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GINA PANE AND KRZYSZTOF JUNG: QUEER LOVE IN EUROPEAN PERFORMANCE ART OF THE 1970s

This essay examines how countercultural performance art and its documentation in the 1970s opened up the possibility for two queer action/body artists to express an alternative vision of love in its diversity. The French-Italian lesbian artist Gina Pane and the Polish gay artist Krzysztof Jung performed same-sex love, pleasure, desire, embodiment, and suffering on both sides of the Iron Curtain in Cold War Europe. In their uniquely pioneering body art, they examined sexual identities, embodied subjectivity, personal emotions, and artistic involvement in human freedom at a time of dramatic social transformation in both Eastern and Western European contexts.

I will analyze ground-breaking performances by Pane and Jung from the 1970s to look comparatively at queer art and performance of the time and also to question the way European art history is divided hierarchically into cultural centers and peripheries. Pane is a well-known

pioneer of European body art of the 1970s, while Jung, a Polish artist from the isolated formerly communist Eastern Block, has almost disappeared from mainstream art history. In this way, my text offers a comparative perspective on body art, and divergent sexualities and embraces a comparative view of European art history, seeing it more from the margins than from the centre.

Early queer performative practices appeared in European art of the 1970s and opened up previously hidden pleasures and desires. In 1974 Jean-Christophe Amman organized the influential exhibition *Transformer: Aspekte der Travestie* at the Kunstmuseum in Lucerne, which then travelled to Graz and Bochum. This pioneering show featured performative drag self-portraits and, as Sarah Wilson writes, ‘was a hymn to extravagant and beautiful drag artist(e)s, demonstrating the new androgyny of genderfuck.’ In addition to Pane, in France Michel Journiac was creating photo-compositions and actions on transvestitism

and homoerotic desire.¹ In Spain, the transgender artist José Pérez Ocaña was performing angelic masculine femininity inspired by Andalusian music and folklore.² Jung was breaking similar sexual boundaries behind the Iron Curtain playing with the eroticism of the male nude.

Pane's *Sentimental Action* (1973) at the Galleria Diagramma in Milan and *Melancholic Action 2x2x2* (1974) performed at Studio Morra in Naples can be juxtaposed with Jung's *Love* (1978) and *The Shared Performance/Conversation* (1980) at the Repassage Gallery in Warsaw. Both queer performance artists expressed the taboo subject of same-sex love in the medium of body art/performance. In both cases love and desire were embodied and enacted in front of a live audience, creating a safe space for an existential and amorous experience that was otherwise difficult to achieve in the outside world. Pane and Jung found in countercultural artistic communities the atmosphere and freedom that allowed them to explore their sexuality, spirituality, and personal life. Hence their actions can be analysed in political as well as intimate terms. Through the exploration of gay and lesbian emotions and desires, they proposed performance art as a form of 'love dissidence' - a powerful and revolutionary act taking place in completely different national and political contexts in the 1970s.

The methodological purpose of this analysis is not to prove that Pane and Jung directly and self-consciously expressed lesbian and gay identity and politics as the main agenda of their multifaceted actions. They both used a highly metaphorical language of bodily gestures and attributes which is open to many readings, that can include contemporary queer readings but which are not determined by them. Moreover, this essay is part of a broader ambition to 'queer' performance art from the 1960s and 1970s in Europe, opening it up for a queer interpretation that is often based on subtle performative allusions, hints in the photo-documentation, contextual historical understanding and biographical facts. We know, from their biographies and letters, that both Pane

and Jung were queer and a desire/love theme was part of their performative exploration. There are some obvious signs in their actions but this is mostly made manifest in ambiguous traces that need close reading. The work of queer reading requires the decoding of complex contextual signs within performative expressions and their documentation.

JUNG

The study of Krzysztof Jung's (1951-1998) output belongs to the bigger project of tracing homoerotic expression in art behind the Iron Curtain, in Eastern Europe, and the crucial role of counterculture in enabling such subversions. Jung performed with his naked, beautiful, and eroticized body; his actions reveal a fascination with the male body as an aesthetic, sexual, and rebellious subject. The visual conventions of the People's Republic of Poland distorted and veiled the male body: full male nudity, considered ugly and pornographic, was censored. The censorship of sexuality left an imprint on the dominant aesthetic formation of communist Modernism in which the male nude was degraded, prudishly concealed and censored. The majority of male and female artists during this period conformed to the obligatory castration, degradation, desexualization, and marginalization of the male body. The suppression of male nudity and eroticism carried with it the repression of its queer dimensions. It was the dominant - female - nude that affirmed the communist patriarchy and channelled the sexual imagination. Starting in the 1960s and 70s, however, some artists used the eroticism of the naked male body as a way of contesting cultural norms. In particular, performance artists associated with the Repassage Gallery in Warsaw, and notably Jung, used male nudity as an act of subversion.³

In those communities that appreciated performance art, Jung found an opening that allowed him to explore male nudity and plural sexuality. In the 1970s, Jung was affiliated with

the Warsaw countercultural gallery Repassage. In its alternative space, he performed many events, that raised such taboo issues as the beauty of the male body, the amorous relation between men, and a deep interrogation of love and desire in its plural forms, especially love triangles. He pioneered art as a form of erotic and amorous dissidence, a vision made in the context of the oppressive heteronormative systems that have been dominant in Eastern Europe.

Surprisingly, homosexuality has never been criminalized in law in an independent Poland. After regaining independence in 1918, the country applied the Napoleonic Code, which decriminalized homosexuality. The 1932 Polish criminal code abandoned laws prohibiting homosexuality. After the Second World War, the liberal interwar law continued to function, making it the only country in the Eastern Bloc not to introduce Soviet criminalization of homosexuality. However, this legal advantage did not in any way change the negative attitudes of society and the authorities. In general, homosexuality continued to exist only as a social taboo or pathology, registered mainly in medical or criminal contexts, and linked with certain underworld subcultures at the margins of society. Moreover, gays and lesbians were represented in the pop culture of the communist period as humorously grotesque characters. But queerness was visible in high culture – in literature, visual arts, and theatre – and treated seriously, but in a coded and highly metaphorical way. Moreover, homosexuality became a subject of public discussion in the 1970s, when journalists for the first time started to deal openly with “silent social issues” such as alcoholism, drug use, and dissident sexualities. Yet in the 1970s, there was no homosexual movement in Poland, like in the West, but only occasional cultural appearances.⁴ Yet it must be emphasised that in the Peoples Republic of Poland homosexuality was not a criminal offence and was present in many high art and countercultural activities, and this relatively liberal context made possible both the art of Jung and its public visibility. It was also a decade when

counterculture was blossoming in Poland in the form of the hippy movement, rock music, student clubs, happening/performance and other forms of experimental art – the so-called ‘neo avant-garde.’ As homosexuality belonged to the margins of society, it found its natural place in this subcultural network of people and art institutions.

Jung worked within the milieu of the countercultural and neo-avant-garde Repassage Gallery, which he also managed in the late 70s, from 1978 to 1979. In Poland, in the 1970s so-called ‘author galleries’ mushroomed and were the location of many and varied experimental artistic activities. These galleries, despite being funded by the institutions of the communist state, had a margin of freedom and depended on the individual visions of their curators. The authors’ galleries were islands of freedom within the institutional art system due to their marginal status and the small circle of artists/friends to whom they catered. In this way, these galleries offered the possibility for art to occupy a position slightly outside the official gender and sexual cultural policy which was patriarchal and heteronormative. New ideas about corporeality, human subjectivity, and interaction were consistently pursued by Repassage Gallery (1971-1981). Founded in Warsaw in 1971 by the married couple Elżbieta and Emil Cieślak, the gallery was situated in a Warsaw University building, under the umbrella of the University’s Socialists Student Union Organization and was run mainly by artists from the Department of Sculpture at the nearby Fine Arts Academy. Thus, even though it was a state-run gallery, like all institutions in the People’s Republic of Poland, and was funded by public money and under the control of the Central Office of Censorship, it was able to operate within those limits with a considerable amount of freedom. A liberal atmosphere was possible because of the double umbrella of the Fine Arts Academy and the Student Union Organization which allowed for a more unorthodox, challenging approach to identity and culture. In general, a certain freedom of expression was allowed to the Polish neo-avant-garde of the 1970s. The authorities of the

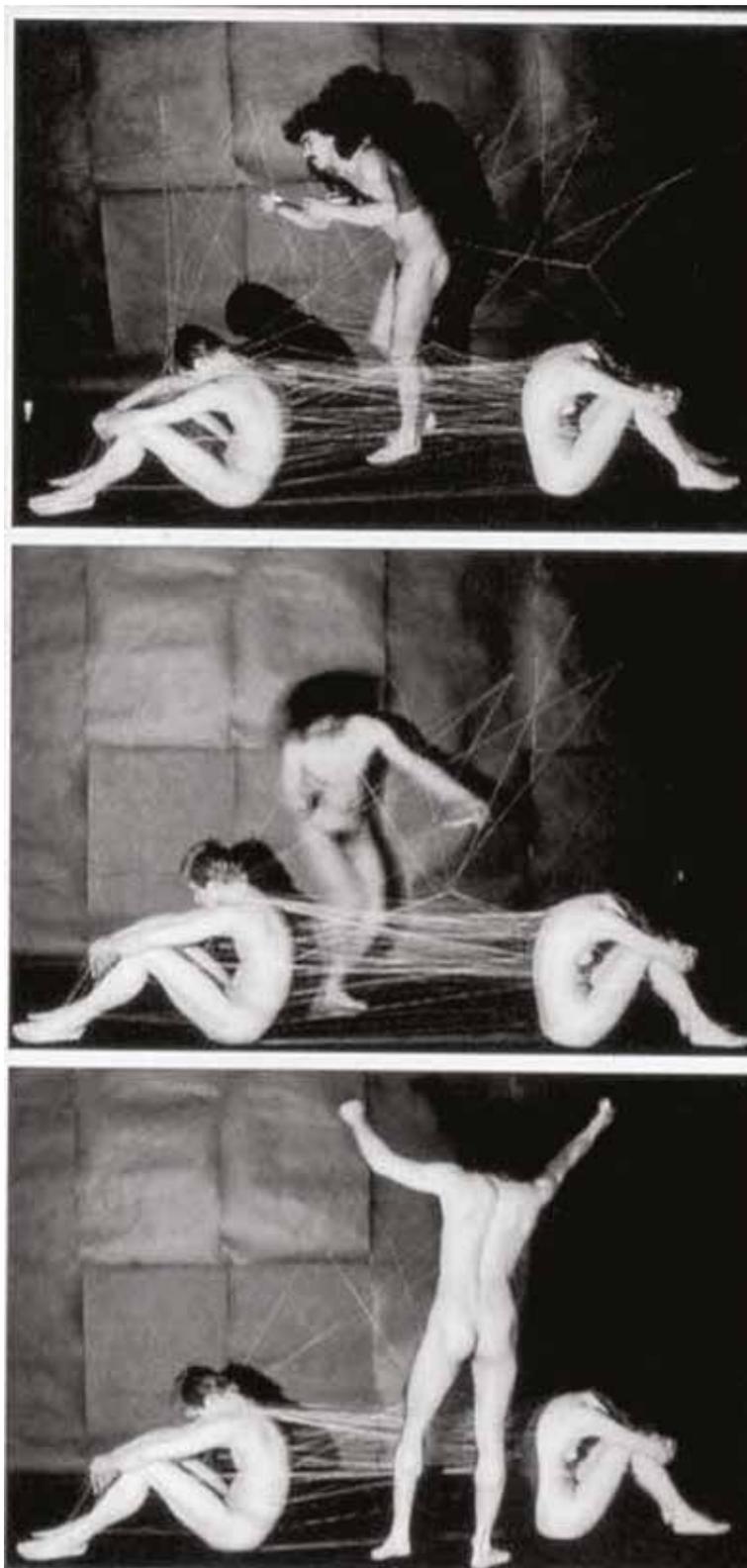
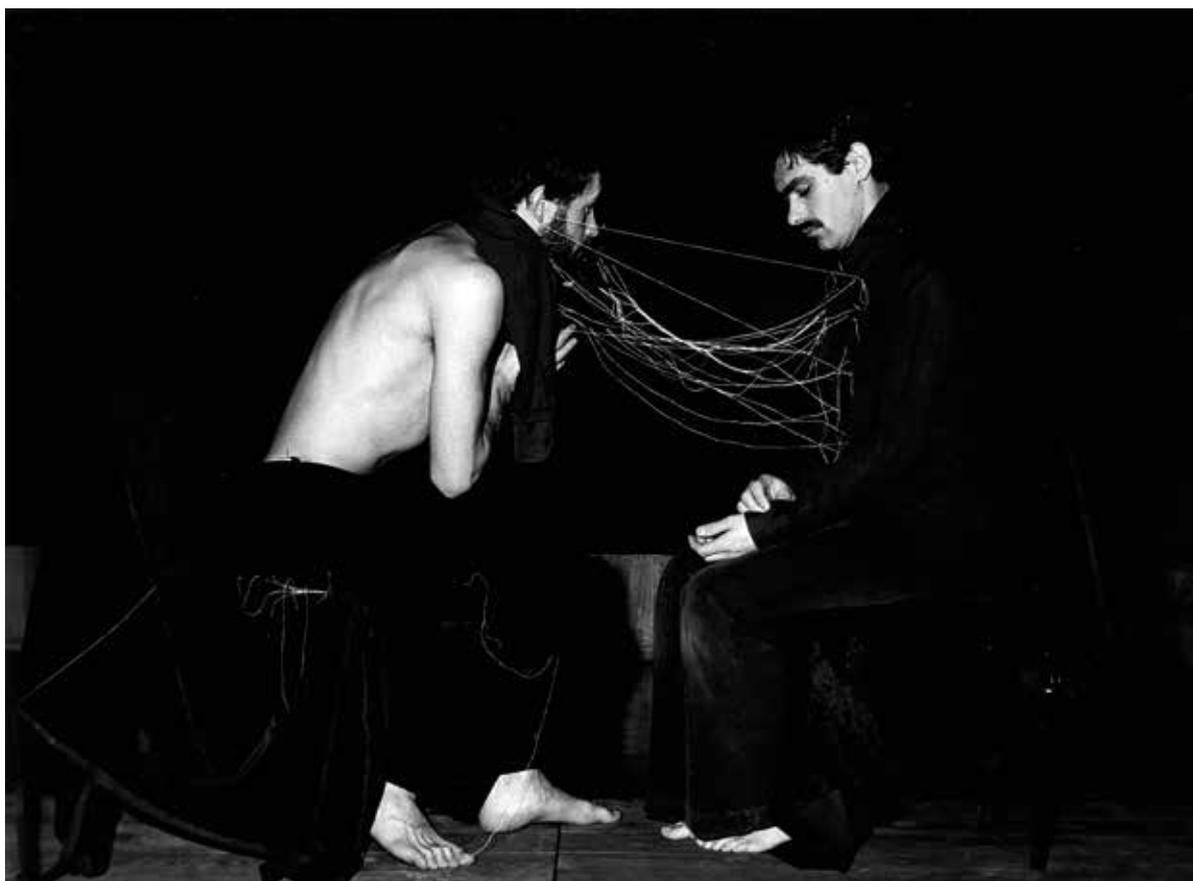


FIG.1) Krzysztof Jung, Love (for Czesław Furmankiewicz), (12/03/1978), performance, performers: Krzysztof Jung, Maria Olejniczak, Jerzy Słomiński, Repassage Gallery, Warszawa 12.03.1978, photo from the Repassage Archive. Courtesy of the Museum of Fine Arts Academy in Warsaw.

FIG.2) Krzysztof Jung, *The Shared Performance/Conversation* (22/12/1980), performance, performers: Krzysztof Jung, Dorota Krawczyk-Janisch, Wojciech Piotrowski. Re'Repassage Gallery 12.03.1978 Warsaw, Photo. Grzegorz Kowalski from the Repassage Archive. Courtesy the Museum of Fine Arts Academy in Warsaw.





totalitarian state considered it elitist and incapable of making any significant impact on society and culture at large. Indeed, if isolation within poorly attended and secretive galleries was a guarantee of relative freedom, it was forbidden to take artistic action beyond the gallery itself. The few actions that originated in Repassage and entered the street were stopped by the police. Further proof of its oppositional status is the fact that Repassage Gallery was deliberately closed at the moment of the introduction of martial law in Poland in 1981.

Repassage specialized in performance and body art as an exploration of human freedom and authenticity and as such it can be rightly considered a location of counterculture. The gallery was set up as a place where art, culture, and community could be practiced as a therapeutic psychodrama of togetherness in defiance of the false ideology of the external state and its imposed social norms of standardized behaviour. The creators and founders of Repassage identified three interconnected concepts, contestation, opposition, and counterculture, and used them interchangeably. They contested and opposed the dreary everyday and official cultural life of Poland, but principally they associated themselves with counterculture as an alternative youth subculture that included rock music and the 'hippy' style. Next to experimental art, other events considered countercultural were concerts of jazz, rock, and eventually punk music, ecological actions and workshops, and discussions about Buddhism and Eastern philosophy.⁵ In this way, the hippy movement of the Western block was partially influential and present in communist Poland, through alternative music, lifestyle, philosophy, and fashion. In photographs from the period, the artists and audience look like hippies, with long hair. Men with long hair introduced a feminization and fragilization of the masculine image and a more unisex look. Moreover, the male nude was explored in the gallery more than the female nude, which questioned the norms of patriarchy. Alongside this, women artists had a strong presence. In this way, countercultural gender non-conformism trickled into the community.

Repassage combined a political, psychological, and sexual understanding of art practice and gallery space. It was a private/public realm that enabled communal gatherings. Foremost, however, was body art's carnality and sensuality, and it was used to uncover an alternative form of primeval existence and a true connection to oneself and others. In this community, Jung found a haven for his existential and erotic experimentation and his performances were psychodramas of togetherness and unbounded desire.

Jung is now recognized to be the major precursor of Polish gay/queer art. His installations and performances at Repassage, preserved only in photographs, reveal his fascination with the nude body, and especially the male body as an aesthetic subject. His performances raised the topics of homoerotic dialogue between male partners, sexuality in multiple configurations, and self-liberation and self-denuding from oppressive norms.

Since his first actions in 1967, Jung's art featured naked men and women who tore apart threads and webs of threads which the artist had woven around them like a spider who was himself caught in the web as well. In his performance *Love* (1978) FIG.1, using thread the artist tied together a man and a woman, both naked, young, and attractive, and both his close friends and fellow artists from Repassage Gallery. As the photo documentation testifies they sat naked on the floor, back to back, and bound by the thread. The naked Jung wove the web with dextrous movement, taking some time to net the participants. Then the threads were broken by tiny fires struck by a match.⁶ The artist placed himself within this burning triangle, making a metaphor for polysexual erotic connection between the genders.

The action of weaving and threading was a typical feature of his performances, and in all these actions, the essential elements were to weave a web, to insert himself inside it, and to work with friends. In Jean Laplanche's psychoanalytic reading, the act of weaving, based on Penelope's loom in Homer's *Odyssey*, is interpreted as unconscious mourning. Hence weaving is related

to loss and working through grief.⁷ Thus repetitive weaving and catching friends in webs in Jung's actions might be seen as a defense against losing them, by keeping them close and alive. His performances affirm the value of friendship and mourn its possible fragility and temporality.

Bound naked men, and sometimes women, who liberated themselves from webs can attract a variety of other meanings as well. Their actions might be a projection, an enactment of their craving for truth, with truth in this context figured as something that is bodily authentic, and opposed to a false official system that stripped people of authentic human contact. This is how Jung's performances were mostly interpreted at the time of their creation in the 1970s. They were not perceived or conceptualized from a queer point of view, even though his collaborators knew about his gay sexual identity and that he performed with men whom he loved or desired, including his main partner Wojciech Piotrowski.

But from a contemporary queer perspective, his artistic theatre can be understood as signifying the destruction of a strict web of masculinity, liberating it from closed Communist, patriarchal, and hetero-centric gender norms and their associated pitfalls. His performance art can be interpreted in political (anti-communist) as well as sexual (anti-hetero-normative) terms. Jung's homoeroticism salvaged the attractive male body in the art of Eastern Block and affirmed its shape, its sensations, and its eroticism. He was the only artist in the region and time-space who specialized exclusively in the male nude. Additionally, his performances depended on friendships with people in the experimental gallery, and he performed both together with friends and for friends. This network of friends was a counter-culture within the totalitarian state, interconnected by touch, emotion, and desire.

The Shared Performance/Conversation at Repassage Gallery (1980) FIG.2 featured three people: Jung and two of his friends, Dorota and Wojciech. The two male lovers, Krzysztof and Wojciech Piotrowski dressed in black and sat in

a dark room surrounded by the audience. They were stitching their shirts and pants together to become one, and looking each other in the eyes. These amorous phases of the performance are well documented in black and white photographs. At the end, they undressed and left the room, leaving the stitched clothes behind. The two men also posed for their fellow artist Grzegorz Kowalski's series of photographs *In the Mirror* (1980) FIG.3. They linger naked on the surface of a horizontal mirror, their bodies reflected and doubled, as two separated Narcissuses drowning in both themselves and one another. Kowalski's role is very special for Jung's performances, as he was the main photographer of the actions.

In 1980, Jung and Wojciech Piotrowski performed in Grzegorz Kowalski's triptych *Three Threads from Life, Each with an Axis of Symmetry*. According to Grzegorz Kowalski's account, Wojciech and Krzysztof, wearing identical black trousers and white shirts, sat at a small table on which a mirror was placed so that they could see each other's reflection. They took off their shirts, and they cut each other's hair. They piled the cut hair on the mirror. Then, they put on the shirts and stitched their sleeves together. Finally, they set fire to the hair and to the threads which connected them, and sat looking each other in the eyes for a long while.⁸

The photographic record of Jung and Wojciech Piotrowski's passionate interactions reveal the eroticism of men in love. This is unique because of the distinct psychological and physical connection as well as the closeness between two naked, attractive men. It is very unlikely that any comparable homoerotic work can be found in the visual culture of the Eastern Block of the period, and especially considering all the homophobic and humiliating allusions produced to stigmatise homosexual identity as pathological or grotesque, such as can be found in socialist films.⁹ In this context, Jung's actions carry a deep psychic and analytic reflection on the relationship between two men. In Jung's 'artistic theatre' things that were impossible in real life became

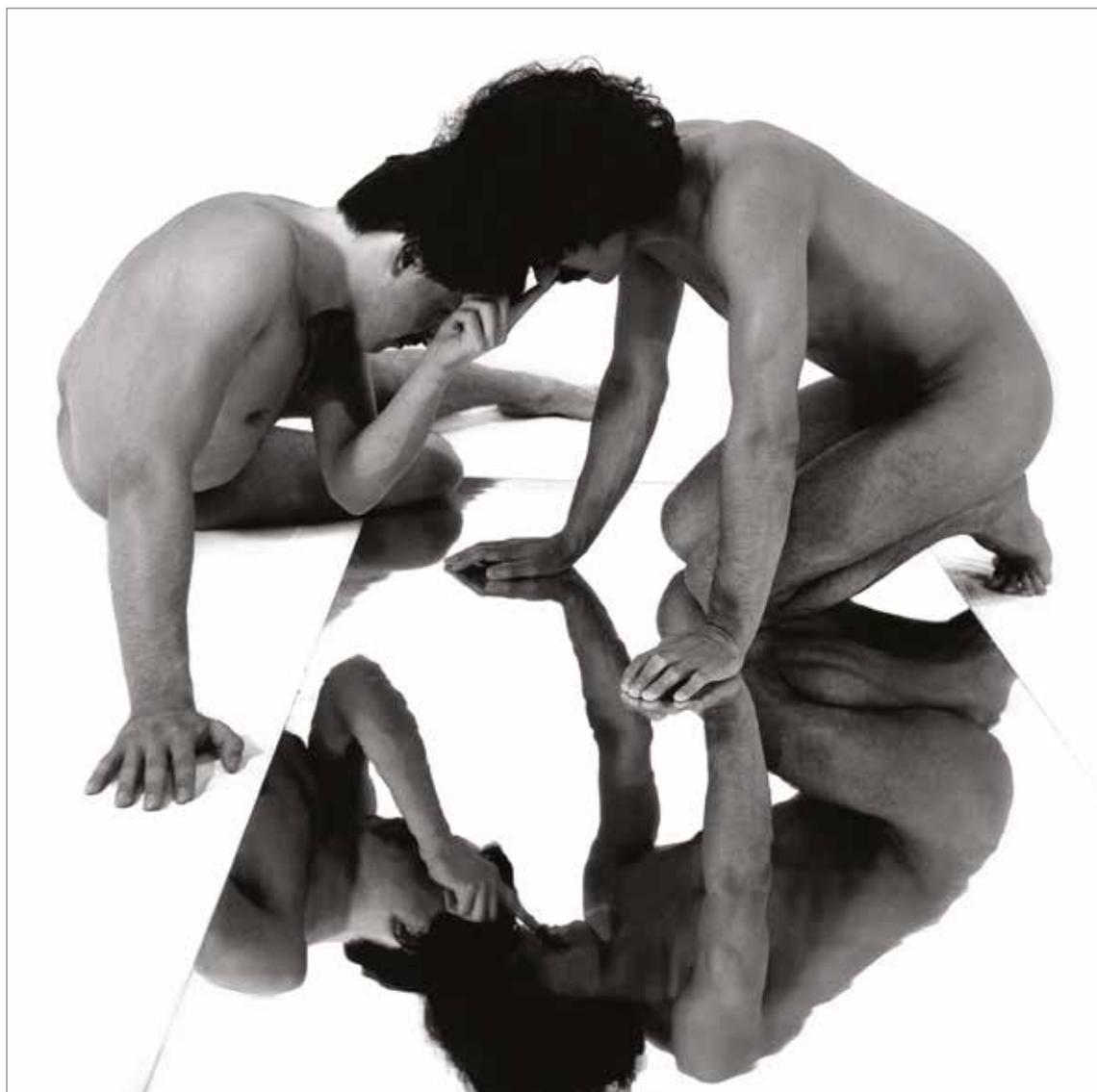


FIG.3) Grzegorz Kowalski, *In the Mirror* (1980), Krzysztof Jung and Wojciech Piotrowski sitting for Grzegorz Kowalski unfinished work *In the mirror*, Courtesy Grzegorz Kowalski.

FIG.4) Krzysztof Jung, *Self portrait with a naked man* (1990), pencil on paper. Courtesy of the Museum of Fine Arts Academy in Warsaw and Doroty Krawczyk-Janisch.



real. What was impossible in the visual culture of the 1970s, namely, non-homophobic reflection and experience of masculine same-sex love and desire, became real in the Repassage circle, and especially when Jung directed the gallery in the period 1979-1980.

Jung's performances and installations are known because they were part of the neo-avant-garde of the 1970s, which was considered an important school of Polish contemporary art. While the homoerotic aspect of his performance art is still ignored, Jung's gay drawings, deposited at the Museum of the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw, were for a very long time completely neglected. They are a treasure of Polish art, comparable to Andy Warhol's drawings from the 1950s, which were also discovered very late. Jung's erotic drawings were rediscovered first in the exhibition *Ars Homo Erotica* (2010) at Warsaw's National Museum, and recently at the German exhibition *Krzysztof Jung, Zeichnungen* (2019) at the Schwules Museum in Berlin.

Jung's drawings mainly date from the 1980s and include self-portraits, portraits, and male nudes. Most of the portraits and self-portraits are nudes depicting in a gentle line attractive male bodies in full frontal nudity FIG.4. There are homoerotic drawings featuring the artist himself, as well as phallic-organic biological forms and vignettes of cruising scenes. There are also portraits of male faces, and friends of the artist, which constitute a record of the artistic and erotic bohemian life of Warsaw in the 1970s and 1980s. Moreover, Jung was very close to the homosexual circle of the Paris-based Polish oppositional magazine *Kultura* which included famous gay writers and artists such as Konstanty Jeleński and Józef Czapski, and created many portraits of both men. In his art and life, he always wove a queer web of connections and interactions with many European references. He often travelled to Paris. It is highly likely but unknown whether he was aware of Pane, the star of European body art at the time.

Pane

In Gina Pane's (1939-1990) case the amorous significance of her performances has to be extracted from other meanings attributed to performance art in that period. The cultural and political revolt of the 1960s and 70s has been a crucial context for reading Pane. May 1968 in Paris is an important historical turning point that inspired and radicalized her. Before 1968, she was exhibiting geometric primary structures; afterwards her art consisted of performances and installations which were politically engaged and idea-driven.¹⁰

The main difference between the art of Pane and Jung is to be found in the sexual and cultural context. Jung's art was one of many isolated islands of sexual dissidence in Poland and there was no gender/queer discourse around his art at the time. Pane's art, however, functioned in the broader framework of an open queer and feminist sexual revolution and movement that characterized the West in the 1960s and 70s. Both in Italy and in France, early homosexual manifestos and theory were published and widely discussed in artistic circles. In 1977 Mario Mieli published *Elementi di critica omosessuale* in Italy. Before this, in 1971 Hocquenghem had set up the Front Homosexuel d'Action Révolutionnaire (FHAR) in France and his text *Le désir homosexuel* appeared in 1972 and is commonly considered the first work of queer theory. Legal, medical, and educational practices were changing in French society. The gay magazine *Arcadie* organized a Paris congress in 1975, with further conferences in other major French cities. In politics, local gay cells on the communist model were organised, in addition to a flourishing gay sex industry and clubbing culture. Homosexual film festivals were held in Paris in 1977 and 1978.¹¹ Therefore Pane's art had a chance to be understood by the audience not only in artistic terms, as in Jung's case, but foremost in the framework of revolutionary sexual politics.

In Pane's case the countercultural elements were different to those of Jung's circle in Cold War

era Poland. In the West, performance art was not always countercultural as it was in Eastern Europe but the ideas that Pane was driven by were, in contrast, rather more typical of the social revolt of the 1960s. Her countercultural influences in Italy and France were much more political and involved women's rights/feminism, the peace movement and anti-war protests, along with opposition to imperialism, capitalism and patriarchy. Yet both artists shared the goal of a utopian spiritualisation of materialistic society. Jung's actions tended to invoke the privacy of human relationships, the spirituality of art and intimate touch as an escape from the highly politicised social reality of the totalitarian state within the private/public oasis of an experimental gallery. Pane's frame of reference was more directly social in a political way, and spirituality referred critically to capitalist materialism. Yet the divergent sexuality of artists from both sides of Europe was nevertheless neglected for a long time in both cases and re-examined only in the 21st century, long after their deaths. So far, critics have only mentioned Pane's sexual identity in passing, choosing instead to concentrate on the broader categories of femininity, religion, or the politics of body art. Jennifer Blessing has presented the most extensive queer reading of the artist's actions and I am indebted to her in my interpretation.

Gay and lesbian identity, which emerged in the 1960s as one of the great modern subjects of cultural and social discourse, to this day constitutes a wound on the body of civilization due to the persistence of homophobia, whereby a continuum of homophobic prejudice extends itself between the poles of silence and violence. The sexuality of both artists has been silenced, and Pane's actions reflect the violence.

The artist was born in France, lived in Paris, yet spent her youth in Italy. Her father was Italian, and her mother was Austrian. Italian and French cultures permeate her art and she makes use of both languages. Pane is experiencing a renaissance in the 21st century, in an age of virtual bodies. Her actions, conceived 50 years ago,

were manifestations of suffering. She repeatedly made small, delicate incisions on the skin of her hands, arms, back, belly, lips, tongue, and eyelids. She used her blood and wounds as a text, writing her artistic manifesto as a *Letter to a Stranger (An Unknown One)*. This 1974 *Letter* states: "If I open my body so that you can see your blood, it is out of love for you, the other..."¹²

Western European and American masochistic body art of the 1970s has usually been discussed within the historical frame of the Vietnam War and artists' identification with the victims of Western imperialist military and political violence.¹³ Accordingly, *Un-anaesthetised Climb* (1971) was the first of Pane's action that employed the act of self-wounding. Over thirty times she scaled a painful jagged-edged ladder. It was presented as a protest against the war crimes in Vietnam to counter a sense of complacency and indifference to such events. This political performance was her most bloody sacrifice in the name of the 'anaesthetized' society.¹⁴ The performance was carefully photographed by a friend - Françoise Masson, who documented the majority of Pane's acts of sacrifice.

Although anti-war politics is present in Pane's art, femininity is equally important. Countless analyses of her art and internet entries on the artist restate the claim that Pane externalized the self-hate that women living in a patriarchy are forced to internalize, or that she reenacted the violence against women present in this culture. Though her feminism is obvious, from a present-day perspective such a generalized feminism may cause meanings to be diluted and to disappear in the universal. I would like to suggest that the deep underpinning of her performances relate to queer femininity and her experience of love, and from this to recover the relevance of her art for contemporary queer perspectives.¹⁵

Critical commentaries on body art also emphasized that the risky, masochistic, and radical practices of the 1960s and 1970s were suffused with the revolutionary spirit of various civil rights movements that shook Western civilization





FIG.5) Gina Pane, *Azione Sentimentale*, performance 09.11.1973, Galleria Diagramma, Milan

© ADAGP, Paris, [2024].

and transformed it entirely.¹⁶ Risk-taking, exposing oneself to suffering, and confronting the aggression of the dominant system were the experiences of those who fought in the name of the rights of women, people of colour, gays, and lesbians. Democratic civil rights were extended to those groups because people had taken the risk of confronting injustice and discrimination. The story of minority movements in the history of humanization is also a story of the continuous sacrifice of human victims. Pane's actions are rituals of suffering and offering. While she did not openly express the gay and lesbian militancy of identity politics, she reflected symbolically on the risk-taking practices of sacrifice undertaken to create a more tolerant, emphatic and equal society.

On November 9, 1973, at the Galleria Diagramma in Milan, Pane performed *Sentimental Action (Azione Sentimentale)* FIG.5. The viewer entered the space of three rooms. On the floor of the first room, there was a black velvet square with a white satin rose appliquéd in the middle. On the walls, there were three photographs showing roses in a silver vase. "Dedicated to a woman by a woman" read Pane's caption. In the next room, a slide was projected on a wall. It showed a portrait of the artist from the waist down, dressed in white pants, holding a bouquet of red roses in her lap. In the third room, a performance was in progress. Rings had been drawn in white chalk on the floor, and inside them the word "donna." Only women were invited to witness this performance. Pane, dressed in white, performed before an all-female audience seated within the circles.

In the photographs, Pane lay on the floor holding a bouquet of red roses, which she alternately pushed away and held close. This was a series of carefully staged and repeated poses, which ended with Pane sitting curled up like an embryo, hugging the bouquet. In the next phase, Pane pierced her forearm with eight rose thorns and sliced her palm with a razor blade. The outstretched bleeding hand symbolizes love passing from hand to hand. The artist offered this blood to the community of women present. Significantly, she surrounded herself with women

and used the rose to say "I love you." Two female voices could be heard while Pane was delicately cutting her body; these were an Italian and a French woman reading letters addressed to one another. It was an epistolary dialogue of love, as well as a narrative about the death of the mother of one of the women, whose lover had sent her a bouquet of roses as a consolation. Then Pane repeated all the initial gestures and movements with a bouquet of white roses. The performance closed with the sound of Frank Sinatra singing *Strangers in the Night* in the adjacent room. This classic and romantic piece about loneliness, longing and fulfilled desire, emphasized the character of the action as a love song in itself.

In the commentary to *Azione Sentimentale* Pane wrote: "The »intra« space is stated by an exchange/mirror closed circuit: the Woman/Women relationship, identifying itself in the primary emotive phenomenon – mother/child, a symbolic relationship which can discover different emotional solutions to one's own conflicts of introjection."¹⁷ Often the artist framed same-sex feminine intimacy with the psychoanalytic language of motherhood and related bodily fluids. For this reason Jennifer Blessing considers that the maternal metaphors in Pane's art represent lesbian desire.¹⁸

Azione Sentimentale is characteristic of Pane's long performances, usually lasting an hour or two, and carefully staged in an almost ritualistic manner. The repetition of certain meaningful gestures and movements, as well as the use of objects, played a central role. Pane's actions tended to combine multiple media: slides, texts read aloud, and music, as well as the filming of the audience. Simultaneously, each performance was documented with film and photography; Pane herself carefully planned the documentation, making drawings so that the photographer knew exactly when to turn on the camera. Pane was the de facto director. Although the cutting, wounding, and pain appeared only at specific points of the performance, it was on the cut that the photo documentation was centered. Pane's language of performance was based on the wound and on pain,

and not on the body, which she rarely exposed fully.¹⁹ The pain and the wound awakened both herself and her audience from paralysis. Pane programmatically worked within and against the so-called “anesthetized society.” Her mission was to make the audience conscious of their own numbed state and to bring them and herself out of it, through the experience of the wound.

By using photo documentation and film footage, Pane and her partner Anne Marchand created artistic representations that she called “evidence.” These were usually geometric compositions of photographs showing the key moments of the performances: the body in religious poses, blood, wounds, the artist's self-mutilation and its demonstration. The “evidence” of *Azione Sentimentale* is especially beautiful. The artist's ritual poses, the whiteness of her clothes, the bouquets, the cuts, the thorns puncturing the arm, and all in shades of white and red. White and red like white and red roses, body and blood, and finally, blood and milk, which fluid often turned up in Pane's performances. The photographic compositions – the artistic evidence of Gina Pane's performances – function as self-portraits inscribed with subtle biographical traces, such as the presence of her partner Anne Marchand and Marchand's own photographs. In the action, Marchand's photograph appeared at the base of a configuration of tarot cards on the floor.

Anne was Pane's long-time companion, who collaborated with her and was part of the art circuit. She was known as Pane's partner in the body art community. As noted by Jennifer Blessing, Anne Marchand appears in a few of Pane's works, such as the actions *A Hot Afternoon* (1977), *Little Journey* (1978), and *Mezzogiorno a Alimenta* (1978); she is also the sole actor in the film *Soli-trac* (1968). Marchand is present in the two main “queer” actions, through the evidence of her photograph in *Action Mélancolique 2x2x2* and *Azione Sentimentale*. The epistolary dialogue between the two women in *Azione Sentimentale* also contains an autobiographical reference to Anne/Gina.²⁰

Azione Sentimentale was a confession of love between women. Queer rights and love stories were no less audible in the 1974 *Action Mélancolique 2x2x2* FIG.6 performed at Studio Morra in Naples. Initially, three couples sat on the stage: two women, two men, and a woman with a man, each couple holding a bouquet. Commenting on this performance, Pane wrote that by putting homosexual couples next to the heterosexual one she had pushed aside pathological associations and created a shared emotional space. Then Pane herself came on stage and drew hearts on her palm and shoulder, and then on the naked back of a woman holding a bouquet. The presence of Pane's partner Anne Marchand in the performance was significant. It was through her photographs that Pane introduced the personal into her public performances. Blood and wounds also appeared in *Action Mélancolique*, during which Pane cut her ear and pierced her arm with pins. The non-hetero-normative amorous emotional space had to simultaneously become a space of pain, which the artist's self-wounding evoked. The transformation was symbolized by the artist rinsing her mouth with cold milk, which she warmed in her mouth and spat out, feeding a cold and unfeeling world with its warmth.

Manifested in her work, suffering reflects not just the ever-present risk involved in the struggle for minority rights but also her private struggle and resistance. Pane often used the word “aggression.” Asked about the central role of the wound in her works, she answered that the wound stands for a statement of the body's extreme sensitivity; it is a sign of suffering, a sign of external aggression. The wound recalls the situation of being the object of aggression, of always being exposed to violence.²¹ The performances, which left the artist in a state of psychological and physical exhaustion, were intended to break through the viewers' indifference or hostility, to expose their fear and disgust, to lead them to empathize with her pain and also to break down the barriers between people. I would like to suggest that Pane internalized and exposed on her body the aggression towards queer subjects that exists in the outside world. Her performances ren-



FIG.6) Gina Pane, *Action Mélancolique*, performance, 1974, Studio Morra, Naples

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der the state of the individual locked in a hostile structure, imprisoned in it as in a trap and subjected to torture.

Pane came to believe in art as a political force that could catalyze change. In an interview in 1973, she stated that she believed that the artist can be “a catalyst of social and moral change because he (sic.) has complete liberty of expression...”²² In this way, her aesthetic perspective was always ethical.²³ She may have also treated the spectacle of suffering as a means to transform consciousness by sensitizing viewers to the pain of others. Sexual identity appeared in her work in three ways: on the biographical level, when she made art together with her partner Anne Marchand and used her photographs in the performances; on the thematic level, when she introduced same-sex couples into the performances; and on the intellectual level, by declaring an affinity with other artists of the sexual avant-garde in her times. In Pane's notes made in 1968 we read: "Merce Cunningham and John Cage were the initiators of new relations; they led to their explosion."²⁴ This is a reference to both artistic and existential relations of these two American artists who worked and lived together in the 1950s.²⁵

Pane performed two decades later, at a moment in Western culture when sexual minorities had come out of hiding and taken on the struggle to win civil rights. Pane substituted her pain for the struggle. Her aggression towards herself constituted a way of externalizing violence, of freeing herself from the ages-long history of violence towards women. It signified the risk associated with gestures of resistance and the risk-taking of the civil rights movements. A wound must appear on the social body for an awakening and healing to take place. It was in this context that Pane spoke about intervening within an anesthetized society.

In Pane's art, the body and sexuality were not just political but, above all, intimate and psychological. Therefore critics emphasize the connections between Pane's art and French psychoanalytic feminism of the 1970s, notably that

associated with Helene Cixous and Luce Irigaray. Both these queer philosophers stressed the freeing of the feminine *jouissance*, meaning pleasure/pain, through a lesbian desire which restores the denied union with the mother's body. Just like the blood and milk in Pane's work, maternal and feminine metaphors were crucial for the invention of a new feminine language of art. In her performances, we find numerous references to the maternal body in the context of love between women, either directly, as in *Azione Sentimentale*, or obliquely, by way of erotic allusions.

Pane's nutritional and maternal metaphors take on queer dimensions in relation to Helen Cixous' concept of *écriture féminine* and French psychoanalytic feminism of the 1970s. Cixous proposed a form of writing that expresses feminine essence, specifically female desire and *jouissance*, bodily and linguistically. Maternal associations were employed to provide a psychoanalytic background for the liberation of female *jouissance* through lesbian desire.²⁶ Woman-to-woman desire was evoked through a symbolic presentation of female genitalia as roses and blood. There are many references to the maternal body through the fluids of milk and blood. In the course of the action titled *Psyché* (1974), Pane unbuttoned her shirt to lick and suck her breast, and then made incisions around her navel.

Queer Love

In Gina Pane's art, the wound and the blood associated with sexuality contributed to the masochistic element that is characteristic of many practitioners of body art. In her work, the suffering additionally contains strong religious and spiritual references associated with a Catholic iconography of martyrs, such as St. Lawrence, St. Francis, St. Sebastian, and St. Lucy. All the wounds are like stigmata.²⁷ In 1981, after ten years of exhausting performances, Pane abandoned actions and turned to the creation of religiously inspired semi-abstract sculptures called *Partitions*. They are reliquary-like vitrines devoted to saints and commemorating her painful body art. One of these forms is entitled *The Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian, After the Posture of a Painting by Memling* (1984). Similarly, when in 1981 the Repassage Gallery in Warsaw was closed because of martial law, Jung started to create a series of drawings and paintings about Saint Sebastian. In one of the photographs from the 1980s, he is shown in the pose of this saint. St. Sebastian has been associated through the ages with marginalized and persecuted queer people and with homoerotic expression in painting. It is not a coincidence that both Pane and Jung decided to identify in their late periods with the iconic 'gay' saint of outsiders.²⁸

Spirituality has here a crucial function on two levels. Firstly, Pane and Jung referenced Christian iconography and theology of suffering and desire to express an existential and political reflection on injustice, violence, and homophobia. Identifying with the martyrs of a religion that officially rejects queers allowed them to queer Catholicism, discovering in it values relevant to non-heteronormative people. Catholicism also provided them with a language of the body and emotions that enabled the expression of extreme psychosomatic and metaphysical experiences.

On a second level, the spirituality of love and friendship played an important role in their performances, which pointed out the role of human empathy and interdependence. The relation-

al nature was strongly spiritual, emphasizing the connection between the personal and the spiritual. They both started from the body but directed their art towards the transcendent, which was in line not only with Catholicism but also with the counter-culture and its interest in Eastern spirituality. This transcendental aspect of their art gave it an aura of mystery. The spiritual character is also indicated by the ritualistic nature of the performances, so it was body art with a spiritual, existential, amorous, and political, multi-level dimension.

So far critics have found it so easy to universalize the radical gestures of Pane and Jung, in her case interpreting them as paradigms of religious ritual, rebellion against the alienation of the individual, and opposition to anesthetized society and capitalist patriarchy. Similarly, in Jung's case, this translation into universalized simplicities is achieved in a discourse about spiritual awakening, authentic human contact, and the neo-avant-garde language of performance art. Yet they were both queer performance artists who enacted the concepts of erotic and amorous differences. In the 1970s both artists were gay and lesbian subjects working in the paradigm of same-sex desire and love, and consciously queering the spaces of art and art institutions in which they performed. It was a time when being open about queer sexuality was both pioneering and transgressive and this has carried the resonance of their work into the present day.

Both were performers of the 1970s, when the private was political, and when the practitioners of body art followed a code of ethical and social responsibility. For Pane and Jung their intimate partners played a role in their performances, connecting art and life in a countercultural spirit. Their respective private lives were queer and from this, we can infer that the subtle politics of their art must have been the same. Their great themes were love and the intimate relations between people connected by love. Pane expressed it through suffering and the exposition of the wound; Jung through the psychodrama of human contact and erotic touch. Theirs was an ethical position in art

because they considered art to function as a link between people and both explored the relationship between their bodies and the collective body. Their performances reached a community of sensitivity and compassion that is an essential component in any social change that aspires to equality and justice.

In this analysis, I intended to emphasize the queer dimension of their performances, and the themes of same-sex love, desire, and subjectivity. It is important to note that even in studies devoted to radical performance art, a hetero-normative approach remains dominant when conceptualizing the subject of love and relationships in performance art of the 1970s. The field is dominated by Marina Abramović and Ulay's actions that reflect their relationship and the vicissitudes of love, particularly in the famous series of *Relation Works* (1976–1988).²⁹ Gina Pane and Krzysztof Jung not only worked on the subject of same-sex amorous relationships in their art but also expanded the experiences and spaces of love and intimacy along queer trajectories, which for us today is significant both in political and private terms. All that remains of their work are descriptions and photographs of mysterious actions: we can only imagine the pain and the pleasures.

Notes

- ¹ Sarah Wilson, "Monsieur Venus: Michel Journiac and Love," in K. Scott, & C. Arscott, eds., *Art and Sexuality: The Manifestations of Venus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 162-165.
- ² Paul Preciado, "The Ocaña We Deserve. Conceptualism, Sexual Insubordination, and Performance Politics," *Stedelijk Studies* 3 (2015), accessed March 10, 2020, <https://stedelijkstudies.com/journal/preciado-ocana-deserve/>.
- ³ Paweł Leszkowicz, "The Male Nude as a Queer Feminist Iconography in Contemporary Polish Art," in Amelia Jones and Erin Silver, eds., *Otherwise. Imagining Queer Feminist Art Histories* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 187.
- ⁴ Tomasz Kitlinski, *Dream Democracy? A Philosophy of Horror, Hope and Hospitality in Art and Action* (Lublin: Maria Curie-Skłodowska University Press, 2014), 214.
- ⁵ Maryla Sitkowska, ed., *Sigma, Galeria Repassage, Repassage 2, Repassage*, exhibition catalogue, (Warszawa: Zachęta National Gallery, 1993), 4-15.
- ⁶ Grzegorz Kowalski and Maryla Sitkowska, eds., *Krzysztof Jung (1951-1998)* (Warsaw: Xawery Dunikowski Museum, 2001), 65-8. Exhibition catalogue.
- ⁷ Jean Laplanche, *Essays on Otherness* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 238-250.
- ⁸ Kowalski and Sitkowska, eds., *Krzysztof Jung*, 90-6.
- ⁹ Ewa Mazierska, "Od homoseksualisty do geja: konstrukcja „innych seksualności” w polskim kinie okresu PRL-u," in Sebastian Jagielski and Agnieszka Morstin-Popławska, eds., *Ciało i seksualność w kinie polskim* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2009), 43-50.
- ¹⁰ Jennifer Blessing, "Some Notes on Gina Pane's Wounds." In *Gina Pane* (Bristol: John Hansard Gallery, University of Southampton, Arnolfini, 2002), 25. Exhibition catalogue.
- ¹¹ Jacques Girard, *Le Mouvement homosexuel en France, 1945-1980* (Paris: Éditions SYROS, 1981), 142-5.
- ¹² Gina Pane, "Lettre à un(e) inconnu(e)," *Artitudes International*, no.15/17 (October/December 1974): 34.
- ¹³ Kathy O'Dell, *Contact with the Skin. Masochism, Performance Art and the 1970s* (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 1-10.
- ¹⁴ Inge Linder-Gaillard, "Stigmata, Icons and Reliquaries: Messages from St. Gina," in *Gina Pane* (Bristol: John Hansard Gallery, University of Southampton, Arnolfini, 2002), 52. Exhibition catalogue.
- ¹⁵ Paweł Leszkowicz, "Female St. Sebastian: Parallel lines in the radical lesbian art of Gina Pane and Catherine Opie," accessed January 10, 2020, http://interalia.org.pl/en/artykuly/2010_5/07_female_st_sebastian_parallel_lines_in_the_radical_lesbian_art_of_gina_pane.htm.
- ¹⁶ O'Dell, *Contact with the Skin*, 10-15.
- ¹⁷ Lea Vergine, *Body Art and Performance. The Body as a Language* (Milano: Skira, 2000), 197.
- ¹⁸ Blessing, "Some Notes on Gina Pane's Wounds," 34.
- ¹⁹ Blessing, "Some Notes on Gina Pane's Wounds," 26.
- ²⁰ Blessing, "Some Notes on Gina Pane's Wounds," 39.
- ²¹ Lea Vergine, "Interview with Gina Pane," in *Gina Pane: Partitions Opere Multimedia 1984-85* (Milan: Mazzotta, 1985), 49. Exhibition catalogue.
- ²² Linder-Gaillard, "Stigmata, Icons and Reliquaries: Messages from St. Gina," 52.
- ²³ Anne Tronche, "If someone is here, they are present," in *Gina Pane* (Bristol: John Hansard Gallery, University of Southampton, Arnolfini, 2002), 68. Exhibition catalogue.
- ²⁴ Tronche, "If someone is here, they are present," 68.
- ²⁵ Jonathan D. Katz, "John Cage's Queer Silence; or, How to Avoid Making Matters Worse," in *Writings Through John Cage: Music, Poetry and Art*, Bernstein and Hatch, eds. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 41-61.
- ²⁶ Blessing, "Some Notes on Gina Pane's Wounds," 30.
- ²⁷ Linder-Gaillard, "Stigmata, Icons and Reliquaries: Messages from St. Gina," 50.
- ²⁸ Richard A. Kaye, "Losing his Religion. Saint Sebastian as Contemporary Gay Martyr," in Peter Horne, ed., *Outlooks. Lesbian and Gay Sexualities and Visual Culture* (London, New York: Routledge, 1996), 86-105.
- ²⁹ Therefore I am not comparing the Abramovic/Ulay work to Pane's and Jung's actions, as I would consider it inscribing the queer artists in the dominant and already established heteronormative framework.

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