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## Bleeding Borders: Abjection in the works of Ana Mendieta and Gina Pane

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The female body is politically inscribed within a hegemonic, masculine discourse. Simply looking at the history of art demonstrates the ways in which the female subject is molded into a particular visual ideal. Traditionally, women in works of art are represented as objects of pleasure for a male viewer. That is to say, the female exists as an object, rather than a subject, within in the sphere of art. The dissolution of the unified subject in Cubism, Futurism and later movements problematizes the objectification of the female body. While still the figure of choice for many artists (see, for example, Pablo Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger*, 1907), the fragmenting of the female body frustrates the pleasure derived from viewing.

In the 1960's, performance art further complicates the objectification of the female body. In this genre, woman is not represented, but represents herself. The mere physical movement of the body makes difficult the serene voyeuristic endeavor of the male viewer. Serenity is further shattered through physical manipulations of the female body, specifically extreme eroticism and mutilation. The destruction/deconstruction of the body in the sphere of performance effectively breaks the boundaries of a masculine, art historic discourse. While corporeality has been figuratively mutilated in masculine projections of the female body (one only need refer to Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres' *Grande Odalisque*, 1814, and her impossibly long spine), the self-referencing frame of female self-mutilation presupposes an agency as well as a demystification of the body. Through performance, the artist's

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body interacts with the audience, creating a dynamic dialogue that depends on performer and spectator's participation. The body becomes a creator of discourse, and by manipulating the ways in which the performance is documented; the artist accedes to a language that challenges hegemonic discourse. The question of creating new discourses is furthered when one considers female body performance art in relation to Julia Kristeva's theory of the abject.

Comparing the works of Cuban born American artist Ana Mendieta and French born Franco-Italian artist Gina Pane, one can see the way in which these performance artists transgress the boundaries of the female body in order to engage in a newly formed female-centered discourse. Documents that catalogue the creation of this dialogue transgress the space and time of the performance. Mendieta and Pane document their performances through series of photographs, textual descriptions of the performances, and video recordings. These documents do not exist as static reminders of the performance; rather, they become an integral part of the work itself. The artists manipulate and control the documentation of the performances, which extends their authority over this newly created discourse through deliberate mediation. For the purposes of this essay, I will focus on Pane's performance *Psyche* (1974) and Mendieta's performance (*Untitled*) *Body Tracks* (1974), while still referencing other works by the artists. The use of blood in these performances forces both the male and female spectator towards the abject, which begins to fade subjectivity or identity. This process can be understood secondarily as a loss of identity in the materiality of the pre-symbolic, or what Kristeva calls the semiotic. The artist and spectator experience *jouissance* through the abject, which, in turn, creates a connection to the pre-symbolic.

*Jouissance* as it is used here stems from a Kristevan understanding of the term. Owing to the necessary relation between the abject and *jouissance*, her use of the term best fits the parameters of this essay. For Kristeva, *jouissance* represents a relationship between self and Other. She describes the bond between the abject and *jouissance*:

It follows that *jouissance* alone causes the abject to exist as such. One does not know it, one does not desire it, one joys in it [*enjouit*]. Violently and painfully. A passion. And, as in *jouissance* where the object of desire, known as object *a* [in Lacan's terminology], bursts with the shattered mirror where the ego gives up its image in order to contemplate itself in the Other, there is nothing either objective or objectal to the abject. It is simply a frontier, a repulsive gift that the Other, having become the *alter ego*, drops so that "I" does not disappear in it but finds, in that sublime alienation, a forfeited existence. (9)

I will analyze the ways in which Mendieta and Pane's performance of the abject leads to a dual removal from logo-centric discourse, in which the female artist dismantles the body politic of male-centered discourse.

Kristeva's development of the abject situates itself against Freudian and Lacanian phallogocentric psychoanalysis, however the reaction *against* is indebted to the developments of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan. Rather than assuming the Freudian and Lacanian notion that entry into the symbolic requires the complete rejection of the mother in order to adopt the symbolic "Law of the Father," Kristeva proposes a return to the pre-oedipal subjectivity identified through the maternal. Alternative forms of subjecthood can be constructed through the reversal of the Law of the Father, that is to say, a return to a language associated with the chaos of the maternal pre-symbolic. For Kristeva, the pre-symbolic affords a space of subjectivity that works on and against the phallogocentric Law of the Father. It is thus worth noting a few of Lacan's developments in order to fully understand Kristeva's theory of the abject. According to Lacan, the unconscious of an individual develops in the Mirror stage, a time when infants recognize their subjecthood through visual distancing of the self. The infant leaves the *infans* stage (a primordial "I" that exists before subjecthood) and begins to see the self as an Other. This doubling of the self develops the individual unconscious, which is a structure of language that exists before an individual achieves the psychological realization of being a subject. An individual acquires the status of a subject upon entry into symbolic language, which spins around questions of desire, specifically desire of the phallus. The phallus is a signifier that manifests as desire for the Other, and which is gained through the Other. According to Lacan, while men have the phallus, women want to be the phallus. The problem with this formulation is the primacy of maleness and the subjugation or sublimation of femaleness. Woman exists as a non-entity of man; a vacuous hole into which and upon which man manifests his desires and fears. Woman is outside of man and discourse. The entry into the symbolic "Law of the Father" (the rejection of the mother and the taboo of incest) requires the casting out of the female for the properness of the masculine body and mind. It also begets the questioning of a female child's accession to the symbolic. Would she too reject the mother, or does her entry require rejection of the father to comply with the taboo of incest? Furthermore, if she rejects the father, is she rejecting the symbolic and thereby rejecting entry into language? It is this casting out of the impure that influences Kristeva's formulation of the abject.

According to Kristeva, before entry into the symbolic, the child exists outside of language and discourse. The entry into language requires the total rejection of the mother and the appropriation of the "Law of the Father." The mother is cast out; the *object* of desire becomes the *abject*. The abject is that which is situated outside of the

symbolic and because it is ousted, it is necessarily threatening to an individual's (or society's) subjectivity. It is a repugnant reminder of the pre-oedipal, unclean relation to the mother. Kristeva, however, argues that the confrontation with the abject can create a new form of subjecthood. Approaching the abject begets a fading of subjectivity, which, according to Lacan, contains an "unconscious aggression" (194). In addition to its relation to a central emptiness (lack), *jouissance*, as formulated by Kristeva, directly connects to the death drive: the constant human propulsion to death or destruction. This death is not necessarily a physical biological death, but rather an end or a metaphorical "wiping the slate clean." The abject is associated with the death drive; "the abject . . . the jettisoned object, is radically excluded and draws me toward the place where meaning collapses . . . it lies outside, beyond the set, and does not seem to agree to the latter's rule of the game" (2). It is an accession to a language outside of the symbolic, but still dependent upon it in its subversion. The opening of a reconnection to a pre-oedipal semiotic allows for the creation of a new discourse that re-integrates the cast out mother, and leads to the possibility of a female centered discourse.

It would be fruitful to consider now the works of Ana Mendieta and Gina Pane, specifically with reference to the abject. Before delving into the works, I would like to clarify my interpretation and use of the terms performance art and body art. Performance art requires the use of the body in some aspect, and in feminist performance art, the body plays a central role. While in many cases performance art and body art are synonymous, I prefer to use the term body art in reference to Mendieta and Pane's work due to the centrality of the body in Kristeva's conceptualization of the abject. Body art can be seen as a subset of performance art, in which the body is the central focus of the performance. Body art becomes an advantageous venue for typically marginalized people. Questions of identity and hegemony are scripted upon the body, and an audience's confrontation with the artist's body forces these questions of identity upon the spectator. Judith Butler notes that the fixity of the body is fully material, but that "materiality will be rethought as the effect of power, as power's most productive effect" (2). The formation of subjecthood, however, depends upon the abjection of others and "the abject designates here precisely those "unlivable" and "uninhabitable" zones of social life which are nevertheless densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status of the subject" (3). This abject space affords possibilities of expression that are outside of hegemony. Butler notes that there exists no true "outside." Discourse is a manifestation of citationality; rather than the works rupturing totally with existing forms of representation they begin to reconfigure these stabilized notions of femaleness. It is from this abject space that body artists such as Mendieta and Pane create new linguistic possibilities. Theirs is a contestatory discourse that, while engaging with and working against hegemonic power, originates in a particularly female-centered vision. I do not mean to be total-

izing when employing the term "female;" it is true that there are different variations of femaleness, yet as a contrastive term to stabilized phallogocentric hegemony, it suits the purposes of this argument. It must not be ignored that Mendieta works at the intersections of gender and race. This element of her identity becomes central to the audience's interpretation of the performance as well as the documents of the performance. The confluence of Mendieta's *latinidad* and femaleness will subsequently be addressed in the analysis of *(Untitled) Body Tracks*.

Before considering specific works, it is important to briefly outline the historical development of body art. Martin Jay argues that the emergence of body art in the 70's stems from a skepticism, questioning, and eventual rejection of the "high modernist fetish of formal purity" (58). Rather than a quest for beauty, body art is "depropertized;" the performance itself cannot be bought or sold, just as the artist's body cannot be bought or sold. However, the fetishization and commercial consumption of the performance documentation is an issue that will be discussed momentarily. According to Jay, body art relates to Georges Bataille's formulation of "base materialism" which posits "the body as a site of creaturely vulnerability, even abasement and decay, rather than ennobling beautification" (59). Rather than projecting a Kantian aesthetic sublime, body art questions the stable materiality of art; it formulates art as a literal experience, rather than a spiritual experience of a static object. The presence of the body in the genre of performance is fleeting, but the experience of the actions continues to exist. Furthermore, the experience is heightened not only by its transience, but also by the proximity of audience and creation. In Jay's terms, body art:

Forces those—with the stomachs—to watch unflinchingly to realize that art need not transfigure or sublimate everything it touches, but rather can find ways to preserve its raw power and disturbing exigency. This is an art that resolutely resists the contemplative stance of disinterestedness associated with aestheticization at its furthest remove from moral and political problems, an aestheticization which paradoxically can have an anesthetic function of numbing us to the real pain outside. (64)

Again, it must be stressed that the non-materialization of body art exists only within the performance itself. The process of photographing and recording the performance makes concrete not only the actions of the artist but the artist's body itself. As such, the purchasing of said documents, either by museums, institutions, or private individuals, can be regarded as a way in which the female body becomes re-inscribed into hegemonic discursive limitations. Commercial consumption of the documentation occurs; however, many artists carefully stage the creation of their performances with the subsequent documentation in mind. The careful construc-

tion of the documents hinders their ability to be readily absorbed into the classic institution of high-art: the museum.

In order to understand the conditions and motives for the performances of Mendieta and Pane, it is necessary to give some biographical information to situate their works historically and contextually. While coming from distinct backgrounds and questioning distinct positions of women in art, the works of Ana Mendieta and Gina Pane display commonalities: specifically their choice and use of materials, the construction and presentation of their respective performances, and the subversion of traditionally inscribed roles of femaleness within phallogocentric discourse.

Ana Mendieta was born in Cuba on November 18, 1948 to parents of a prominent Cuban family. After the revolution of 1959 led by Fidel Castro, Ana and her sister Raquelín were sent to the United States on September 11, 1961 under the auspices of Operation Peter Pan.<sup>1</sup> Laura Roulet notes that upon arrival in Miami the two sisters were housed at Camp Kendall, and three weeks later shipped to St. Mary's Home (a group home for disturbed and neglected children) in Dubuque, Iowa (227). It was not until 1966 that the sisters were reunited in Dubuque with their mother and brother. While in Iowa, Mendieta was tormented by girls from the United States, who called her a "whore," and used racial slurs against her. This imposed racial categorization will later manifest itself in Mendieta's performance and sculptures.

The status of the exile has an analogous relation to the abject. In Cuba during the 60's (and beyond), those who work against the Castro government are literally ousted from discourse, and as such are expelled and/or exiled. Interestingly, in her timeline of Mendieta's life, Roulet includes a quote from Castro's speech "Words to the Intellectuals." Castro states: "What are the rights of revolutionary or counter revolutionary artists? Within the Revolution, everything; outside the Revolution, nothing" (227). The imposition of political discourse, a hegemonic or symbolic discourse, expels that which disturbs the newly established order. As Kristeva notes, "it is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules" (4). Mendieta, situated as an "outsider," exists as an abject object outside of Castro's political discourse. While Mendieta does not specifically situate herself as an exile, the relation of her deterritorialization from dominant political discourse (both in Cuba and the United States) is noteworthy. Her earlier works (the focus of this study) such as *(Untitled) Body Tracks* and *Death of a Chicken* address her deterritorialization and her search for a connection with Cuba. In her work *Unseen Mendieta: The Unpublished Works of Ana Mendieta*, Olga Viso catalogues a statement made by the artist in 1978, which describes this connection to Cuba as it relates to her performances:

The first part of my life was spent in Cuba, where a mixture of Spanish and African culture makes up the heritage of people. The Roman Catholic Church and Santería—a cult of the African divinities represented with the Catholic saints and magical powers—are prevalent religions in the nation. It is perhaps during my childhood in Cuba that I first became fascinated by primitive art and cultures. It seems as if these cultures are provided with an inner knowledge, a closeness to natural resources. And it is this knowledge which gives reality to the images they have created. (296)

While the use of animal blood in the performances relates to the trauma of exile and loss, Mendieta utilizes these abject substances not so much to heal a wound, but rather to expose it to the world in order to construct a discourse. In a statement made in 1983, Mendieta describes the trauma and subsequent healing encountered in her work:

For the last twelve years I have been carrying on a dialogue between the landscape and the female body. Having been torn from my homeland (Cuba) during my adolescence, I am overwhelmed by the feeling of having been cast out from the womb (Nature). My art is the way I reestablish the bonds that unite me to the universe. It is a return to the maternal source. The obsessive acts of reasserting my ties with the earth are really a manifestation of my thirst for being. In essence my works are the reactivation of primal beliefs at work within the human psyche. (297)

The return to the maternal relates to the reconnection with the pre-oedipal, as formulated by Kristeva, since "abjection presents what existed in the archaism of pre-objectal relationship, in the immemorial violence with which a body becomes separated from another body in order to be" (10). While the attempt to reconnect with the Earth is strongly visible in Mendieta's later works such as the *Siluetas* series (1970-1981), I am more interested in the performance pieces created as a graduate student at the University of Iowa. While in later works the viewer is presented with the traces of Mendieta's body, her earlier works incorporate and display the body as a central element of the performance. As such, for the purpose of this analysis, I classify her earlier works as body art and her later works as earth art performance.

In Mendieta's performance *(Untitled) Body Tracks*, the spectator can see the beginnings of the famous "Mendieta trace." Yet in this performance the spectator still experiences the presence of the artist's body, rather than assuming its presence non-visually through marks left upon the earth. In the short piece, the artist enters the studio space, while Cuban music plays in the background. She dips her hands and forearms into animal blood, places her back to the camera, lifts her arms and

places them on a large sheet of white paper attached to a wall, and then proceeds to slowly drag her arms down the page, until almost reaching the bottom. She then walks off screen and out of the performance space. The camera, documentation, and performance stops.<sup>2</sup> The impact of the performance comes through the use of blood, the connection to sacrificial rituals used in Santería, and how these elements relate not only to questions of exile, but also to questions of femaleness. The inclusion of Cuban music furthers the artist's identification with Cuba, as well as her identification with *cubanidad*. The presence of the body during the performance demonstrates the need for the visualization, rather than supposition of the body's existence achieved through the body's trace, as seen in the *Siluetas* series. The slow dragging of Mendieta's arms gives the work a temporal dimension that does not exist when one considers only the documentary remnants of the work. If one only examines the photographs of the performance, it becomes impossible to recognize the relatively large amount of time it takes for the artist to move her arms down the page. The movement of Mendieta's arms emphasizes the trauma of blood ripping through clean paper, while the static nature of the photographs minimizes the element of trauma. In Mendieta's works the body is fundamental to the objective of reestablishing the bonds that unite her to nature. Without the body, the document appears as a traumatic wound ripping through clean white paper. The performance brings to the forefront the *creation* of these markings; seeing the creation underscores the connection to the abject. The viewer sees the physical contact and manipulation of the animal blood, the transgressive joy of approaching that which has bled beyond constrictive and confining hermetic borders. According to Kristeva, "contrary to what enters the mouth and nourishes, what goes out of the body, out of its pores and openings, points to the infinitude of the body proper and gives rise to abjection" (108). Mendieta is clearly aware of the ways in which documenting a performance can manipulate the original intention of the artwork. Catherine Grant notes that "Mendieta staged these photographic and filmic works so that the final 'event' experienced by the viewer would always be a partial account, an effect compounded by their subsequent presentation as individual image" (37).

As I have given much importance to the presence of the female body in the early works of Mendieta (and I will also demonstrate the same with Gina Pane) it is worth digressing for a moment into some contrasting viewpoints about the primacy of the female body in body and performance art. Firstly, it is important to recognize one of the first theorists to question the positioning of the female within the male gaze, Laura Mulvey. Although she dedicates the majority of her research to the study of film, performance art lends itself to an analogous relationship between "seeing" and "being seen." According to Mulvey, "Woman then stands in patriarchal culture as a signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his fantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing

them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer, not maker, of meaning" (1173). Mulvey argues that cinema (and here I add performance) "offers a number of possible pleasures. One is scopophilia (pleasure in looking). There are circumstances in which looking itself is a source of pleasure, just as, in the reverse formation there is a pleasure in being looked at" (1174). As such, the male spectator is positioned as an active "watcher" while the female is positioned in the passive situation of "being-watched." Various American and British feminist artists and scholars, such as Mary Kelly, Griselda Pollock, Judith Barry, Sandy Flitterman and, to an extent, Peggy Phelan, take this formulation of the objectification of the female and apply it to the presence of the female body in performance art, specifically, the naked body. Amelia Jones' work *Body Art: Performing the Subject* neatly summarizes Mary Kelly's objection to the presence of the female body. Essentially, Kelly argues that the display of the female body re-inscribes it within the phallogocentric directive male gaze. According to Kelly, "most women artists who have presented themselves in some way, visibly, in the work have been unable to find the kind of distancing devices which would cut across the predominant representations of woman as object of the look, or question the notion of femininity as a pre-given identity" (24). I argue that Kelly essentially articulates the anxiety of being subjected to the male gaze. I do not want to belittle her commentary or her fears of re-inscription within a phallogocentric discourse, but I disagree with her opinion that the presence of the female body essentially causes a re-inscription into the male driven voyeurism of the audience. Jones argues, and I agree, that the "interrogation on the part of body art is deeply political when it is engaged with through a phenomenological and feminist model" (24).

As stated previously, body art is a manifestation of political discourse for typically marginalized voices. The sheer presence of the body forces the recognition of those who are politically or hegemonically cast out. Interestingly, when considering Mendieta's double positioning as a woman and a *cubana*, the genre of performance allows for a double visualization of her double identification: Mendieta plays with conceptions of racial, ethnic, and national identity in her earlier works at Iowa, such as *Facial Cosmetic Variations*, 1972 and *Untitled (Facial Hair Transplants)*, 1972. Peggy Phelan also fears the re-inscription that may occur through the presence of the female body in these types of performances. In her work *Where is Ana Mendieta?*, Jane Blocker notes that "just as Judith Butler is suspicious of the presumed benefits of establishing identity categories, Peggy Phelan is suspicious of the presumed benefits of political visibility for the subaltern" (25). For Phelan, there is more political power in remaining "unseen politically" (25) being that the visual presence of minorities and women contributes to the identification of dominant representations, rather than subverting dominant classifications or identifications of otherness. I argue that remaining invisible only re-inscribes the problem of long-silenced alterity.

Furthermore, one cannot expect that a particular art movement will shake the whole foundation of phallogocentric psychoanalytic discourse. Turning to Foucauldian rhetoric, "if there was no resistance, there would be no power relations. Because it would simply be a matter of obedience . . . [s]o resistance comes first, and resistance remains superior to the forces of the process, power relations are obliged to change with the resistance" (167). Rather than a meek cry from the closet, female body art ruptures the expectations of femininity and displays them publicly.

Critics such as Kelly and Phelan fear that the presence of the female body will re-inscribe the "pleasure of looking," and perhaps, they assume that a female body necessarily means a sexualized body. Does not this argument in itself re-establish the dominance of the male gaze? Amelia Jones astutely notes that Kelly's arguments "fundamentally foreclose on the most dramatic and transformative potential of such engagement precisely by assuming that spectators will necessarily react or participate in a predictable way" (25). Kelly and Phelan's arguments (with respect to female body art) assume an explicit sexualization of the female body in the sphere of performance art. While it is true that some female body artists (Hannah Wilke and Marina Abramovic, for example) play with the idea of the sexualized body, Mendieta and Pane's bodies are far from sexualized. With respect to Pane's work, Judith Barry and Sandy Flitterman argue that certain performances re-instate the female within male hegemony. They argue that Pane's quasi-masochistic performances set up a dichotomy between pleasure and pain that is still "within the dualistic tradition of Western metaphysics" (55). Furthermore, Barry and Flitterman contend, "because [Pane's] wounds exist in an art context, they are easily absorbed into an artworld notion of pain as beautiful" (55). Barry and Flitterman's assumption that pain is absorbed into the art world as something beautiful presumes the high modernist idea that entry into a museum necessarily equals beauty. They neglect to consider the agency that comes with presence and performance: an agency that goes beyond the modernist conception of the aesthetic sublime. Looking back to Martin Jay's analysis of body art, "[the audience] who watched these performances or their video records were thrust into the word of the *informe*—formlessness—and base materiality celebrated by Georges Bataille, rather than the realm of the art as cultivation of the senses and elevation of the sensibility" (60). The anxiety of being categorized or stereotyped is understandable, but it is not necessary to view this categorization as essentially demeaning or subjugating. While Kristeva's formulation of abjection necessitates the differentiation between male and female, the experience of the abject and the return to the pre-oedipal creates a discourse that makes possible multiple identifications. Again, to summarize Foucault, in order to transgress borders they must first exist. Rather than utilizing specific elements of performance to "define woman," Mendieta and Pane's entry into abjection implies a necessarily fluid space

of identification, where multiple identities communicate within the artist and with the audience.

Gina Pane was born in Biarritz, France in 1932. While her work does not focus on issues of national identity as much as Mendieta's, questions of gender and representations of femininity are central in much of Pane's work. *Psyche* was performed and documented in 1974 at the Rodolphe Stadler Gallery, in Paris, France. The work is a twenty-seven-minute thirty-two-second performance in which Pane applies red lipstick onto a mirror, covering the reflection of her face. The use of lipstick is an interesting object choice in itself, owing to its symbolic representation as "ultimately feminine" while at the same time serving as a phallic symbol. After tracing the outline of her face, Pane then cuts the skin below her eyebrows, "the effect being to superimpose the images of her lipsticked reflected and bloodied face, and simultaneously to confront the sense of the body with the sense of sight" (431). Next, Pane carves a vertical and horizontal line across her navel the location of the original connection of fetus and mother. Uta Grosenick catalogues many of Pane's descriptions of her works in *Women Artists in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. As part of the documentation of the work, Pane describes the cuts on her stomach:

Cruciform incision. Four lines radiating from the centre of the body: the soft navel "me" moving towards the others so as to achieve the projection that joins together two diametrically opposed points—the aspect of the centre spreading outwards toward the four points of the compass, gathering up and unifying the outermost points in a synthesis of love where time and space of the umbilical cord (never cut off from the body) and of the cosmos linked to the original centre intermingle. The cross is a totalizing figure from top to bottom/from bottom to top. (428)

Pane's use of the "trappings of femininity" (the mirror, the red lipstick) does not serve to reinforce femininity or to reposition the female within the phallogocentric gaze as Barry and Flitterman argue. Rather, these trappings invert meaning because they are applied upon the mirror image (the Other) of Pane, while on her face the performer "beautifies" herself with herself by using her own blood. Furthermore, as Grant argues, Pane situates her performances "in ways that provoked intense emotional reactions, making the audience aware of the process of watching her, rather than experiencing the work as a homogeneous work of art" (38). Pane forces the audience to recognize itself as a voyeur, which subverts voyeurism; the audience is aware of watching, and it is Pane who conditions their watching. Pane becomes an agent of watching, rather than a subject who is watched. This watching reaches another dimension when one considers the use of the mirror. While the audience

observes the performance, the artist observes herself. Kim Hewitt notes that, "mutilating herself and her mirror image visually and metaphorically reproduced and multiplied the artistic product as her bloodshed became both process and product" (104). Just as her performance is about seeing and being seen, and subverts the traditional power structures of "male subject watching" and "female object being seen," Pane forces the audience to recognize that they are also part of the process of the creation of the work, as well as a product of that same creation. Furthering the audience's recognition of themselves as observers, Pane strategically situates her performances for the documentation process more so than for the audience. According to Grant, Pane "would prioritize the positioning of the photographer, so that the experience for the initial audience already had an element of the frustration inherent in the documentation of performance work" (28). The forced frustration caused by the construction and enactment of the performance effectively pushes the audience toward the abject. The audience becomes interwoven into the fabric of the pre-semiotic, where creation and documentation of the work undercuts the typically stabilized positions of "viewer" and "viewed."

Not only does Pane's performance play with the abject as formulated by Kristeva, it also forces the observer into the psychological space of the abject. The exposure to bodily mutilation and blood creates an uncomfortable situation for the spectator, and clearly this exposure to that which transgresses the confines of the body creates a physical sphere of abjection. The way in which Pane situates her performance pushes the spectator into the realm of psychological abjection. That is to say, the construction of space within the performance frustrates the viewing experience through the documentation process. Pane prioritizes the position of the camera, not the position of the viewer, which effectively forestalls the viewer's voyeuristic agency. Furthermore, since the audience can only see parts of the performance (due to the positioning of the camera and the position of the spectator in the audience) they must piece together the elements of the performance they *can* see in order to interpret it as a whole. As such, the viewer is forced to navigate to a pre-semiotic space, in which signs and signifiers are fractured. Within this abject space, the viewer must appropriate the bits and pieces of meaning that Pane provides through the obstacle of performance, documentation, body and camera.

Implicating the audience as complicit in the act of mutilation and pain furthers the psychological abjection of the spectators. Beyond the mere fact that in Pane's work, the performance depends on the audience as viewer, the performance and viewing of pain begets the tacit participation of the audience in the act of mutilation. In regards to the position of pain in literary texts, Dana Milstein notes "it is no longer enough for the artist to rely on pain to stimulate art. In today's world, an audience is necessary once again, but this time with the purpose of engaging specta-

tors in the entire process of suffering along with the artist" (90). Although Milstein writes about literature, this quote is particularly poignant in regards to female body performance art, especially when considering the role of engaging and implicating spectators as those who suffer with and through the artist. Pane's audience not only feels suffering through the viewing of the abject, but also through the psychological abjection that occurs through the artist's compositional techniques that obstruct and disunite the viewing process. Pane's agency extends beyond the performance itself to the manipulation and control of the documentation of the work. For Pane, the construction of the documentation is as important as the performance.

Like Mendieta, Pane's work searches for a deeper connection with the *collective Other*. Pane contends that "the body's essential location is in 'we.' My body experiments show that the 'body' is lent by society, and formed by it: the objective of my experiments is to demystify the image of the 'body' as the citadel of our individuality, in order to restore it to its true reality, the function of social communication" (428). Pane's objective is to subvert traditional classifications of "feminine" and display the ways in which the body communicates. Confronting ideas of femininity is key for Kristeva's formulation of the abject. Kristeva is not concerned so much with the "socially productive value of the son-mother incest prohibition but the alterations, within subjectivity and within the very symbolic competence, implied by the confrontation with the feminine and the way in which societies code themselves in order to accompany as far as possible the speaking subject on that journey. Abjection, or the journey to the end of the night" (58). In contrast with Mendieta's work, Pane's approach to the abject comes through the bleeding of the self into a public space. This follows the Kristevan approach to the abject since, "the body's inside... shows up in order to compensate for the collapse of the border between inside and outside" (53). Performing self-mutilation and pain relates to *jouissance*, which creates an entry to a pre-oedipal discourse. The assumption of pain into art does not necessarily "beautify" it, as Barry and Flitterman argue, rather it purifies the abject. According to Kristeva "the various means of *purifying* the abject—the various catharses—make up the history of religions, and end up with that catharsis par excellence called art, both on the far and near side of religion" (17). Both Mendieta and Pane utilize art as a catharsis: a ritualistic purifying of the abject.

For Ana Mendieta, approaching the abject allows her to re-identify with the maternal, as represented by the earth. Her identity does not hinge on social constructions; rather she achieves her identity through her bodily presence in the performance space. By subsequently manipulating the documents of the performance, she furthers her self-constructed identity. The control that Mendieta has over the documents extends her agency beyond the space of the performance and into the space and time of the viewer of said documents. While the performance creates a

visual artwork that the viewer is free to interpret, the artist herself mediates the documentation of the performance. What is included and what is excluded forces the viewer to recognize her construction of identity. Indeed, documentary fragments allow the viewer to "fill in the blanks," but it must be noted that it is the artist who constructs the blank spaces of potential meaning.

Gina Pane approaches the abject by identifying with the "we." Her quest is not so much for a formed identity, but rather a construction, the possibility of communicating with the self in a manner that does not rely on the individuality of the body. The cuts into Pane's flesh and the subsequent bleeding of borders topples the individual, creating a connection with the pre-oedipal, a collapse of the Other, which connects back to the maternal. If the abject is the return to the pre-symbolic, to a language which "finds its voice in alliance with the mother and her milk, her body, her rhythmic and nonsensical language . . . outside time, plural, fluid, bisexual, de-centered, non-logocentric," (58) then Pane's concept that performance reconnects with "social communication" rather than "identification" inaugurates a discourse based not on prescriptive identities (male/female) but rather a discourse based on interconnectedness and heterogeneity. Pane achieves this interconnectedness through the fact that the abject returns to the connections between mother and child, rather than being one and Other, they are essentially the same. Here the cutting into the navel in Pane's performance shows its particular significance.

Abjection questions the stability of the self. Approaching the abject shatters the borders which construct this stability. Paola Bono notes that "like abjection, pregnancy and the pre-natal period are borderline phenomena, they are a space-time of con/fusion, bodily co-existence (coincidence) of identities that link in a vital and deadly relation, at the same time preparing their separation and distinction" (1). "Abjection" says Bono, "is the recurring, threatening sensation of an incurable instability of the self, it is the radical and repeated questioning of the integrity of the subject" (2). Mendieta and Pane both question the integrity of a unified subject. The mere act of performing demonstrates this instability. The act itself is transitory, the documentation leaves holes which are unstable, and filling these gaps depends on the viewer's incomplete knowledge and interpretation. Mendieta's work becomes unstable when she disappears from the space of the performance, and this space is always part of the performance. Yet her appearance in the performance is integral to establishing this instability. For example, considering the *Siluetta* series, the body is essential for the creation of the silhouettes, yet once the body disappears, the work destabilizes the notion of a permanent, consumable art object. The ephemeral trace of the artist's body achieves a "stable" existence through a series of photographs. Again, this stability is tenuous, as the viewer is left with the task of decoding and interpreting the documentary fragments. The instability in Pane's work occurs in her physical presence. The act of self-mutilation defies hegemonic conventions of

decency and forces the spectator into the abject. Making the viewer aware of their watching further destabilizes the phallogocentric gaze; it is Pane who controls the act of looking not only by forcing the spectator to watch the subversion of the object of scopophilia into masochistic "destruction," but also to make the spectator fully accountable and aware of their gaze.

It is from this abjected space that Mendieta and Pane attempt to reconnect to a universal dialogue of the self. The visual presence of the female body is necessary for the spectator's confrontation with the abject. Although the physical presence of the body disappears at the end of the performance, documentation forces future confrontations with the artists. Both Mendieta and Pane's transgression of the borders of the female body, be they through the use of the blood of others or the artist's own blood, question and defy traditional conceptions of decency and "female properness." By finally breaking these borders, discursive possibilities arise. Both Mendieta and Pane, although effected in distinct ways, create accession to a new form of discursivity, a language which connects self with other, effectively diffusing the rigid binaries of post-oedipal subjectivity.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Operation Peter Pan was "a program facilitated by the Catholic Diocese of Miami that granted visa waivers to unaccompanied Cuban minors seeking political asylum in the U.S." It began in 1961, and this is when Mendieta, age 12, and her sister Raquelín, age 15, left Cuba. Olga Viso, *Unseen Mendieta: The unpublished works of Ana Mendieta* (Munich: Prestel, 2008) 14.

<sup>2</sup> Description of film clip taken from *Ana Mendieta: Fuego de Tierra*, dir. Nereyda García-Ferraz, Kate Horsfield, and Branda Miller, DVD, Art Institute of Chicago Video Data Bank, 1987.

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## Queering the Memory of the Mexican Revolution: Cabaret as a Space for Contesting National Memory<sup>1</sup>

Stephany Slaughter  
Alma College

*Los auténticos revolucionarios de hoy ... somos Andróginos, o sease que ni hombres ni mujeres, sino que somos mujeres y hombres al mismo tiempo, dos presentaciones en el mismo envase, dos personas en un solo cuerpo, un solo cuerpo convertido en pareja. Somos todos hermafroditas.*

Jesusa Rodríguez, "La soldadera autógena"

*del susto le tuve que aplicar otro 30-30, por faltas al código de indentidad, y por andar sustituyendo su identidad por la de otro, pues resulta que el tal Zapata, no era Zapata, sino una mujer que en realidad respondía al nombre de Rosita González y que se hacía pasar por Zapata, así que le apliqué otro 30-30*

Policía 1, Carmen Ramos, "D.J Rapidita González"

Since the time of the nation-rebuilding projects that followed the Mexican Revolution, the concepts of Nation and Revolution were intricately bound such that the Revolution formed the epicenter of Mexican nationalism (Turner viii).

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