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Gina Pane's Witnesses

The Audience and Photography

Jennifer Blessing

At a recent symposium on live art practices I was asked to speak about Body Artist Gina Pane's 'collaborative and complicit relationship with an audience and all this implies for a live, time-based practice'.¹ It is impossible to address this topic without looking at the way Pane used reproductive media such as photography and video. I argue here that their purpose in her performances was not simply to record an ephemeral event for posterity, but also, and perhaps even primarily, to emphasize and solicit from the spectators an understanding of their role in the action.

INTRODUCTION TO GINA PANE'S PRACTICE

From 1968, Gina Pane rejected conventional painting and sculpture for a conceptual practice that employed photography to document performative gestures. She herself frequently appears in this work. Her persona is that of a generic 'actor' – a person committing acts – rather than a specific personality. The earliest pieces involve discrete actions outdoors, such as moving a shaded stone into the sun or 'capturing' sunshine with a mirror and planting it in the earth. The documentation of these gestures usually consists of a series of black-and-white photos, often in a grid format suggesting a film sequence. The time taken to perform the action is implied by repetition of the images. It is not insignificant that Pane made two films during the late 1960s, one of which is lost while the other, *Soli-trac* (1968), presents a single protagonist in a small room, performing enigmatic actions (see Blessing 1998: 268–70).

The documentation for *Escalade non anesthésiée* (Unanesthetized Escalation 1971), a studio performance in which a barefoot Pane climbs a metal ladder lined with sharp bits, consists of enlarged contact prints of film strips. Again, the repetition of close-up images of Pane's hands and feet gripping the rungs, and the slight frame-to-frame variation, insist on recognition of the passage of time inherent in the performance of the piece.

Up until this point in Pane's oeuvre, the work is characterized by a traditional form of address, despite its avant-garde format and mode of creation: the artist presents static objects which are subsequently viewed by an audience in a gallery situation. In late 1971, however, Pane created her first action in front of a live audience, entitled *Hommage à un jeune drogué* (Homage to a Young Drug Addict). In the next 7 years she would perform 21 actions (as she preferred to call them), all before spectators. At first she performed in private homes, later in commercial galleries, museums, and at international festivals such as Documenta.

Pane's actions were carefully planned and calmly executed.² Over the course of an hour, more or less, the artist presented a multivalent and at times cryptic vocabulary of symbolic objects and gestures. Key movements and activities, such as bouncing a ball, were ritualistic in their repetition and duration. In her notes, Pane describes the actions in phases, each phase associated with specific motions and objects. Typically an action consists of four to seven phases. Explicitly multimedia, performances might include slide projections, attention to lighting, amplified sound, and recordings of music

and/or spoken words (in a variety of languages including English, French, German, and Italian).

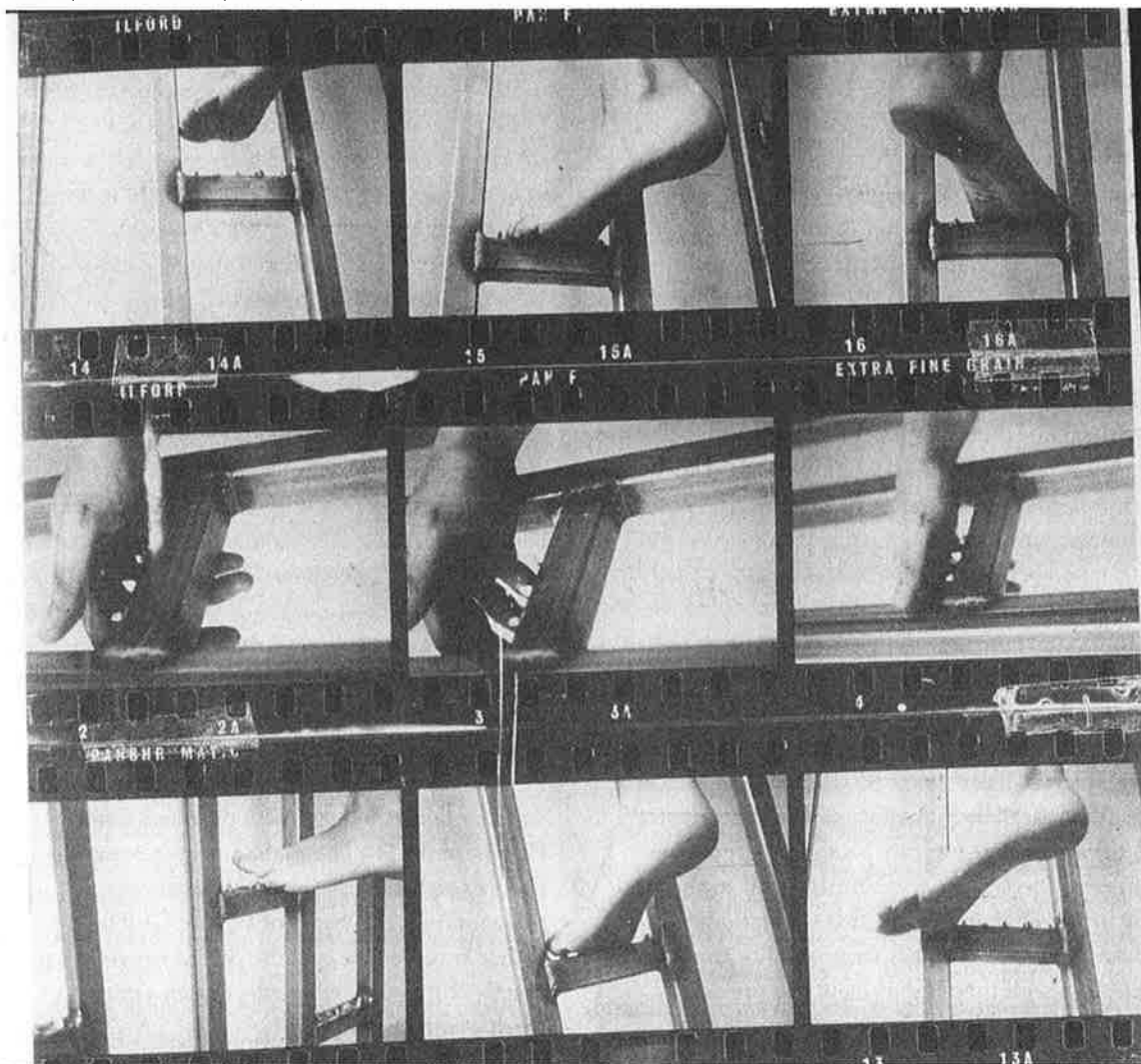
In her first actions she chewed and spat out raw meat, put out fires with her hands, lay on a metal frame above burning candles, and gargled milk incessantly. Most frequently in all her subsequent actions, she delicately cut her skin with a razor blade – at various times on the lips, back, hands, stomach, tongue, scalp, feet, ears, and above her eyelids. Yet wounding gestures such as these occur in no more than half the phases of any given performance, and they are generally counter-

balanced by repetitive movements suggestive of child's play or sport.

All of Pane's actions were photographed, and 10 of them were also videotaped.³ I believe Pane used reproductive technology in her actions for two central reasons. The first was to create documents of the performances, to preserve them for posterity, since by nature the actions were ephemeral events, which she insisted on enacting only once. Pane presented this photographic material to the public in two ways, one was by providing publications – journals, books, newspapers – with images to

Handwritten notes:
 1) Documente
 2) Proben
 3) Reproduktion
 4) Publikation
 5) 1ste Vorstellung
 6) 2te Vorstellung
 7) 3te Vorstellung
 8) 4te Vorstellung
 9) 5te Vorstellung
 10) 6te Vorstellung
 11) 7te Vorstellung
 12) 8te Vorstellung
 13) 9te Vorstellung
 14) 10te Vorstellung

•Gina Pane, *Escalade non anesthésiée*, Paris (1971, detail). Photo: copyright © Anne Marchand



177. 7
constats
Bewerke

accompany text; the other was in the context of independent artworks, which she called constats, a French word that can be translated as statements, reports, or proofs. The second reason she used photography, I would argue, is to foreground for the audience its ontological status as witness to the event taking place before it.

By focussing on the photographic aspects of Pane's work, I by no means intend to underprivilege the significance of the live actions themselves. Pane enacted them only once because she believed them to be catharsis-producing events; she wanted them to have a visceral impact on her audience. She frequently used psychoanalytic vocabulary to describe the transformative processes that took place, which would by necessity be diminished in their force – presumably for herself as well as the audience – if she repeated them. Certainly there are elements of her live practice which are arguably unassimilable to static forms of documentation: for example, the significance of duration, of the real time it takes to perform gestures, is central to the actions. One of the most notable aspects of Pane's performances is the repetition over time of banal movements, the monotony of which forces viewers to confront their seeming simulation of the logic (if it can be called that) of the repetition compulsion.

It is important to note, however, that Pane repeatedly insisted that the actions were composed of three stages, only one of which was the actual performance of the piece. She equally stressed the significance of the period of preparation in which she engaged, before the action, as well as the creation of the constats after it. She argued that her presentation of photographs, in groups of sequential series, activates 'the highest cognitive faculties' (Pane 1977a) in the viewer in a way that parallels the experience of the audience in the action.⁴ She felt that the constats could immerse the viewer, breaking down an aestheticizing or moralizing distance that the static single image permits. Certainly their seriality connotes the passage of time just as Pane had previously rendered it in her Land Art conceptual images, and in the contact sheet repetition of the *Escalade*

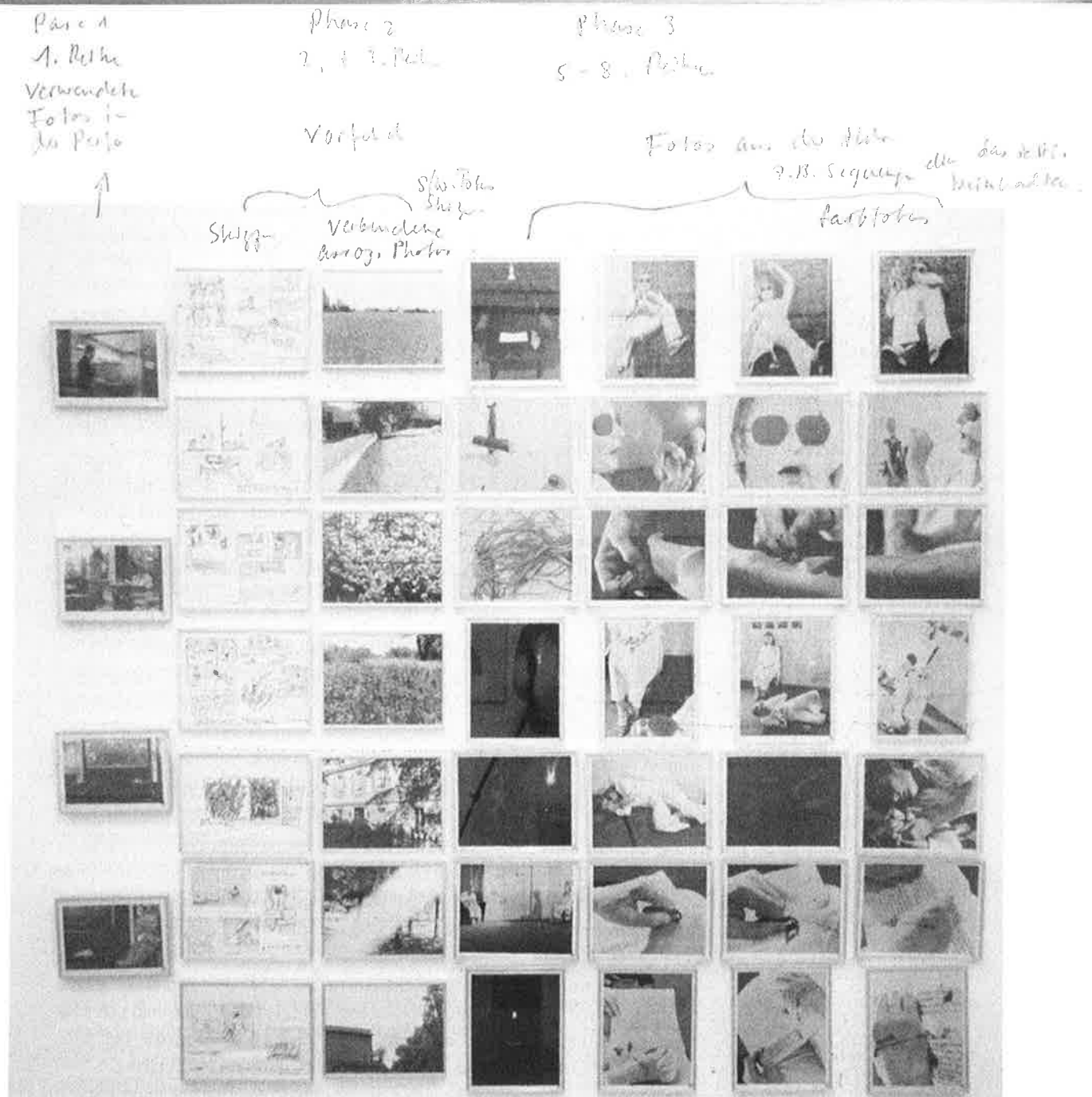
non anesthésiée performance documentation, for example.

In order to better understand the relationship between Pane's live performances and the constats, I briefly describe Pane's *Action Laure* (below) to serve as a case study. I hope not only to illustrate the complexity of Pane's process, but also to show how she attempted to recall the audience's experience of the action for the viewer-after-the-fact of the constat.

ACTION LAURE, A CASE STUDY

Laure is the name of a poet from the Surrealist milieu, Georges Bataille's lover, whose collected writings were published in 1971.⁵ Pane's *Action Laure*, which she performed in a gallery in Brussels in 1977, consists of five phases (see Tronche 1997: 102–5; Pane 1978: 19). In the first phase, Pane, wearing eyeglasses covered with green felt, mimics various poses she gives to a small female artist's mannequin made of wood. With her index finger she taps the mannequin's mouth as she makes semi-coherent amplified sounds. Then, kneeling in front of fabric ruled like a child's school notebook, she inserts into her arm sewing needles with coloured threads attached. At the same time, a female performer seated among the audience types a passage from Laure's 'Story of a Little Girl' (1995). In the next, third, phase a female performer sits beside a sheet of glass, again with lines drawn on it to recall a child's notebook. In front of four photos of the Caffè El Greco in Rome – a famous haunt of the literati – the performer slowly eats strawberries from a plate on her knees. Meanwhile, lying on the ground, Pane simulates playing ping-pong with a green racquet. In the following scene, illuminated by a red light, Pane smashes the lined glass sheet with her body and plays with the mannequin. Finally, in the last phase, she sits in an armchair, a child's notebook inscribed with handwritten passages from the 'Story of a Little Girl' balanced on her knees, as she cuts the skin of her right hand exactly at the place where the muscle contracts when writing with a pen.

This piece of Pane's exists in a complex dialogue



•Gina Pane, *Laure* (1977). Photo: copyright © Anne Marchand

with the writer Laure's 'Story of a Little Girl'. Laure's text is an apparently autobiographical evocation of her childhood, with rich descriptions of the physical environment she inhabited and the people in her life, especially the women and girls. Its sense of mourning the lost past and its generally melancholic tone are echoed in much of Pane's work, as well as its visceral engagement with death, and specifically death contrasted with its opposite – childhood vitality expressed through play – which

always carries a foreshadowing of the finitude of life.

It is not possible nor desirable to construct a linear narrative from this work, but it is worthwhile to identify a few themes that exemplify some of Pane's enduring concerns. In a statement about this action, Pane notes that, for girls, dolls represent the promise of maternity, which in Freudian terms compensates the female subject faced with penis envy. Pane says that the girl is permitted 'to alienate

her ego through this passive object' (Pane 1977b: 172). Instead the artist attempts to make the doll speak. The issue of passivity is symbolized by copying the postures of the mannequin. This activity is very much in keeping with Laure's text, which outlines the struggle of a young girl to find her voice, despite the repressive expectations for women in her social milieu. Here, as elsewhere in her work, Pane addresses the experience of female subjects (see, for example, Blessing 2002).

Another theme that appears in *Laure* as in all of Pane's actions is the contrast between gestures of play and wounding acts. In *Laure* Pane simulates ping-pong and plays with a doll, but she also sticks pins in her arm and cuts her hand with a razor blade. For Pane these activities represent an oscillation and overlap between two poles: that of childhood which symbolizes life, and that of the wound, or elements of suffering, that signal death. She wants to portray them all fully and without fear because they are integral to the human condition. It is because they are taboo subjects that she insists upon exploring them. Hers is a 'revolt against death', which consists of 'integrating into one's life one's experiences of pain, sickness, death in a lucid fashion refusing the anesthesia when it happens, resisting the manipulation that prevents us from facing the inequality of death' (Pane 1974). This is why the piece *Action Death Control* (1974) consists of one monitor in which maggots crawl all over Pane's face, squirming into her nose and nestling into the warm corners of her eyes and mouth; while on another monitor two children celebrate a birthday – complete with cake, Coca-cola, and happy chatter – marking one year closer to death.

The *constat* for *Laure* is composed of 46 framed images.⁶ The first vertical row contains the four sepia-toned photos of Caffè El Greco that were used in the action. The next two rows of seven images each include representations from the preparatory phase of Pane's process: first drawings and then black-and-white landscape photographs.⁷ The remaining 28 images are colour photos from the action itself, which are legible sequentially, concluding in the lower right corner with Pane's

bloody hand poised over the handwriting in the notebook. Thus the passage of time *within* and *around* the actual action is represented in the variety of imagery and text.

In her *constats*, Pane arranged diverse blocks of framed photographs, and sometimes texts and drawings, to create a kind of syncopation recalling the panoply of stimuli in her actions, as well as the audience members' shifting attention, from still photo or object to performer to mediated image. The *constats* are constructed to be read sequentially, like text in a book, or serially, like a comic strip. Sometimes both of these methods of reading, in combination and along with other more complicated structures, have to be puzzled out by the viewer. Looking at the *constats* is always a process that unfolds across time, it is never one of momentary absorption, characteristic of a single image. The *constats* demand mental and emotional engagement with sensate experience. In this way they recall the live actions.⁸

Performance historian and feminist theorist Peggy Phelan (1993), discussing two other artists' work, but in a manner relevant to Pane's practice, notes that the viewer of a performance that engages pain is left to feel masterless.⁹ She also argues that presenting photographs that 'call for a form of reading based on fragments, serialization, and the acknowledgement that what is shown is not what one wants to see' unmoors the traditional position of authority of the viewer, and leads to a 'loss of [the sense of] security' (1993: 160).¹⁰ Using Phelan's logic, one could say that the decentring effect upon the spectator of Pane's (re)presentation of pain in her performances is recalled formally in the construction of the *constats*.

THE PHOTOGRAPHIC WITNESS

The sensuous images of Pane's performances were shot by a professional photographer, *Françoise Masson*. Pane said, 'During the action, the photographer *Françoise Masson* occupied the same place as I in regard to the public; she *constituted* the media of the action, uniquely constructing it

Wetterström: recalling a performance
mit fotografischen Fotos!

Masson arbeit mit genau
Praxis für die Fotografie

Gina Pane's Witnesses
Mit der Fotografie Fotos

die Arbeit Masson ist nicht
nur die Fotos, sondern die
Gestaltung der Fotos

Foto 1
Action und
die nicht
nur die
Fotografie
in Video
bild war
ein Phänomen
die Fotos
die 1975

according to a precise scenario that I handed over to her in advance' (Tronche 1997: 64). In another statement, Pane described her interaction with Masson as a collaboration in which they worked together 'in order to find the most objective meeting place for realizing the transfer' (Pane 1977a), presumably referring to the translation of the action into images, but there is probably also a psycho-analytic inflection here, in the sense of a transference of affect.

Pane emphatically asserted that the constats she made were not determined by the photographic residue of the actions, but rather the other way around. The photographic shots were directed in advance, thus the photographer 'participated in the language of the action' (Tronche 1997: 64). In other words, photography was an integral part of the performance while at the same time the creation of photographs was in the service of the eventual construction of the constats.

It is not possible to divorce the production of photographs of the actions from the performances themselves. Pane goes to great lengths to argue for their assimilation in her tripartite process, and certainly the experience of the action itself was defined by the presence of the photographer. This becomes clear in viewing the videotaped performances. You hear the camera shutter clicking, you see light stands, and sometimes you see Masson herself, who blocks your view of Pane as she takes close-up shots, all of which occur in the video of the 1975 action *Discours mou et mat* (Soft and Heavy Discourse), for example. Interestingly, you never see Masson, and rarely the least vestiges of photographic equipment, in the constats. The images have been determined, selected, and cropped to focus attention on the moments which Pane deemed most significant. This is especially true of the later performances documented by colour photographs, in which much attention is paid to riveting harmonies of colour and form.

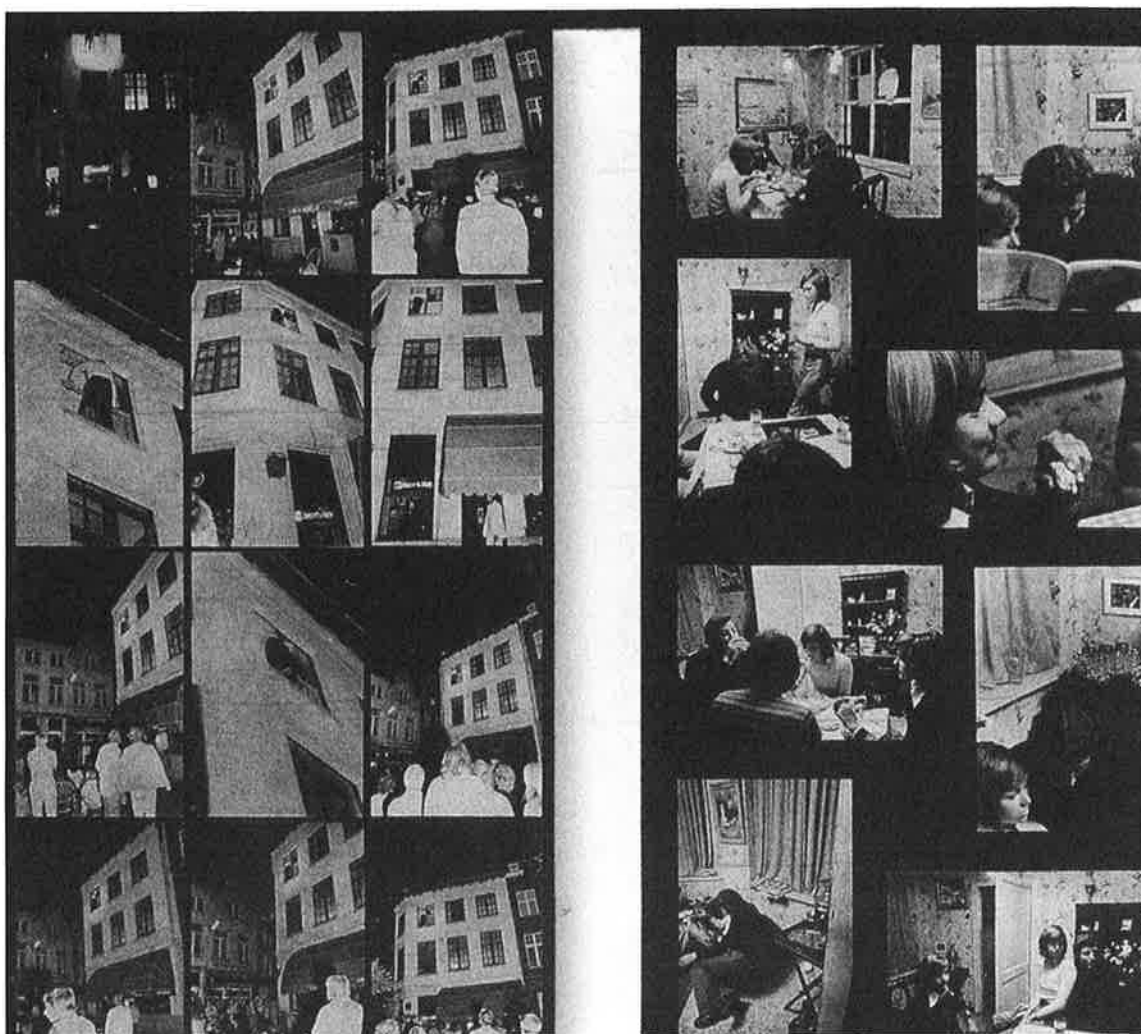
In order to understand my reading of the function of photography in Pane's practice – as a means to bear witness to her actions which parallels the function of the audience during the live event –

we must think back and try to remember what it was like to actually 'believe in' photographs. Photography, from its inception, has been thought to have a privileged relationship to reality in a way that traditional painting and sculpture, for example, do not. Art historian Rosalind Krauss (1977), inspired by the philosopher C. S. Pierce (1955), has written about the indexical quality of the photograph, the way that the imprint of the real world is registered through the reflection of light on sensitive paper. Through this logic the photograph is seen as an unassailable bearer of truth, of representation of fact. By extension, there developed a tradition in photographic practice, a journalistic practice really, in which the reality of human suffering is presented to viewers with the intention that they will bear witness, that they will acknowledge, the plight with which they are confronted. I am thinking here of what has come to be called 'concerned journalism', with its classic photographs of sharecroppers, and famine victims, and the liberation of the concentration camps. This is photography with an ethical (as opposed to but not exclusive of aesthetic) intent and of course it continues today in the work of Magnum photographers and artists such as Sebastião Salgado.¹¹

The audience member is accorded a similar role in Pane's action. Within the context of Pane's live performances each person bears witness to the experience that the artist endures. And of course the fact that the experience is unpleasant, distinctly painful, is key. By asking the spectator to watch her perform acts of self-mutilation, she is also asking, perhaps demanding, that the spectator empathize with her experience as a human being. By insisting on presenting her subjectivity in the face of the Other, she insists on an acknowledgement of that subjectivity. And each audience member, through their attendance, is witness to the reality of the event, is thus put in the position of being able to testify that it actually took place. The audience proves that the action happened, just as the photographs – in their privileged relation to the real – yield 'proofs' (the constats). In this regard, I would argue that Pane, unlike many other conceptual and

Foto
1975
Bewusstsein
Realität

Pane will
das Publikum
als Zeugen
der Aktion
erweisen



*Fastfoto
also took later
beginning*

performance artists of her day, used colour photography not just for aesthetic reasons but because such images appear more 'real'.¹²

It was apparently very important for Pane to have this proof, because she had a modernist belief in the value of authenticity. When you read her comments in interviews, her statements intended to accompany the work, and of course when you view the work itself, you cannot help but confront her belief in the power of art to transform life in a positive, potentially healing way. Pane started out as an abstract painter, she was moved by van Gogh and Malevich, and she saw complex symbolic meaning in aesthetic properties of form and colour.

She never vacillated from this completely unironic spiritually based position.

The underpinning of my argument that the ethos of photography parallels that of the performance environment lies in Pierre Bourdieu's (1990) sociological reading of the role of photography. Bourdieu argued emphatically that photography is an ethical rather than aesthetic practice. In studying the popular use of the camera, he argued that it is used to cement group bonds, particularly that of the family. He notes that it is considered an integral part of rituals and festivities, and that sacrifices are made (in terms of acceptance of the disturbance the process poses to the actual event)

photo as Rite

*Bourdieu: Fotos made
it an ethical practice
and not a beauty one
as photography*



•(above and opposite) Gina Pane, *Je* (1972). Photo: copyright © Anne Marchand

because the members of a group share their belief in the importance of capturing a given occasion.

Bourdieu's work has been widely commented upon since it was first published in France in 1965, and it is quite likely that Pane read it. For one, she describes photography as a "sociological" object' in her short 1973 essay, 'The body and its support-image for non-linguistic communication'. She writes:

The body which is simultaneously: project/material/performer of artistic practice finds its logical support in an image by the photographic medium. Photography is a 'sociological' object which permits the seizure of reality itself; it can thus quickly seize the dialectic which renders a behavior significant, by becoming communicable to a collective audience.

(Pane 1973: 10)

This passage suggests Bourdieu's notion that the photographic object is determined by (through selection) and determinant of (through its representation) a specific group. I would also argue that Pane's implicit belief that the audience should tolerate the taking of photographs during her actions might be based, in part, on her understanding of the public's ready acceptance of photographic documentation of events deemed significant or important.

Pane performed an action entitled *Je* (I), in 1972, in which she stood on the third-floor ledge outside the window of an apartment, while inside a family group goes about its business, ignoring her (see Blessing 1998: 264–6). In the square below, she presented speakers amplifying the ambient sounds from the apartment, and she distributed Polaroid shots of the family engaging in its activities. Her

investigation of the family group, and her presentation of family snapshots to passers-by, seems to develop conceptually from her reading of Bourdieu.¹³

On the other hand, the argument could be made that Pane needed audiences for her actions in order to attest to their existence, to the fact that they actually took place. Photography was not enough, because she lived at the moment when the authenticity of the photograph was being questioned. Not just in terms of the question of veracity – for example, acknowledgement of the ability to doctor a picture – but also in terms of the rising sense of doubt which accompanied the explosion of commercial advertising, and the development of semiotics, in which photographic meaning was described as complex, contradictory, and often highly motivated, in the service of ambitions beyond the scope of aesthetics (to put it mildly).

In this regard, the history of the use of photography in performance art is apropos, see for example Yves Klein's famous *Leap into the Void* of 1960. Pane was influenced by Klein, made a piece in homage to him, and his use of symbolism in the service of spiritual aspirations probably appealed to her. And yet his Duchampian practice was permeated with the master's irony, which was a direction Pane never followed. For all its suggestion of a leap of faith (and implication of impending pain), Klein's photo is a consummately faked shot. There are in fact two versions, both with Klein's

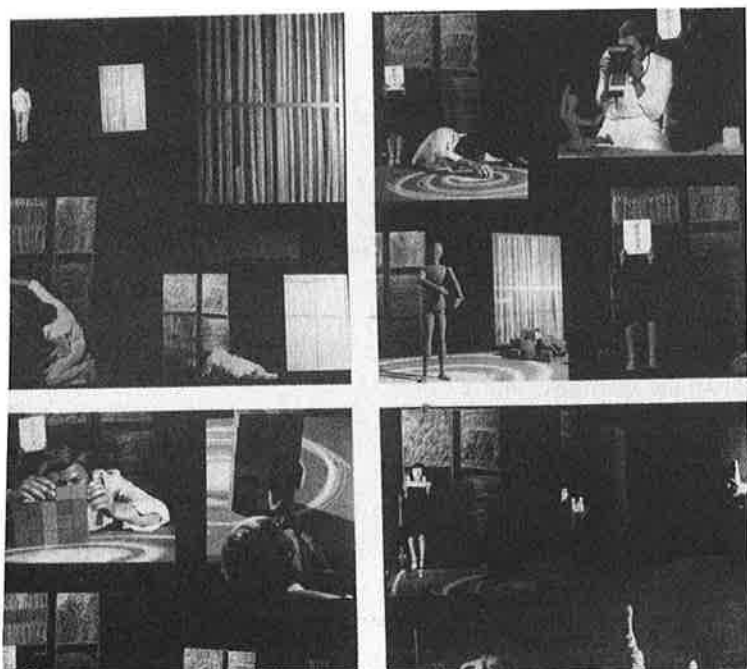
body in the exact same position; however, one has a bicyclist in the shot, the other does not.

Keep in mind also the photographs of the Viennese Actionists' activities of the mid-1960s. Their blood and guts existentialist performances, including Rudolf Schwarzkogler's presumed self-castration, were documented photographically, and yet the 'blood' was sometimes paint, the disembowelled animals already dead, and of course the castration unrealized, at least physically if not psychically (see Stiles 1990: 35).¹⁴

In the cases of Klein and Schwarzkogler, knowledge of the way they exploited notions of photographic truth, while creating images not literally representative of actual events, caused aspersions to be cast on the legitimacy of their art in some quarters. In the 1970s, artists who used their own bodies in their work touted the 'realness' of their practice, of the transcendence of life into art. Any kind of 'fakery' was antithetical to this position. Pane's use of colour film is significant in this regard. The Actionists use of paint instead of blood in their dionysiac performances, which were documented with black-and-white film, are reminiscent in their mutual contrivance of Hitchcock's use of chocolate for the blood in the shower scene of the movie *Psycho* (1960). Pane's colour *constats* show the lurid beauty of real blood. And with that reality enters the question of whose blood – which real person's – and how it got there. At that point, the blood had better be the artist's, else the spectre of sadism is raised. Pane once said that she could only enact her gestures on herself, otherwise she would be a sadist, which was of course an impossible position given her stated intentions.

Gina Pane's insistence on the upfront presence of the photographer during her actions is unusual for the period. It was more typical for a photographer to attempt to be discreet while capturing the flavour of an event. Some artists rejected photography altogether; or severely limited it so as not to disrupt a performance. One critic writing about 1970s performance art documentation noted that artists are 'concerned about the right of the audience to experience a piece undisturbed by the

• (Below and opposite) Gina Pane, *A Hot Afternoon* (1977). Photo: copyright © Anne Marchand



✓ Pane selbst die hässliche
Anwesenheit des Fotografen
ist ihre Idee, die sie durch
absoluten Schmerz ausbalanciert.

Dröben der Fotograf
macht dann der Publikum

Holografische

Wenn dann es gerade kein Wort

verfolgt die

Kritik: der Moment ist wichtig, weil die Aktion

Gina Pane's Witnesses

activity associated with documentation', and that 'the actual moment is given priority over the record' (Zelevansky 1981/2: 39). One solution was to photograph rehearsals rather than the actual performance. And then there were occasions when the photography seemed almost incidental, for example, the picture, taken after the event, of Chris Burden's bleeding arm post *Shoot* (1971). Clearly Pane's uncommon insistence on the centrality of the photographer's presence is intentional. She performed for an audience and for a camera, because neither one alone would satisfy her goals. Perhaps she also insisted on the obvious presence of the photographer in the name of 'authenticity'; rather than attempt to minimize, she emphasized, for the sake of honesty.

piece, which is uniquely derived from the video documentation of the action, includes some 90 frames from the video mounted in three square grids. The last frames show Pane with the camera, and images of Pane montaged with audience members, which were created by freeze-framing the video at the moment when the image of Pane fades out and an image of the audience fades in. On one level, Pane's gesture and these frames visualize the breakdown of subject/object distinctions that characterizes Body Art performances: Who is looking at whom in the context of the action? It also symbolizes the quest in Pane's practice to transcend the self in the figure of the other, a very French modernist goal, to which Pane repeatedly returns. Another important aspect, though, is the way the audience is presented with itself, sees itself in the process of looking at Pane. In this way the artist emphasizes to the spectators, by reproducing their image to them, their complicity in the events that take place.

I have been arguing that one of the reasons Pane incorporated a stills photographer into her actions was to foreground for the audience its status as witness. She also documented almost half of her performances with videotape recordings. However, these were always black-and-white and not finished to the degree of the photography that forms the basis of the *constats*. In fact, she did not consider the videos to be independent works of art, with one exception, the 10-minute, tightly edited *Little Journey*, made in colour in 1978, shortly before she stopped creating actions. It is clear that she did not accord videorecording the level of attention that she did other aspects of the performance. For example, the existing tapes do not necessarily record an action from start to finish, but rather consist of incomplete segments. They do, however, demonstrate the existence of the audience in a way that the *constat* photos, especially the later colour ones, do not.

In the videotape documentation of the 1973 action *Autoportrait(s)*, Pane presents images of the audience on monitors, so that viewers see themselves as they watch her. This three-part performance begins with Pane lying on a metal structure above burning candles and ends with her gargling and choking on milk from a bowl on the floor. It is during the second phase, while she cuts herself on the lip and beneath the brow, that she presents the audience members with images of themselves, shot by a technician at her direction. In her notes for

Yet Pane also occasionally used the videocamera and monitor as an integral part of the live action. For example, in *Le lait chaud* (Hot Milk) of 1972, Pane turns the camera on the audience. In this action, Pane cuts her back and other parts of her body for extended periods of time, alternating with phases of bouncing and rolling a ball. Near the end of the performance, she points a very cumbersome-looking camera at the audience. The *constat* for this



Sie zeigt dem Publikum
Bilder ihrer selbst, des Publikums
in der sie die Kamera zur Publikum
richtet.

Argumente
als dokument
gilt.
damit die
Publikum
hier wird
das Bild
Fragen sind
Gebrauch
von Kamera
im Moment
in der Aktion
verbunden

Pane

Publication als Komplize
Gefährliche wie ein
Werkzeug

this piece, Pane indicates that female audience members will be shown on a monitor, interspersed with a tape of a woman painting her nails. (This is not visible in the videorecording, only the image of a mixed audience, but it is likely that another camera and monitor were used to play tape or feedback the audience's image, rather than record.)

Autoportrait(s) addresses the social repression of femininity, so it is no surprise that Pane intended to speak directly to female spectators, to make her 'self-portrait' a mirror for them. Perhaps she emphasizes the plural in the title – *Autoportrait(s)* – in order to implicate the other women present as well as herself.

Pane asserted that she wanted to transcend alienation, to break down the barriers between self and other, and these gestures of reciprocal viewing seem a way to visualize that desire. She shows the audience members that she is looking at them just as they look at her. She emphasizes the act of looking as a form of communication. Most notably in terms of the argument I have been trying to make, she shows the spectators, by way of their monitor-mirror image, themselves as witnesses to her acts. By an extension of Bourdieu's logic, she also creates a community through representation.

Pane's use of Polaroid photography within the context of her performances operates in a similarly self-reflexive way. At Documenta VI in 1977, during her action *A Hot Afternoon*, Pane took Polaroids of a mannequin-surrogate – an androgynous wooden artist's mannequin that mimics her postures – and of the audience. This is a very complicated piece composed of 10 phases; my intent here is simply to note that the instantaneity of the Polaroid process presents a kind of static mirroring which is mobile in the case of the closed-circuit video monitor.

•Gina Pane, *Nourriture/actualités télévisées/feu* (Nourishment/Televised Current Events/Fire) (1971). Photo: copyright © Anne Marchand



Significantly, at one point in *A Hot Afternoon* the audience is also reflected to itself in a mirror.

A COMPLICIT AUDIENCE

In Pane's work, the presence of the audience authenticates the photographic reproduction, just as photographic reproduction authenticates the existence of the audience. For the sake of my argument, I am emphasizing Pane's use of the audience, collectively, as a kind of tool, and yet certainly this was not her only interest in its presence. Those of us who are drawn to work like Pane's are aware of our complicity in experiencing it. Art historian Kathy O'Dell (1998) speaks of this mutual relationship in terms of a contract between the artist-performer and the audience. In performances involving the representation of pain, or endurance, some spectators are entirely rapt, while others may insist on vocally expressing their refusal to acquiesce in the scenario presented. The tape of *Autoportrait(s)*, for example, gives evidence of distracted or inattentive behaviour by some audience members, which should be interpreted as a means of expressing discomfort with the proceedings.

One could argue that, to some extent, Pane was forcing her audience to see what they did not want to see. This is another ethos shared with documentary photography, in that one might prefer not to have, for example, Susan Meiselas's image of an upright human spine in a war-torn Nicaraguan field seared into one's memory for life. And yet, as is well-known, we become inured to images. In the second phase of her 1971 action *Nourriture/actualités télévisées/feu* (Nourishment/Televised Current Events/Fire), Pane presents a television playing that evening's news, which unsurprisingly relays stories of war and other social ills. She sits before the TV, among her audience, with a blinding light shining into her eyes. This gesture suggests both an inability to see, as well as the pain caused by seeing. Pain is an extremely time-based phenomenon, and perhaps the best way to inspire empathy vis-a-vis pain is through witnessing it directly, in its actual duration.¹⁵

For some reason Pane's, in retrospect, rather tame presentations of violence have inspired

(over)reactions of fear among some potential audience members. An important French art critic found herself unable to attend Pane's performances because the sado-masochistic imagery was too disturbing, and yet she had no problem participating in Michel Journiac's *Messe pour un corps* (Mass for a Body 1969) in which the artist distributed for the audience's consumption sausages prepared with his own blood (see Millet 1987: 200). A curator also mentioned to me her last-minute reluctance to attend one of Pane's final actions, out of fear that she would not be able to tolerate it. And I have witnessed gallery viewers turn queasily from *Azione sentimentale*, which is to my mind one of the loveliest of Pane's *constats*.

I summarize these renunciations of Pane's practice, these rejections of the implicit contract between audience and performer, in order to assert by contrast the cooperation and complicity of those who did attend, to dramatize the significance of the act of compliance, in both live performance and its photographic documentation, and to assert that they both require an agreement to participate, whether in terms of physical attendance of an event or attention to a photograph.

NOTES

- 1 A version of this paper was presented at the 'Marked' symposium on 16 March 2002 at Arnolfini Bristol (UK). I thank director Caroline Collier for providing the opportunity to present it. I would also like to thank Anne Marchand for permission to reproduce the illustrations.
- 2 Small portions of this essay appear in modified form in Blessing (2002).
- 3 Fleck (2000: 42) asserts that Pane's unique approach to photographic documentation is one of her important contributions to 1970s performance art. For a thoughtful account of Pane's use of photography see also Hountou (2000). Hountou's reading is compatible with my own, although our emphases differ. See Grant (2002) for a relevant discussion of Pane's work in the context of other artists who use photography.
- 4 The texts of Pane (1977a) and (1977c) are identical. A related version of Pane's process appears in Pane (1980); see Pane (2001: 281) for an English translation. Note also the artist's statement: 'L'action corporelle n'a jamais été pensée comme une oeuvre éphémère, mais comme une composition murale réalisée en trois temps' (Lawless 1989: 97).

- 5 Born Colette Peignot, Laure died in 1938.
- 6 This piece is reproduced in colour in Blessing (2002).
- 7 'Je souligne également le rôle des photographies réalisée avant l'action, celles-ci relatent le plus souvent des lieux, choses, personnes, événement d'un temps vécu au passé ayant un lien avec la "pièce". Cette activité dés-actualisante du "déjà plus" et du "pas encore" introduit un moyen de comparaison permanent aux prises de vue de l'action s'annonçant comme "Vraie actualité"' (Pane 1977a).
- 8 It is perhaps worth noting that, just as the live actions are difficult to present after the fact, the *constats* are hard to reproduce. In installation shots the frequently large number of photos and drawings render almost inscrutable the individual images, and details fail to capture the rhythm of the gridded sequences or their sense of scale. Thus one might argue that the *constats*, like the live actions, can only truly be experienced in person.
- 9 'While the gaze fosters what Lacan calls "the belong to me aspect so reminiscent of property" (*Four Fundamental Concepts*: 81) and leads the looker to desire mastery of the image, the pain inscribed in [Angelika] Festa's performance makes the viewer feel masterless' (Phelan 1993: 158).
- 10 'Unmoored from the traditional position of authority guaranteed by the conventions of address operative in the documentary tradition of the photograph, a tradition which functions to assure that the given to be seen *belongs* to the field of knowledge of the one who looks, [Lorna] Simpson's photographs call for a form of reading based on fragments, serialization, and the acknowledgement that what is shown is not what one wants to see. In this loss of security, the spectator feels an inner splitting between the spectacle of pain she witnesses but cannot locate and the inner pain she cannot express' (Phelan 1993: 160).
- 11 This kind of photography is sometimes discussed in terms of the catharsis its often tragic subject-matter yields. As noted above, Pane (as well as other Body Artists) touted the cathartic effects of their performances. It is also interesting to note that Pane's action *Mezzogiorno a Alimena* (1978) was inspired by a photograph she cut out of a newspaper of women and a child on the streets of a Sicilian town. Her ethical intentions are clear in her description of the piece: '*Mezzo Giorno à Alimenta* qui est un travail sur la pauvreté, le dénouement, l'abandon de certains territoires et individus dans la société industrielle d'aujourd'hui' (Lawless 1989: 102).
- 12 For an important examination of the problematics of representation of pain see Scarry (1985).
- 13 Five texts that were displayed on the street during the performance of *Je* appear in the accompanying *constat*. At least two of the texts have a decidedly sociological cast. It is also worth noting that, in the years just prior to this piece, Pane worked on a number of

collaborations with Christian Boltanski, whose work can also be read through Bourdieu, and whose brother, Luc, was a professional collaborator of the noted sociologist.

14 Stiles is cited in Jones (1998: 36–7). Jones provocatively discusses performance photography.

15 In a discussion of Pane's expectations of her audience's commitment it is worth noting that she explicitly requested the viewers of *Nourriture/actualités télévisées/feu* to deposit an amount equivalent to 2 percent of their salary at the door.

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