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ANA MENDIETA: POSTHUMANIST PERFORMATIVITY AND SPIRITUAL BECOMINGS*

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ABSTRACT: This essay addresses the role of materiality and spirituality in the work of Cuban artist Ana Mendieta. What has been missing so far within the extensive historiography of Mendieta's artistic practice seems to be a closer look at a spirituality that the artist articulated openly and which was materially inscribed. Following the theory of physicist Karen Barad on posthuman performativity as well as the reflections of Chicana theorist Gloria Anzaldúa on the concept of so-called *Spiritual Mestizaje*, Mendieta's engagement with organic matter will be examined in the light of a potential influence of spirituality on her methodology and artistic approach. Thus, new interpretative paths will be explored that attempt to take into account her special position in contemporary art.

KEYWORDS: Posthumanism – Spirituality – Performativity

ABSTRACT: Der vorliegende Essay widmet sich der Rolle von Materialität und Spiritualität in der Arbeit der kubanischen Künstlerin Ana Mendieta. Innerhalb der umfangreichen Historiografie zur künstlerischen Praxis Mendieta's scheint die nähere Betrachtung einer von ihr offen artikulierten, materiell inskribierten Spiritualität bisher zu fehlen. Ausgehend von der Theorie der Physikerin Karen Barad zur posthumanistischen Performativität sowie von den Überlegungen der Chicana-Theoretikerin Gloria Anzaldúa zum Begriff *Spiritual Mestizaje* wird die Auseinandersetzung Mendieta's mit organischer Materie in Hinblick auf den Einfluss von Spiritualität untersucht. So sollen neue Wege der Interpretation erkundet werden, die ihrer besonderen Stellung in der zeitgenössischen Kunst Rechnung zu tragen versuchen.

SCHLAGWÖRTER: Posthumanismus – Spiritualität – Performativität

What are Ana Mendieta?

The artist Ana Mendieta (1948–1985) seems to have always managed to perplex. Somehow, her works elicit such peculiar affective reactions that they eschew attempts not even so much at categorization but sometimes at plain articulation. Nancy Spero famously said: “Ana Mendieta’s art, even when she was alive, was the stuff of myth.”¹ This has often been led back to her involvement with nature and her body, or to the exile that brought her from Cuba to the windy plains of the Iowan countryside. People have asked who she is, where she is. Most approaches have tried to account for the complexity of her oeuvre by tackling its ambivalent materiality, and it is with regards to matter that the interpretative ways tend to part.² How to address matter, its presence (or absence), within Mendieta’s work?

Focusing on works created by Mendieta using organic materials, my argument is that her artistic praxis aided in her subjectivation process by means of a materially based awareness of the profound connection that she, as part of nature, shared with it; an awareness which is sometimes called spirituality (cf. fig. 1). The artist once said that

¹ Spero 1992, p. 75.

² Blocker 1999, p. 24ff. Redfern, Caron 2011. Lippard 1990, p. 86. Bryan-Wilson 2013, p. 30.

“art is the result of a spiritual activity.”³ As straightforward as this statement is, no analysis has seriously considered its validity and productivity when looking at the way she worked.⁴

There seems to be an increasing demand for new conceptual ways in which to account for the physicality of bodies in discursively coded social inscriptions, to rearticulate a notion of (bodily) matter. Within this framework, the work of physicist Karen Barad has been greatly influential in its convergence of ontology, epistemology, and ethics. With regards to Mendieta, her approach offers a refreshing analytical tool which accommodates the inclusion of further material agencies in the making of both her artworks and subjectivity. Mendieta’s spirituality, then, can perhaps be best addressed via the work of Chicana theorist Gloria Anzaldúa and her theory of *Spiritual Mestizaje* (from the Spanish word meaning miscegenation, crossbreeding), which advocates for the appropriation of the often traumatic negotiation between contrasting cultural realities as tool to discover new ways to create one’s self.

Together, these theories offer a framework within which nature, artistic practice, spirituality, and experiences of trauma and displacement can not only interlace but also be co-productive of embodied subjectivities that can shapeshift and evolve in becoming, disjoining them from a victimized position. Both approaches are determinedly feminist, as was Mendieta’s own outlook on work and life, and which is perhaps best summarized by the words of Julia Bryan Wilson: “In fact, the feminism that mattered the most to Mendieta [...] is a feminism that sees spirituality as a political issue; that is unafraid to use the word ‘faith’.”⁵

Matter(s) and Patterns of Relation: Posthuman Performativity

“*Cogito ergo sum* is the obsession of the west, its downfall, its folly”⁶ could easily provide a slogan for a great deal of academic discourses of the last forty years. The re-centering of “the” material has aroused a new articulation of the concept of nature itself in order to free it from its relegation as the “other” of discourse, forming a cluster of discursive configurations broadly identified as New Materialism and its related term

³ Mendieta 1996.

⁴ Orenstein 1978, p. 77f. Bryan-Wilson 2013, p. 30ff.

⁵ Bryan-Wilson 2013, p. 34.

⁶ Braidotti 1994, p. 13.

Posthumanism.⁷ Relinquishing Humanist premises can be conducive to the dismantling of its hegemony on the delineation of the criteria for human emancipation, of which secularity presents one of its fundamental principles: Posthumanism can allow for alternative perspectives in which spirituality and religiosity are not systemically mutually exclusive with the exercise of reason.⁸

The approach of theoretical physicist Karen Barad to Posthumanism is deeply entrenched both in feminist critical theory and in natural sciences.⁹ According to Barad, performativity needs to postulate an alternative rationale able to address the processes and practices, both material *and* discursive, which affect the conditions of materialization and differentiation of all bodies. Bedrock of her theory is the so-called philosophy-physics developed by physicist Niels Bohr in the first half of the 20th century. His experiments with electrons conducted to his dismissal of the Newtonian deterministic principle of the existence of individual objects with definite boundaries and to the elaboration of a new, quantum model of the atom. Barad expands Bohr's postulations, delving into their ontological repercussions with the development of what she coins "agential realist ontology"¹⁰. It is a

[...] posthumanist performative account of the production of material bodies [...], advocating [...] *a causal relationship between specific exclusionary practices embodied as specific material configurations of the world* (i.e., discursive practices/(con)figurations rather than "words") *and specific material phenomena* (i.e., relations rather than "things").¹¹

Being and knowing merge in the term *onto-epistem-ology*. As per Barad, "phenomena are ontologically primitive relations – relations without preexisting relata."¹² Matter has no clearly definite ontological boundaries; it is only by the action of relating that both matter *and* meaning obtain a locally engendered determination and differentiation *within* the phenomenon (thus intra- and not inter-action), which enables to differentiate them as agencies in the first place.¹³ Agency is not something to be gained but what everything *is* by performing reality in its different iterations. "In summary, the universe

⁷ Braidotti 2013, p. 56f. Bennett 2010. Alaimo, Hekman 2008, p. 2–5, 12.

⁸ Braidotti 2013, p. 35.

⁹ Barad 2008, p. 126.

¹⁰ Barad 2008, p. 122, 131f. Barad 2007, p. 107, 138.

¹¹ Barad 2008, p. 132 (emphasis in the original).

¹² Barad 2008, p. 133.

¹³ Barad 2007, p. 133ff.

is agential intra-activity in its becoming.”¹⁴ Our human physical bodies come into being and into signifying concurrently.¹⁵ Ethical issues are thus always a part of material-discursive practices, challenging artificial divisions not just between being and knowing, but between being, knowing and responding to both. By that, Barad shows to not be reluctant towards practices of anthropomorphization, when it is done “in fracturing the presumptions of the ‘anthropos’ of ‘anthropocentrism’, and in so doing opening up a space for response.”¹⁶

Sacred Fissures: *Spiritual Mestizaje*

The inclusion of spirituality into an academic discourse proves to be a sensitive issue, particularly as there is no singular, homogenous notion of what constitutes it. In light of these premises stands out the work of poet and scholar Gloria Anzaldúa. The principal view underlying her body of theory lies in the conviction of a fundamental connection between all on the planet in the perception of a reality that transcends the so-called ordinary world, subsumed in the word *spirit*.¹⁷ Anzaldúa’s notion of spirituality is conceived of as ontological assumption of the existence of exosomatic (external to the body) entities, *within* material reality. She postulates a monist, overarching universal consciousness illimitable by conventional ideological regimes (showing an affinity to Spinoza).¹⁸

The author reclaims a positioning which actively seeks to reintegrate spirituality at the social and political level, a move which she terms *Spiritual Mestizaje*.¹⁹ It indicates the cognizance of a collective spiritual linkage that is experiential, embodied, and has the potential to shape the multiplicity of reality’s realities by reclaiming historically marginalized subject formations, the *mestizos/as* – the crossbred – which are opened beyond a Mexican geopolitical specificity.²⁰ The overarching intentionality can be said to be a propulsion towards a split wholeness. Anzaldúa takes on the myth of the Mesoamerican moon goddess Coyolxauhqui (dismembered by her brother Huitzilopochtli as vengeance for the planned death of their mother, earth goddess Coatlicue), as metaphor

¹⁴ Barad 2008, p. 135.

¹⁵ Barad 2007, p. 147.

¹⁶ Barad 2012, p. 27.

¹⁷ Anzaldúa 2015, p. 24ff.

¹⁸ Anzaldúa 2015, p. 38, 44.

¹⁹ Anzaldúa 2015, p. 44, see also p. 37.

²⁰ Bandau 2006, p. 172f. See also Delgadillo 2011, p. 13. Anzaldúa 2015, p. 44, 71, 73f., 89.

for traumatic experiences which “catapult us into [a ...] state of dissociation and fragmentation”²¹. The shift in perception brought about by such moments brings spirit/the body to *nepantla*, an interstitial, disorienting inner space which in its ambivalence nevertheless allows for change to take place and for movement to seep in between precarious structures.²²

Mestizos/as are used to living fragmented biographies and are thus especially equipped to delve in *nepantla*. Like the Mesoamerican mythical figure of the *nagual* and the figure of the *chamana* (female shaman), they can metamorphose into different shapes and states of being (the resort to so-called shamanism has been criticized for its alleged romanticizing, an issue she addresses acknowledging the problematic elements present in Chicano appropriation of native cultural figures).²³

The distinctive feature lies in the ambiguity of creation/disruption in a constant contradictory flux of conciliation and resistance. Fragmented *mestiza* subjectivities positively appropriate the splits, the separability, to put it in Baradian terms, while refusing the division of the ultimate, separating split: “We are both *nos* (us) and *otras* (others) – *nos/otras*.”²⁴ Where Barad stresses the blurred demarcations between bodies and how their mutual emergence within matter’s indeterminacy intimates an entirely new concept of performativity, Anzaldúa conceives an embracement of and acting with such ambiguity as a spiritual endeavor. The issue is thus not about healing from disintegration, “the healing occurs in disintegration.”²⁵ Mendieta used very similar words to describe her own diasporic condition: “[...] this idea that I felt this trauma. Personally, in a way, I think now that it liberated me, in a sense, to go through that.”²⁶

²¹ Anzaldúa 2015, p. 17f.

²² Anzaldúa 2015, p. 17, 127.

²³ The term stems from the Siberian Tungusic language meaning “the one who knows” and is commonly referred to individuals said to be able to come into contact with spirits and travel to alternative realities (i.e. the land of the dead), through altered states of consciousness, often approached in issues concerning sickness and healing by means of spiritual interaction. See Hutton 2001, p. viif., 48, 52. See also Anzaldúa 2015, p. 31, 53. Bandau 2006, p. 168.

²⁴ Anzaldúa 2015, p. 63 (emphasis in the original).

²⁵ Anzaldúa 2015, p. 29.

²⁶ Marter, Mendieta 2013, p. 231.



Fig. 1: Ana Mendieta, *Untitled* (*Silveta Series*, Iowa), 1979, Lifetime color photograph, 50.96 × 33.18 cm

On Form-full and Form-less Bodies

The 1979 work *Untitled* from the *Silveta Series* (fig. 1) was carried out in Iowa in a wetland region within the county of the same name.²⁷ The piece shows a vertically framed swampy landscape of muddy land, with brown and soft-looking, malleable soil. In the foreground, and with certain concentration, the form of a somewhat human silhouette can be recognized excavated in the mud: what is likely its head lies centrally at the bottom part of the picture, a roundish, slightly irregular shape open at its lower

²⁷ Herzberg 2004, p. 178.



Fig. 2: Ana Mendieta, *Untitled (Silueta Series)*, 1976

end. From said opening, the margins of the silhouette become broader on both sides, probably referencing arms and legs. The outlines of the *Silueta* blend seamlessly into the surrounding ground, itself characterized by an alternation of bulging and recessing soil patches forming cavities and small elevations with shapes altogether similar to Mendieta's figure.

In 1985, she declares: "I've worked with very specific earth, I've worked with landscapes that other people would not find attractive in any way."²⁸ Fittingly, the area called Amana where our *Silueta* was made, had been dubbed by Mendieta and Hans Breder "Dead Tree Area"²⁹. It is not "the" earth she interacts with, but always a particular earth, with regards not only to a specific landscape but also to a specific kind of soil (fig. 2). Iowa, specifically its central-eastern counties, is topographically characterized by the Southern Iowa Drift Plain, a landscape of glacial origin.³⁰ In such areas and especially along rivers, soil combinations tend to be clayey and are often poorly drained, meaning they retain the bigger amount of water they come into contact with while turn-

²⁸ Marter, Mendieta 2013, p. 228.

²⁹ Herzberg 2004, p. 178.

³⁰ Prior 2017. See also Herzberg 2004, p. 176f.

ing easily friable and brittle when dry, making them generally rather barren and unsuitable for farming.³¹

It is there where Mendieta's own attraction arises, one of the places where she becomes "one with earth"³². The slippery sludge in which we can hardly recognize the silhouette in its formal blurriness, open-ended as if it were part of a group of proto-humans or just a limb of a modular meta-being, reveals the richness and alternative fecundity of that sort of territorial laboratory. Both engendering and disruptive of life, Amana is reminiscent of *nepantla*, of how death is but another facet of life, the place where agential separability flows back to its primal state of indeterminacy and is thus open for new material-discursive configurations, new forms of life. With each iteration of her *Siluetas*, Mendieta is in differential becoming; her differential boundaries are re-articulated in congruity with not just the symbolical, but onto-epistemological patterns of the geographical sites that entice her.

Confrontations with the Void

Following her re-/dis-location as unaccompanied minor from Cuba to the US in the wake of Fidel Castro's advent to power and the precarious political standing of her family, Mendieta experienced an intense awakening to personhood, propelling her through her own Coyolxauhqui process.³³ That violent chasm, the body "tossed into the void by traumatic events"³⁴, opened a perspective towards difference, wherein the devastation represented a crucial step in the acquisition of a deeper, albeit darker gaze upon a world itself more complex than the one perceived ahead of the disruptive experience. With the Coyolxauhqui process, Mendieta's response towards her displacement offers a broader perspective from which trauma and loss are no longer solely as the causal premise of healing.

A perhaps unexpected side effect of that experience resulted in a jolt which prompted her to discard part of her own Catholic upbringing: "When I first started working this way [imprinting her body on the earth], I felt a very strong Catholic connection, but as I continued to work, I felt closer to the Neolithic. Now I believe in

³¹ Highland, Dideriksen 1967, p. 2f., 42ff., 161. Calvin 1898, p. 92ff.

³² Mendieta 2015, p. 323.

³³ Within the US led *Operation Peter Pan* in collaboration with the Catholic Church. Mendieta 1996, p. 228. Blocker 1999, p. 51f.

³⁴ Anzaldúa 2015, p. 50.

water, air, and earth.”³⁵ Curator Gloria Moure affirms that Mendieta “chose a creative approach for expression [...] that embraced a holistic and integratory conception of all things.”³⁶ Farther than that, her Coyolxauhquean journey induced her to *believe* in water and air. “They also speak.”³⁷ Such affirmations go beyond an anthropologic interest for old myths and cultures; they denote a conviction in the sacredness of terrestrial elements and the intrinsic kinship she feels with them, which in turn is part of her art-making in approach and content.³⁸ When questioned with regards to her dialoguing with nature, Mendieta argues: “It was very important that it was just me and nature by ourselves, having this thing together. It was not a performance. I do not want people around me when I’ve done it – doing it has really been a moving thing for me.”³⁹

I think it is important to underline the propulsive force of the traumatic void – a different move than its romanticizing; the necessity of the severance on the path to healing, perhaps in a way not too different than the “cutting together-apart”⁴⁰ of the separability engendered by agential cuts. An interpretation informed by a posthumanist performative approach allows a shift from those analyses which highlight impermanence in Mendieta’s work as loss or “aesthetics of disappearance”⁴¹. Such focus falls prey to a postmodern constructivist bait, which relinquishes matter to canvas for cultural inscription, wherein earth remains a semiotic field.⁴² Within such interpretations, the invisibility of a contour, of a work, is regarded as an adequate weapon to undermine various restricting paradigms by being equaled to an obliteration of matter itself, as the latter can only but epitomize the fixed rigidity of modernist nominalism or mediate geopolitical discourses. Yet the absorption or softening of the human shape by the weathers and the earth does actually far from correspond to a loss or a vanishing of materiality; quite on the contrary, what takes place is an outburst of materiality, a bulging and moving of mud and branches (or as in other cases, spurting from the soil, multiplying in a myriad of fungi, spreading across the river waters in flowers). Literally *mattering* Mendieta’s existence by reclaiming it as part of itself.

³⁵ Montano, Mendieta 2000, p. 396.

³⁶ Moure 1996, p. 24.

³⁷ Montano, Mendieta 2000, p. 396.

³⁸ Mendieta 2015, p. 323.

³⁹ Marter, Mendieta 2013, p. 228.

⁴⁰ Barad 2012, p. 46.

⁴¹ Blocker 1999, p. 24.

⁴² Blocker 1999, p. 18.

Blocker does have a point with her emphasis on the “powerful function for a seemingly disempowered identity”⁴³ as a more positive lead on an analysis otherwise overly focused on the negative effects of trauma. To her, the material transiency within Mendieta’s practice reveals the underlying inconsistency of the concept of identity by the very process of disintegration, implying the dissolvment of a fictitious homogenous core.⁴⁴ Rebecca Schneider addresses Mendieta’s practice as *vanishing*; a “documented erasure—bringing the dynamics of disembodiment into relief”⁴⁵ vis à vis women’s invisibility and subordinate unutterability towards men. Although I agree that the practice of making her female-marked body less linearly intelligible can be read as an act of mutiny against a colonial representationalist pressure to conform, by doubling down on the disappearance Schneider ultimately reinscribes Mendieta’s act as mere reaction to a white position, depriving her of an utterance and a performative agency of her own (body) able to be(ar) different connotations.

The optical vanishing of Mendieta’s body implies its disappearance only if one limits the body’s contours to their flesh-containing form. By making the earth/body works Mendieta becomes one with earth; she does not necessarily leave it. The agential “cutting” moment, here perhaps as in the moment where an artwork becomes crystallized as such, might be read as not merely a conscious decision by Mendieta to attribute a form and a meaning to some pre-found matter, thereby infusing it with “artwork essence”. Actancy might not be as unilinearly distributed: the performativity taking place in/as Mendieta (’s work) moves from and to different directions.

Boxelder, Cosmic Tree

One of the first iterations of the *Tree of Life Series* carried out by Mendieta took place at Old Man’s Creek, a stream in a rural area close to Iowa City in 1976 (fig. 3). A 35 mm color slide shows the trunk and the lower portion of the crown of a tree, below it a thick layer of earth sediment from which several roots and smaller bushes spurt out; in the lowermost section of the picture is a meadow or what could be part of a bigger glade. Mendieta’s body stands straight and naked and its surfaces covered in relatively thick mud of a brown-greyish color.

⁴³ Blocker 1999, p. 27.

⁴⁴ Blocker 1999, p. 33f.

⁴⁵ Schneider 1997, p. 117.



Fig. 3: Ana Mendieta, Documentation of *Tree of Life*, 1976
(Old Man's Creek, Sharon Center, Iowa), 35 mm color slide

In that period, the artist frequently visited Mexico, especially the archeological site of Teotihuacán.⁴⁶ The title of the work makes explicit reference to the topos Tree of Life, and I would like to argue for a deeper and more direct connection to Aztec cosmology, and within it the myth of the five suns as cosmogonic premise to a *spiritual* approach to the world with which the artist at least partly engaged. The title and the choice of the tree itself recall the spatio-temporal structure of the Aztec spiritual cosmos in its foundational elemental energies. Therein, four Smoking Mirrors are each responsible for the forces of fire, water, air, and earth; their energy is tied to the fifth pole, the central Cosmic Tree or Tree of Life, which keeps in balance and distributes their power

⁴⁶ Viso 2004, p. 45, 52.

to all of the universe.⁴⁷ All energy passes through it and it is (connected to) all energy in a fragile equilibrium of mutually engendering forces. By merging with the Tree of Life, Mendieta materializes a spiritual, intra-active becoming-univer-self. She says:

My art is grounded in the belief in one universal energy which runs through everything from insect to man, from man to spectre, from spectre to plant, from plant to galaxy. My works are the irrigation veins of this universal fluid. Through them ascend the ancestral sap, the original beliefs, the primordial accumulations, the unconscious thoughts that animate the world.⁴⁸

She is serious about her connection with the universe, and the fact that she feels such a connection is a spiritual experience. It takes place materially, where her works are part of the greater universal organism. As Keith Jordan refers with regards to the definition of deities in Mesoamerican religions, they were “in fact a series of overlapping symbolic complexes, representing natural phenomena conceived as protean and fluxing manifestations of a generalized notion of holiness or sacred force.”⁴⁹ By the same token, it will not be possible to acknowledge Mendieta’s practice and methodology as legitimate spiritual activity if the lens through which it is observed disallows for a perspective on spirituality that extends beyond Judeo-Christian notions. A different perspective, like the one proposed, could instead broaden prospects for critique as well, i.e. with regard to issues of possible cultural (spiritual) appropriation on part of Mendieta towards traditions and cosmovisions not “her own” in relation to the concept of *Spiritual Mestizaje*.

In another piece of the *Tree of Life Series* from 1979, Mendieta cocoons herself under the tree among the roots, again covered in mud; the tree stands on the upper part of a river or pond bank, with the greater portion of the root system exposed (fig. 4), and it seems to carry no leaves. It certainly does not look like a great energy channeler ... Considering the same location of both works and comparing them, it seems reasonable to assume that the two trees could belong to the same species. An interactive research page by the Iowa State University allows to recognize plants through leaf description; without claim of faultless accuracy, the photos show that in both cases the tree might pertain to the species of the boxelder (*Acer negundo*), very commonly found in Iowa, its

⁴⁷ Velasco Alonso 2004, p. 178f.

⁴⁸ Mendieta 2015, p. 323.

⁴⁹ Jordan 2016.



Fig. 4: Ana Mendieta, Documentation of an untitled work from the *Tree of Life Series*, 1979 (Old Man's Creek, Sharon Center, Iowa), 35 mm color slide

soil being especially “moist bottomland and disturbed sites”⁵⁰. Indeed, it is unclear if the tree is dead or alive, on a ground that is in part semi-stable and muddy, in part plainly non-existent. Its botanical description supports the general sense of debility, in that the boxelder “is a rather short-lived tree, is quite brittle or fragile and is of little value”⁵¹.

Within this scenery, Mendieta becomes another root, embedded in the same precarious equilibrium where everything might crash down unexpectedly. If read in Anzaldúan terms, the rickety standing of this weak boxelder could actually be subverted as fertile ground particularly apt to channel transformational energy, no less of a Cosmic Tree than its more robust sibling. And in fact, the boxelder is a tree that grows fast, spreads wide, and it has the shrewd capability to grow where other do not bode as well.⁵² Ultimately, Mendieta's belief in the universal energy points to an imagination of

⁵⁰ Iowa State University Extension Outreach, Boxelder, Natural Resource Stewardship, Iowa State University of Science and Technology, 2019, https://naturalresources.extension.iastate.edu/forestry/iowa_trees/trees/boxelder.html (last accessed: June 27, 2019).

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

a Tree of Life where “the primordial accumulations, the unconscious thoughts that animate the world”⁵³ coalesce and shift in great fluid drive.

Conclusions

In the time-spatial constellation of her life, Mendieta not so much intended to rebel against obsolete artistic attitudes like many of her US colleagues wanting to shed the calcified tissue of their own educational crust. She rather tried to be(come) in (reiterative) ways that felt closer to herself on a plane which never stopped including a social, spiritual *and* material condition.⁵⁴ This might be why she kept her distances to most artists with which she shared formal similarities and wherein may partly lay the historiographic fickleness of her work.⁵⁵

Jane Blocker has once referred to Mendieta’s works as “daring us to act on faith.”⁵⁶ I say faith needs not be blind nor irrational, although it will always be more than cognitive vision or articulation. Faith needs not be separated from matter. Just like meaning, it needs not come from outside; western academic discourses are only recently opening to this option. To account for spiritual traditions and sensitivities in the study of social and cultural practices bears extensive implications. Such practices engender from diverse, materially inscribed epistemologies, in which spirituality does not oppose access to rationality in an aporic dichotomy and where the experience of oppression can productively be dealt with from an equally materially inscribed spiritual awareness. Finding new ways to attend to artistic expressions such as Mendieta’s is thus far more than a matter of elegant art historiography; it is part of a project that bespeaks an urgent need for a new dynamism within interpretative methodologies: humbler perspectives, open to learning new ways of seeing and perceiving and willing to unlearn their own limitations by acknowledging the myriad entanglements that constitute them as (just one tiny) part of the material-discursive world.

⁵³ Mendieta 2015, p. 323.

⁵⁴ Rosenthal 2013, p. 18, see esp. n. 62.

⁵⁵ Blocker 1999, p. 4–10.

⁵⁶ Blocker 1999, p. 23.

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