

# *Dona-Arbre [Woman-Tree]* by Fina Miralles: Gleaning Corporeal Knowledge.

**DONA-ARBRE [WOMAN-TREE] BY FINA MIRALLES:  
GLEANNING CORPOREAL KNOWLEDGE.**

**ABSTRACT**

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In this article I claim that *Dona-Arbre [Woman-Tree]* by Fina Miralles from the series *Traslacions*, is part from a sequence of exercises and practices experienced during her performance work in which the body is increasingly perceived and experienced. All them are exercises in a search for the body in connection with its environment and with herself. It precedes her later focus on the body where there is a more overtly feminist political intervention. I argue that an exploratory method of the environment and the body starts with *Dona-Arbre*, and that this method is valuable to a feminist politics that begins from a somatic self-knowledge. Based on embodied methodologies, research-creation and kinesthetic empathy, I engage with feminist theories of embodiment and agency, and take on Carrie Noland's concept of kinesthesia to elaborate on the specific strategies in *Dona-Arbre* such as the still body, kinesthesia and micro-movements. I read them as a subtle resistance and pivotal instruments for building corporeal agency in the context of the acute restrictions on body politics during the Franco dictatorship.

**Keywords**

body, environment, Fina Miralles, kinesthetic knowledge, kinesthetic empathy, corporeal agency, feminist intervention.

## **DONA-ARBRE [MUJER-ÁRBOL] DE FINA MIRALLES: RECOLECTANDO CONOCIMIENTO CORPORAL.**

### **RESUMEN**

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En este artículo sostengo que *Dona-Arbre [Mujer-Árbol]* de Fina Miralles, de la serie *Traslacions*, es parte de una secuencia de ejercicios y prácticas experimentadas durante las acciones realizadas en las que el cuerpo se percibe y experimenta cada vez más. Todas estas acciones son ejercicios para buscar el cuerpo en conexión con su entorno y con ella misma. Esta acción precede un trabajo que más adelante se centra en el cuerpo y que puede leerse como más abiertamente feminista. Mi argumento es que con *Dona-Arbre* comienza un método exploratorio del cuerpo y del entorno, y que este método es valioso para un feminismo basado en un autoconocimiento somático. Partiendo de metodologías encarnadas, investigación-creación y empatía kinestésica, utilizo teorías feministas encarnadas y de agencia, y tomo el concepto de kinestesia de Carrie Noland para describir las estrategias específicas en *Dona-Arbre* tales como el cuerpo inmóvil, kinestesia y micro-movimientos. Los interpreto como resistencias sutiles e instrumentos fundamentales para construir agencia corporal en el contexto de las restricciones políticas del cuerpo durante la dictadura franquista.

#### **Palabras Clave**

cuerpo, entorno, Fina Miralles, conocimiento kinestésico, empatía kinestésica, agencia corporal, intervención feminista.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

If anything was learned in the Franco regime, it was to invent strategies to say what could not be said [. . .] these other ways of saying become spaces of resistance against the power of the other [...] the body, through materiality and gesture, becomes a language.  
(Maite Garbayo, 2015, p. 19)

On November 20, 1975, Francisco Franco<sup>1</sup>—who had spent a few months in a hospital where his body was kept alive by machines—passed away. Two years before, in the same month, Fina Miralles (Catalonia, 1950)<sup>2</sup> produced the action *Dona-Arbre* (1973), where she appears de facto in the action and “puts her body”<sup>3</sup> into the artwork. In *Dona-Arbre*, Fina Miralles’ still body is present and buried to the thighs. She is dressed in cotton jeans and a dark jersey. Three photographs in black and white document this performance. In one (Figure 1) Fina Miralles is looking at the camera, yet with a vacant gaze, as if she is in another state of consciousness. In the second one (Figure 2), still with open eyes, she does not look to the camera but at a point between the ground and the horizon. In the third one (Figure 3), Fina Miralles almost closes her eyes.

1 Francisco Franco (1892-1975) was a Spanish general who took control of Spain as a military dictator from 1939, after the Nationalist victory in the Spanish Civil War, until his death in 1975. This period is called the Franco regime (Francoism). During the dictatorship, political power took over bodies in public spaces. Power also controlled the space of the private sphere. Juan Albarán-Diego has described that “the privacy of individuals (in their home and their bodies) could be infringed upon any time looking for some kind of information or simply as a means of repression. During the late years of Francoism and the transition, the body (especially the body that dissents), as the last redoubt of the privacy and identity of the individual, will always be threatened by political violence and torture”. (2013, p. 304) [my translation].

2 Fina Miralles was born on September 27th, 1950 in Sabadell, Catalonia. Her complete name is “Fina Miralles Nobell,” with her first surname from her father and the second from her mother. In an interview during the 1980s, Fina Miralles, in a challenge to the paraphernalia around the surname of the artist announced, “from here and now I will be Fina.” She recently told me that sometimes she even signs as “Fina” because it is more “intimate” (personal communication, June 26, 2018). From a feminist perspective, I read this as a way to build her own subjectivity out of her family and social heritage. For this reason, I use “Fina Miralles” instead of simply “Miralles,” in order to acknowledge her wish to use her first name.

3 This expression –in Spanish “poner el cuerpo”- is taken from *Cuerpos que aparecen. Performance y Feminismos en el Tardofranquismo* by Maite Garbayo, where she applies it to strategies of appearance/disappearance used by artists in the late years of Francoism. Garbayo draws from Amelia Jones’ description of *Silhouette* by Cuban/USA artist Ana Mendieta. Jones (1998, p.26) explains here the absence/presence in appearance/disappearance (Garbayo 2016, p.68).



**Figure 1.** Black and white photograph (Author: Unknown). Documentation of *Dona-Arbre [Woman-Tree]* (photograph 3) (Sant Llorenç del Munt, Barcelona, Novembre1973) by Fina Miralles.  
Archive: Museu d'Art Sabadell (MAS)



**Figure 2.** Black and white photograph (Author: Unknown). Documentation of *Dona-Arbre [Woman-Tree]* (photograph 1) (Sant Llorenç del Munt, Barcelona, Novembre1973) by Fina Miralles.  
Archive: Museu d'Art Sabadell (MAS)



**Figure 3.** Black and white photograph (Author: Unknown). Documentation of *Dona-Arbre [Woman-Tree]* (photograph 2) (Sant Llorenç del Munt, Barcelona, Novembre1973) by Fina Miralles.  
Archive: Museu d'Art Sabadell (MAS)

In one of our conversations about this performance, Fina Miralles told me that although it does not look like it, the soil feels colder than other elements. Through an empathy exercise, I imagine that she probably felt the freshness of the soil through the fabric of her cotton jeans, perceived the breeze of the air on the rest of her body. An empathetic approach allows me to understand *a relation* between the body and the elements—half of the body within the soil and the other half in relation with the air—as a sensorial exploration more than a symbolic act. I turn to the body as a site for thinking not only the experience of women under patriarchy but also for conceptualizing somatic strategies of emancipation and self-knowledge. I argue that there is a perceptual and somatic dimension of the political that is especially important for explaining the resistance to the censorship in the late years of the Franco dictatorship, when artists like Fina Miralles developed dynamics with their bodies under obligatory “mute” circumstances—in other words, a repressive system with no possibility of freedom of expression.

During my research—in addition to other strategies<sup>4</sup>—I have located a somatic point of view from which I could unpack the body actions by Fina Miralles and distinct phenomenological, affective and conceptual perspectives of the gestures. This somatic empathy was useful for approaching my research questions<sup>5</sup>. I situated myself beside Fina Miralles when I looked at the

<sup>4</sup> My research of embodiment in performance art was experimental in its methodologies: I made use of my own performances, re-creations of Fina Miralles' performances in the sites where they took place, extensive archival work in Spain, the curation of her super-8 films into a media exhibit, the use of film and video during fieldwork and while conversing with the artist, as well as a kind of “deep hanging out” with Fina Miralles.

<sup>5</sup> What was emancipatory or liberatory about her bodywork process? What might feminist political action look like when it is not overtly revolutionary?

traces of her work, or when I conversed with her about it. To develop this strategy while looking at the photographs, I sometimes used the “first person” to describe what was happening in the performances as a way to put myself in the action, as a way to understand what the process of the action was. This strategy allowed me to develop an empathy process in the analysis. In the introduction to *Kinesthetic Empathy in Creative and Cultural Practices*, Amelia Jones argues: “Empathy is one way of thinking about our connection to art (our desire to see and interpret is informed by our empathetic connection with the person we imagine to be making/performing or to have made/performed the work)” (2012, p.11). Drawing from David Morgan, Jones argues that this “aesthetic empathy” considers that

particular kinds of human expression (here, visual art) project feelings and elicit what Lipps had called ‘aesthetic sympathy’ such that those engaging with the work feel (presumably similar feelings) in response. [...] Art is that which expresses feelings. And art can, by expressing feeling, move viewers in the future by changing their ideas, their emotions, their beliefs. (2012, pp. 11-12)

Giving my interest on the somatic, I draw from Deidre Sklar that argues that kinesthetic empathy provides information that could not be possible to gather with visual perception or symbolic analysis. Through kinesthetic empathy it is possible to feel the proprioceptive sense in relation with oneself and the world. She defines kinesthetic empathy as “the capacity to participate with another’s movement or another’s sensory experience of movement” (1994, p.15). Through this strategy, I was in touch with the body micromovements of Fina Miralles in *Dona-Arbre*. My own performative actions, during this research and before, created a space of sensorial empathy with Fina Miralles’ performances, to see in them potential spaces for bodily awareness. Also, my training as a psychologist shaped the approach I used in this research. I used my skills in interviewing, listening, observation and empathy as modes of doing art historical research and analysis of body performance. Through this and other strategies –such as curating her films<sup>6</sup>– I realized the importance of perceiving my own bodily sensations during the research process, and here resides the way I arrived to this methodology, and concepts and methods such as “kinesthetic empathy”.

Because my research question was about embodiment, I suggest an embodied and feminist methodology that develops a tactile and corporeal sense of Fina Miralles’ corporeal practice. I practice “empathy exercises” as a mode of feminist historical research. I show with that that what I excavated were Fina Miralles’ gestures and performances in the late years of Francoism, and the roots of the history of my own country. All my research approach defines this investigation as an interdisciplinary one that put my situated knowledge and body in the research, being affected by the process in an embodied way, not only building my own voice through the writing but actually making the exercise of reconstituting my own body as a woman of the second generation of the Franco dictatorship, which I argue is a feminist and embodied research methodology. Through this process I challenged the traditional ways in which production of knowledge happens, particularly in that this research was approached specifically in a corporeal manner. The process itself was a creative production and advanced my research: it was through the corporeal and creative experiences/practices I undertook that the theoretical concepts and arguments emerged. In this research, I develop a methodology of encounter

<sup>6</sup> “I create new spaces, I build paths, I walk through them” [Creo espacio, Construyo sendas, camino sobre ellas] Feminist Media Studio (2017) <http://feministmediastudio.ca/events/fina-miralles/>, and “Les recerques de Fina Miralles” [Fina Miralles’ Search] at Centro Cultural de España (Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional al Desarrollo, AECID) <https://ccesd.org/exposiciones/les-receperques-de-fina-miralles-super-8-film-1973-1976/>

(self encounter and with the artist) for examining Fina Miralles' work as an alternative to the critical distance in traditional art historical methods. This methodology contributes to other –more traditional- forms of evidence in art history research such as textual evidence, artists' testimonies and/or visual analysis. The creative and embodied process I committed to took certain risks in terms of the physical/emotional/personal labors that the critical distance of “the good eye” in art history would not have taken. In sum, I challenge the mind/body dichotomies through putting in practice an embodied methodology in a research that is related with the body, and I contribute to the articulation of feminist methodologies that are embodied.<sup>7</sup>

What do the corporeal dynamics in *Dona-Arbre* tell us about emancipatory/liberatory dynamics in the last years of Francoism? Beginning from *Sensitiveland* [Tierra de los Sentidos] (1972), *Natura Morta* [Still Life] (1972) *Fenòmens Atmosfèrics* [Atmospherical Phenomena] (1973) and the series *Translacions* [Movements] (1974) –where *Dona-Arbre* pertains- in my doctoral thesis I argue that there is a procedural and pedagogical value in the exercises for self-knowledge and feminist emancipation that culminate in the series *Relacions* [Relations] (1974-1975)<sup>8</sup> and *Petjades* [Footprints] (1976). After these works, Fina Miralles developed a group of actions that have attracted more attention by researchers who have observed a feminist component in her work. In the Spanish literature about feminism and art, there are references to pieces by Fina Miralles, particularly those works that had a clear activist purpose against abuses of power that also deconstructed the female role under Francoism: *Petjades* [Footprints] (1976), *Standard* [Estándar] (1976), *Enmascarats* [Masked] (1976), *Triangle, Simbologia de Poder i Mort* [Triangle, Symbols of Power and Death] (1976) and *Matanzas* [Slaughter] (1976) (Aliaga, 2013, 2015; Bassas, 2001, 2007, 2011; Garbayo, 2016; Parcerisas, 1992, 2007). Marta Pol labelled this work as “visual work with sociological characteristics” (2012, p. 44). According to Garbayo, “some concrete interventions that directly appealed to power and repression exercised over subjects, such as Fina Miralles' performance *Standard* (1976), have become paradigms of feminist political art of the time” (2012, p. 108).

Through the reading of *Sensitiveland* (1972), *Natura Morta* (1972) *Fenòmens Atmosfèrics* (1973), the series *Translacions* (1974), *Relacions* (1974-1975) and *Petjades* (1976), I reflected about these research questions: What was emancipatory or liberatory about her bodywork process? What might feminist political action look like when it is not overtly revolutionary? I elaborated the notion of a process of developing kinesthetic awareness which implicates the body more and more, and which provides a method for building corporeal agency, and considers this method valuable for a feminist politics that begins from self-knowledge. By looking at corporeal agency, kinesthesia and embodiment from a feminist perspective, in this article I argue for the specificity of stillness, micro-movements and kinesthesia in *Dona-Arbre*. The series *Translacions* consists of three actions where Fina Miralles moves natural elements to landscapes or spaces where they do not originally pertain or belong: *Deixada Anar de Cargols* [Letting Snails Free] (1973), *Flotació d'Herba en el Mar*, [Flotation of Grass in the Sea] (1973); *Duna* [Dune] (1973), and *Dona-Arbre* [Woman-Tree] (1973). I see in these movements and simple bodily acts the possibility not only of a kind of bodily knowing, but also a feminist liberatory possibility emerging in the context of the repressive gender order of the dictatorship.

<sup>7</sup> More details about this methodology can be found in my doctoral thesis “*Fina Miralles' Relacions: Kinesthetic knowledge and Corporeal Knowledge*” (2018) at Concordia University (QC, Montreal, Canada): <https://spectrum.library.concordia.ca/984673/> and in “*Fina Miralles: Partituras Corporales*” in *Contagis. Sobre l'obra de Fina Miralles* (Girona, 2020) –pending publication–

<sup>8</sup> This series was divided into two subseries: *Relacions del Cos*, *Elements Naturals* [Body Relations, Natural Elements] and *Relacions. Accions Quotidians* [Relations. Everyday actions].



In this article, I analyse the impact of the sensorial experimentations and corporeal dynamics of *Dona-Arbre* has on postulating a *method of emancipation*, one which understands agency not only as a process in the mind but mainly a corporeal one. Drawing from Carrie Noland's thinking on kinesthesia, instead of using a purely linguistic or/and visual model of analysis, I will construct one that focuses on the somatic and experiential –as well as the aesthetic, cultural and contextual – dimensions of corporeal actions and experiences. As I have explained previously, I proceed through ways of “doing” analysis of corporeal work, employing different strategies based on “embodied methodologies” (Spatz, 2017), research-creation<sup>9</sup> (Chapman & Sawchuck, 2012), haptic experience (Kathy O'Dell, 1997), and “kinesthetic empathy,”<sup>10</sup> (Sklar, 1994; Reynolds and Reason, 2012), and proceeding from a situated feminist approach<sup>11</sup> (Haraway, 1988).

## 2 THE STATE OF THE QUESTION AND THE CATALONIAN SCENE OF THE 1970S

From 1973 to 1976<sup>12</sup>, Fina Miralles had a wide production of performance classified under different labels. She is referred to as a pioneer of Catalanian conceptual art by Pilar Parcerisas (1992; 2007) and discussed from different perspectives, such as feminism, femininity and nature (Laura Mayayo, 2003, 2013; Juan Vicente Aliaga, 2012, 2013; Assumpta Bassas 2001, 2007, 2008, 2011, 2013; Maia Creus 2007, 2018; Isabel Tejada 2011; Marta Pol, 2012, and Irene Ballester, 2012), feminist politics and performance (Maite Garbayo, 2016), and performance as a tactile experience (Juan Albarrán-Diego, 2013). Also many artists and curators have approached her work from different experiences and practices, such as performing, documenting and creating art work with her (Isabel Banal, 2010; Joan Casellas, 2012; Denys Blaker, 2013; Marta Vergonyos, 2013; Francisco Salas, 2013), interviewing and conversing with Fina Miralles, and interested in her art and life strategies (Francisco Salas, 2013; Laura Corcuera, 2017), curating her work in solitary or with other artists (Tamara Díaz, 2013; Creus, 2018; Juan Canela, 2018; Francisco Salas, 2013) or interpreting her work with various corporeal and artistic strategies (Mar Serinyá, 2019), between others. These valuable readings, exhibitions and experiences have been contributing to create a historiography of art and feminisms in Spain, and especially to understanding the value of Fina Miralles work.

There have been attempts to understand Fina Miralles' work through a feminist lens, yet these have been commonly focused on her most explicitly political work<sup>13</sup>. Fina Miralles' early works have been frequently associated with conceptual artists or have been considered emblematic of an essentialized feminine relation with nature. On the other hand, aesthetic connections to other international body art practices<sup>14</sup> miss the specific socio-political context within which Fina Miralles' work gained significance, and thus we should be cautious in thinking about questions of influence too easily, even as these contribute to understand the climate of aesthetic experimentation and the languages of body practices in that period.

9 “Creation-as-research [...] redefines the very concepts of theory, creativity, and knowledge [...] Knowledge is produced as creative work, and not simply through their analysis and interpretation, contributing to knowledge in a profoundly different way from the academic norm” (2012, p.21).

10 Kinesthetic Empathy is defined by Deidre Sklar as “the capacity to participate with another's movement or another's sensory experience of movement” (1994, p.15).

11 From my position as a Spanish woman, and being influenced by the research.

12 Fina Miralles resumed creating performance in 2012. Bassas has addressed the potential connection between her current work and the one of the 1970s (2013).

13 *Petjades* (1976), *Standard* (1976), *Enmascarats* (1976) and *El triangle com a simbologia de poder i mort* (1976).

14 For instance, with Ana Mendieta (Laura De la Mora Martí, 2005).

Fina Miralles' work between 1972 and 1975 does not fit into some of the neat oppositions present in the art history of Catalonia. Conceptual art in Catalonia is usually understood as marked by two different groups: the more political Grup de Treball [Work Group] and artists from the exhibition *Qué fer?* [What to do?].<sup>15</sup> According to Pilar Parcerisas:

Things were not so simple. The Catalan conceptual was not homogeneous, on the contrary; and, apart from the *Grup de Treball*, there were no more collectives. What is certain is that the textual radicality of the *Grup de Treball* made other artists take different positions, and the exhibition *Qué Fer?* is a manifestation of that. *Que Fer?* put into *question textual and/or verbal conceptualism* and a more *material conceptual art* was claimed without renouncing the ideological component. (2007, p.440) [my translation, emphasis added]

Parcerisas labels the work of Fina Miralles through the category “nature and landscape” (1992, pp.16, 22) and in relation to “the poetics of nature”, thus in opposition to the political work of *Grup de Treball* (2001, p.47). Most accounts of conceptualism in Spain understand only the practice of the *Grup de Treball*<sup>16</sup> as politicized, and not other proposals that emphasize the presence of the body and dislocate hegemonic models of representation from other perspectives.<sup>17</sup> In a conversation with Garbayo, Francesc Torres, one of the members of *Grup de Treball*, surveys the Spanish panorama of the 1970s and articulates interesting reflections: “It seemed that if you wanted to be a politically implicated person and you were an artist, you had no choice but to be literal, and this seemed to me the last imposition of Francoism” (Torres as cited in Garbayo, 2014, p. 107). In this sense, the work of the artists from *Que Fer?* opened another line of work.

In *El Arte Conceptual en Cataluña I* (1975), Alexandre Cirici describes the artistic scene in Catalonia and defines conceptual art as “those manifestations of visual or *sensory practice* that have replaced the traditional artistic system of manufacturing tangible and durable objects by a system as purely *communicative* as possible” (1975, p. 22) [my translation, emphasis added]. He argues that there was an “exploration of the *subsenses*” in 1972, the year when the “sociological”<sup>18</sup> dimension was most present in art, and that in 1973 there were many collective manifestations. According to Cirici, this led to an increase in theoretical proposals that, during 1974 and 1975, “seemed to corner sensory practice” (1975, p. 22). My reading of the concept “subsenses”<sup>19</sup> is that it does not refer only to the commonly understood five senses (hearing, touch, taste, smell, vision), but to other modes of apprehending sensation such as kinesthesia,<sup>20</sup> one of the main aspects through which I explore Fina Miralles' performance as a feminist intervention.

15 *Qué fer?* was held in *Sala Vinçon* in June, 1973, and its participants (without pretending to form any group) were Ferrán García Sevilla, Fina Miralles, Jordi Pablo, Carlos Pazos, Olga L. Pijoan and Lluís Utrilla, pioneers of conceptual art. Fina Miralles was also the coordinator of this exhibition room in 1974.

16 The *Grup de Treball* was a movement of conceptual art in Catalonia that was politicized in an activist sense. Most of its members were related to the anti-Francoist militant left and understood art inserted in a process of production in materialistic terms. The group was active for approximately three years (1973-1975), writing 33 texts reflecting on artistic practices and their relationship with politics, and intermittently brought together a total of 20 people, of whom 5 were women: The artists Angels Ribé, Dorothee Selz, Alicia Fingerut and Maria Costa, and the researcher and art critic Imma Julián (Garbayo, 2016, p. 46)

17 Such as Fina Miralles, Àngels Ribé, Olga L.Pijoan, Jordi Pablo, Lluís Utrilla, and Francesc Torres, some of them part of the collective exhibition *Qué fer?*

18 Marta Pol labelled the art works that had a clear activist purpose against abuse of power and that also deconstructed the female role under Francoism as “visual work with sociological characteristics” (2012, p.44).

19 Catalanian artist Antoni Muntadas also uses this word for his work *Experiències Subsensorials* [Subsensual Experiences] (1971-1973). However, “subsenses” does not exist in the dictionary (*Diccionari de la Llengua Catalana*).

20 And other senses such as proprioception, synaesthesia, interoception, equilibrium, etc. I draw from Noland for a definition of kinesthesia. She understands that “kinesthetic experience –the sensory awareness of one's movement- can indeed encourage experiment, modification and, at times, rejection of the routine” (2009, p.3).

In “Feeling the Body,” Albarrán-Diego highlights artists’ works that propose “tactile experiences.” For Albarrán

all these works show an interest in *recuperating the control of the body* using it in turn as a tool for knowledge. [These works] enhance the sensorial capabilities of the body—touch, and not just sight—at a time when it was annulled, atrophied, in a patriarchal, ultraconservative, national-catholic society. And, at the same time, *they claim the body as its own, assume its control*, to wrest it away from a dictatorial state that, through laws, legal gaps and various coercive mechanisms, had seized the body of its subjects. (2013, p.307) [emphasis added]

In this article he mentions Antoni Muntadas, Eva Lootz, Antoni Llena, Jordi Benito, Àngels Ribé and Juan Hidalgo. He also highlights *Relacions. Accions Quotidians* [Relacions. Quotidian Actions] (1975) by Fina Miralles. I have also observed this sensorial exploration in Fina Miralles earliest works therefore I have traced a line of connexion between those performances that I explain in my doctoral thesis (and future articles). In this article, I focus on the beginning of this somatic experimentation, which is the specificity of the corporeal dynamics in *Dona-Arbre*, such as the still body, kinesthesia and micromovements.

### 3 DONA-ARBRE: BEYOND LAND ART AND FEMININITY

Referring to *Dona-Arbre*, Aliaga says that it “is an action within the spirit of land-art. . . it is a proposition that connects with one of the lines drawn from feminism in those years: the search of integration (holistic) between creation and nature” (2013, p.55) [my translation]. He also argues that *Dona-Arbre* is a “proposal straddling embodied and personalized land-art from a reflection on the link between women and nature” (2011, p.209). Regarding the connections between her work and the artistic practice known as land art, Fina Miralles, in the publication *Naturaleses Naturals* (1975), specified that the intention and concept behind *Translacions* was different from the theoretical and visual approaches of artists aligned with the land art movement. According to Parcerisas, despite the fact that Fina Miralles’ artistic practice contained some formal similarities with artists such as Walter de María, Richard Long or Dennis Oppenheim, her conceptual approach was completely different (2007, p.75). Fina Miralles argues that Land Art artists used nature as a support or artistic material with an aesthetic purpose;<sup>21</sup> I argue that she used natural materials as *data or objects* to study how natural and artificial things are made, that is to say, to speak of nature’s corporeal substance.

Fina Miralles emphasizes the specificity of her projects and denies that they have anything to do with land art:

In my present *research*, the use of nature is not a substitute for the picture shaping the work of art; rather, the materials are taken as *study elements* and not as an aesthetic medium. In some cases, the material space has been used to make *experiences*, such as in *Translacions*, which are developed in nature as the space and context of natural materials, the basis of these *exercises*. (Fina Miralles, as cited in Parcerisas 2007, p.80) [my translation, emphasis added]

<sup>21</sup> This is only one aspect of Land Art since there is a huge literature on Land Art, Earth Art, and Environmental Art, yet Fina Miralles’ comments are in relation with the dominant work of artists in the land of the period in the US.

The cultural framework where land art took place is very different from the restrictive situation of the dictatorial system in Spain. In this dictatorial system, to work with the environment was a way to experiment other forms to express oneself and have access to a space outside of the system. Landscapes and elements provided some materials to raise the voice of the artists through their bodies.

When referring to the debate about Fina Miralles' works as Land Art, Garbayo argues that the main difference is a "question of scale." She affirms that the artist's body is the measure of the work and the important aspect in Fina Miralles' performance is "the immediacy of a presence:" "in *Translacions* . . . the *body*, although not present as a support, is responsible for the transfer of matter from one place to another (2016, p.74) [my translation, emphasis added].

Bassas<sup>22</sup> notes that "there is a very mature moment in Fina Miralles' conceptual body of work which started in 1972 when she began exploring the relationships between natural elements, her body, cultural representations and the uses of nature (1972-1974)" (2005, p. 6) [my translation], and observes an association of the feminine and nature –as symbolic "mother" (2001). Bassas' main interest is the exploration of the feminine body in relation with nature.

Art historian Maia Creus (2007) describes *Translacions* as a work in relation with nature, beyond land art categories:

Often, this work has been compared to the aesthetic sphere of land art, although it is necessary to put this work [Fina Miralles'] in relation with a particular cosmological view of the world and of the art that the artist will be exhibiting throughout her career with a work, in and from nature, in which body and language become the elements of the mediation. (p.132) [my translation, emphasis added]

Creus highlights the relation of the body with nature in Fina Miralles' work. Bassas (2001) affirms that Fina Miralles and other Catalanian artists were finding a "way to look for a transcendent sense of feminine experience in the world" (p.93) [my translation, emphasis added].<sup>23</sup>

Garbayo, referring to the essentialism debate, argues:

While Assumpta Bassas has identified in *Dona Arbre* a link between the life-giving femininity and the figure of the tree, with both concepts inserted in the paradigm of nature, the importance of this piece in my view lies in the appearance for the first time of the artist's own body as an integral part of the work, with all that that entails. And although it is obviously a body that we identify as feminine, I do not believe that there is a direct and *a priori* association between the tree and a femininity that in any case has been redefined for a long time. (2016, p.72) [my translation]

<sup>22</sup> Bassas is the first scholar that made an in-depth research on Fina Miralles' artwork, and also responsible for the first attempt to make an archive with the documentation associated with the artwork by Fina Miralles.

<sup>23</sup> Both researchers (Bassas and Creus) draw from a feminist politics of difference, and base their readings on an essential relation between women's bodies and nature. Feminisms of "difference" were initiated by Luce Irigaray, Annie Leclerc, and Hélène Cixous, and in Spain by Victoria Sendón de León, and the *Milan Library* and Philosophers of Diotima. These are the main sources of the *Centro de Investigaciones Duoda* [Duoda Research Center] in the University of Barcelona where both Bassas and Creus are currently members. In Spain in the 1970s, there were two main feminist approaches: *Feminismo de la igualdad* [Feminism of Equality] and *Feminismo de la diferencia* [Feminism of Difference]. The first one was focused on changes to laws and women's rights while the second one, according to Sendón de León (2000), made a more intimate path and created women consciousness groups.

The debate about the potential essentialism or non-essentialism of Fina Miralles' work is ultimately about the role of gender in the performance. I focus my analysis on the corporeal relation with physical matter and what that entails for feminist readings of embodiment and agency. Also, it is my argument that Fina Miralles already "put her body" in the previous works where she already starts combining sensorial explorations with natural elements and makes transpositions of natural elements where a search for the body in relation with the surroundings is key. Through the analysis of Fina Miralles' works in the 1970s, I suggest that Fina Miralles' oeuvre explores emancipatory corporeal dynamics far from both the necessary fight for women's rights and from an essentialist position that defines women through the lens of their essential "difference" (from men) and connects women with nature.

#### 4 THE INVISIBLE SEARCH FOR THE BODY AS SUBTLE RESISTANCE

What is the seed?  
Yes, the seed is one  
And you have to discover it,  
All has an origin: The Dona-Arbre  
(Fina Miralles, 2009)<sup>24</sup> [my translation]

In *Dona-Arbre's* photograph documentation, Fina Miralles is on the one hand looking to the camera (Figure 1), it seems she is prompting the audience to inquire or discover the origin or the roots of this action. On the other hand, she looks immersed in an introspective experience, with her absent gaze from the surrounding landscape, or even closing her eyes (Figure 2 and 3). This introspective look allows her to focus on the invisible sensations produced through her action, and thus through kinesthesia, gathering knowledge about the borders of her body and how they can be felt in a different way in her body parts that are buried and the parts that are above the ground. I see these qualitative dynamics of kinesthesia as a subtle resistance, happening in the silence, and in the invisible. Fina Miralles' refers to this as the "invisible-visible": "What interests me is form and three-dimensional reality. The invisible-visible, what is not seen does not mean that it is not there. The sight, the feelings, the words... that are heard but cannot be seen" (personal communication, June 26, 2018) [my translation]. Therefore, for her there are many corporeal sensations happening in the relation with oneself, the world and others that are not visible —for instance the act of looking, or feeling the body micromovements.

We should remember that as Garbayo explains: "During the regime, the production of the female body as a frail, fearful and dependent body, configures femininity as a limitation of the movement in public and reinforces her allocation to the private" (2016, p. 17). She adds, drawing from Sara Ahmed, that "fear serves to align the corporal and social space, allowing some *bodies to move and expand* in the public space by restricting others' body mobility to spaces that are bounded or contained" (Ahmed as cited by Garbayo, 2016, p. 63) [my translation, emphasis added]. Fina Miralles *makes space within the body* and outside the body. I use "make space" in a metaphorical sense to explain what it could mean to extend her body inwards through corporeal awareness and through its very presence in the public space, something under restrictions in the dictatorship.

<sup>24</sup> Even though Fina Miralles' text is from a later time (2009) than *Dona-Arbre* (1973), I use this quotation in order to show how the importance of the lived body for her starts during this period in her life, as well as how she articulates it later in her writings and life (and also by resuming doing performances in 2012).

I observe in *Dona-Arbre* a process of self-knowledge in relation with the world, *making space* within but also outside, by occupying in a different way the intimate and public space. This space is a perceptual and somatic dimension that could be unknown by the repressive system. Fina Miralles expands her body through the exploration of the sensorial and this is a manner of resistance under the dictatorship's censorship, where there were obligatory "mute" circumstances. In our conversations, she says that *Dona-Arbre* is the action where she uses the body for the first time, but she says that she did so "without knowing yet. [...] I did not connect with my body until later" (personal communication, 2016) [my translation]. This statement has important implications for feminism and my understanding of agency located in the body as a mainly corporeal process.<sup>25</sup> From Fina Miralles' statement I understand that she moves first and sees the movement as liberatory and agential after. Regarding this she also notes:

[in conceptual art] I used the body as another element, like 'my body is something that I have.' Yet it was very intellectual/rational. Now, *I take good care of my body. I exist in my body. I exist through my body.* But I didn't know this before or I didn't want to know. (Personal communication, Summer 2016) [my translation, emphasis added]

For Fina Miralles, the contact with the body was nonexistent in these works; yet there was already a relation with her own body. I do not aim in this reading to contradict Fina Miralles' understanding of her own corporeal processes; however, I argue that these processes have connections to the construction of agency, a process that starts with corporeal dynamics, and with sometimes un-perceived movements that later are understood as agential. Bodily dynamics are taking place in Fina Miralles' still body in *Dona-Arbre*, where she makes the statement with her action: "I am part of the earth." (personal communication, 2016) [my translation]. Her feet can feel that they are part of it.

Kinesthesia, affectivity and tactility are the experiences through which the artist verifies that she is alive and present in the flesh, something that I argue is a subtle resistance under the repressive body politics of the Francoist system. With subtle resistance I am referring to a perceptual and somatic resistance that happens in silence, in a different arena than representational democracy, occupying the streets, activism in women's rights or the feminist emphasis on consciousness raising,<sup>26</sup>

Kinesthetic sensation is thus in league with the mind's attempt to experience its embodiment as an animate form. That kinesthesia might be seen as *providing sensory experience for the purposes of introspection* is of course highly relevant, for it implies that the way movement feels ("sensation in its own right") can indeed become the object of intentional consciousness (to evoke Husserl's terms). (Noland, 2009, p.10) [emphasis added]

If the sensory experience of kinesthesia provides a process of introspection and allows agentic processes, then I consider this a form of resistance because those very points were what Francoism was acting against. For this reason, Fina Miralles' explorations are a particular and different kind of liberatory process. This political and personal dynamic that is mainly a somatic

<sup>25</sup> Researcher in Social Psychology, Satu Liimakka, has explored women's bodily experiences and possibilities for embodied agency. She suggests that a strategy of the mind, such as being conscious of the oppressive status for women, is not enough to provoke a change in learned corporeal roles. She proposes an agency that arises from and in the body (Liimakka, 2011, 2013).

<sup>26</sup> Second-wave feminism emphasized shared feminist consciousness and feminist resistance to the objectification of women. Consciousness-raising groups were frequently based on a traditional definition of agency as resistance (and thus a Cartesian understanding of agency).

process invisible from outside in this work is missed within other readings of Fina Miralles precisely because of its subtlety and because it is an invisible dynamic. For this reason, it is of utmost importance to turn to kinesthetic empathy as a mode of doing art history, where one can understand not only the action's aesthetic and symbolic dimensions, but its experiential ones, and in and through that, one can also understand something about the transformative possibilities present in *Dona-Arbre* (and the rest of the performances that I analyse in my doctoral thesis and that I observe to be connected). Through an empathetic approach to the piece, I recognize these possibilities in and through the body, and not through a kind of authorial or artistic intention. This is why I call these pieces "pedagogical" in that the body itself, its sensation, *instructs* Fina Miralles and also myself, on how to proceed.

## 5 THE STILL BODY

In *Dona-Arbre* we see a still body. Drawing from psychologist Daniel Stern, Noland affirms kinesthetic awareness is working in both the gestures of a moving body and the postures of a still body. She argues that

locked in a cramped or awkward position, we may not be visibly moving, but our neuro-receptors nevertheless pick up the sensation of discomfort and, accordingly, compel us to move. Kinesthesia, in Stern's reading, refers to the feedback the body provides, and to which the subject can choose to listen; kinesthesia thus stands for body awareness in general, with the understanding that the body is never—even while dreaming—entirely in repose. (Noland, 2009, p.14)

In "The Impossible-Possible of Being Still,"<sup>27</sup> Gretchen Schiller explains that being still permits us to take hold of a comprehension that is not possible when we move through space. She explains that

the performers' bodies play a double role: they are both the microscope and the physical site of sensation: a *sensescope*. Like a microscope that allows us to amplify *the too small* or the telescope that allows us to see the too far away, the body as still becomes a sort of faraway nearby sensescope which feels what is not visible to the naked eye. The body-still affords a sensual fine reading of time and space. (2017, p. 188-189)

Drawing from André Lepecki, Schiller notes that stillness implies a "differential presencing:" "Stillness operates at the level of the subject's desire to invert a certain relationship with time, and with certain (prescribed) corporeal rhythms" (Lepecki as cited in Schiller, 2017, p. 189). In this sense, Fina Miralles' still body is an intervention fighting the established corporeal rhythms installed by the dictatorship. Her still body is an exploration of another type of presence under the Francoist rules. The dictatorship didn't want bodies in movement, nor bodies that feel. There were restrictions for the way a body moves, senses, and where it goes. The gendered roles were marked in that regime. It can be said that Fina Miralles in *Dona-Arbre* is repeating some forms of constraint. She literalizes metaphorical statements such as, for instance, being

<sup>27</sup> The aim of this article is "to turn the stage inside out and ask performers to illuminate the ways in which this invisible figuring of approaching and approximating immobility cultivates movement thinking" (Schiller, 2017, p. 178). In this article she interviews contemporary artists Catherine Schaub-Abkarian (dance and theatre), Yoann Bourgeois (dance and circus), and Ruth Gibson (dance and video).

cut off at the knees, which as Francoism, limits the possibilities of movement. The dictatorship debilitated bodies and wanted them to be rendered immobilized under rigid gender roles. However, when Fina Miralles literalizes the symbolic description of this situation, I observe that she understands it differently. There is a sensorial exploration that breaks these limits through perception. On the one hand, her body instructs her on what constraint and repression look and feel like physically. On the other hand, her body—in relation with the very materiality of the world—proposes a possibility of breaking those cruelly installed body routines. She does this through kinesthetic perception as a way to create a corporeal dynamic that leads her to develop an attention within her body. In *Dona-Arbre* she fights the corporeal rhythms installed by the dictatorship, literalizing the immobilization but also proposing a perceptual exploration where kinesthesia becomes an access to introspection through the still body.

Schiller argues that “being still also wipes off the historical dust of other movement sediments in our bodies” (2017, p.190). Fina Miralles’ still body reveals the cruelly installed gestures established by the regime which are rigidly gendered, it creates a pause, a situation of silence, that articulates what cannot be said with words: the claustrophobic society that immobilizes bodies and minds leading persons not to act, not to think, not to reflect about themselves nor the suffocating world around them. In sum, the dictatorship educated people into not having a subjectivity, nor a body. However, the experience of Fina Miralles in *Dona-Arbre* opens other possibilities. As Garbayo states, “when the body is presented in other ways that are not recognizable and that have not yet been codified or regulated, the body and the act become spaces in which the incalculable can happen” (2016, p.21). Being still reveals “a schematic inner vector or tendency-toward movement that can persist in the body even when the large-scale gesture that the ghost gesture schematically implies is not actually being performed” (Elizabeth A. Behnke as cited in Schiller, 2017, p. 190). By being still, Fina Miralles is creating a “psycho-physical space” where self-knowledge and introspection can take place. The body becomes a space of possibilities, a hopeful prospect.

## 6 KINESTHESIA, PERCEPTION AND MICRO-MOVEMENTS

I wish to highlight that in *Dona-Arbre* there is an important perceptual and sensorial process. Reynolds and Reason also explain that “stillness is far from simply the absence of movement but rather a moment in which perception is allowed to settle upon the ‘microscopy’ of reverberation, of detail, of closeness, of difference” (2012, p. 196). Kinesthesia is a forgotten sense. It is commonly understood that human beings have five senses. However, as Sheets-Johnstone (2016) notes, kinesthesia is a sensory modality that has fallen into oblivion. In her opinion, with only five senses human beings would be simply statues. Kinesthesia allows bodies to sense movement, and the awareness of not only the beginning of that movement, but also finishing it, as well as its spatio-temporal energy dynamics (Sheets-Johnstone, 2016). This is important when observing *Dona-Arbre*, because it locates the site where a process of consciousness happens in the body, suggesting a different method of emancipation that situates agency not in mental processes but in corporeal dynamics. The still body gives access to the habitual gestures inhabited in our bodies but also to the body as a source of new capabilities and movements. Schiller notes:



The unperformability of being still is a creative impossible-possible for performers. Internally it is a bodily-felt dynamic landscape of micro movements, which invoke subtle shifts of bones, tendons, ligaments, nerve endings, fluids, breath, cells, states of energy and the imaginary. During the various discussions with the performers the terms: augmented perception, amplification, dilation, listening, reacting, surrendering and opening were often mentioned. These micro eukinetic<sup>28</sup> perceptions of being still cultivate the performer's sensitivity to enact an economy of action-reaction: a heightened responsivity to itself, to others and its environments. Being still produces *inner trace-forms and shadow-forms*, which often escape the public eye and printed press. (2017, pp. 191-192) [emphasis added]

Schiller's thinking supports my argument about *Dona-Arbre*. Fina Miralles' still body under this repressive system is exploring a creative possibility for the obligatory "stillness" and "mute" circumstances under Francoism. I have argued previously how Fina Miralles' actions are subtle resistance in this context. Here Schiller describes "micro-movements" in a still body as "subtle shifts" of different segments of the body. In my understanding of the corporeal dynamics of Fina Miralles, the augmented perception of bodily sensations is a silent awakening of the body, that is, a subtle resistance by increasing the awareness of a body that the Franco system wanted to immobilize and "shut up." Fina Miralles does not talk in *Dona-Arbre*, yet through the body there is a communication with herself through kinesthesia. "Inner trace and shadow forms" are invisible to the eyes, yet a transgression of the system it is at play.

## 7 HOLDING THE BODY AS CORPOREAL AGENCY

In *Dona-Arbre*, Fina Miralles doesn't document digging the hole, neither placing herself in it. I understand this as a strategy to focus on what she is only documenting: the still body in the hole, the enigma of the disappeared legs, the confusion of a body in pieces, or a body semi-buried. The still body is the main element of a physical action. To go inside the hole in this action, she moved the earth out with a shovel. She made this effort to create a physical, clear place where she could situate her body. At a time when there was no real (nor imaginary) space for women to move freely, Fina Miralles pushed herself to open a hole in the earth to touch a physical and visible possibility that could hold her body. Matter sustains the body. Fina Miralles can let go her body supported by matter. She can feel its weight and volume. Holding the body indicates a different exploration than what can be understood as a burial, which implies associations with death. *Dona-Arbre* opens the door to the first part of her next series *Relacions*, where Fina Miralles covers her body with different natural materials in the Catalan countryside. I argue against an overemphasis on the burial of the body (with all the Christian undertones and allusions to death). Holding the body is such a different action and I argue that there is something quite other going on here. This exploration is far from a symbolic death or lack of movement; instead there is an awakening process.

In *Dona-Arbre*, Fina Miralles holds her body with the earth as matter. It is important to note the very meaning of holding, that is, sustaining the body, avoiding its fall, something necessary and totally coherent under the dictatorship. By holding the body in this action, the matter created a space for the body, or an exercise for figuring out what space a body occupies. Drawing from

<sup>28</sup> She draws from Rudolf Von Laban's "term Eukinetics ('Eu' refers to good, and 'kinetics' to movement) in the 1920s to describe the dynamics of movement. See Maletic, Vera, *Body Space. Expression: The Development of Rudolf [Rudolf? Check] Laban's Movement and Dance Concepts* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1987)" (Schiller, 2017, p.191).

Schiller, I wish to pay attention not only to the “shape and forms of movement” but also to the “inner-felt mechanisms of the performer-body-stage turned inside out” (2017, p.192). In performing the action, she physically testifies to how much space her legs occupy. She not only confirms the space she occupies by being hold, but also perceives from inside the invisible kinesthetic corporeal dynamic created through her performance. As she says during our conversations:

My work is very pedagogical. I am a *maestrira* [diminutive of teacher]. Even for myself. There is no work of art. There is *process*. I just say it and show it as it is. [...] The interesting thing about conceptual art and performance is that they are *experiential*, because what I am committed to is an experiential art. It has to make sense. [...] Let’s go to life, please [...] but start with your life [...] and get going!” (personal communication, Summer, 2016) [my translation, emphasis added]

*Dona-Arbre* is thus a key action in Fina Miralles’ trajectory. In it, she anchors her body in the soil, she holds her body in the matter, where she feels its freshness on her legs. The still body talks without words through sensations. As Schiller notes referring to body knowledge and stillness: “the impossibility of immobility cultivates *creative kinaesthetic improbabilities* and a *performative agency* which listens with its cells and hears with its hands” (2017, p. 192) [emphasis added]. Fina Miralles argues: “All has a sense [in my actions]. [It] is very easy to follow it [...] It is important to learn how to look [...] I am telling the things without words [...] [it] is a simple language. [...] There must be a learning of looking more in depth” (personal communication, July 24, 2018) [my translation]. I argue that this “simple” and “invisible” knowledge is communicated through the body, positing it as the very site of knowledge, which has implications for understandings of feminist corporeal aspects of agency that comprehend the body as an agent and the place where agentic processes begin (Lois McNay, 2000; Diana Coole, 2005, 2007; Letitia Meynell, 2009; Sharon R. Krause, 2011). In Fina Miralles’ words there “is a knowledge that you do not realize that goes on inside you. [...] This knowledge cannot be gathered intellectually, but with the hands, with one’s gaze” (personal communication, July 24, 2018) [my translation]. A corporeal and somatic way to gather knowledge, and consequently agency, is implied.

## Conclusiones

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In *Dona-Arbre*, Fina Miralles creates a space for her body, and also a way to intervene in the world. Fina Miralles explores her specifically corporeal existence, challenging the learned behaviours in the Francoist system, governed by the implicit mandates: Do not exist, do not be, do not think<sup>29</sup>. The sensorial explorations and corporeal exercises lead her and the viewer to glean corporeal knowledge. This intervention is feminist in the sense of bringing the sensorial to the body, as a way to reconstitute her body and verifying her existence. *Dona-Arbre* has its own specificity in the series where it pertains (*Translacions*). It is a literal manifestation of bodily micromovements that are about explorations of the relations between the self and world, between things “in place” and things “out of place”. This is not only liberating but specifically feminist because it proposes a model for feminist emancipation in a different arena than the activist, the feminist emphasis on consciousness-raising or public one. She proposes a corporeal experimentation on the work on and in the self as a mode of the political in its very origins. Fina Miralles suggests a form of knowledge of the self/body/environment, yet she explores another side of this consciousness –different from, for instance, the consciousness-raising proposal. Noland’s approach assists my argument for seeing in *Dona-Arbre*’s micro-movements and sensorial explorations key instruments of the corporeal form of liberation (even if only temporarily) in the context of the acute restrictions on body politics during the Franco dictatorship. I argue that *Dona-Arbre* is the anchor of an exploratory method of new corporeal experiences and existences that Fina Miralles did since her earlier works and continued in further actions.

This is a pivotal point for a feminist politics of corporeal agency. I consider this specifically feminist in the link I establish between a feminism that focuses on somatic processes and one that uses self-knowledge and kinesthesia as paths to embodiment and agency. Together with Noland, I understand that without kinesthesia “the subject would not be able to distinguish her own body from other bodies: would have no capacity for independent movement; and thus, would be incapable of assuming any agency at all” (2009, p. 9). *Dona-Arbre* is expressive without words, transmitting knowledge through the body. I argue there is a presentation of the senses and the “subsenses,” such as kinesthesia, as a way to gather knowledge and intervene in the world through bodily awareness, and through movement. *Dona-Arbre* (and other works of the moment) are seeds for the rest of her work where the artist’s still body continues to be a source of kinesthetic knowledge, and others where movement or micro-movements will be not only invisible, but also visible interventions in the world. *Dona Arbore* shows corporeal and embodied strategies that are less visible yet open new avenues to consider the central role of the body in processes of agency, and consequently the implications for a feminist intervention that is focused on the body as a source of emancipation.

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<sup>29</sup> This sentence is inspired by the recited words by Fina Miralles in the performance “Recordant Aquell Temps tan Gris” [Remembering those grey times] (2012): No se qui soc, No soc ningú, No penso res [I don’t know who I am, I am nobody, I don’t think anything]. In a conversation with her about this piece, she joked, telling me: “¡Yo se quien soy!” [I know who I am].

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