recipes, and so could not have been used in Europe before the colonization of Abya Yala (Geeta 2016, Hatsis 2015). However, Indian, Arabic, Persian, and Andalusian sources confirm the hypothesis that this plant arrived on other continents before colonization. But the academic world seems to struggle when it comes to conducting transdisciplinary research that takes non-Eurocentric sources into account, in contrast to the well-documented , as we found through our research process—arrival of the sweet potato before the colonization of Abya Yala (Brand 1971, Roulier 2013). The fact that there is no ritual continuity in the use of these plants in contemporary European culture does not prove the absence of such practices, but opens up a field to be redefined, one strewn with taboos, silences, and secrets, producers of ignorance. *Datura* is just one example of shamanic plants and practices that have been “discredited.” A history of knowledge manipulation: from ritual use, it has been reduced to toxic or ornamental functions.

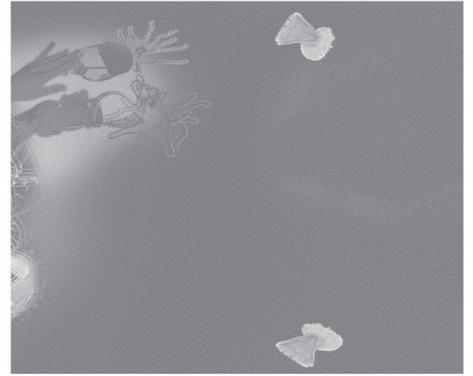
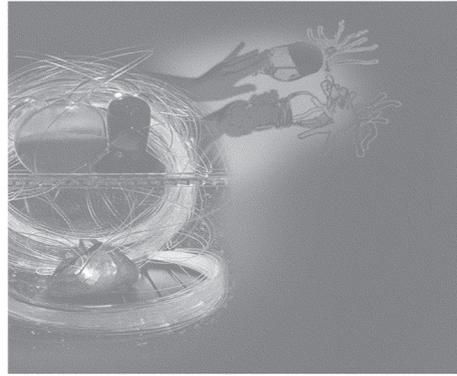
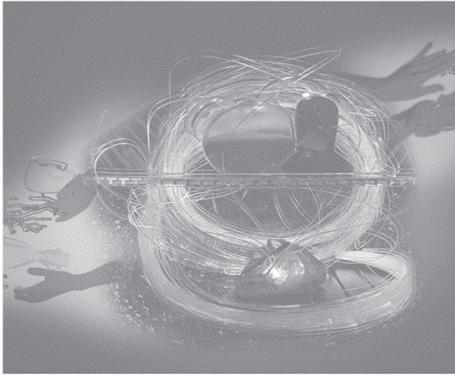
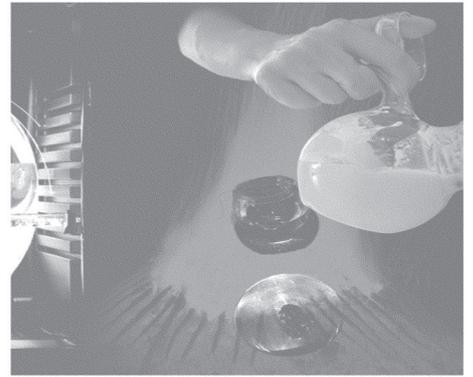
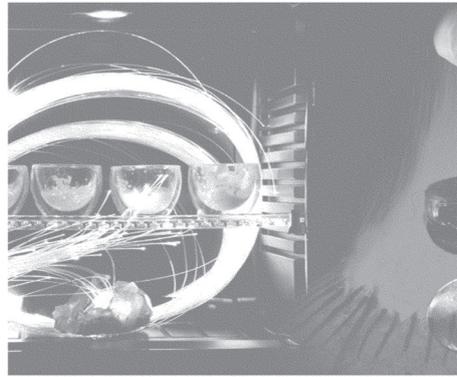
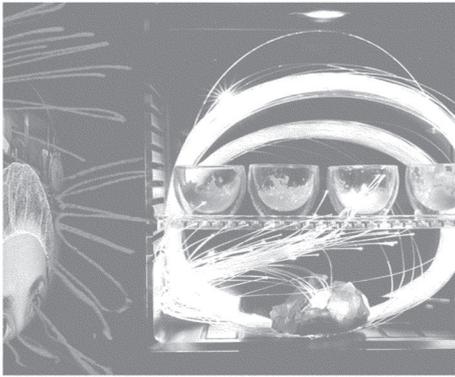
As part of my arts and sciences thesis, we developed a “flying ointment” at the Genialis biotech company in Henrichemont, France. This company is committed to, among other things, a more ecological chemistry, which

retains the organoleptic properties (sensory stimuli) of active ingredients and improves the preparations’ bioavailability (absorption type). In making emulsions, surfactants are replaced by movement and high and low sound frequencies. The combined physical force of sound and movement transforms matter, embracing dimensions that are both esoteric and scientific.

Developed in collaboration with chemists Nicolas Poupard and Aurélie Amilien, our cream is a non-hallucinogenic update of witches’ ointment. It is a preparation for vaginal dryness, neglected mucous membranes, the neovaginas of trans women, those dried out by menopause, chemotherapy, drugs, hormone treatments, and so on. These are all issues that the pharmaceutical industry addresses only by considering them as related to sexual intercourse, proposing only lubricants. A cream to break the silence that pathologizes our pleasure.

Taking into consideration microcirculation problems—similar to those that contribute to erectile dysfunction—our cream contains plants that improve the microcirculatory system, such as yarrow and myrtle, regenerating plants such as Damas rose, and so-called “female” aphrodisiacs, which—coincidentally?—are the most expensive spices on the planet: saffron and vanilla. Local plants thus enter into synergy those from all over the world.

Line by line, the plants tell of their instrumentalization and oblivion. In a forest on the brink of catastrophe, “flying ointment” rises from the ashes to bring past knowledge back to life. Reminiscent of a psychedelic universe, the contribution draws attention to buried, feminized knowledge at the center of our bodies.



Recette

- * 320 ml d'eau
- + 226 ml d'hydrolat de safran
- + 130 ml d'hydrolat de Myrthe
- + 49 ml d'hydrolat de rose
- + 29 ml d'hydrolat de bois sacré
- * 84 ml d'extrait de vanille
- + 28 gr d'huile de coco
- + 28gr de beurre de cacao

Recette Crème pour

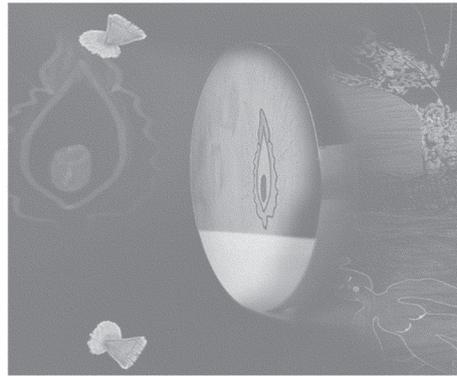
- * 320 ml d'eau déminéralisée
- + 226 ml d'hydrolat de safran
- + 130 ml d'hydrolat de Myrthe
- + 49 ml d'hydrolat de rose
- + 29 ml d'hydrolat de bois sacré
- * 84 ml d'extrait de vanille
- + 28 gr d'huile de coco
- + 28gr de beurre de cacao

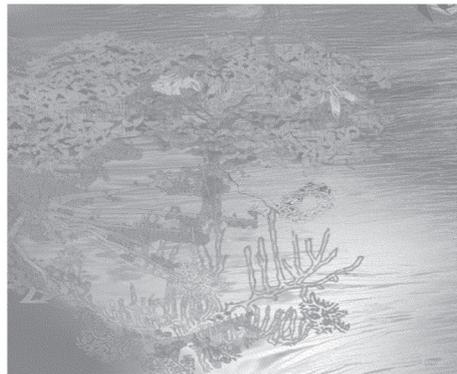
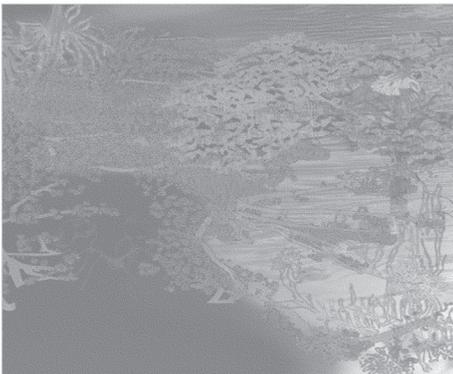
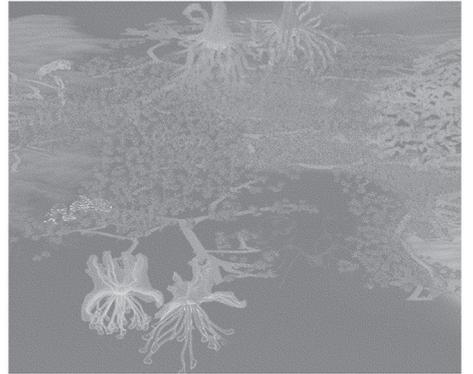
Crème pour Voler :

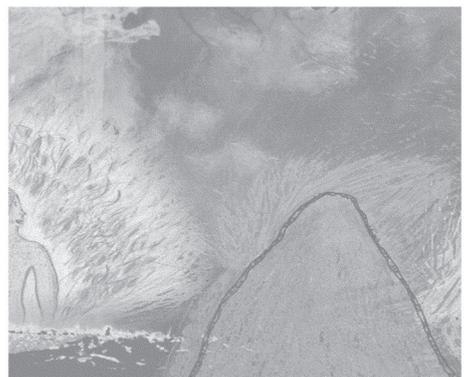
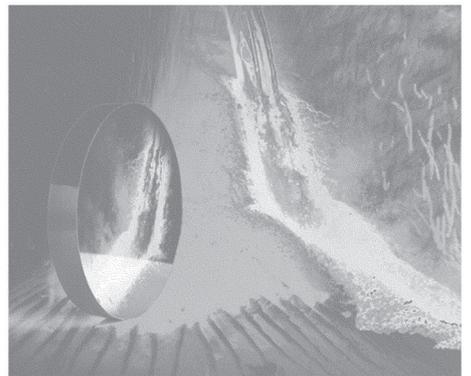
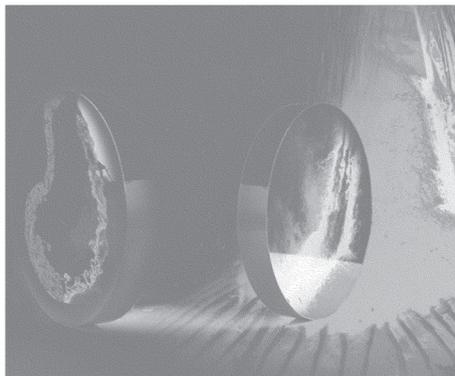
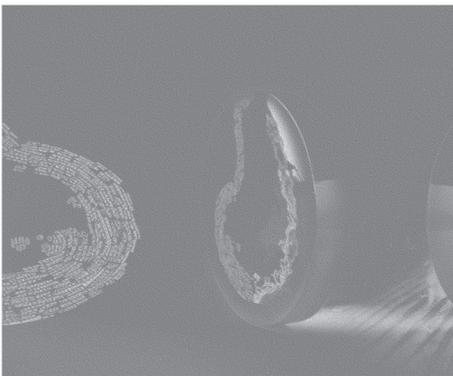
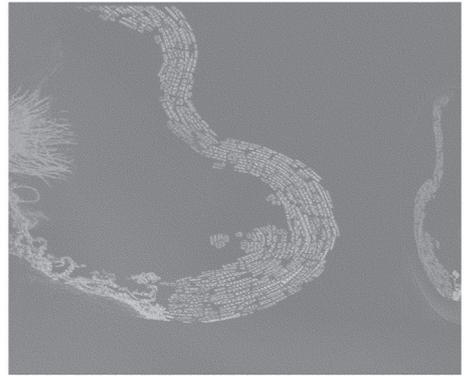
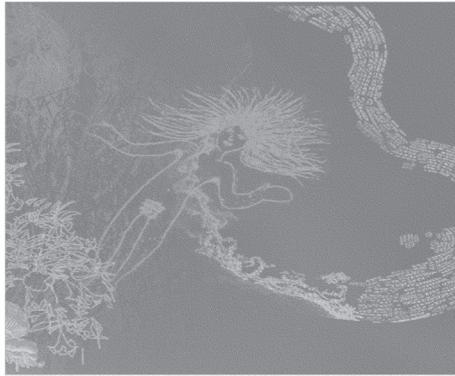
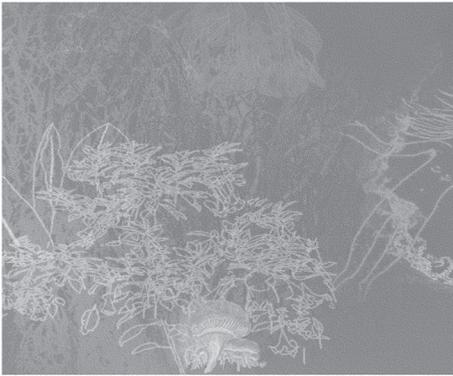
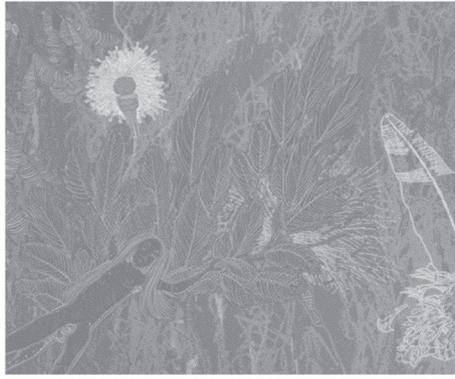
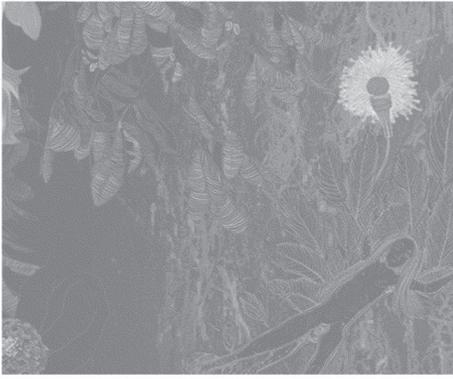
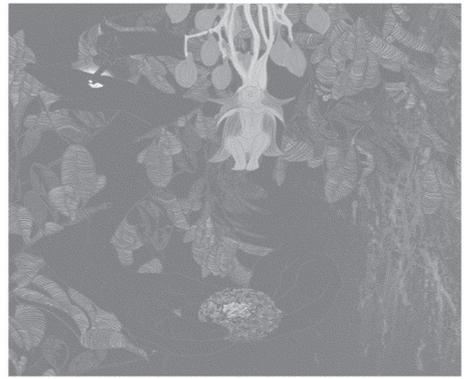
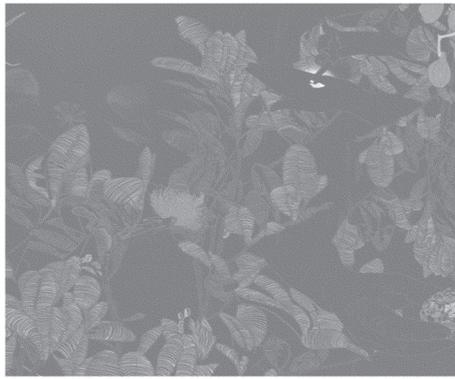
- * 40gr de soude 91%
- * 2gr Vitamine E
- * 15gr Acide oléique
- * 6gr Naticide
- * 10gr Xanthane

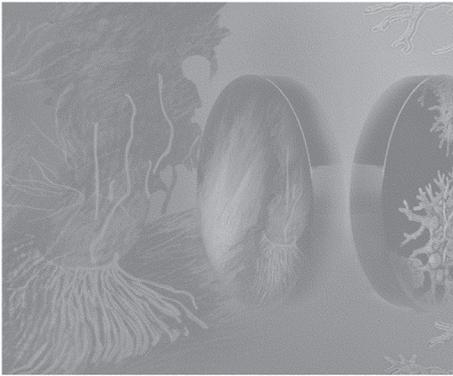
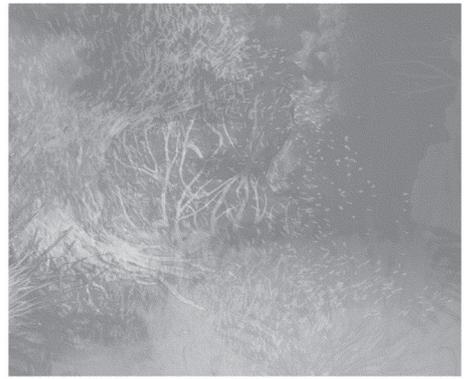
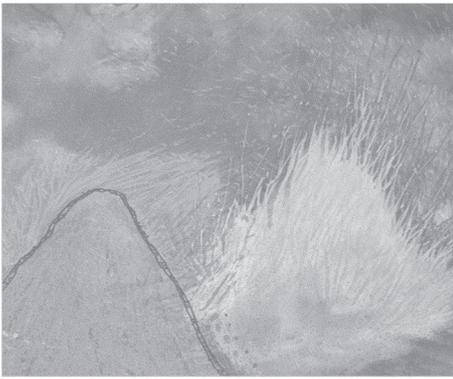
Voler :

- * 40gr de soude 91%
- * 2gr Vitamine E
- * 15gr Acide oléique
- * 6gr Naticide
- * 10gr Xanthane





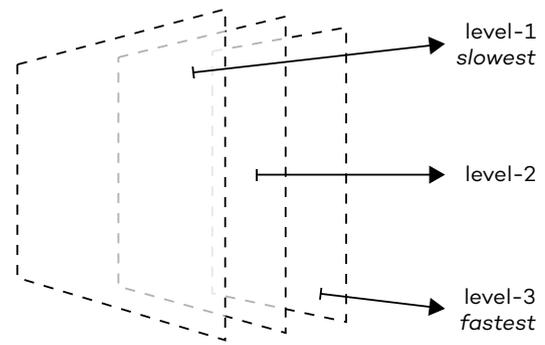




This contribution was published on www.able-journal.org in a pan.able format:

www.able-journal.org/en/flying-ointment

When the user scrolls, each image layer moves from left to right at different speeds giving an impression of depth in the page.



credits

author: aniara rodado

media designer: Camille Olympie

editorial mediation: Julie Sauret

scientific support: Genialis Biotech, Nicolas Poupard, Aurélie Amilien

supported by: Chaire arts et sciences

acknowledgments: Antre-peaux, Erik Noulette, Alexis Abfayer

about the author

aniara rodado (PhD) is a choreographer, artist and researcher. She explores witchcraft and interspecific relations, taking the plant world as a starting point, from a transhackfeminist and countercolonial perspective. Her choreographic practice aims to go beyond dance and the human body to better question the current context of ecological crisis and techno-scientific fetishisation. The tendency to standardise different forms of life, at all scales, affects bodies as much as alliances and knowledge. Her performances, installations, texts, videos, drawings, dance pieces, etc. are created in open source, with a preference for old/low technologies and domestic DIY. aniara holds a PhD in science and art from the Ecole Polytechnique de Paris and teaches at the École Supérieure d'Art d'Annecy-alpes (ESAAA).

rights and references

illustration rights and references

"Flying Ointment" was presented in an installation alongside a DIY alkaloid extractor made from datura seeds. It was also part of a performative test carried out by 21 people suffering from vaginal dryness, in accordance with cosmetics-industry protocols and including a somatic dimension. It was also offered to the public in the choreographic installation *Against Witch Washing*.

bibliography and references

Clifton, Chas S. 2019. "Witches Still Fly: Or Do They? Traditional Witches, Wiccans, and Flying Ointment." In *Magic and Witchery in the Modern West*. Edited by Shai Feraro and Ethan Doyle White, 223-243. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-15549-0_11

Penicka, Sarah. 2004. "Caveat Anoynter!: A Study of Flying Ointments and their Plants." In *The Dark Side: Proceedings of the Seventh Australian and International Religion, Literature, and the Arts Conference, 2002*. Edited by Christopher Hartney and Andrew McGarrity. Sydney: RLA Press.
<https://openjournals.library.sydney.edu.au/index.php/SSR/article/view/210>

Ostling, Michael. 2016. "Babyfat and Belladonna: Witches' Ointment and the Contestation of Reality." *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft*, vol. 11 (no. 1): 30-72.
<https://doi.org/10.1353/mrw.2016.0008>

Hatsis, Thomas. 2015. *The Witches' Ointment: The Secret History of Psychedelic Magic*. Rochester, NY: Park Street Press.

Geeta, R and Waleed Gharaibeh. 2007. "Historical evidence for a pre-Columbian presence of Datura in the Old World and implications for a first millennium transfer from the New World." *Journal of Biosciences* 32 (no. 3): 32.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s12038-007-0132-y>

Rhodes, Tim, Magdalena Harris, Francisco Gutiérrez Sanín, and Kari Lancaster. 2021. "Ecologies of drug war and more-than-human health: The case of a chemical at war with a plant." *International Journal of Drug Policy* 89.

Cencin, Alessandra. 2018. "Les différentes versions de la 'découverte' du clitoris par Helen O'Connell (1998-2005)." *Genre, sexualité & société*. Special issue no. 3.
<https://doi.org/10.4000/gss.4403>

Waetjen, Elaine, Sybil Crawford, Po-Yin Chang, Barbara Reed, Rachel Hess, Nancy E. Avis, Sioban D. Harlow, Gail A Greendale, Sheila A Dugan, and Ellen B Gold. 2018. "Study of Women's Health Across the Nation (SWAN). Factors associated with developing vaginal dryness symptoms in women transitioning through menopause: a longitudinal study." *Menopause* 25 (10): 1094-1104.
<https://doi.org/10.1097/GME.0000000000001130>. PMID: 29916947; PMCID: PMC6136974

Brand, Donald. 1971. "19, The Sweet Potato: An Exercise in Methodology." In *Man Across the Sea: Problems of Pre-Columbian Contacts*. Edited by Carroll Riley, Charles Kelley, Campbell Pennington, and Robert Rands, 343-365. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
<https://doi.org/10.7560/701175-021>

Vasconcelos, Danilo de Almeida, Melania M. Amorim, Lorena Carneiro de Macêdo, Eujessika Katielly Rodrigues Silva, José Roberto da Silva, Jr., João Guilherme Bezerra Alves. 2016. "Effects of Strength Training on Microcirculation, Muscle Performance and Functional Independence in Elderly Women." *Obstetrics & Gynecology* 127: 12S.
<https://doi.org/10.1097/O1.AOG.0000483298.84198.ad>

Roullier, Caroline, Laure Benoit, Doyle McKey, and Vincent Lebot. 2013. "Historical collections reveal patterns of diffusion of sweet potato in Oceania obscured by modern plant movements and recombination." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 110.
<https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1211049110>

Simon, James. 2016. "Non-Hormonal Treatment of Perimenopausal and Menopausal Climacteric Symptoms." *Obstetrics & Gynecology* 127: 12S.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1097/AOG.0000000000001373>

Federici, Silvia. 2004. *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*. New York: Autonomedia.

Rodado, Aniara. 2022. "Conjurer les épistémicides: Alliances plantes, sorcières, machines." PhD thesis, École Polytechnique.

to cite this article

Rodado, Aniara. 2023. "Flying ointment: material memory of an epistemicide?"
.able journal: <https://able-journal.org/en/flying-ointment>

MLA EN Rodado, Aniara. "Flying ointment: material memory of an epistemicide?"
.able journal, 2023: <https://able-journal.org/en/flying-ointment>

ISO 690 EN RODADO, Aniara. 2023. "Flying ointment: material memory of an epistemicide?" *.able journal* [online]. 2023.
Available from: <https://able-journal.org/en/flying-ointment>

APA EN Rodado, A. (2023). Flying ointment: material memory of an epistemicide? *.able journal*: <https://able-journal.org/en/flying-ointment>