

# ***After, Rehearsal After* (Script)**

Malin Arnell

**Here I am—Now—And then**

**In front of you**

**Within History**

**Over time—In time—Right here**

**Colliding**

**In love—By love and uncertainties**

**With documentations**

**Others and mine**

**Ours**

**Together**

**In Difference**

**Action—Enacted—Re-enacted—Later rehearsed.**

**(This is what I desire.)**

**We ask: Is your body mine?**

**She said: “this is a mobilization of aesthetics against anesthesia”**

**“I am the others”**

**In June 28th, 1975, the French-Italian artist Gina Pane** performed the action *Discours mou et mat (Soft Matte Discourse)* at de Apple Arts Centre in Amsterdam. Following her instructions I realized the action *Reflect Soft Matte Discourse* in May 2011 in Stockholm, Sweden.

***In the beginning there is an end.***

Slipping between position of power and passivity, between control and subservience.

Back to the fall of 2010.

***This is a beginning.***

Approaching Gina Pane, approaching *Discours mou et mat*. I had the film documentation of *Discours mou et mat* sent to me. I played it on my computer, 22 minutes 34 seconds. I had help in translating the words spoken, but not clearly audible, in the action: *Te Souviens-tu des seins de ta mère?* In English: *Do you remember your mother's breasts?* And the response: *Yes, they were soft and matte as snow.* Up to this point I had not been aware that the action contained a dialogue about the mother, that the mother was present in the action, that the naked body could be understood as the mother. I hadn't known and I really didn't want to know. It was important to me, not to know. I didn't want to know about Gina Pane's relationship to the various objects or to the different activities. I wanted to learn, to learn by doing, by putting *Discours mou et mat* into motion, by putting my own body into dialogue with the objects and activities of which *Discours mou et mat* is composed. I wanted to be able to relate to, and understand *Discours mou et mat* through a physical interaction with the material. I wanted to use *Discours mou et mat* to allow the pain, the wound, to take its place.

There is a distinct difference between my body here and now (or then and there in 2011) and Gina Pane's body in Amsterdam in 1975. There are similarities. I imagine a lesbian continuum or a continuum of homosocial desire. My body. Gina Pane's body. The lesbian body. Gina Pane firmly asserted that her attitude was 'absolutely not autobiographical.' By using Gina Pane's instructions, I am firmly asserting that my attitude is autobiographical (but not authentic). Is that possible?

I follow the score to create experience via my body, along with an audience in a given place in a limited time span. Not to put forward the truth concerning *Discours mou et mat*, but instead in an attempt to take responsibility for what I do not know through doing, through action, through performance.

“I lose my identity to find it again in others, back and forth, balance between the individual and the collective, the transindividual body”, Gina Pane writes.

***This is a mutual act.***

**VIDEO 1:** *Discours mou et mat*, 22:32 min

(The video is screened in silent, I continue to read)

**There are different version of the score** for *Discours mou et mat*. I will now read the one available in the archive of de Apple Arts Centre in Amsterdam:

In order to enter the performance space, visitors first had to sidestep a motorcycle that blocked the entrance. In the room several objects had been placed as the scenery of the forthcoming performance: a safety helmet, boxing gloves, knuckledusters, a goldpainted golf ball and razor blade, red and white roses plus a naked woman whose back had been decorated with blue stars.

The first scene lasted 15 minutes. Pane entered the performance space, dressed in white pants, a white blouse and high heels of the same colour. She wore sunglasses and had drawn blue stars on her left arm and hand. On the floor had been placed two mirrors, with sheets of glass on top. On the right mirror (from Pane’s point of view) stars had been drawn and the word ‘aliénation’ had been written on the glass. The left mirror was blank, but on the sheet of glass on top the portrait of a person wearing shades had been drawn. The sunglasses reflected a mill and a field of tulips. Pane kneeled down behind the mirrors and played two cymbals of cardboard, with cotton wool on the insides. After this silent concert several slides were projected.

During the second scene of five minutes Pane smashed the sheets of glass with her fists.

The next ten minutes Pane sat down on a stool, playing tennis with a ball that hung from the ceiling. She hit the ball with a racket and stopped it with her forehead.

During the fourth scene Pane crawled to the shattered sheets of glass to hit them once again, meanwhile gasping into a microphone.

For scene five, that also took ten minutes, Pane cut a vertical incision in her upper and under lip with a razor blade.

During the final scene, Pane laid down next to the naked woman and looked at the ceiling through binoculars. Meanwhile music by Brahms was played in slow-motion and some slides were shown.

**The score lists a number of objects** as you just heard. Now I will provide a brief description of how I relate to these objects and how I approached them or how they approached me in anticipation of *Reflect Soft Matte Discourse*.

A motorcycle:

I don't have a driver's license. I don't own a motorcycle. I am not a "bike dyke." (Was Gina Pane a bike dyke? – I dot know) Gina Pane used a bright red Kawasaki, I get hold of a black Harley Davidson. The owner drives it down into the garage near the space where the action will take place. We back it into the stairwell, put down the kickstand. The owner asks what is going to happen that evening. I answer: "an action, a performance – it's art." He looks around, then goes to the gym, returns after the action and drives off. I say, thank you!

Two mirrors with sheets of glass on top:

On the day of the action I set the framed mirrors on the floor. Write 'alienation' using a big white marker, and draw blue stars on the plate glass over the right-hand

mirror. On the left-hand mirror I draw a pair of glasses with a blue pen, a nose in black and a mouth in red. In the lenses of the sunglasses I draw the outline of a windmill on one lens and red tulips in the other.

Two cardboard cymbals, lined with cotton:

Take down one of the empty moving box from the attic. Draw two circles using a saucepan lid. Cut them out and glue cotton all along the inside. Then I sew it onto the cardboard using a heavy-duty needle. Attach two loops to each cymbal to put my hands through so I can hold them firmly.

Projected slides:

I can only distinguish a few of them. A woman tennis player, one of those big binoculars you can use at a scenic spot, a close-up of Gina Pane in sunglasses. I collect other images, older women walking around town, people demonstrating in Cairo on Tahrir Square, a group of queer lives on a seaside beach (my friends), a hand using a razorblade on a fingertip (Gina Pane's), the earth seen from space, a crystal chandelier, a broken mirror, a high barbed wire fence, Gina Pane on a path in the woods, a pair of feet in chains, a close-up of women demonstrators, police using violence, two motorcycles on a highway, a burning car, wounds all over a naked abdomen, another woman playing tennis, me high up in a birch tree, a view of the sea through binoculars, hands digging in the earth (Gina Pane's), me lovingly licking a tree trunk, a group of people carrying lit candles. Print them black and white on transparent film and mount about seventy of them.

A nude with blue stars drawn on her back:

A nude white woman as one object among many. There are no notes as to who she is. She has no name. What was her relationship to Gina Pane? I want a body that can be read as in between. In between genders, in between spaces. She is not white. She is close to me. She is my lover, my partner, at the time. I paint blue stars on her broad back.

A pair of white trousers, a white blouse and white high heeled shoes:

My closet is full of white garments, some used at previous performances, others just there for everyday use. Need something new. A pair of white jeans. A white

shirt with a white tank top underneath. My closet is also full of various white shoes, white men's walking shoes, white open-toed pumps, white pumps with a low heel, white pumps with high heels. I used to collect, maybe I still collect. Thought I had found the right ones. But none of the white shoes make me feel steady and strong. In the end I wear my old black boots.

Blue stars drawn on her left hand and arm:

I had made up my mind to have the nine blue stars tattooed on my left hand and arm before the action. Went to a tattooing salon to make an appointment. She said: we don't tattoo such thin lines in blue because the blue has a tendency to smudge a lot. I accept, think they don't want to get a reputation for doing lousy sailors' tattoos, and leave. Do I really want nine blue stars across my arm, as a permanent mark? Can't make up my mind. Instead I draw nine blue stars on my left hand and arm right before entering the action.

A stool:

The documentation shows a three-legged stool, steel legs and a black seat. There is a black, three-legged stool in the room next to the exhibition space. It's an expensive stool, a piece of designer furniture. Get permission to use it.

A ball suspended from the ceiling:

Can't remember where the tennis ball came from. Suddenly there were two of them in the closet. Painted one of them with black acrylic. Pull a thin, white string through the ball using a heavy-duty needle. Tie a knot at the bottom of the ball. Keep the string long.

A tennis racket:

I never learned how to play tennis. When I was a kid my father told me I didn't have a feel for ball sports. The date of the action came closer. I had an appointment with my therapist. I talked. I Paid. I left the room, looked up at the hat rack in the hall. There was a tennis racket standing there. A wooden one from the 70's. Two days left until the action. I went back in to my therapist with the racket: "This may sound stupid, but I am doing a performance the day after tomorrow and I need an old wooden tennis racket, like this one. Do you think I could possibly borrow this until

next week? Biked off with the racket in my hand convinced that everything would be fine.

Sunglasses:

There are sunglasses for sale almost everywhere. Don't know the brand of the one Gina Pane used. In the picture it looks like she painted the frames gold. Find myself buying about ten cheap pair. In the end I choose a pair that make me feel both secure and alien. I don't paint the frame gold.

A microphone:

Need a mic to breathe in. Borrow one and connect it to an old bass amplifier with loudspeakers.

A pair of boxing gloves:

I have never learned how to box, but I have been in fights. I look for brown boxing gloves, used, preferably from the 70's. On Gina Pane's pair it was written BERG in large white lettering. Emailed to several boxing clubs. Did not dare to visit one. No one answered me back. Found a pair of black ones on eBay. Phoned about the ad. Later I met the young woman, Leila on a street corner. Biked home with two pair in a paper bag. I think she never used them. I let them be black, I add no white letters.

A gold-painted golf ball:

I do not have a golf ability license. But I have played a couple of times. Once I made a hole in one on a short course somewhere in the south of Sweden. I don't have a golf ball at home. Bike from one sporting goods stores to the next asking whether I could buy one single golf ball. They say no everywhere, until at the fourth place where they go and get one golf ball in the back and give it to me. Good luck, they say. Later I paint it gold.

A gold-painted razorblade:

Go looking for those old-style rectangular razorblades. Maybe Gillette or Wilkinson, which Gina Pane used. Can't find anything but double and triple blades in the stores. Get help buying them in another country. Delivered straight to my door. A five-pack rectangular Gillettes. Paint one of them gold.

A set of knuckle-dusters:

Where could I get hold of knuckle-dusters today? The Swedish law, Act 1990:413, stipulates: "Knuckle-dusters, throwing stars or other objects specifically intended for use as weapons in life or health threatening crimes, as well as switchblade knives or switchblade stilettos may not be transferred to people under the age of twenty-one or sold." It is against the law to sell knuckle-dusters in Sweden. Do I really want to buy a set of knuckle-dusters? Instead I bike off and buy some black modeling clay. Make a set of knuckle-dusters myself. Fire them in the oven. They almost fit my right hand.

A pair of binoculars:

I am not an ornithologist or am I a peeping Tom. Find an ad on eBay. Call and talk to Bengt. Bike out to the residential area Henriksdal. Take the elevator up to the seventh floor. Bengt isn't home, Kerstin shows me the view, which is of both Slussen, Djurgården and Lidingö. It is a view of the architectural manifestations of the gulfs between the social and cultural classes. I pay two hundred kronor and leave with a heavy set of binoculars in a leather case. Just what I needed.

Music by Brahms:

Listen to the documentation. Absolutely unable to figure out what piece by Brahms Gina Pane used. In the score it says that the Brahms was played in slow motion. This isn't audible in the documentation. Decide to use part of his Concerto for violin and orchestra in D major, opus 77, from 1879.

Objects not mentioned in the score but clear from the photo and video documentation of the action:

A tape-recorded text beginning "Te Souviens-tu des seins de ta mere"?:

Decide to translate the French spoken text into Swedish – Minns du din mammas bröst? Someone else has translated it into English from French – Do you remember your mother's breasts? A few hours before the action I sit down at the computer and record the text.



Two pieces of black cloth:

I have a patchwork quilt made of black leather patches that I found a couple of years ago in a fabric shop in here NewYork. I use it and a black, satiny quilt cover I bought at the Salvation Army store. I put the black patchwork quilt where the nude woman will be lying. On the black, satiny quilt cover I put the gold-painted golf ball and the gold-painted razor blade.

A white-painted brick wall and a wooden floor:

There is already a white-painted brick wall in the venue on Linné street in Stockholm. It looks like it has been carved in stone, predetermined. I stand steady on the gray cement, don't need a wooden floor.

Objects mentioned in the score but at that moment not visible for me in the photo or video documentation of the action:

A safety helmet:

On one of the black cloth, a black round shaped shiny object is placed. Impossible for me to see what it is. I decide what I see is a ball gag, a ball to gag someone with. I don't use it during the action, instead, I let it rest on the black, satiny quilt cover. Later I understood that it was the safety helmet I was not able to see or that I didn't want to see. The helmet I left hanging on the handlebar of the black Harley Davidson.

Red and white roses:

Memories and images merge. In the action *Azione sentimentale* from 1973, Gina Page uses a bouquet of white roses and a bouquet of red roses. "Often associated with eroticism, and taken as a metaphor for the vulva, the red rose here became a symbol of love: motherly love, but also lesbian desire..."

**VIDEO 1:** *Discours mou et mat* ends.

**There is a clear difference** between the political situations in Paris and Amsterdam in 1975 and the one in Stockholm in 2011. During the thirty-nine years that have passed since *Discours mou et mat* was performed, any number of political battles have been fought. Some of them familiar and some are not, probably different for all of us.

Then: I was 5 years old. I was hiding in the woods making up my own reality. Out there, the New Left, the Black power movement, the war in Vietnam, the African independence movements, gay liberation movement, the situationist movement, the May -68 revolt in Paris, the French structuralist feminism movement. Monique Wittig published *Les Guérillères* and *Le Corps Lesbien* (tr. *The Lesbian Body*).

Now: In have nowhere to hide. It's all around. It's inside. The inexorable growth of financial neoliberalism and concentration of wealth in fewer hands, the war on terror, the environmental catastrophe, the struggle to get through pessimism, the Arab spring, the Occupy Movement, Tiqqun in France, the revolts in Brazil and the deaths and confusion in Ukraine, the criminalization of homosexuality in Russia and a Nordic region where xenophobia and racism are rampant and the dismantling of the Swedish welfare state is at its peak.

And here we are. What battles are taking place right here - right now?

### ***What is at stake?***

In 1977, Gina Pane wrote: "Before May 68, all living forces in Paris were working intensely to be able to get beyond the 'Social Criticism Theory' in order to be at peace with 'real life.' In this broken, upset environment, creativity was emerging everywhere. The confrontation of mine with the post-1968 public, benefited from a relationship that I could define as 'active' and my work was not only looked at, but lived."

Gina Pane's actions, including her self-inflicted wounds, were motivated by her ambition to promote an idea of the body as a communal entity. Indeed for her, this was the condition for a collective de-anesthetization.

“If I open my body so that you can see your blood, I do so out of love for you, the other”

There is a religious, spiritual aspect in Gina Pane’s work. In this respect her actions can be seen as a direct attempt to create a link between her own body and the spilling of blood associated, in Christianity, with redemption. The tone of Gina Pane’s words is sometime biblical, and she seems to be referring to an almost Christ-like wound when she cuts herself, when she opens the wound in her actions. When she cuts her lips, her eyelids, her abdomen, tongue and upper arms. The wound stands for a state of the body’s extreme sensitivity; it is a sign of suffering, a sign of external aggression. The wound recalls the situation of being the object of aggression, of always being exposed to violence. Gina Pane often used the word “aggression”.

Pane once said that she had to perform *Discours mou et mat* to “get her father and mother relationship under control”. I thought I finally had that part under control. And here I’m back in the middle of the psychoanalytic drama. Between consideration, offer, and acceptance.

The same year as Gina Pane performed *Discours mou et mat* Hélène Cixous wrote *The Laugh of the Medusa* in which she states: “Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies. *Écriture féminine* places experience before language, and privileges the anti-linear, cyclical writing so often frowned upon by patriarchal society”

Gina Pane never claimed to be a feminist, never firmly position her self as a lesbian, or dyke. In many of her work she took a firm anti-bourgeois and anti-imperialist standpoint and her fight was against the anesthetized society. She was neither an activist nor belonged to any political party but she expressed a desire to challenge, through her work, ‘the internal determinism’ propped up by ‘the regulatory systems’.

***Between you and me.***

“Gina Pane’s blood could not provide affirmation and succor for spectators, instead it demanded action.”

When I decided to reenact *Discours mou et mat*, I tried to be very concrete in my approach to the material. I did not want to relate my actions to a predetermined narrative. It was more about putting my body into dialogue with the objections and activities that comprise *Discours mou et mat*. I wanted to admit not-knowing. Create another narrative. Making a path. Following one. I wanted to point out the daily occurrence of violence. To point out that violence is present.

From here we step into *Reflect soft matte discourse*.

**VIDEO 2:** *Reflect soft matte discourse*, 22:43 min

(While the video is screened I sit down among the audience. When video ends I walk back to the mic and continue to read)

**Behind the closed door** we try to take care of each other. The nude is trembling and weeping. Here the naked body has a name. Clara López Menéndez. I sense her frustration. Anger. Fear. I still have slivers of glass in my hand and blood dripping from my lips. I am a wordless body. Exhausted from the pain that took over the entire room, that forced its way deep into the bodies. Into my body.

“This was the worst experience of my life,” she says as we walk home through the city later that night.

I was not prepared. We had not rehearsed. This was real. It became real. Everything or nothing is. The sounds of broken glass, breathing and the razorblade against my lips. The audience shouting no no. No, Malin, stop. Malin, no. That’s enough. This muddle of a body addressed as Malin and the body that was there in the action, in the performing as art on the basis of Gina Pane’s instructions. There was no boundary between this body, mine, and the body of the action. There I was, Malin with the wound, Malin with the power.

Much later someone else said: "I didn't feel sorry for you. I felt sorrier for myself."

Gina pane wrote: "(The body is) the irreducible core of the human being, its most fragile part. This is how it has always been, under all social systems, at any given moment of history. And the wound is the memory of the body; it memorizes its fragility, its pain, thus its "real" existence. It is a defense against the object and against the mental prosthesis."

I decide to pursue my dialogue with Gina Pane's action *Discours mou et mat*. I wanted to supplement Ulrike Gomm's video documentation with reflections from people who were in the space during *Reflect Soft Matte Discourse*. My desire was to collect parallel discourses. Parallel documentations. Other positions. Other senses. Memories. Emotions.

I sent out a request to twenty people, asking them to write a short text describing their experience of the action and the thoughts it triggered immediately after and possibly even later.

- What emotions / feelings did the action trigger in you? What memories?
- What are the implications of causing pain to yourself, in relation to yourself, or in relation to an audience?
- How does pain work for you?
- Were you able to relate to what was going on in the action and to the objects, events, images and texts that were part of it?
- Where were the desire or the desires?
- What was the balance of power among the various bodies and positions in the room?
- What are the implications of doing a remake of an action previously carried out by a different artist, in a different venue, at a different time?
- Can, and if so, how can a performance/a physical experience give rise to political mobilization through affect?"

Six people responded. I did not manage to write down my own answers or reflections.

**I never rehearsed Reflect Soft Matte Discourse** before stepping in to it that night in May 24, 2011. I had never tried out the different activities before they happened. I trusted the script. I trusted the situation. One way to continue the dialogue with Gina Pane would be to rehearse. Gina Pane always rehearsed the actions thoroughly, as a way to prepare and also to make images, to create traces to be put together later.

I decided to make a rehearsal, a new action, to process the experience of the re-enactment. I needed to step back, before moving on. I wanted to rehearse together with an audience. As a dialogue with some of the people who were there, present at *Reflect Soft Matte Discourse*.

I invite Clara López Menéndez, the naked body, and Imri Sandström, one of the people in the audience; to read the letters they wrote answering my questions. I wanted to hear their voices in the space. We called it *Rehearsal after Reflect Soft Matte Discourse*. We do it two times, one time in Copenhagen and the second time in Glasgow. I wanted to renegotiate the power positions, to redistribute power and vulnerability. I still have responsibility for the piece. One time I was dressed in black the other time in white.

In 1972 Gina Pane performed the action *Le Lait Chaud (Warm Milk)*: "The theme, she said, was "white doesn't exist" and I set out to prove it. I started to cut my back with a razor blade and the blood gushed onto my shirt creating an intense paroxysm between the public and myself". Gina Pane referred to white as "neutral". Today I where white. This white, this "I" is not a neutral position.

*Rehearsal after Reflect Soft Matte Discourse* takes place in a black box. We bring the props, all the object and the slides. We add a microphone and a note stand. We make a score how to move through the timespace in dialogue with the video documentation and one another. Imri Sandström takes care of the slides. I mark the activities, sometimes in line with the video documentation, sometimes not. I'm not protected behind dark sunglasses. I breathe in the microphone remembering the pain.

In the end when Clara López Menéndez reads her letter, I undress and lay down on the black satiny quilt cover.

This is not a rehearsal.

**VIDEO 3:** Claras López Menéndez testimony

(I sit down on the stool in front of the screen, embracing the bouquet of red roses and slowly eat them)