

"Know that I do not suffer, unlike you..."¹ - Visual and Verbal Codings of Pain in Body and Performance Art

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1 The flagellation and crucifixion of Jesus Christ, the *Mater dolorosa*, tortured martyrs such as Saint Sebastian - Western art history abounds in painted and sculpted displays of pain and suffering. By illustrating the necessity of painful submission to the symbolic order, these images have always served as reminders of Christian duty and morality: "Literally crucified, Christ gives figural expression to the way all human subjects must subject themselves to the law of the father and the reality principle he stands in for" (Bronfen 109). Christian iconography usually foregrounds the cruelty of the pain sustained and its ideals of passive endurance and unconditional confidence in God by the typical, visibly restrained motility of the figures involved. Christian images of suffering thus privilege a specific form of pain-processing and rely on the spectatorial gaze, which is why they are intimately linked with gender issues, as Kaja Silverman contends: "Christian masochism has radically emasculating implications, and is in its purest forms intrinsically incompatible with the pretensions of masculinity" (198).

2 From the 1960s onward, body and performance artists have substituted canvas and clay by real bodies and have exposed these to more or less painful experiences - obviously not with Christian morality in mind but out of a desire to test and possibly transgress body boundaries and social taboos. Early experiments by the Viennese group and by body artists were so successful that they provoked not only slanderous press campaigns but even led to legal prosecution or prison sentences - e.g. in the cases of Günter Brus and Otto Muehl. Significantly, the charges brought against Günter Brus following his 1968 performance *Der helle Wahnsinn* in Aachen were physical injury of the audience, some members of which had to vomit during the spectacle (Schröder 70). The offense was thus seen as a relocation of the site of suffering or as a "contamination" of the viewers with the bodily pain originally undergone by the performer. Paradoxically, even today, when Western popular culture embraces body-damaging techniques like tattooing and piercing, deliberate and seemingly non-purposive self-harm seems to persist as one of the last taboos of the late 20th and early 21st centuries (Schneede 59).

3 The catalyser for performance art involving bodily self-harm was Yves Klein's photographic montage *Leap into the Void* (1960). Although Klein, whose interest in levitation

¹ Orlan's address to her audience after one of the surgical pieces which make up her performance series *The Reincarnation of St. Orlan* (as cited in Davis 463).

apparently bordered on obsession, had really jumped from a two-storey house before the action itself took place, he carefully stage-managed this photographic event (several people were holding out a jumping blanket) in order to simulate the original situation while pretending it was purely documentary material. Two aspects seem especially significant in this context: (a) Not coincidentally, this origin of pain sold as art was a male narcissistic fantasy of heroic omnipotence and superhuman transcendence, which negated any notion of pain or danger (and was continued by artists such as the Australian Stelarc in his 1976 to 1988 *Suspension Performances*, who had his skin perforated by meat hooks and his body lifted in the air by ropes attached to them). (b) Klein was so euphoric about his successful leap and anxious to create photographic "evidence" for it that he created artistic material which faked the risk of pain and death (Zell 45-46) and thereby gave rise to a whole new tradition of photographic body work.

4 Even though it is held to be the first instance of calculated self-harm in performance art, Klein's example is not representative. Since the skin is not only perceived as the border of the self but is also the organ most sensitive to pain because of its enormous amount of nerve cells, body artists experimenting with real pain preferably draw on diverse forms of skin penetration such as cuts (Gina Pane, Marina Abramovic, Valie Export, Yoko Ono, Günter Brus), shooting (Chris Burden), biting (Vito Acconci), suspension (Stelarc), crucifixion (Chris Burden, Magnus Scharmanoff, Bob Flanagan) and operations (John Duncan, Orlan). While the performances themselves and even their filmic or photographic documentation are all meant to shock and provoke the public, the performers' negotiation of pain differs considerably. Apart from being merely simulated, pain is in most cases and for various reasons marginalized, hidden and even negated, while in other instances it is deliberately made visible, i.e. bloody, or audible. The majority of performers only incurred minor injuries but some artists (Günter Brus, Rudolf Schwarzkogler, Marina Abramovic, Chris Burden, Gina Pane and others) exposed their bodies to real risks and extreme forms of pain² - a form of work they ultimately had to stop for reasons of health.³

5 This paper sets out to analyse the status of pain and its visual and verbal representations in body art with regard to gender difference. Apart from potentially gender-

² Schröder (100, Fn. 191) cites an extreme example of self-mutilation ultimately leading to self-destruction: An artist called John Fare had a machine constructed which successively amputated his limbs during several performances until he died in front of an invited audience. Unfortunately Schröder gives no details concerning the negotiation of pain or the viewers' reactions.

³ Compare Günter Brus: "...meine Technik der Aktion war an einem Punkt angelangt, der sehr nahe am Selbstmord lag" (cited in Schröder 72) [my technique had reached a point very close to suicide], and Marina Abramovic: "My earlier works for instance were based on pain, they were very drastic. If I hadn't met Ulay, they would have destroyed my body" (cited in Zell 50).

related intertextual/ intermedial references to cultural codes such as religion (Christian iconography, sacrifice, rituals of initiation), references to pathological spectacles such as hysteria and cultural practices such as cosmetic surgery, the analysis will include: subject-object relations during the performance itself, the scenarios of narcissism and voyeurism implied by it, gender-specific forms of pain-processing and programmatic statements or manifestoes formulated by the artists themselves.

Sufferers and Perpetrators - Constellations

6 Within body and performance art, subject-object relations have always been a central concern. Performance artists consciously stage and position themselves, or more precisely their bodies, as objects to be looked at and sometimes even to be touched and meddled with (Vergine 15). This narcissistic type of performance, in which the work is the artist (25), replaces or supplements an earlier type of narcissism. In his *Anthropométries* performances, Yves Klein employed female models as stencils or stamps and invested his narcissism in female bodies as art objects, thus reducing them to their traditional domain of reproduction. Klein's own insight that his female nudes functioned as living paintbrushes did not keep him from unashamedly posing as a superior artist figure and stage-manager completely detached from the action itself:

Was mich selbst betrifft, so werde ich nie versuchen, meinen Körper mit Farbe zu bestreichen und mich selbst in einen lebendigen Pinsel zu verwandeln. Im Gegenteil, ich würde lieber meinen Smoking anziehen und meine weißen Handschuhe überstreifen. Ich käme nicht einmal auf den Gedanken, mir meine Hände mit Farbe zu bekleckern.

Die künstlerische Tätigkeit muß vor meinen Augen und unter meinem Befehl stattfinden, während ich dabei Abstand halte und davon losgelöst bin. (Yves Klein, "Hotel Chelsea", written in New York 1961, cited in Schröder 76-77)

[As far as I am concerned, I will never attempt to cover my body in paint and transform into a living paintbrush. On the contrary, I would rather dress in my dinner jacket and put on my white gloves. I would never dream of letting paint stain my hands. The artistic act must take place with me watching it and giving orders, while I remain distanced and uninvolved.]

Such a constellation between male performer and female model/muse does not really come as a surprise insofar as it merely continues art history's traditional distribution of roles. More generally speaking, early body art - where it engages with male-female relations - mirrors the conditions of Western culture at large, which has always linked femininity with corporeality and conceived of Woman (in the sense of a generic category) as the undifferentiated object of male imagination (Almhofer 37).

7 Within the history of body and performance art, a major shift occurred in the 1970s, when an exclusively male domain of artistic practice was gradually entered by female performers. Valie Export, who had been affiliated with members of Viennese actionism, was one of the earliest woman artists to explore the female (i.e. her own) body as an active part in live performances. Export and other female artists took advantage of the fact that performers operate from subjective or even narcissistic stances. They act as first-person "narrators", offer individual, corporeal interpretations and perceptions of the world (Georg F. Schwarzbauer cited in Almhofer 34) and have a tendency to monologize (Voigt 21) which can appear almost self-therapeutic. From a gender-based viewpoint this opens up an important but never uncontroversial potential for self-stylization and self-expression. Female body artists have to face the gender-specific problem of moving inside an affirmative tradition of bodily adornment meant to foreground typical characteristics of femininity, while aiming in their performances at a negation and transgression of these constraints. Bodily deformation, exhaustion or a conscious staging of performativity via plastic surgical transformation as in Orlan's case are the main venues they have chosen in the past.

8 Apart from autoaggressive works, both female and male artists arrange interactive performances in which they are attacked or harmed by someone else - either by an anonymous public (Yoko Ono invited the public to cut up the dress she was wearing in *Cut Piece*, 1964; in *Deadman*, 1972, Chris Burden lay down in the middle of a busy Los Angeles boulevard, wrapped in a canvas bag; similarly, in his 1975 performance *Teppich*, Wolfgang Flatz hid in a carpet to be trodden on by the public) or by a chosen participant or partner (Chris Burden had a friend fire a bullet at him in *Shoot*, 1971; Marina Abramovic and her partner Ulay ended their joint performance *Relation in Space*, 1976, by running naked into each other with full force). In this context the crucial question, at least from a gender studies perspective, seems to be whether the performers also *pose* as victims. From a feminist viewpoint, overtones of masochistic pleasure and especially the decision to perform naked bore a more problematic semantic potential in the case of women, who had traditionally been objects of a male, pleasure-seeking voyeuristic gaze. This dilemma, which some artists have clearly realised, might explain why the majority of performances by women emphasize the element of pain or its endurance more than they foreground the usually concomitant aspect of pleasure. Thus Lorena Wolffer, who declares herself to be "a politicized Mexican woman artist" (71), comments on the filming of her 1995 performance *Mexican Territory* for a TV broadcast as follows:

The TV director assigned a sports cameraman to shoot it. Sadly, he was more interested in my nude body than in the political content of the piece. It was deplorable

that my piece was perceived by this man precisely through the very sexist gaze I criticize in my work. This shocking incident forced me to select more carefully the contexts in which the piece is performed and documented. (72)

9 American performance and video artist Bob Flanagan, who suffered from cystic fibrosis from an early age and died of it in 1996, would be a contrasting example. Flanagan's work draws on an S/M aesthetics - in one of his most renowned pieces, *Nailed* (1989), he ended up nailing his penis to a wooden board in front of the camera - and this inclination has made him "a hero and model to the denizens of this subculture, even as he found much of their interest to be superficial and trendy" (Cooper 77). Again, it is significant that he completely ignored the pain caused by the action itself and maintained an ordinary communication, thereby refuting all notions of passive suffering and martyrdom. As one of the viewers observes: "When Bob hammers that nail through his member while telling a joke or personal anecdote to his video camera, he's trying less to shock than to make us reconsider the topography of desire, and the relationship between bodies and egos" (Rugoff 64). Nevertheless, not all male spectators take the action so lightly. As Renata Salecl has noted, many of them "scream in panic, some even have to leave the room" (30) when Flanagan removes the nails and the blood squirts onto the camera. According to Flanagan himself, masochism is not a unilateral form of sexual control but the roles in S/M are dynamic and reversible (Drier 80-81) so that S/M is not (or not exclusively) about objectivization or victimization, which he thinks people hate and which he sees at the core of most Hollywood movies (79). That his performances attracted voyeuristic spectators, not least because he was suffering from a lethal illness, was a circumstance he was obviously quite ready to accept.

10 Most body art relies on a cooperation between the artist, who employs his or her body as material, and a co-author behind the camera, who documents the action (Dreher 320). Consequently, exhibitionism and voyeurism are to some extent always part of the performance itself, even where there is no public. Nevertheless, public viewers are frequently an indispensable condition for the performance's proper functioning. This applies, for instance, to the Californian feminist performance called *Ablutions*, which was realised in 1972 by Judy Chicago, Suzanne Lacy, Sandra Orgel and Aviva Rahmani. Insofar as it played with references to rituals of initiation and used the flesh of dead animals, the performance had certain features in common with Hermann Nitsch's *Theatre of Orgies and Mysteries* but it differed from Nitsch's or Mühl's material actions in its feminist-didactic concern. The thematic context - rape and violence directed at women - was evoked by scenes in which a naked woman was bandaged from head to foot, another nailed cows' kidneys to the wall and still others bathed in eggs, blood and clay. Finally the performers tied up every person and

object in the room with strings and ropes while a tape-recorder was playing reports by women who had actually been raped. The fact of female victimization was thus communicated and criticised via scenarios of (simulated) pain and restricted motility involving the public directly. As Schröder remarks (157-158), the women remained subjects and in control of the action; they thus insisted on the integrity and invulnerability of the female body even by making it part of a rape scenario. The audience was not primarily provoked but appealed to as witnesses of a very intimate and revealing kind of experience in which communication and understanding were more important than self-expression and abreaction.

11 The role of the spectators in a performance thus ranges from accomplices in dangerous, painful actions, from voyeurs, witnesses and active participants to sources of energy and actual life-savers (during *Thomas' Lips* Abramovic was saved by members of the audience, who came on stage, removed the blocks of ice from underneath her body, covered her with coats and carried her away). The power the public can exert over the artist and the action shows most clearly when they are perceived as accomplices in a pact which makes it possible to the performer to overcome extreme bodily pain and which lends credibility to what happens. Chris Burden chose to perform in front of spectators for exactly these reasons (Schimmel 94, Schröder 114, Zell 71), and Marina Abramovic concluded a pact with herself but depended on the energy the audience chose to invest:

[...] I made the restrictions for myself, I kept to them, and I overcame the pain and got through to the other side. I've experienced that this is possible. That's why the transitory objects and the instructions are an important structure for the audience. They give them the possibility to invest their own energy so that the experience can take place. It works like a bank, the more money you put in, the higher the interest. (Celant/Abramovic 28-29)

12 While body artists typically foreground the intersubjective aspect of their work and thereby revolutionize the traditionally disembodied, narcissistic stance in art and art history, their dominant body/mind conception tends to perpetuate the Cartesian hierarchy of mind over body. At least in earlier instances of performance descriptions, *overcoming* and *resisting* bodily pain, with the connotation of conquering the body (sometimes as part of a politically charged emancipation process), are recurrent key terms in the rhetoric. Stelarc's statement "To me it [stretched skin] is part of the manifestation of the gravitational pull, of overcoming it, or of at least resisting it" (16) is a case in point, as is Marina Abramovic's outrage at her failure to remain in control in *Rhythm 5* (1974): When her feet started to burn after she had set a huge sawdust star aflame, she fainted and a doctor, who happened to be in the audience, took her away and saved her life: "I was very angry because I understood there is a physical limit: when you lose consciousness you can't be present, you can't perform. So I started thinking about how I could make the performances, in which I could use the body with and without

consciousness, without stopping the performance" (Abramovic 29).

Pain in Life and Art: Political and Aesthetic Programmes

13 As has been argued widely in phenomenological studies, pain is an experience central to human subjectivity in that it helps the subject to situate itself in relation to the world: it works both as a world-constructing and as a world-reconstructing faculty, i.e. both on an ontological and on an epistemological level (List 1996: 235). It is perhaps the one feeling which lends some credibility to the old-fashioned and long deconstructed notion of authenticity: "*Those who are in pain will tell you that they have the right to be taken seriously*" (Vergine 8; italics in the original). Apart from being an organic reaction, it is also a symbolic mode of expression. Its advantage is that it works when conventional forms of communication fail to do so, but at the same time it lacks a "vocabulary" which would adequately convey the feelings it triggers. Both as a real subjective experience and as a form of artistic expression pain is, as Elaine Scarry has demonstrated, uncommunicable and therefore unsharable (4); its liminal cultural status somewhere between body, psyche and discourse (List 1996: 224) is conditioned by its resistance to language and to factual verification - to quote Scarry's own, laconic but very apt formulation: "To have pain is to have *certainty*; to hear about pain is to have *doubt*" (13).

14 Pain's resistance to language can cause the person in pain to fall silent or to hold on to an archaic, pre-linguistic and therefore seemingly irrational form of expression (as attributed to the female hysteric, whose trauma-ridden body language seems to turn up again in some performance pieces of the 20th century like Marina Abramovic's *Rhythm 2*, 1974). Apparently body and performance artists preferably have recourse to the silencing of pain where they are affected by it themselves. Artistic "simulators" of pain, however, frequently use an alternative code, which consists in a careful display of objects culturally associated with pain and violence: "Both weapon (whether actual or imagined) and wound (whether actual or imagined) may be used associatively to express pain. [...] As an actual physical fact, a weapon is an object that goes into the body and produces pain; as a perceptual fact, it can lift pain and its attributes out of the body and make them visible" (Scarry 16). In their filmic and photographic work, body artists such as Günter Brus (*Selbstverstümmelung*, 1965) or Rudolf Schwarzkogler (*Aktionen mit Akteuren für Fotosequenzen*, 1956-1966) arranged weapons and cutting instruments and placed them next to human bodies or (bandaged) body parts in order to conjure up in the minds of the viewers associations of medieval torture, of mutilation,

castration or other painful processes.⁴

15 Günter Brus actually intended his body actions and the accompanying documentary material to point out the painful and necessarily mutilating process of art-making and the structural violence and destructiveness inherent in Western civilisation.⁵ As his colleague Peter Weibel elaborates, Brus practised body art as a self-referential, corporeal attempt to bridge the intolerably painful difference between the object of art and the work of art portraying it:

Die ästhetischen Mittel wurden also Realien. Der Schmerz darüber, daß in der Abbildung erst die Kluft zwischen Sein und Schein geöffnet wird, die Differenz zwischen Bild und Objekt, sollte ausgelöscht werden, indem eben Bild und Objekt identisch wurden, daß es eben keine Abbildung mehr gäbe, sondern nur mehr Sein. Der Körper als Abbildungsmedium war dafür das ideale Medium (42).

[The aesthetic devices thus became real facts. The identification of image and object, the abandonment of representation for mere existence was supposed to erase the painful thought that representation opens up the gap between reality and appearances, the difference between image and object. The body was the ideal medium of representation to realise this with.]

Understood in this way, pain is a psychological component of art production which body artists translate into physicality. Brus himself even tried to revalorise terms such as "destruction" or "self-destruction" when he pointed out their productiveness in art-making (Zell 24). He cited famous examples like Pablo Picasso's cubist destruction of the human face or Egon Schiele's and Willem De Kooning's deformation of the human body but significantly refrained from reflections on the physically painful difference between the fine arts and body art.

16 Brus' social critique - like most of the Viennese actionists he bluntly attacked the decrepit bourgeois attitudes prevailing in conservative Vienna and its failure to deal critically

⁴ Cf. Schwarzkogler's description of his second action "o.T.", summer 1965: "C. steht nackt an einem weiß gedeckten Tisch, auf dem ein schwarzer Spiegel liegt. Auf dem Spiegel liegen der bandagierte Penis, zwei Scheren und eine Injektionsspritze. Oberhalb des Penis ist ein quadratisches Stück Zellstoff mit Pflaster geklebt/ es werden Rasierklingen dazugelegt/ es wird eine rote Plastikkrabbe dazugelegt" (Klocker 186). [C. is standing naked at a table covered with a white cloth, on which a black mirror is lying. On the mirror are placed the bandaged penis, two scissors and a syringe. A piece of cellulose is attached to the top of the penis with sticking-plaster/ razor blades are added/ a red plastic crab is put with them.]

⁵ Compare Jochen Gerz, who cogently points out the painful side-effects of art-making: "Der Akt der Gestaltung, der in unseren kulturellen Bereichen allem zugrunde liegt und allem vorausgeht, ist auch immer ein Akt der Verstümmelung. "Es werde Licht", heißt es in der Schrift, und man könnte hinzufügen: "damit es dunkel wird". Die Geschichte unserer Kultur ist auch die Geschichte der Trennungen und Hierarchisierungen. Die Geschichte der Skulptur ist auch die Geschichte der Unterwerfung des Steins, die der westlichen Musik auch die des Verstummens des menschlichen Körpers als eines Instrumentes, von anderen Instrumenten zu schweigen" (Gerz 24; 26). [The act of formation essential and prerequisite to our domain of culture is at the same time always an act of mutilation. "Let there be light", the Scripture says, and one could add: "so that darkness sets in". Our cultural history is also a history of separations and hierarchies. The history of sculpture is also a history of the stone's submission, the history of western music also that of the silencing of the body as an instrument, not to speak of other instruments.]<

with its Nazi past (cf. e.g. Schröder 1990: 71) - materialized on the level of corporeality in performances such as *Zerreiẞprobe* (*Endurance Test*, 1971) during which he presented himself in blatantly antisocial fashion by appealing to the audience for certain banal favours (for instance to shut the window or to give him a glass of water) while ignoring their reactions or insulting them (by peeing into the glass and drinking its contents). Brus thus got to be known as the *enfant terrible* of early performance art and was actually marginalized socially not only because of his chaotic, dirty or sometimes even disgusting body actions but also because he put his finger on something Judith Butler thirty years later explicated theoretically: on pain as a side-effect of social norm-giving and norm-maintaining processes (related, not only etymologically, to *poena* or "punishment" - Scarry 16).⁶ As Brus put it, solely the child who does not yet know about social rules is still unhurt ("das Kind, das noch nichts weiss von dem Kram, ist noch mit heiler Haut da", cited in Schröder 86). The calculated social scandalon of body art lies in the presumptuousness with which it seems to take over traditional prerogatives of the state such as the negotiation of pain, of body discipline and the right to decide over life or death. Artists like Brus thus "assume the function of the aggressor; they both imitate his function and assume his symbols" (Vergine 19). Brus's colleague Peter Weibel explains:

Wenn nun die Kunst beginnt, dem Staat das Tötungsmonopol streitig zu machen, auch in der Selbsttötung und der "unendlich ausgekosteten Selbstentlebung", dieser unendlich verzögerten Selbsttötung, dann geht es einzig und allein darum, die Todesproduktion selbst zu brechen. (45)

[When art starts to dispute the state's exclusive right to kill, even by suicide and a "disembodiment enjoyed to the full", this infinitely retarded suicide, it is solely concerned with overcoming the logic of death itself.]

Durch die reale Verstümmelung des Körpers wurde die Realität der sozialen Codierung des Körpers und die verstümmelnde Funktion der sozialen Codierung angegriffen. (48)

[The realised mutilation of the body was an attack on the realness of social codes concerning the body and on the mutilating function of social encoding.]

That pain also originates in mutilating processes of genderization due to an inflexible heterosexual matrix, which excludes and prohibits all deviant forms of desire, as Judith Butler argues (65), is an insight still unavailable and possibly irrelevant to Brus and most other male artists of the time.

17 This is completely different for artists such as Carolee Schneemann or Valie Export,

⁶ This close affiliation between notions of pain and of punishment is also mirrored in Stelarc's statement on his *Suspension Performances* that "[The stretched skin] is the physical penalty you pay for suspending your body" (16). It becomes most obvious in S/M practices, which Bob Flanagan and Sheree Rose draw on for their performance work.

who were aware of gender constraints well before the second women's movement started to make itself felt in continental Europe. In her 1968 performance *Aus der Mappe der Hundigkeit* Valie Export led her partner, Peter Weibel, who followed her on all fours, through an inner city Vienna street on a dog's leash. Although in commenting on this action she does not refer to gender explicitly - what she wanted was in her own words "die negative utopie des aufrechten rückgrats in unserer tierischen gemeinschaft zu proklamieren" (Mueller 19) [to proclaim the negative utopia of the upright backbone in our animal community], the ironic reversal of gender roles implied is unmistakable. In her performance *Kausalgie* Export differentiated between a black causalgy (the dark pain of oppression/submission) and its white counterpart (the light pain of emancipation), thereby acknowledging the fundamental ambivalence of pain, which is always intertwined to a certain extent with lust and desire and can, when the person affected by it is in control, even have liberating effects.⁷ In her programmatic article on "Aspects of Feminist Actionism" Export stresses the emancipatory power of re-enacting, resisting and overcoming pain. With regard to her own pieces *I am beaten* (1973) and *Bewegungsimitationen* (1974/75) she foregrounds the performative possibility to express "die Freude am eigenen Widerstand, die Freude, Schmerz zu ertragen und zu überwinden, die Freude, den fremden Widerstand zu überwinden, den Verlust zu sehen und darüber zu lächeln" (Export 159) [the pleasure of resisting, the pleasure of bearing pains and overcoming them, the pleasure of overcoming the resistance of the other, to realise the loss and smile]. Export tries to free herself from the pain involved in the performances themselves through desensitizing her body and thus putting a magical ban on them (Prammer 138).⁸ At the same time, her concept is an openly didactic one, which closely follows the feminist axiom of the personal being the political: she attempts to change people's consciousness by staging typically gender-marked experiences of pain, which hurt her

⁷ Interestingly, pleasure on the one hand and pain and violence on the other also mix rhetorically in Valie Export's retrospective observations on the Viennese group: "Es war eine großartige, gespannte Stimmung damals. Es klingt wie ein Schlagwort heute, aber es war eine echte Aufbruchsstimmung, alles war so mit Lust an der Provokation, mit der Lust am radikalen Ausdruck, ich meine damit Lust als Haltung. Die Zeit war lustvoll, frech und aggressiv für mich, jedoch auch sehr konstruktiv, innovativ. Man hat sich nicht um Normen und Regeln gekümmert, die eingehalten oder verletzt werden sollten. Man hat sie einfach verletzt, das war die Voraussetzung, man hat Wunden in die Regeln geschlagen. Es war eine starke, progressive Kraft vorhanden, man hat geglaubt, alles sei möglich und man könne die Welt, das System, umkrempeln [...]" (Valie Export cited in Zell 18). [We were in a tremendous, tense mood at the time. This may sound like a slogan nowadays but it was a time of genuine new departures, everything was teeming with the desire to provoke, the desire for radical expression, I mean desire as an attitude. The times were full of relish, cheeky and aggressive in my case but at the same time extremely constructive and innovative. No-one cared for norms or rules which had to be kept or broken. They were simply broken, this was a precondition, wounds were cut into rules. There was a strong, progressive sense of power, people thought everything was possible and the world, the system could be turned upside down.]

⁸ Compare Marina Abramovic's comment on *Thomas' Lips*: "The idea was to see how much you can increase the pain you inflict on yourself and really make your body immune" (30f.).

viewers more than herself (Zell 164).

18 In comparison to Export's feminist work and political attitude, Hermann Nitsch's aesthetic programme, which he conceives of as a *theatre of abreaction* (Vergine 177) and enacts in his *Theatre of Orgies and Mysteries*, appears to be a decidedly masculine one. Nitsch's performances do not involve real pain but use (animal) blood and (mostly male) human participants/models or slaughtered animals in order to evoke pain in faked rituals of sacrifice and festivity, which mingle associations of violence and desire (he refers to crucifixion, the holy communion, ritual regicide, the blinding of Oedipus and the killing of totemistic animals in his performances - Schneede 138). A theatrical framework serves him to stage what he considers to be an integral but - in modern times - suppressed element of cosmic reality and human nature: aggression and destruction. "Ich sehe Zerstörung auch als Folge von Lebensüberschwang, von zu viel Kraft, von ungebändigter Kraft" (Hermann Nitsch cited in Zell 40). Nitsch's Dionysian and implicitly masculine concept of performance art is based on an idealized, ecstatic aggressiveness considered to be an outlet for naturally built-up feelings which are norm-breaking and norm-reaffirming at the same time. Through his recourse to ancient rites, which he aestheticizes and presents in pseudo-priestly fashion, he evokes a shared cultural past but strips the individual ritualized act of the religious circumstances and community which alone justify it. His actions have a close affinity to Georges Bataille's theorizing on the social function of violence and sacrificial rites, by which societies, according to Bataille, achieve periodic moments of unity with a basically violent and excessive nature through a temporal suspension of the rules of rationality.

19 Similar to Yves Klein, Nitsch insists on the theatricality of his performance actions, which seem to hold the promise of catharsis for the audience (even though violence and pain are only simulated). Nitsch's reasoning with regard to sacrifice reveals his self-assessment as a messianic figure:

Ich nehme durch meine Kunstproduktion (Form der Lebensandacht) das scheinbar Negative, Unappetitliche, Perverse, Obszöne, die Brunst und die daraus resultierende Opfer-Hysterie auf mich, damit IHR EUCH den befleckten, schamlosen Abstieg ins Extrem erspart" (Nitsch cited in Schneede 139).

[Through my art production (a form of life worship) I take upon myself the apparently negative, unappetizing, perverse, obscene, the lust and the resulting sacrificial hysteria so that YOU are spared the stained, shameless descent into extremes.]

That an aesthetic programme like Nitsch's can corroborate self-stylizations as a (male) hero and figure of pathos is confirmed by Peter Weibel's comment on his 1971 performance *Initiation*, in which he stigmatized his palms by burning fuses. This "initiation rite" was supposed to have been an incentive to the viewers to accompany him on his artistic journey

and to trust him as a man who bears pains with a smile (Weibel cited in Schröder 124). Heroic endurance of pain is used here as a possible source of artistic credibility and charisma, following a masculine rather than feminine tradition established by Van Gogh cutting off his left ear.

20 Rudolf Schwarzkogler's performance work is also said to show characteristics of rituals or cult behaviour (Badura-Triska, "Kunst als Purgatorium der Sinne", 259). In his *ÄSTHETISCHES PANORAMA*-Manifest Schwarzkogler makes it clear that he aims at catharsis and regeneration through art, which he declares to be a purgatory of the senses, supposed to intensify the viewers' sensory perceptions (Badura-Triska, 257). Looked at more closely, however, his actions seem to be directed much less at a public audience than they are meant to further his process of spiritual self-perfection inspired by Eastern philosophies and practices such as buddhism, hinduism, yoga and tantra. Rudolf Schwarzkogler never enacted a single piece in public; only photographs remain as documentary material. In his reminiscences of his colleague and friend, Hermann Nitsch suggests that Schwarzkogler's own body and psyche were the target of his highly aestheticized but more apollonian than dionysian performance pieces and that these were not unaffected by messianic appeal: "vom gesundschwitzen des organismus, vom aderlaß war die rede. ein läuterungs- und auferstehungsvorgang war gemeint und dies nicht ohne die ausdrücklich gemachte anspielung auf die mythische gegebenheit von tod und auferstehung" (Nitsch 17). His self-imposed diets furthered the myth of Schwarzkogler as a martyr, who sacrificed his health and life in the name of art. In fact, his premature death was repeatedly but wrongly attributed in the media (initially in the American *TIME* magazine) to the consequences of a presumed self-castration which was thought to have taken place during one of his performances. Obviously, his photographic actions, in which he had staged several castration scenes, had been taken at face value as art's blueprint for life (and death).

21 In comparison to male artists like Klein and Nitsch, who clearly view themselves as directors of pre-structured works and sometimes even as divinely inspired saviours of the world, Marina Abramovic relies much more on the specific and changing reactions of her viewers for her performance effects. Her concept of body art is first and foremost based on dialogical exchange and openness, even though her artistic aims expressly include the test and transcendence of psycho-physical boundaries of the self:

Performance is some kind of mental and physical construction in which an artist steps in, in front of the public. Performance is not a theater piece, is not something that you learn and then act, playing somebody else. It's more like a direct transmission of energy. [...] I could never really reach the point that I can go over my physical and mental limits privately. There always has to be the public, there always have to be

viewers who give me that kind of energy. The more the public, the better the performance gets, the more energy is passing through the space. (Abramovic 27)

Accidents and interruptions are deliberately taken into account by Abramovic, who explains that her performance concepts, especially in the 1970s, resemble scores or recipes rather than a fully elaborated script. Her work has an undeniably political ring to it, sometimes even with feminist overtones, while at the same time it is strongly autobiographical. Abramovic experiments in autoaggression in order to explore her own body boundaries and to achieve a state of cathartic, transcendent purity. The presence of viewers allows her to harm herself in ways normally impossible, as she explains in an interview, and she admits that she loves the feel of complete liberty, of child-like innocence, vulnerability and emptiness that live performances arouse in her (Jappe 140). The fact that her performances are very drastic from the point of view of the pain involved can be attributed to her keen interest in states of trance requiring extreme physical challenges, which she got acquainted with during her one-year stay with Australian aborigines.⁹ In another interview with Thomas McEvilley, however, Abramovic intimates that her early Yugoslavian performances were a reaction to her strict upbringing by her mother who insisted that she be at home by 10 pm even when Abramovic was nearly thirty: "Es ist total verrückt, aber all die Selbstverletzungen, die ich mir zugefügt habe, die Schnitte, die Peitschenhiebe, das Brennen, aber auch, dass ich in dem Feuer-Stern fast umgekommen wäre, das alles geschah vor 22 Uhr" (Abramovic in McEvilley 16) [How absolutely crazy that all the self-harm I inflicted on myself, the cuts, the whippings, the burns and even the fact that I nearly died in the fire star, all this happened before 10 pm.]. Interestingly, with hindsight she regards these violent performances as having resulted from a masculine attitude of heroic resistance ("Bevor ich Jugoslawien verlassen habe, hatten alle meine Arbeiten einen absolut männlichen Ansatz, totaler Einsatz und Heldentum, immer bestand die Möglichkeit, dabei umzukommen, und all das", 16 [Before I had left Yugoslavia, all my work had a completely masculine approach, total commitment and heroism, always including the possibility of dying from it]), although the scenarios she created (e.g. she scourged herself until blood flowed in *Thomas' Lips*, 1965) were actually of a masochistic,

⁹ "Auf meinen Reisen nach Tibet und zu den Aborigines lernte ich auch einige Sufi-Rituale kennen, ich sah, dass all diese Kulturen den Körper an physische Grenzen treiben, um einen geistigen Sprung zu vollziehen, um die Angst vor dem Tod auszuschalten, die Angst vor dem Schmerz und vor all den körperlichen Einschränkungen, mit denen wir leben. Wir hier in der westlichen Gesellschaft sind so ängstlich. Die Performance war die Form, die es mir ermöglichte, den Sprung in jenen anderen Raum, jene andere Dimension zu vollziehen" (cited in Zell 50). [On my trips to Tibet and to the aborigines I got to know some sufi rituals, I saw that all these cultures drive the body to its physical limits in order to perform a spiritual leap, in order to shut out the fear of death, the fear of pain and of all the physical constraints we have to live with. People from western societies are so fearful. Performance was the form of expression which enabled me to carry out the leap into this other space, this other dimension.]

submissive nature conventionally associated with femininity, as the interviewer also remarks with respect to *Rhythm O* (an experimental piece in which a completely passive Marina Abramovic allowed the public to cause her either pleasure or pain with the help of diverse instruments at their disposal). That these kinds of performances may have been a way of working through a childhood trauma in that they recreated the typical constellation of a little girl suffering at the hands of her elders suggests itself. Abramovic obviously feels the need to refute this painful explanation and masked it by foregrounding the less disconcerting principles of heroic masculinity.

22 It could be argued that exposing oneself to extreme, i.e. potentially lethal forms of pain and injury is in itself not a clearly genderized behaviour. Rather, what counts from the point of view of gender relations are the masculine or feminine connotations generated by the choice of painful scenarios and their specific symbolic charges, the artist's attitude during the performance itself and his or her rhetoric in performance descriptions. If we turn to the American artist Chris Burden, for example, the bodily risk he takes is comparable to that of Marina Abramovic but his nonchalant behaviour, his mad scientist attitude and matter-of-fact style of comment reinforce connotations of modern heroic masculinity. As Schimmel (97) expounds, within a five-year span Burden underwent shooting, electric shock treatment, spearing, cutting, drowning, locking up and isolation. Viewed against these extreme risks of health, Burden's description of his performance *Shoot* (1971) appears not only laconic but must be considered a deliberate, conventionally masculine understatement: "At 7:45 p.m. I was shot in the left arm by a friend. The bullet was a copper jacket 22 long rifle. My friend was standing about fifteen feet from me" (Burden cited in Dreher 310). His professed political programme consists in making people aware of the ubiquity of violence and crime in American society (to "re-enact certain American classics - like shooting" - Burden cited in Goldberg 159), but the rhetoric he uses in a later interview to describe his aims in *Shoot* also betrays his personal excitement generated by the extreme physical challenge of this test of courage:

My sources are sometimes from the news, from reading, from what goes on in the world. The performance I did a long time ago - when I was shot - *Shoot*, worked so well because it deals with issues that everybody thinks about. You can see these things on television, you see it in real life and you read about it all the time - it has become an American tradition, like apple pie. Since I was an artist and I did this piece in an extremely clinical, scientific way it made people ask themselves: Why does he do this? What does he mean? The piece becomes the vehicle for an empirical, scientific inquiry because it ultimately raises the question: What does it feel like? Well, in order to find out, you have to do it! [Getting shot] is a fear everybody has, especially in America, for it's there all the time. When you read that an artist did this, then it does suddenly spark. (Burden 66; 68)

His relationship to pain, as he himself sees it, is one of direct confrontation ("[...] you must create a situation where you can test your fantasy and your fear against the actuality - rather than turn from it, face it head on and find out what it is", 84), and unsurprisingly, in most of his performances a strong focus lies on technical mastery and acrobatic stunts (Zell 70-71). Burden frequently acts in such a staggering manner, exaggerating traditional notions of masculinity, that his work seems to verge on gender parody, although such an intention is not verifiable.

23 Otto Mühl, one of the Viennese actionists, acknowledges the strong autobiographical impact of his own artistic work, which in his opinion led to its pronounced aggressiveness: "im aktionismus stellte ich die verbindung zu meinen verhinderten lebensenergien her und boxte mir den weg zu mir selbst frei. ich lernte nicht nur meine positiven energien kennen, sondern die negativen, verkrampften" (11). In contrast to Marina Abramovic, however, Mühl's biographical references are unmistakably and prototypically male. In his autobiographical prose work *Weg aus dem Sumpf* he frankly describes how much he despised and rejected his highly emotional mother (imitating his father in this respect) and how he modelled his artistic personality on the masculine traits his father stood for, of power, discipline and consequential behaviour (66). The decisive turning point in 1961, as Mühl himself realises retrospectively, namely from an earlier phase of painting to performance art, necessitated nothing less than a highly aggressive, symbolic matricide:

mitten im malen, das bild begann bereits abzusacken, ich konnte es nicht halten, kam die entscheidende wende. ich nahm das küchenmesser und schlitzte das bild auf. ich riss die leinwand mit beiden händen auseinander, zertrümmerte den rahmen, trat mit den füssen danach, das holz splitterte, ich drehte alles ineinander, ich würgte das bild, als ob ich jemandem den hals umdrehe. ich verknotete das bündel aus holz und leinwand mit schnüren, später wickelte ich noch einen stacheldraht darum, den ich auf der strasse gefunden hatte und überschüttete und bespritzte alles mit farbe, die ich gerade zur verfügung hatte. [...] ich hatte keine ahnung davon, dass ich einen symbolischen muttermord dargestellt hatte. (150-151)

[in the middle of a painting process, the painting had already to started to sink, i had difficulty holding it, the decisive turning point came. i took the kitchen knife and slit the painting open. i tore the canvas apart, smashed the frame, kicked it, the wood splintered, i twisted everything into each other, i strangled the painting as if i were wringing someone's neck. i tied up the bundle of wood and canvas with strings, later i wound a piece of barbed wire around it which i had found in the street and poured and splashed paint which happened to be there all over it. [...] i had no idea that i had represented a symbolic matricide.]

Mühl realised in 1977 that he needed the carapace of male heroism to hide his feelings of inferiority and vulnerability. In spite of his secret preference for being a woman (66), the body art he practised in his *Materialaktionen* perpetuated the misogyny he was taught as a

boy. He utilized, objectivized and exploited his female models, covered them in paint or in layers of film or tied them up with tissue and pieces of string. The potentially painful physical reality he thereby created was one which only affected the models so that his performances were not completely devoid of sadism. Mühl's description of his very first performance speaks for itself:

als ich die erste aktion durchführte, ging ich gerade so vor, als ob ich irgendein bild, ein objekt, zu demontieren hätte. indem ich babsi mit farbschlamm bewarf, mit in farbe getauchten tüchern zudeckte und umwickelte, verknotete, abfall über sie schüttete, sie mit dicker farbe einschmierte, zerstörte ich gründlich das menschenbild, das auf seife und intimspray beruht. ich hatte ein tabu verletzt (158).

[when i realised my first performance i proceeded as though i had to dismantle some painting, an object. by throwing mudpaint at babsi, by covering babsi and wrapping her in sheets soaked with paint, tying them up and spilling garbage on her, by covering her in thick paint, i destroyed once and for all the idea of human nature based on soap and deodorant. i had broken a taboo.]

24 After its first climax in the 1960s and early 1970s, Western body art was revived in the late 1980s and 1990s by artists such as Bob Flanagan and Sheree Rose in the United States or Orlan in France. Especially in Orlan's work, revised but by no means uncontroversial notions of feminism and subjectivity manifest themselves, which are closely linked to current postbiological/ posthuman concepts. In her series of performances entitled *The Reincarnation of St. Orlan* (1990-1993) Orlan used her own body as a physical medium of successive, performative transformation, which she herself regarded as a "woman to woman transsexualism" (O'Bryan 54). She developed a computerized synthesis of selected famous women portraits from Western art history and made a team of surgeons operate her face according to this blueprint, while she herself, only locally anaesthetized, read out from philosophical, literary and psychoanalytical texts. Insofar as she attacks and counteracts in her performances the hysteria with which a flawless, idealized female body is being propagated in the media and popular culture, Orlan proves to be a deconstructive feminist in her own territory of performative, visual art: "My work is not a stand against cosmetic surgery, but against the standards of beauty, against the dictates of a dominant ideology that impresses itself more and more on feminine ... flesh" (Orlan cited in O'Bryan 54). Her transgressions consist in the substitution of the canvas by an operation table, in her collection of corporeal "relics" or souvenirs from individual operations, in her role as director of a self-conceived surgical spectacle and *gesamtkunstwerk*, including specially designed robes for herself and for the medical personnel involved, and, last but not least, in the aesthetics of corporeality set out in her *Carnal Art Manifesto*: "Unlike "Body Art", from which I set it apart, Carnal Art does not conceive of pain as a means of redemption or as a source of purification. Carnal Art is not

interested in the plastic-surgery result, but in the process of surgery, the spectacle and discourse of the modified body which has become the place of a public debate" (cited in Kerejeta 218).

25 This transformative aesthetics also revolts people by its citation of conventional norms of ugliness and monstrosity (Baxmann). In her 1993 surgical performance *Omniprésence*, which took place in New York and was broadcast live to a forum of intellectuals at the McLuhan Center in Toronto and to the Centre Pompidou in Paris, Orlan had two silicon implants in the form of horns inserted into her temples. The spectacle did not fail to shock the viewers, who witnessed an extremely brutal operation involving Orlan's skin being cut open and moved by surgical instruments in close-ups. The artist herself, however, appeared totally unaffected by the cruelty and pain she suffered and when asked about the impact of pain, she merely shrugged and said: "Art is a dirty job, but someone has to do it"; "Of course, there are several injections and several grimaces ... but I just take painkillers like everyone else" (Orlan cited in Davis 463). In her almost arrogant dismissal of pain Orlan resembles male artists like Chris Burden, and it is hardly astonishing that feminist critics have criticised Orlan harshly for her denial of feminine embodiment and for her neglect of pain. A feminist, biotechnological utopia as Orlan conceives of, who uses her own body as raw material, comes dangerously close to classical scenarios of martyrdom, it trivializes the dangers of cosmetic surgery and ignores the very real suffering of women who are not content with their looks. Furthermore, Orlan's operation theatre poses the question of subject-object relations anew with respect to authorship but does not offer any easy answers. Even though Orlan acts as a client with specific orders in mind, it could be argued that the surgeons are the actual performers and, because of their superior medical knowledge, are ultimately responsible for the end result.

26 The range of political and aesthetic positions in painful modern body and performance encompasses, as has been shown, traditional, art-specific legitimization patterns based on notions of catharsis or redemption (Nitsch, Brus) as well as more decisively "modern" motivation patterns such as self-transcendence through trance-like or ecstatic states of the body (Schwarzkogler, Abramovic). All of the performers, whether they stage autoaggression or experiment in injuries inflicted on them by participants in the performance, share the common aim of provoking and shocking the public - either directly as in live performances in front of viewers or indirectly via photographic or videotaped material. A dilemma they have to face is the rapidly increasing spread of images of violence in modern and postmodern culture and especially the media and the fact that this habituates people to scenarios of pain and suffering.

With regard to performances such as Orlan's theatrical operations, the question arises, therefore, whether they do not run the danger of losing their sensational appeal, especially if one takes into account that live broadcasts of plastic surgery have recently become a popular TV format on the US channel ABC.

Languages and Images of Pain

27 That intersubjective communicability of pain is a problematic issue has been Elaine Scarry's thesis and argumentative point of departure. Another, related question is how pain makes itself felt, how it figures as a sensation. Ernst Pöppel has analysed the interplay of pain and pleasure in human experience from a predominantly anthropological point of view and has come to the conclusion that the threshold of pain assessment ("Bewertungsschwelle") is an individually but above all culturally variable dimension (10). He differentiates between a minimal intensity of stimulus on the one hand, at which pain is perceptible as such and which seems to be universal among humankind (239), and a variable tolerance level of pain on the other hand. An interesting concrete example he cites is birth pains, which in Western civilizations seem to be more negatively charged and result in a comparatively low level of tolerance among Western women giving birth. Another example, which sheds an interesting light on Stelarc's *Suspension Performances*, is an Indian religious ceremony during which a young man chosen by the community to bless the soil is lifted up in the air by hooks inserted into the muscles of his back (239-240). Pöppel points out that the man shows no signs of pain whatsoever during the ritual and explains this by the cultural value and positive connotations attached to the process. The decisive factor in the negotiation of pain thus seems to be social conditioning so that in (religious) ecstasy, trance and masochism, which may be linked emotionally and mentally with positive features, perceptions of pain can be blotted out by endorphins the brain produces (249, 251). The frequent absence of pain in body-centred art performances, especially when they are performed live before an audience, are therefore not necessarily a consequence of the artist consciously withholding all bodily reactions but may be attributable to an ecstatic emotional state of dis-embodiment triggered by the performance situation itself.

28 The perceptible reactions to pain or unease which are being articulated in performance art, however, are often employed consciously as critical, antisocial gestures. Asked whether he regarded body and performance art as a climax of speechlessness within art history, Otto Mühl answered in 1994: "Im Aktionismus wird eine neue Sprache eingeführt: die Sprache des Bauches. Sie ist viel echter. Rülpsen, Scheißen, Brunzen, Atmen, Röcheln. Der anderen ist zu

mißtrauen. [...] Die Sprache ist total vom Staat eingenommen, man kann eigentlich kein vernünftiges Wort mehr sagen. Und der Aktionismus hat es zum Ausdruck gebracht" (Roussel 118-119). [A new language is introduced into actionism: the language of the body. It is far more real. Belching, shitting, grunting, breathing, groaning. The other language is suspect. [...] Language has been completely appropriated by the state so that it is practically impossible to utter a single sensible word. And actionism has given expression to this.] Vito Acconci's photo action *Trademarks* (1970) appears to be a concretization of this linguistic scepticism among performance artists. Acconci assumed various painfully contorted postures in order to bite into various parts of his body and thus to refunctionalize the mouth as an instrument of aggression: "Mich beißen: Meinen Körper überall beißen, wo ich hinkomme. Tinte auf die Bisse auftragen; den Bißabdruck auf verschiedene Oberflächen stempeln" (Acconci cited in Schimmel 91). [To bite myself. To bite my body in all the places I can reach. To apply ink on the bites; to stamp the bite's impression on different surfaces.] A sceptical attitude towards conventional language as a medium of the symbolic order and the valorization of non-symbolic communicative modes such as the semiotic (in Julia Kristeva's terms) seems to have been a widely shared position among artists of all orders since the 1960s, but body artists probably had the most immediate and effective (because multisensory) access to such alternative languages. One of those was and is the language of blood and of skin colour.

29 Jochen Gerz took a specific way of speaking literally in his painful performance *Schreiben mit der Hand* (1972), when he grazed his hand against the wall of a house in order to write the sentence "Diese Worte sind mein Fleisch und mein Blut" [These words are my flesh and my blood] in blood onto it (Schneede 142-144). Gerz poses as a messianic figure in that he takes the Christian motif of the Eucharist out of its religious context and plays with its underlying concepts of physical pain as a gift to believers. Dennis Oppenheim's *Reading Position for a Second Degree Burn* (1970) could be regarded as another, though probably less painful and more passive, performative act of achieving colour change, "a traditional painter's concern" (Oppenheim cited in Goldberg 158), via body language. Oppenheim exposed himself naked to the sun, with a large book placed on his chest, until the sun had burnt the uncovered area and produced a body-specific form of pigment. He relegated artistic authorship to the forces of nature in this piece and thereby implicitly questioned the role of the performer: "I allow myself to be painted - my skin becomes pigment"; "I feel the act of becoming red" (Oppenheim cited in Schneede 62).

30 Feminist theory, which revealed the symbolic to be male- or phallus-dominated and

searched for alternative, "feminine" modes of expression, was taken up in the work of body artists such as Gina Pane. Pane, who wanted to draw attention to everyday violence against women by her facial self-mutilations, is very explicit about pain as a (feminine) language and her programmatic statements resemble those by French exponents of *écriture féminine* such as Luce Irigaray or Hélène Cixous: "Für mich, die ich Frau bin, ist die Wunde auch Ausdruck für mein Geschlecht, sie ist Ausdruck für die blutende Spalte meines Geschlechts. Diese Wunde hat den Charakter eines weiblichen Diskurses. Die Öffnung meines Körpers impliziert sowohl den Schmerz als auch die Lust" (Gina Pane cited in Zell 107) [For me who am a woman the wound is also an expression of my sex, it is an expression for the bloody hole of my sex. This wound is like a female discourse. My body's opening implies both pain and pleasure.] In a comment on her performance *Le corps pressenti* (1975) Pane stresses her effort to construct wounds as a visual language which is supposed to communicate their psychological relevance as bodily traces (Schimmel 99). When pain and its language of wounds are made manifest to a public, one could argue, they take over the function of a non-verbal collective memory, with blood functioning as a visible authentication of pain. From the perspective of cultural anthropology, Veena Das has convincingly argued that pain is a profoundly ambiguous social element: it can create a moral community between those who have suffered and those who have witnessed this suffering (818) just as much as it can represent an individual form of resistance against complete social incorporation (821). In other words, pain may operate as a marker of social affiliation or, contrarily, as a marker of individuality.

36 Especially those performances in which a visible action of self-injury is painfully slowed down or repeated seem to be motivated by the projection of suffering onto the viewers, while they also create a new consciousness of medialized images. In *Psyché* (1974) Gina Pane, who always performed dressed in white to intensify the visual effects of blood, took an almost unbearably long time cutting up her skin just underneath her brows until blood became visible and dropped onto her mirror image. Pane's self-professed intention, apart from the decision to use the body as a new type of raw material,¹⁰ was meant to shake up an

¹⁰ "Ich fing [1968] an, über den Körper ohne eine bildhauerische Prothese nachzudenken. Es sollte eine direkte Kommunikation zwischen dem Material Körper und seiner Vermittlung geben. Und deswegen habe ich Anfang der siebziger Jahre eine theoretische Verletzung realisiert. Ich nannte sie theoretisch, d.h. ich nahm eine Rasierklinge, die mir damals dazu diente, Collagen anzufertigen, Papier zu zerschneiden oder damit in der Erde zu arbeiten. Ich nahm also diese Rasierklinge wie ein Werkzeug, das ich gut kannte, um eine theoretische Verletzung zu realisieren" (Pane cited in Zell 48). [[In 1968] I started to think about the body without having recourse to sculpture. My goal was direct communication between the body as material and its mediation. And this is why I realised a theoretical injury at the beginning of the 1970s. I called it theoretical, i.e. I took a razor blade which normally served me to create collages, to cut paper or work with earth. I took up this razor blade like a well-known tool in order to realise a theoretical injury.]

anaesthetized public of television viewers out of their habitual lethargy. Douglas Gordon claims a similar artistic motivation for his two-part video performance *Dead Left* (1998) filmed in real time, which showed him slowly cutting off first one and then his other wrist from circulation with a piece of string until they turned blue and Gordon became an emergency (Schneede 39). Gordon, who was inspired by the educational films of psychopathology and who shunned any sensational effects, staged his action as an experiment in visual perception. By slowing down the moving image to an extreme degree and presenting a process of self-torture to the viewers he hoped to disturb their expectation of filmic simulation and to make them painfully aware of the sadistic side to voyeurism: "Sadism seems to me to be the logical progression in the beautiful and torrid relationship between the viewer and the screen. It's a post-voyeuristic state. Once we have had enough of looking, then perhaps we start touching. [...] Sadism is possible (maybe unavoidable) for our generation as we grew up with the VCR and the remote control and the video camera" (Gordon cited in Spector 85).

37 An increasing awareness of and interest in the role of the medium chosen for performance work has been making itself felt recently. With regard to gender issues, the medial aspect is not always unproblematic, as Nobuyoshi Araki's photographic work as well as his remarks on photography show. Araki, whom Marina Schneede praises as the most famous Japanese artist at the end of the 20th century (36), continues Otto Mühl's and Hans Bellmer's practice of tying up female models in seemingly erotic, aestheticized poses. The models do not only appear to the viewer like beautiful corpses but if we trust his words, Araki actually considers them victims of his "lethal" artistic instrument - the camera -, which grants him satisfying feelings of self-aggrandizement, mastery and total control:

Wenn man das, was sich bewegt, festhält, ist das eine Art von Tod. Die Kamera, das photographische Bild beschwören immer schon den Tod herauf. Und ich denke beim Photographieren auch an den Tod, was man den Bildern ansieht. Vielleicht ist das eine orientalische, buddhistische Vorstellung. Für mich ist Photographieren ein Akt, bei dem mein "Ich" mittels des Gegenstandes hervorgeholt wird. Photographie war von Anfang an mit dem Tod verbunden. (Araki cited in Schneede 36)

[If you keep hold of something which moves this is a sort of death. The camera, the photographic image always conjure up death. And when I take photographs I even think of death, which you can tell by the pictures. Maybe this is an oriental, buddhist idea. Photography for me is an act which brings out my "self" by means of the object. From its beginnings, photography has been associated with death.]

38 It appears as though initially, i.e. in the 1960s and early 1970s, body art's major innovation was to make use of the body as artistic material, to stage the sheer physicality of making art and to search for ways of spiritual transcendence. Later on performance art

typically went a step further in opening up additional, often politicized, levels of semantic content and offering some sort of "legitimation" for the pain undergone. In recent years, however, artists such as Stelarc, Orlan or Matthew Barney proceed from the tenet of the human body's obsolescence in a highly technologized world and aim at overcoming its biological constraints. Viewed against this development, it appears only logical that the treatment of pain as manifested in their performance work is tantamount to negation and marginalization. Any articulation of real pain would run the risk of reintroducing notions of the embodied subject into the discussion.

39 This development from an early focus on the "realness" of the body to its political framing and a revised notion of the embodied subject can be illustrated, I would contend, by body art's changing references to the highly popular motif of crucifixion. One of the first and most notorious artists to use it in body art was Chris Burden. In *Trans-Fixed* (1974) he was nailed with his arms spread wide onto the bonnet of a Volkswagen beetle. Insofar as he made a profane substitute (the car) take the place of the cross and had his own cries of pain replaced by the roar of the engine, Burden deprived a 2000-year old motif of Western art history and the central image in Christian religion of its singularity and pathos in an expressly antireligious, political gesture (Schröder 117). Because the action was not shown in public and many people (not unlike Thomas the apostle) doubted the authenticity of the action, he had photos taken of his pierced palms for evidence (Schneede 28). The realness of the event seems to have been a central concern for Burden at the time. Almost 25 years later, Finnish artist Magnus Scharmanoff took up Burden's motif and complemented it with a female mirror-image in his photographic cycle *Tappion Tunne - A Sense of Loss 8* (1997). The photo's two-part structure fits the scene of a double crucifixion, separated by a wooden post. The left-hand side is dominated by an unmistakably intermedial reference to Burden's *Trans-Fixed*: a young man, the artist himself, is lying on a car bonnet, his hands and feet attached to the vehicle by sticky tape. A procession of ordinary-looking men follow the car. On the right a middle-aged woman with rasta locks can be seen in the typical posture of Christ on the cross, with tears in her eyes and traces of mascara running down her cheeks. Her wrists are tied to a scaffolding by means of the same sticky tape. The profanation and gender criticism are more pronounced than in Burden's performance in that a man and a woman assume and share a traditionally male position fetishized in Christian religion. Pain, however, is only simulated and does no longer seem indispensable as a special thrill. As becomes clear from an e-mail interview by Angela Wenzel, Scharmanoff's photo series is part of his ongoing analysis of masculinity, of traditional male role patterns and their deviations. The artist

himself stresses that he regards identity - whether male or female - as a fluid and open rather than as a fixed and stable concept (Wenzel 272). In *Bob Flanagan's Sick* (together with Sheree Rose, 1991), this postmodern notion of the split, multiple subject is taken up, supplemented with a new concept of the body as map of erotogenic zones and linked to Christ's crucifixion in a completely different way:

[...] seven monitors hang in the form of a crucified figure. On them appear shifting images of the appropriate body part, spryly juxtaposed with Christian iconography, and scenes from bondage-themed movies like *Mutiny on the Bounty* and from Flanagan's own self-mortifying performances. Masochistic impulses, clearly, inflect a range of "acceptable" behaviours. Yet the Frankenstein composite constructed here is a body of independent parts, with each part enduring separate sensations (feet being whipped, face dunked, penis dripped with wax, etc.). (Rugoff 64).

As Rugoff points out, Flanagan uses associations of passively endured pain not only sexually but also as a critique of the medical establishment, which requires docility and ignorance of its patients: "While making us rethink these socially condoned forms of masochism, as well as our complacent submission to authority, Flanagan underscores both the body's frailty and its amazing resilience" (Rugoff 64). His intertextual and self-referential treatment of pain creates a metalevel of simulation which makes it impossible to differentiate between realness of pain and its mere staging.

Pain on the Advance or The Glamour of the Flawed Body

40 With regard to the history of pain in body and performance art, it is important to note that even up to the 1960s, the mechanistic conception of pain as developed by René Descartes was the predominant one in medical theory. According to this view, pain was a symptomatic physiological reaction to some sort of disease and would disappear as soon as the disease itself was cured. Read against this foil, performance art including pain as a side-effect or as a major concern probably helped to explore the multidimensionality, semantic ambiguities as well as the genderization of pain at a time when pain was only just advancing to the status of a scientific object in its own right (Zell 56). The 1960s and 1970s celebrated and emphasized the body "as a social enactment of a subject who is particularized beyond norms and stereotypes" (Jones 198). As Amelia Jones has pointed out (see esp. 22-25), the 1980s saw a turn away from the body in mainstream art discourse, closely linked up with feminism's sceptical attitude towards potentially fetishizing effects of the male gaze. Only in the 1990s did a revival of body art take place - again in connection with a return of the body in theoretical discourse but furthered by a new interest in the politics of body/self representation.

41 However, in the wake of postmodern theories, the notion of the body in pain has been

fading or is gradually being replaced by a posthuman body which seems to know no pain (List 1999: 763). At the same time, it could be argued that the realness of the body and of pain has never been felt more acutely and is even absolutely vital to popular culture. A recent instance of pain used in a sensational way for purely commercial reasons is the recent promotion campaign "Body Craze" organized by the London department store Selfridges. Whether Stelarc's *Suspension Performances* were an inspiration to the artistes engaged for a show of brutal and perverse self-chastisement, which also involved the use of meat hooks (Knöfel 142), was not verifiable. Apart from the popular genres of horror and splatter movies, an interesting, concrete example of pain and disgust utilized in the media for sensational effects is the American TV show "Jackass" on MTV. Protagonist Johnny Knoxville and his team try out painful weapons for self-defence on themselves and invent absurd tasks such as crashing into heaps of garbage bins. Although the format has been severely criticized in the past for playing down the risks of self-harm and attracting imitators and is only allowed to be broadcast after 10 pm in Germany, it enjoys a dangerously growing popularity among youngsters (*Kölner Stadtanzeiger*, March 3rd, 2003).

42 More generally speaking, exposing one's own body to painful, sometimes even torturous procedures such as tattooing, cosmetic surgery, piercing or extreme forms of fitness training has become an integral part of Western leisure culture. A current tendency is the greed for the sensational and unheard-of, for adventure and limit experiences, which alone seem to be able to stimulate the senses in a satisfactory way and typically involve the body (e.g. in extreme kinds of sport), reckoning with pain or even death. To some extent, pain has thus become popularized. Another widespread but more serious painful phenomenon is self-harming behaviour (cutting, scratching, etc.), a form of addictive, post-traumatic autoaggression teenage girls are especially prone to. The definition provided in a newspaper article on the subject (*Kölner Stadtanzeiger*, *Moderne Zeiten*, May 11th/12th, 2002) lists cutting oneself with knives, razor blades or shards of glass, burning, scratching one's skin until open wounds develop, the tearing out of body hair, the regular opening of healing wounds, knocking one's head against hard surfaces and injuring one's genitals. While the relationship between body art proper and non-artistic body practices is difficult to determine, it is almost eerie to realise that practically all forms of psychopathological autoaggression have at some stage been presented as art in public performances.

43 As far as pain is concerned, it seems that on the whole, performative spectacles of cruelty have gone out of fashion because of their waning impact on an audience which has long grown accustomed to painful procedures of body styling. Obviously, it is no longer

sufficient to destroy the integrity of the human body in order to impress a contemporary art public. Instead, the new target both for body artists and for lifestyle aesthetes is the flawlessness of the body, which provides an effective foil for any blemishes body artists may choose to inflict on it. In a recent *Spiegel* article on the status of the body in present-day culture and art, Ulrike Knöfel cites the example of Swiss photo artist Daniele Buetti, who has specialized in tattooing female top models, using the emblems of famous fashion brands such as Dior, Gaultier or Chanel - albeit only on paper (140). What she leaves unmentioned is the political impact behind this, namely the criticism of an unscrupulous marketing of bodies and their visual appropriation by the media. Knöfel's view that nowadays pain in art figures in ways ever more glamorous and sterile and thereby distinguishes itself from the 1960s, "der Zeit der schmuddeligen Körper-Aktionisten" (142) [the decade of messy body artists], proves to be right with respect to the highly stylish performances by artists such as Orlan. The risks taken in body art are no longer as extreme as they used to be in the beginning and live performances have ceased to dominate the scene. Instead, the medial shift of the 1990s has led to the current predominance of multimedia installations and photographic works, which, because of their lack of immediacy, allow the viewers to distance themselves from any painful experiences they witness.

44 The political impact of performance work revolving around painful experiences, however, remains crucial. Compared to performances of the 1960s and 1970s, recent body art is less an artistic innovation - since it continues a by now more or less established tradition - than a form of social and, more often than not, gender-related critique. This seems to be especially true for female-authored body art, which has always been more openly political, and it distinguishes performance art from the currently existing multitude of cultural practices involving pain. Representations of the body as technologized and as decidedly unnatural have opened up new venues within body art and helped to reformulate questions of gender. Comparisons between male and female icons of suffering, the confusion of gender and the critical engagement with notions of masculinity in recent body art seem to be a far step away from the misogyny and gynophobia which dominated its beginnings.

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