

○ EARTH ACTIONS

DISINTEGRATION AND DIASPORA IN ISAIAH 44 AND IN MENDIETA'S *SILUETAS*

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Drawing upon the performances of the earth-artist Ana Mendieta, this piece approaches Isaiah 44 as a prophecy enacted before a diaspora community. Both artist and prophet employ metaphors of water and earth to illustrate identity's inevitable erosion and disintegration, but not utter destruction, in exile. Mendieta's subjection of the female form and her own body to the earth's regenerative cycles also aids in a critique of the masculine constructions in the prophetic chapter – and by way of contrast shows divine creative action can be more accurately characterised as a feminine function.

No matter how well they may do, exiles are always eccentrics who *feel* their difference... as a kind of orphanhood... Clutching difference like a weapon to be used with stiffened will, the exile jealously insists on his or her rights to refuse to belong (Said 1984, p. 53).

'Exile' is not simply a geographical fact, but also a theological decision (Brueggemann 1986, p. 93).

Edward Said's recalcitrant figure and Walter Brueggemann's recognition of the Exilic stamp's theological weight both indicate the intensity with which the 'exile' can punctuate critical discourse. A metaphor of sorts in twentieth-century cultural criticism, the phenomenon previously functions as a turning point in the prophecy of ancient Israel. The sense one gets from perusing the humanities stacks of the university library, and in reviewing a large portion of the work written on the Babylonian exile, is that exile is not always a nice place to be. But it can be a creative place to be.

Said's statement imagines exile's transformation as 'a potent, even enriching, motif of modern culture' and locates society's entire spiritual condition within 'the age of anxiety and estrangement'. He continues: 'We have become accustomed to thinking of the modern experience itself as spiritually orphaned and alienated' (Said 1984, p. 173). The exiled as a rootless, troubled protagonist appears as well in mythologies spun by certain art historians about the fearless founders and descendants of the *avant-garde*. And in the same way that Clement Greenberg once cast Jackson Pollock as a painterly hero of Promethean proportions – withstanding the degrading forces of kitsch and leading Modern Art's crusade towards its culmination in the purest extremes of Abstract Expressionism¹ – biblical scholars have been known to sensationalise the poetic brilliance of prophets whom they immortalise as tormented artistes and Byronesque bards of the devastation, dislocation and ultimate salvation exile can bring.² To trust the prophetic propaganda or the Chronicler's heroic accounts of a mass return and rebuilding at the good command of Cyrus, however, would be to miss some obvious signs that something much less sensational might have actually taken place.

Torrey (1910) began a revisionist campaign against the theological view of the exile, declaring it in fact to have been 'a small and relatively insignificant affair' (p. 285). Bright (1981) and Donner (1984) are among those who have offered equally less forgiving views of the legendary accounts of the suffering and the walking wounded: Bright reckoned, 'their lot does not seem to have been unduly severe'; and Donner surmised, 'Babylonian policy was not overly oppressive... The exiles were not forced to live in inhuman conditions'. Carroll (1998) and Davies (1998) have, however, been more recently forthright in cautioning a more discriminating assessment of the exile and supposed exodus back to Jerusalem. Slicing through the discourses of deportation and return, both have asked not just 'Was the exile all that dire?' but 'Did the exile actually ever end?'

The questions raised by Carroll challenge the portrait of a group of faithful and pious descendants who finally all got to go home and to realise there was no place like it. 'To talk about the exile', he warns, 'is to take a position following or favouring the Jerusalem-orientated point of view' (Carroll 1998, p. 67). But is it not more likely, he proposes, that a significant number stayed behind in the 'diaspora', where they might have hovered precariously on the brink of complete assimilation? If many stayed behind, prophecy would have to negotiate with an audience of descendants who would live permanently away from Jerusalem, in places they would comfortably call home.

None of which is to deny that an exile and the destruction of Jerusalem were not in fact highly traumatic for the people of Judah, or that many did in fact return. Archaeological evidence does suggest an increase in population by twenty-five percent at the end of the sixth century in Judah/Yehud (Kochavi 1972). But following Carroll's suspicions, the exile must be considered the construct of a minority that won its own propaganda war.³ One legacy of this trope was to bind a diaspora community together with a renewed sense of centre and of punishment suffered together. Furthermore, it became the second most important milestone in Israel's history after the Exodus – an equally powerful historical trope and highly charged metaphor/event in the prophetic (and liturgical) literature.

Historical criticism shall perhaps never deliver the demographic specifics on how many exiles were deported, how many returned, or how well or poorly deportees and their offspring were treated. But aspects of biblical literature can at least be reread with a view that considers authorship to have occurred a few steps beyond the tragedy and trauma that are commonly associated with displacement. In other words, certain prophetic texts composed during the exile need not be treated as the outpourings of a victim or 'survivor'. Especially when reading work dating near to the time of Cyrus's advance, it seems limited (and historically misinformed) only to imagine an author and audience living in a situation resembling captivity.

An alternative to this scenario is one in which an exilic author exercised a degree of artistic autonomy within a more accommodating atmosphere. An environment governed by the modern principles of free speech would of course be an anachronism, but surely the mentality of those who had been born and raised in Babylon differed from those who had previously known Judah as their home. And if it became important for some to remind these generations that their forbears had been oppressed, clearly the situation was such that many failed to feel the weight of that past experience; they felt settled rather than displaced.

So where the Exodus ends ultimately in the crossing of the Jordan, the Exile did not end in the return alone. Shedding the baggage readers have loaded onto the exile and the exilic prophets, and reading texts from the vantage-point of diaspora, can ultimately highlight the ways in which prophecy caters to alternative audiences and confesses more expansive attitudes towards God, geography and exile.

PERFORMANCE PIECES

Although anthropology's influence on folklore and biblical studies has resulted in a rising interest in the performed nature of prophecy, some of anthropology's questions about performance have gone unasked in prophetic criticism. Since the 1970s, cultural theory on the function of performance has queried whether performance primarily produces pleasure, or if it does not in fact curiously undermine its viewers' values. Christian tradition has appropriated Deutero-Isaiah's joyous intonations towards messianic ends; the exilic prophet is employed to affirm the reader that Jesus is near. Considered in its sixth-century BCE context, Isaiah 40-55 assures an audience that no doubt liked what it was hearing about comfort, renewal and the re-election of Israel as God's chosen one. The initial performance provokes applause rather than controversy.

On the other hand, if one interprets exile as an experience that elicits 'nomadic, decentered [and] contrapuntal' perspectives,⁴ then perhaps the juxtaposition of prophetic forms within Deutero-Isaiah can be said to generate coarse, angular and restless tensions, like those found in a collage. The viewer might fixate on sequences such as the Servant Song in 52:13-53:12 and find something unsettling about having to suffer for salvation. In a staging that places a sickly and stricken prophet at the centre of the drama,⁵ the character of Deutero-Isaiah could be lit, costumed and directed as an outsider artist in exile – suffering servant, controversial cubist, starving artist-in-residence, whatever position of protest suits. But do such castings fairly reflect the exilic experience? Do Deutero-Isaiah and all exiles always and everywhere clutch their difference 'like a weapon', and do the people watching them necessarily feel all that threatened?

Isaiah 44 typifies several of the visual strategies Deutero-Isaiah employs to celebrate the end of the exile and the possibility of return: the heavens and the earth are called forth to praise (44:23; cf. 49:13); with water comes salvation (44:3-4; cf. 41:17ff; 43:2, 19; 48:21; 49:10; 55:1); and God regularly identifies Israel as his servant (44:1, 2, 21, 26; cf. the Servant Songs). The idols passage (vv. 9-20) is unusual as one of only two passages in chs. 40-55 that are generally translated as prose.⁶ But the chapter's emphatic optimism assures its audience that redemption triumphs over fear. Israel's transgressions have been swept away like a cloud (v. 21), and a new shepherd will see to it that Judah and her cities are rebuilt (v. 28). All of which is very nice indeed.

The forms follow a logical progression and indicate a coherent, untormented, though multi-textured assemblage: an oracle (or 'announcement') of salvation (vv. 1-5), now commonly considered as a continuation of the final verses of ch. 43;⁷ a broken trial speech, which is often addressed in commentaries in its amended form (vv. 6-8, 21-24); the lengthy prose passage (vv. 9-20), sometimes translated as poetry;⁸ an eschatological hymn of praise (v. 23); and the beginning of the oracle on Cyrus (vv. 24-28), which often gets pushed out of the frame and into that of Isaiah 45.⁹ The chapter consists of cut-up pieces that bear differing tones and hues due to their associated *Sitze im Leben*, but their aesthetic arrangement is far from violent.

Baltzer's commentary on Isaiah 40-55 however takes an important step beyond form-critical treatments by structuring the exilic corpus according to six acts and an epilogue. He plots the judicial, satirical, instructional, and hymnic sequences in ch. 44 over five scenes between Act II (42:14-44.23) and the opening of Act III. His sub-scenes follow the traditional forms, but his dramatic rubric appreciates that the prophecy should be imagined *acted out*. Interpreting the chapter as a scripted sequence within a broader performance structure, and reading it against the performed work of a more recent performance artist, can reveal its appeal for those living away from the imagined centre. And when questions addressed by the contemporary artist are applied to the dynamics of the prophetic scene, it becomes possible to disrupt the comfortable complacency on the surface of the text without reverting to romantic typecasting and the assumption that artists in exile refuse at all costs to belong.

WHEN ANA MEETS ISAIAH

The earth artist Ana Mendieta (1948-1985) left Cuba with her family when she was ten and later married the minimalist sculptor Carl Andre. She remembered and referenced her homeland in her work, yet in interviews she revealed that she considered Iowa, where her parents had settled, to be her home as well. The photographs that document her earth and body sculptures provide only silent stills of once witnessed performances. And the exclusion of her work from the SoHo Guggenheim's male-dominated inaugural exhibition in 1992 led to a protest at which one banner demanded to know: 'Carle Andre is in the Guggenheim. Where is Ana Mendieta? Donde está Ana Mendieta?' (Carl had been acquitted in 1988, but many still harboured suspicions that he had pushed Ana to her death out of the window of their 34th floor apartment three years earlier.) So for someone who called several places home, it is ironic that her legacy is overshadowed by her absence and distance.

As a woman 'in exile',¹⁰ Mendieta showed her true home to be the earth: female forms sculpted in mud dissolve in an Iowan current; flowers appear to sprout from her body, lying like a corpse in a shallow and uncovered grave; and, at the conceptual level, man-made maps and other gendered constructions disintegrate as such *siluetas* are left to be absorbed back into the earth's endless cycles.

Addressing the liminal nature of identity in an untitled piece from 1978, she branded the shape of her hand onto a coverless copy of Mircea Eliade's *Rites and Symbols of Initiation: The Mysteries of Birth and Rebirth* (1958) – enacting what the art historian Jane Blocker has described as her distinctive 'dissolutive process' of 'marking through disappearance' (Blocker 1999, p. 30). Through her symbolic strategy, Mendieta communicates 'the unyielding power of names'.¹¹ Eliade's name has been formally erased but the remaining words preserve his socio-scientific vocabulary and ethnographic position. 'Rites and Symbols' and 'Birth/Rebirth' have survived the red iron and now signify the grouping of the mythological into prescriptive pairs, clinical compartments set up by men who treat 'primitive' religion as a land of 'Mysteries' and make-believe. His name has been branded over, but His text has survived.

Through burning the shape of her hand onto Eliade's opus, however, Mendieta turns part of his work to ashes and rejects his binary perceptions of modern and ancient man, of history and prehistory (as discussed by Blocker 1999, p. 35). Through branding she marks her presence over the text but leaves only an anonymous trace of herself. This universal shadow or silhouette

symbolises the negotiation of an identity that is, like that of many exiles, refugees and women, destined in part to disappear.



Figure 1 Rites and symbols of initiation

In Is. 44, hands are not imprinted on texts, but YHWH's name is printed on the hands of the performers. YHWH speaks: 'This one will say, "I am the YHWH's", and call himself in the name of Jacob. This one will write on his hand, "the Lord's", and will title himself in the name of Israel' (v.5). Deutero-Isaiah certainly polarises Israel and the nations at times, but if these extras in the drama are rewriting YHWH's name onto their hands they might also be writing over names of foreign owners that are already on them.¹² The ritualistic titling of selves by extras in the prophetic performance indicates the need to eradicate the signs of previous ownership. Israel's framing as a nation of exodus and exile reflects the attempt to solidify identity on a more comprehensive editorial level, but here the gesture of identification is set on metaphorical dry ground, whose thirst will be quenched by water and streams (v. 3). The 'thirsty land' is not site-specific. The characters hover somewhere in 'third-space',¹³ between the imagined homeland and their homes abroad. Under the universal threat of disappearance in diaspora, the anonymous become named in YHWH.

As has been noted, the quenching of dry ground occurs frequently throughout chs. 40-55. So the situation in 44:3-4 is not so unusual at first glance: 'For I will pour water on the thirsty, and streams on the dry ground; / I will pour my spirit on your descendants, and my blessing on your offspring. / They shall spring up like grass (or the green tamarisk tree) amid waters, /like the poplars beside flowing courses.' The dry ground evokes the parched experience of exile, and the layer of dry, cracked earth left by drought will wash away with the rushing streams. The descendants will nevertheless spring up like grass and willows and presumably will steadily

withstand the current. They will survive where the dry earth drowned. But in a reversal of the dust and gush of this scene, the proclamation in v. 27 in which God says to the deep, ‘Your waters will dry up’ (or, ‘Be dry!’) pulls the tides mentioned in the trial speech back in the opposite direction. With water and with its absence in drought the playwright illustrates not just the power of the Lord to pour water and to take it back but, on a more mundane level, the reality of erosion. The ground disintegrates, but the descendants of the exiles effortlessly resist this process as blades in gentle waters. They are not fully threatened by such natural forces.

Water flows in Mendieta’s work with a similar softness. In *Isla* (*Siluetas* series, dimensions unknown, 1981), Mendieta moulded mud into a fertility figure roughly in the shape of the island of Cuba and left it to wash away in a river outside Iowa City.¹⁴ Its erosion is a more commonplace activity than the branding of the text, but in producing the exiled female body as a map-less object, Mendieta both mimics the creation of land and humankind from the ground (Gen. 2:7, 3:19) and makes the woman in Her own image. She conjures the ‘fleeting’ condition of exile (Blocker 1999, p. 82) and, through the disintegration of the woman/island, an accusation against the grating forces of masculinity and misogyny.



Figure 2 *Isla*

Mendieta knows the forms she creates with earth and with her own body are going to wash away. Her forms recall ancient fertility statuary, and such ‘idols’ parody what the theologian might call the gods of men. The dissolution of the goddess in the sand shows work formed by hands to be at the mercy of the natural processes of water and earth, not men. It illustrates the relative smallness of masculine constructions (including nationalism and sexism) in relation to the creative force of/behind the earth. The critique of the self-worship of men does not occur so conspicuously in prophetic performances; on the contrary, the bad examples set by the seductress and the harlot in so many of the playwrights’ scenarios hardly sends a message that power is poorly handled by her opposite sex. And though ch. 44 does not explicitly dramatise a breakdown in gender politics, vv. 9-20 nonetheless provide a parody of certain men whose power is shown to be relatively small and therefore ludicrous.

Several critics have argued that vv. 9-20 were composed by a single Deutero-Isaiah, though a team of dramaturges seems more likely than a solitary bard. Most follow Duhm in determining the passage to have been interpolated (regardless of authorship), as it disrupts the expected flow

of the trial speech now framing it:¹⁵ YHWH's name is absent from the passage; the *puncta extraordinaria* above *heyyma*(v. 9) at the opening mark the word as uncomfortable to the Masoretic eye; and, as Elliger (1938; cf. Baltzer 2001, p. 193) determined, a 'confusion of tenses' reigns.

This skit about self-deception and making idols requires some character actors adept at slapstick to solder, carve and slave away after cheap disposable props. The ironsmith goes through the motions of working his piece over glowing coals, hammering away at it, and forging it with all of the strength of his arms (v. 12),¹⁶ but he simply ends up tired and hungry. The carpenter follows an even more elaborate and exhausting regimen that ends after five verses in the tragic-comic plea for the remaining piece of wood to save him (v. 17). He draws a line, traces it with a marking tool, marks his plane with a compass even, and makes it 'like the form of a man...to inhabit a house' (v. 13). Next, the materials which he so diligently and aggressively sources for his darling little sculpture (it has the cunning appearance of 'the beauty of a man') are discarded for the sake of home utilities; the cedars he cuts down and the cypress and oak he takes for himself (v. 14) become fuel for the fire. Rather preposterously, the carpenter then takes the remainder of this wood, turns it into an idol, and bows down to it (vv. 15-17). The scenario proves the futility and pettiness of the process of making fetishes that will only end up in the dustbin.

Mendieta's disappearing *siluetas* allow one to establish a scenario in the prophetic performance that mocks and dismisses men and their faith in masculinity. Likewise, her portrayals of the earth as home highlight a correlative feature in the indeterminate locale in vv. 9-20. The absence of a specific geographic setting (no specific forest is mentioned v. 14 or in v. 23) makes it accessible to audiences everywhere. All over the earth fools make useless things with their hands. The characters now cut and take trees and hammer endlessly away at the anvil with graphic, probing, possessive, even masturbatory force. Their behaviour contrasts the images of Israel in YHWH's womb that frame the scene (vv. 1, 24). When Ana meets Isaiah, formation is no longer the exclusive action of a masculine God but rather a feminine function. The ground of the earth and the womb of YHWH defy the borders imposed by men, while to form out of clay or in one's womb becomes a more God-like pursuit than bashing blindly away with manly tools.

RELATING TO THE LIVING EARTH

The earth motif and the subject of divine vs. human creativity continue in the scenes that follow the prose skit. God calls on the redeemed Israel to remember and return to him (v. 22). The command to rebuild Jerusalem at the end of the chapter could mean that the return God calls his people to implies one back to Zion, but directed as it is to the servant, the sense of return is figurative not literal: the people Jacob-Israel return to their master metaphorically, because their sins have been swept away 'like mist'. This return can be enacted anywhere, in diaspora or chosen exile.

Then the eschatological hymn of praise in v. 23 follows with a jubilant chorus of wonder and harmony. The land sings praises to the Lord for his redemptive and restorative actions. Since exiles are everywhere, the whole earth sings:

Sing for joy, O heavens, for YHWH has done it!

Shout out, O depths of the earth!

Break forth, O mountains, into singing – you forests and every tree in it...

God is separate from the land and, having created it, has authority over it and can command it to praise. It is of course common in Deutero-Isaiah and in the Psalms to see the earth witness and praise God's redemptive power and creative influence (cf. Is. 41:1, 5, 18-19; 42:5, 10; and Ps. 96:11; 98:4; *et passim*), and here the reason for praise is once again for bringing the time of punishment to an end.

The singing mountains and the rock-God of v. 8 continue a geological motif that recurs fifteen times in chs. 40-55.¹⁷ Mountains and hills break forth into singing in 49:13 and 55:12, while elsewhere mountains serve as the rostra from which tidings are proclaimed (40:9; 42:11). Most prominently (and four times prior to ch. 44), mountains appear to illustrate the ultimate power God bears to manipulate them at will or have them flattened or threshed on his behalf (40:4, 12; 41:15; 42:15; 49:11). In 52:7, mountains are the stomping ground for the messenger's 'beautiful' feet, but in no instance does the text specify an actual range either near Babylon or in Judah itself. These mountains are of a generic variety; these are the mountains of the earth.

Zion appears in parallel and synonymous with Jerusalem, but not as a mountain in competition with other mountains (or high places for that matter). The mountains after all are choristers of divine praise. In 40:9, Zion and Jerusalem are called to 'go/get up to a high mountain' to announce the arrival of God, so rather than designate an exact elevation or route that would confine the space for praise to Zion, Zion personifies the dispersed people instead. The ransomed (51:11) and YHWH return (52:8), but otherwise Zion is either the one to whom tidings are told (40:9; 41:27; 51:16; 52:7), the one who is comforted (51:3), or the one awaiting salvation (46:13; 49:14). Putting on her strength and 'beautiful garments', the captive daughter Zion appears shaking herself of dust and loosening the bonds of her neck (52:1-2) – a feminine counterpart to Said's alienated orphan perhaps. Zion's physical supremacy as a literal mountain does not feature in the prophet's landscape at this moment. The mountains and the earth are distinct from Zion, counterbalancing the Jerusalem-centred axis of salvation perhaps. The viewers are addressed as Zion and are thus relieved of the responsibility of climbing it themselves.

The oracle of salvation and the chapter as a whole envision an earth made up of mountains and trees – a land that is properly understood as demarcated and crafted by God alone. The whole earth is an object of a masculine subject, but the conception of a living earth poses at least a partial challenge to the borders men arrogantly project onto it.

Is. 44 discredits the worship of foreign gods, while also demonstrating a healthy and confident scepticism towards nations that supposedly threaten to absorb the colonized subject into their own ideologies and practices. The Cyrus oracle that formally opens the next scene reintroduces the messenger of the rebuilding, this time as a shepherd. The exiles returning home accept Cyrus as a messenger but will worship YHWH alone. Now that the exile is over, the redeemed people do not wither in diaspora but instead accept their new ruler as the one who will fulfil all of YHWH's purpose (v. 28). The chapter ends marking the presence of the foreigner and welcoming him as one's neighbour and God's shepherd. But the curtain call reveals a disappointing flaw: the *dramatis personae* consists entirely of men.

So to ask a question once shouted on Mendieta's behalf: where are all the women in Isaiah 44? Save for the virgin of Babylon (47:1), the children born during their mothers' bereavement (49:20-21), mothers being divorced for the audience's transgressions (50:1), and the appearance of Jerusalem as a disempowered and captive daughter, the exilic prophet does not give his women

much stage time. In a performance by men and mostly about men, women have all but disappeared. The comparison to Mendieta's earth and body works reintroduces them into the repertoire.

Set against the work of the Mendieta's hands, the earth in Isaiah decentres Jerusalem and reminds viewers of God's creative and redemptive powers. Her dissolutive process helps highlight the failure of men's hands to produce relevant work, and the lies they perpetually tell themselves about its importance (cf. v. 20). Assurance in exile comes from having fewer fears about the disintegration of identity over time and between spaces. Keeping one's hands from the fruitless pursuit of the gods of foolish men ensures connection to the community's exiled heritage.

Mendieta likened her exile as a girl to being torn from the womb but renewed her broken 'bonds with the universe' through art. Like Kristeva, she embraced exile as a privileged position that granted her an outsider's critical awareness (Mendieta 1980, n.p.). In her earth works performed in exile, she exercised a greater intimacy with the earth than she might have had she simply stayed in Cuba. Her branded hand and her self-conscious 'fertility' forms manifest creation of a woman's presence not in conjunction with the gods of men but instead with the earth's cycles.

So why not contrive a production of Deutero-Isaiah in which the actions performed by prophets, mountains, mud, water and rocks serve to animate the earth's regenerative properties and the power God has over them? Why not employ the records of her performance as means towards destabilising the power of men? By projecting images of the earth artist's work onto the biblical script, the viewer is treated to a performance which articulates the inadequacies of masculine action. Flowing waters and eroding islands find counterparts in Deutero-Isaiah's quenching streams and singing mountains. These figures provide a backdrop against which exilic identity is allowed to form itself, as well as dissolve, in fluid motions. Fertility figures made from mud bring a silhouette of an Israel formed in a feminine womb more clearly into focus. Disintegration comes as a natural consequence of living on the earth, as only God-the-rock can claim true permanence.

Perhaps in such a staging there emerges a new answer to the divine challenge in v. 7: 'Who is like me?' From the evidence being enacted, one could hardly say it is men, who with their tools in vv. 9-20 and with their wayward knowledge in v. 25 only seem to make fools of themselves. Juxtaposed to such inadequate production, God's creative powers (stretching the heavens, choosing a servant, and announcing the raising of ruins, to name a few) include the distinctly feminine function of forming a people in the womb. Mendieta's fertile forms can form a chorus behind this divine gesture and help feminine action to upstage the vain things men do. In exile and diaspora, feminine action proves itself to be sustainable, Godlike and synchronised with the earth's actions.

And yet the branding of identity, both in Mendieta's ashen handprint and in the signing of YHWH's name on the exiles' hands, nevertheless occurs within a world scripted by men. Eliade's text survives and the descendants of the deported are called by the name of Jacob. But in a drama so prone to metaphor, in which the return to Zion happens not by physical journey but by verbal declaration, there is room for more inventive direction. Set in the shadows of Mendieta's earthen forms of disappearance, the exilic identity can be freed from the captivity which binds it to Jerusalem and can instead be shown to integrate itself beyond borders and within a broader geography of mountains, streams and foreign lands.

Forms constructed by humans are prone to disintegration. Floods, flames and foreigners work their toil, but identity does not dissipate so easily. So do the performers along the routes of diaspora play to their audiences, or do they clench their fists in protest? Mendieta's *siluetas* are haunting but not aggressive. The Isaiah piece lacks offensive histrionics, but a degree of dramatic leeway leaves the curtain open for slightly subversive enactments.

In fact Isaiah and Mendieta stray somewhat from Said's model of the exile: instead of wielding weapons, they seem content to lay down their hammers and hatchets, retire their well-worn walking shoes, and replace them with tools more fit for forming earthly bonds. Witnessing Isaiah 44 against Mendieta's practice permits the series of scenes to be staged as a lived event in which the dispersed servant Zion can comfortably focus both on God and on the earth. Each performer's earth actions can reflect an acceptance of the disintegration of identity while living as potential outsiders, because identity can be maintained anywhere. Earth actions can intervene in such conditions to propel the exile into a more hospitable diaspora.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Art historians have since then deconstructed the myths Greenberg set forth in his essays, 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch' (1939) and 'American Type Painting' (1955).
- 2 Among other instances of critical hyperbole she gleans from the prophetic commentaries, Sherwood cites Gunkel's 'distinctively Romantic' description of Jeremiah, whose dark emotional life fed his creative genius, inspiring him to write 'majestically rolling sentences [like] Isaiah' (Sherwood 2000, p. 188, cf. Gunkel, as cited in Petersen 1987, p. 47).
- 3 Michael Goulder's recent argument for a 'Deutero-Isaiah of Jerusalem' (Goulder 2004) might help explain the Jerusalemite bias, but it will be shown that the place of composition is in one sense as irrelevant as the geographical location of the individual or group witnessing the prophecy.
- 4 'Composure and serenity' are for Said 'the last things associated with the work of exiles' (Said 1984, pp. 186, 182).
- 5 The servant may generally refer to the nation, or to a Davidic heir, but 44:26 seems to confirm an identification of the servant with the prophet himself.
- 6 The other prose passage occurs in 52:3-6.
- 7 In keeping with Merendino's conclusion that the verse more closely resembles an 'announcement of salvation', which he likens the judicial context to that found in Jer. 28:15-16; 34:4-5; Ezek. 21:3-5; *et passim*, he treats this oracle as the conclusion to the trial speech of 43:22-28 (Merendino 1981). Westermann (1969) and Baltzer (2001), on the other hand, reflect a tendency to treat vv. 1-5 as a separate form altogether.
- 8 Thomas (1971) explains his reasons for formatting this passage poetically in BHS, while more recently, Dempsey translates poetically, revocalising for a 'timeless present' (*weyiqtol*) and maintaining the Masoretic pointing, which renders a 'past relative' (*wayyiqtol*).
- 9 A frame has been placed around 43:22-44:23 by John D.W. Watts (1987) and Childs (2001), among others.
- 10 Some readers might take issue with the description of the Cuban elite who fled Castro as 'exiles'. Certainly access to private funds can ease the transition into a foreign culture, but I have not found any definitions of exile that insist the subject either be stripped of all finances or fall on a particular side of a political fence. I do not know if Ana's parents were active Battista supporters or if they

- simply chose to leave to avoid the consequences of the revolution, but the answers to these questions seem not to directly impinge on the identity issues she addressed in her life and work.
- 11 Blocker illustrates how in Mendieta's work the power of names and of men acutely oppose the 'un-baptized' nature of the earth.
- 12 Letters from Elephantine mention the branding of slaves.
- 13 The term was coined by Soja (1996) to account for a combined perception of real and imagined space. Calling this marginal state 'lived space', metaphilosopher Henri Lefebvre (1991) had conceived it to be the complex space in which power is made concrete through social production.
- 14 The exact location and body of water are unknown.
- 15 For a summary of opinions of the integrity of this passage, see Baltzer (2001, p. 192, n. 270).
- 16 The literal translation is complicated by the presence of the *waw*-consecutive, indicating an absence of a verb in the first phrase. Ignoring that, v. 12 reads: 'The craftsman of [the] iron tool works it over the glowing coal, fashions it with hammers, and forges it with his strong arm. He also becomes hungry, so he has no strength; he cannot drink water, so he grows faint.'
- 17 The prophet remembers God cleaving the rock and making water flow at Meribah in 48:21, and in 51:1YHWH directs those who seek deliverance: 'Look to the rock from which you were hewn, / and to the quarry from which you were hewn' (RSV).

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