

Franko B: Haute Surveillance, Haute Couture.

I have only a face of wax and I am an orphan
And yet wherever I go angels come
To show me the path of that strange Father
Whose heart is softer than a human father's heart
...

I am he who can dissolve the terror
Of being a man and going among the dead,
For is not my body the miraculous ash
Whose earth is the voice of the speaking dead?

Antonin Artaud, *Saint Francis of Assisi* 1

Haute Surveillance

Tough and gentle, ugly and radiant, Franko transforms cruelty into beauty, contempt into love; he has turned his story of abuse and institutionalisation, from orphanage to art school, into a parable of creativity. His current performances become an arena of encounter: the exploration of self and others. Like a latter-day Jean Genet, Franko generates a tension between the abject, the everyday and high culture; his hybridity constitutes an essential part of his message.

Franko's first seven years were spent in an orphanage in Brescia, in northern Italy run by priests; he returned to his mother for the next three years in a small town near Novara; again he found himself sent away, this time to an institution run by the Red Cross, not far from the Lake of Mergozzo, near Lake Maggiore. In the summer of 1973, while staying in a Red Cross holiday camp at Marina di Massa near Carrara in Tuscany, he went on a trip to Florence. Here, for the first time he was taken to the Uffizi and discovered the madonnas, angels and demons of the Florentine churches: Saint Francis, Saint Sebastian, the repentant Magdalene - transfigurations and torments, depictions of life, death and martyrdom – just as Genet had discovered the possibilities of literature, Ronsard, Racine, Corneille and Victor Hugo, in his prison libraries. Franko's life-changing confrontation with painting and sculpture would be intellectually consolidated only much later in England when he was in his early twenties.

Genet's story was that of the illegitimate, adopted, changeling boy, who created a universe of homoerotic love and meaning out of the degradation of his prison experiences. "Genet had been measured... throughout his life; (his body was virtually an official document, as much a record as his accumulated crimes and sentences)."2 The relationship was constant between Genet's changing image and official control. *Haute*

Surveillance was the title of a play of 1947.³ Surveillance was essential to his 'reform' - from the panopticon structure of the Petit Roquette jail, to criminal mug shots; his *Thief's Journal*, specifically describes two mug shots taken at sixteen and thirty years old. Franko was similarly inspected and controlled. His body, inscribed with multiple signs of the Red Cross, with his loves and his scars, is also a record through time. His skin bears witness to his past, while functioning apotropaically - as a protective and defensive organ - and as an invitation to a certain kind of lover, a certain kind of love, in the present.

The Burning Chapel / La chapelle ardente

We descend through swing doors into Franko's studio: a basement space in Toynbee Hall, the haunt of lost souls and Victorian philanthropists, the purlieu of Jack the Ripper, John Profumo's territory of rehabilitation after the great political scandal of 1963. The Establishment descending to the tart; compare Franko's double portrait of himself, tattooed, naked, beatific and Melvyn Bragg stiff-necked, suited, self-confident. The two men are surrounded by anonymous male beefsteak playing cards - the Queen of Spades, the Ace of Diamonds, the wanking Seven of Clubs... Here, the 'liberal' English Arts establishment sees only sex, naked bodies, issues of decency or censorship. The collage piece is called *Mr Disclaimer and I (with friends)*; the preposterous Lord Bragg as "Mr Disclaimer" has all the resonances of a Peter or a Doubting Thomas. Bragg posed with Franko for these photo shots - then distanced himself from the 1998 South Bank Show, *Body Art* in which Franko participated with Fakir Musafar, Orlan and Ron Athey, and which Bragg, himself, had commissioned.

Franko's studio and his flat in Waterloo form a continuum: two complementary environments within his personal Torture Garden.⁴ In the flat, perforated metal screens are cut with the letters TAKE; filing cabinets are branded with red crosses, a car door hangs on a wall - cut, again, with the cross - all these rejects transformed, burnt through with an oxyacetylene torch - into things of beauty. A red and white bus stop shouts REQUEST, next to a display of crucifixes and colostomy bag reliquaries hung on the wall. Rubber gear, anal jewels, diaphanous jelly nozzles and pricks from the sex shop are offered like sweets: the paraphernalia of ecstasy. There is an overwhelming presence of flesh, everywhere "postcards or pictures of some of the boys I went out with", the porn shots, rent boy posters, Franko's fabulously erotic flipper machines, topped with plaster saints. There are pin-boards of changing collages, where a gape-mouthed sex doll encounters Titian's *Sacred and Profane Love*, Indian gods with giant erections are measured against cut-out shots from *Homo Action*, photos of Franko's performance art friends, Stelarc and Orlan, Ron Athey and Annie Sprinkle confront the inane grin of a Smiley badge. Again, one recalls Genet: *Our Lady of the Flowers* begins with the extraordinary scene of the *chapelle ardente*, the chapel burning with the fires of love. On the walls, photographs of beautiful men and boys form a shrine of faces torn from illustrated papers, representing the now decapitated, guillotined heads of the previous inhabitants of Genet's prison cell, where as he says: "I raised egoistic masturbation to the dignity of a cult."⁵

In Franko's apartment, and studio, there are also the signs of hospital and operating theatre: a prosthetic universe - wheelchair, crutches and callipers - used in performance actions and photographs which were staged in concrete underpasses, in homeless London's "Cardboard City": a vocabulary of poverty, spiritual deprivation, blockage and impotence made visible through excess. And everywhere there is the red cross or the heart, not only cut through metal but gouged into desktops, children's chair seats, the twin push chair, the grubby pair of trainers, yellow wellingtons - or the tragic pair of baby's boots. "You can turn anything into an icon which can be religious" Franko declares.

Franko's titles: *Blinded by Love, I Miss You, I'm Not Your Babe, When I Grow Up I Want to be Beautiful, Protect Me* - all imply the child alone, the artist alone, inventing icons to be adored, inventing strategies of a deflective love, a love that finally repels or mutilates its objects - a love, finally, that cannot be endured or cannot be sustained?.

The Heart and the Cross

Aiutare e aiutarsi: to help and be helped. Franko's universe is a universe of *caritas*, the caring and protecting love which combines the heart with the Red Cross motto in Italian. "I don't believe in a blood-related family... Love has to be a big thing" says Franko, who at one time was a blood donor. He also worked for Age Concern as a punk-haired volunteer, favourite of the Lambeth grannies... Love, art, escape and survival are inextricably linked, beginning with Franko's first paintings as a child - mystifying his instructors - tree trunks in red. To escape his condition meant becoming a man, and leaving his country, Italy. To avoid military service was an imperative, and Franko found himself travelling through France, reaching England and getting to London. A period of poverty and experimentation led, at one stage to hospitalisation and Franko's determination, at this point, to make something out of his life. In Thatcher's London, Franko became a punk and an anarchist, attending meetings and discussions before the homophobia of various groups discouraged him. A casual suggestion that he take up pottery classes in Brixton (he made small male figures, rather than bowls) led to his admission to Camberwell School of Art's foundation course. He moved to painting, and at last managed to be admitted to Chelsea School of Art. Even more inspirational than the Fine Art teachers, perhaps, was the encouragement of the librarian: Susan Sontag's *Under the Sign of Saturn* and Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, for example, offered new frameworks and structures of thought that would rapidly feed into his work.

But intellectual perspectives onto his past or creative present never detracted from the directness and the simple universals of Franko's world - a directness that continues to today. The series *I Miss You*, shown last year at the Wellcome Institute, transformed motifs first generated as sketchy drawings on "wound wipe" tissues, into rough carvings on wooden panels. Red painted figures, the heart and the cross, accompany a series of other images: a desultory house, a cruciform window, an ambulance, a male figure, vertical, horizontal or in a doubled configuration. As was said of Henri Matisse's crudely graffitied *Stations of the Cross*, "These violent signs suffice me: they tell me the essential story. Why should I need anything else?"⁶ Franko provides a conflated narrative of love, encounter, security, loss, and death:

I work in, across and between the mediums of sculpture, installation, performance, photography and video. I create objects, images and actions that both focus on and frame my raw and exposed body

Much of my work presents the body in its most carnal, existential and essential state, confronting us with the essence of the human condition in an objectified, vulnerable and yet seductively powerful form. My concern is to make the unbearable bearable and to provoke the viewer to reconsider our collective understandings of beauty and suffering. In my most recent sculptural work I have been continuing to manipulate found objects, but have been concentrating more on developing an iconography of seemingly everyday images and symbols within them.⁷

Mysteries of the Wound

The signs of heart and cross blossoming everywhere, in Franko's studio and on his skin, have not merely appeared like miraculous stigmata. Burned in, cut in, the shiny red inserted with perspex sheets or thickly painted, each edge surrounded by a scar-like crust of metal or frayed edged of cloth... these are also wounds. They signify, literally, the making vulnerable of any object: wounds which at once pain and say "Protect me".

Franko's earthly family of friends, lovers, artists, is complemented by a spiritual family. Nearer in time to us than his ancestors, the great Italian religious artists or the Flemish masters (I think here especially of Ruben's standing, bleeding male – *The Death of Seneca*), two figures are especially important – both encountered while Franko was at art school in London. The first is Francis Bacon, a painter of extremes, of screaming human existences trapped within the furnitures of modernity, of passionate couplings in claustrophobic spaces, of lurid oranges and blacks, of red and purple bodies opened to blood, bone and gristle. A painter with old master aspirations; a painter of religious triptychs in godforsaken times; a homosexual, contemporary artist and humanist. The second is the Italo-French performance artist of the 1960s and 1970s, Gina Pane, whose work Franko discovered as a student in Lea Virgine's book *Body Art*, in the library at Chelsea. In Gina Pane's remarkable sculptures and actions, both physical objects and the artist's body are governed by an aesthetic of the blade and the wound. In 1990, Franko made a video of someone cutting "Democracy" on his back, while he cut "Freedom" on theirs; the work became part of his degree show. This was the still militant, actively anarchist Franko, but he was also responding, almost immediately, to Gina Pane's profoundly Catholic aesthetic. For her, pain and the cut are deeply symbolic concepts at stake within a discourse of redemption and transcendence. Pane, a lesbian, doubly stigmatised in a male-dominated Paris, created her actions and performances in a milieu where the mappings of Lacanian psychoanalysis onto the artist and the art work coexisted with an intense radicalisation of political protest. It was the time of Vietnam. A dialogue des sourds was the result of this crossing of discourses; the psychoanalytical and the political (Freud against Marx, Lacan against Althusser) seemed fated never to communicate. Yet nowhere was this crossing in the present more intense, and the reference to the past more acute, than in Pane's performance of 1971, *L'escalade non-anesthésiée*. Here, before a small audience, on a metal frame she had created, she

mounted barefoot, its ladder-like elements, set with razor-sharp pieces of steel on the rungs. Her own feet, slit, cut and bleeding, became symbols for the escalation of atrocities in Vietnam.

As a Catholic, “Pane knew that saints always communicated with people by means of their own body, stigmata, flagellations, swoons, were on one hand the symptoms of a manifest sanctity, and on the other the empirical certainty of the existence of the divine.”⁸ The body, then, had always been a devotional tool, martyred or erotic, and the wound a focus for adoration, mystic trances, transformations, divine music:

O Cult of the Shed Blood
O Window of Paradise
O Place of Refuge
O Sepulchre of Pilgrims
O Nest of Clean Doves
O Furnace of Love
O Treasure of the Catholic Church
O Stream of Living Water 9

Despite the apparently masochistic dimensions of her work, Pane was eloquent in her own writings on the wound about what she described as its role within the “transindividual body” of society:

*“The wound seeks out, indentifies and enscripts a certain malaise. It is at the centre of my practice, it is the cry and the blank of my discourse. The affirmation of the vital, elementary revolt of the individual. An absolutely non-autobiographical attitude. I lose my identity, finding it again within others, and the equilibrium between the individual and the collective, the corps transindividuel.”*¹⁰

But the personal must enter the political. She also said: “the action is over when the pain has anaesthetised my desire to dominate”,¹¹ and the showing of the wounds, the ostentatio vulneris, is both a founding religious trope for the paintings of martyrdom, and a calculated ploy, by Pane or by Franko, for a particular empathic reaction in the part of the spectator.

Pane was writing and teaching at a moment of the birth of *écriture féminine* in France, a reappropriation of the voice by woman, a voice previously suppressed - albeit the matrix of language and the mother-tongue. The ecstatic writings of the female saints were the great precursors of this movement. Pane nourished her students on Bataille, and the inspirational writings of Laure (Colette Peignot) writings which Bataille discovered and published only after his lover’s early death.¹² The conjunction of the most sacred yet most problematic moment of the crucifixion, of death and the female sex comes in a passage of Bataille surely known to Pane. In his epiphanic, erotic novella, *Madame Edwarda*, at the precise moment when the narrator kneels to lick Edouarda’s guenilles, the purple rags of her sex, he evokes Christ’s wound and with it his cry from the Cross, *Eli, Eli lama sabachthani* – “My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?” At the moment of absolute ecstasy, of absolute agony, of transcendence, the body itself

dissolves to a cipher. For Bataille, this moment is acephalic and informed by a reading of Saint Angela of Folino. He discovered her writings at the same time as the mystic practices of medieval piety and the ecstasies of the crucified Chinese torture victim whose beatified, gazing body he published in the review *Documents*.¹³

Aktion! The Body Politic

Franko's Milan performance, *Aktion 398*, along with the exhibition *Who's going to lick my wound?* of performance relics and installation pieces, was again a conscious or unconscious *Imitatio Christi*. Provocative, of course, in an explicitly gay and AIDS-informed context, it would become his most symbolic moment of homage to and affiliation with Gina Pane, who, unbeknownst to him, had performed her *Azione sentimentale* in exactly the same space, then known as the *Galerie Diagramma*, in 1978 (now the *Galleria Luciano Ingapin*). This space was a centre of performance art in the 1970s, well known to alternative artists such as Marina Abramovic at the time.

*We saw her holding alternately a bouquet of white roses and a bouquet of red roses and incrusting thorns into her fore-arms... I understood that Gina Pane's action, which spoke of love and suffering showed how a body animated by thought is capable of integrating, interiorising and going beyond what denies it; what Gina Pane called a vital transcendence.*¹⁴

As Franko performed, his body whitened and scarred, Lea Virgine entered the gallery, and, instantly aware of the fateful parallel with Gina, cried to the curator: "Please tell him to stop!" Yet, as its title demonstrates, *Aktion 398*, in which Franko wears a dog-muzzle and insists upon a one-to-one encounter, was also a salute to the Viennese Actionists. Franko's spiritual godfathers include Hermann Nitsch, whose psychodramatically constructed performances extended the notion of action painting when he was splashed with animal blood in 1962; Otto Muehl, whose *Material Aktion*, three years later involved plethoras of food, blood, body fluids; Gunter Brus, whose *Breaking Test* cut the body with razor blades to the point of exhaustion, and Rudolph Schwarzkogler, whose third *Aktion* marked the high point of his collaboration with a photographer in rituals of critical self-observation... Franko's different performances of *Aktion 398* with variations for Mexico City, Birmingham, Antwerp, Malmo – or *I Miss You*, as it took place in London, Antwerp or Turin, are likewise meticulously documented. There are aerial versus ground shots, close ups of scars or medical apparatus, and commemorations of the beautiful boys – Kristian or Stuart – who acted as his assistants.

Again, the Viennese Actionists posited both sexual liberation, a Sadean outrage aux mœurs - and the possibility of political readings of the body as body politic. To express a grief or an outrage in their works commensurate with Austria's blindness – with Second World War atrocities - would have been impossible; the cutting, the excrement, the body fluids on stage simply indicated the gap, the chaotic *mis en abime* – a disruption which aimed to fling the 'real' and its everyday body into the abyss – an abyss perpetually gaping if anyone cared to look. Emissions from the body, like the scream, carried their own imperatives and meanings. ¹⁵ Exasperation with art objects and the art world imperiously dictated a transgression of boundaries, a return to body-frontiers – to these

primal screams, while the body itself became an ensign representing a whole anthropology of purity and danger:

Soiling, *la souillure*, in itself is scarcely a representation, and this is linked with a specific fear which stymies reflection; with soiling and dirt we enter into the reign of Terror.¹⁶

Kazuo Shiraga's *Challenging Mud*, 1955 – the semi-naked artist writhing in mud and shingle, a key work of the Japanese Gutai group, described in the authoritative *Out of Actions* catalogue as aiming to make “an essentially two-dimensional painting”¹⁷ would, of course, have been read by his contemporaries as a tragic metaphor of Hiroshima; tragic but with all the (neo)dadaistic absurd of the non-commensurate, of the generations separated from those who suffered, by a trick of time or of space. Chris Burden in Los Angeles, challenged as to the pertinence of his dare-devil performances, his scrapes and pains, his ‘courage’, in contrast with his peer group who were actually risking their lives in Vietnam, accepted this absurd, this non-equivalence – a non-equivalence parallel to the blood scraped from the male face in Martin Scorsese's 1967 short, *The Big Shave* – or that of Pane's *L'escalade*.¹⁸ Yet for the Viennese Actionists, for Pane or for Burden, actions were a way of pushing life to its limits, living in extremis, that created a personal and political resonance with those other, anonymous soldier's lives. “War is the strong life, it is life in extremis... pacifists ought to enter more deeply into the aesthetical and ethical point of view of their opponents”, claimed William James, as early as 1910.¹⁹ We do not choose who we are, but we can choose the subjects or the people with whom we wish to engage.

With the issue of the body politic as metaphor comes the question of how legitimately the individual artist, like Christ, or a scapegoat or shaman in more primitive societies, can embody or redeem “the sins of the world”. As a corollary comes the clash of conflicting emotions in the onlooker, whose empathic projections involve a visceral identification at some level with the performer. These feelings may often be hard to reconcile with the interpretations of the intellect. At a second remove for the spectator also, comes the clash - the unbridgeable gap already mentioned - between psychoanalytic and political interpretations of a piece: the Other's body as owned, lived, excited, stimulated, scarred; the body sacrificed as a symbol for the community.

How in postmodern society, in Blair's glitzy and rotten Britain, might Franko's work serve as a comment on the body politic? The founding premise, even of the sado-masochistic community, is the rule of consensuality; it is surely around this notion, one could argue, that the relationship between rulers and ruled in life today has gone profoundly awry.

In *(Per)versions of Love and Hate*, Renata Salecl has recently attempted to collate practices such as clitoridectomy, body piercing and performance art within a synchronic and anthropological vision, in which self-cutting (mutilation/decoration) is defined as the inscribing of an irreversible and ineradicable ‘real’ upon a postmodern body adrift in a valueless and simulacral society. It is also an expression in Lacanian terms, she argues, of anger and disappointment at the collapse of authority of the big Other – or the masochist's constant attempt to reestablish Him. She introduces a Deleuzian reading of

masochism into the performances of live artist, Bob Flanagan, describing neurotics who “try to show how they are not essentially marked by the law, since they can openly play with castration rituals on stage.”²⁰ But, while writing from the States rather than London, Flanagan’s own manifesto “Why” (Why cut? Why cut on stage?) is far more eloquent a summary of his condition - in its disjunctures, its rushing together of past and present, its memories of childhood, of humiliating nuns and the Catholic world view - than Salecl’s post hoc pontifications:

WHY

Because it feels good; because it gives me an erection; because I’m sick, because there was so much sickness; because I say FUCK THE SICKNESS; because I like the attention; because I was alone a lot; because I was different; because kids beat me up on the way to school; because I was humiliated by nuns; because of Christ and the Crucifixion; because of Porky Pig... because of NO PAIN NO GAIN; because SPARE THE ROD AND SPOIL THE CHILD; because YOU ALWAYS HURT THE ONE YOU LOVE...²¹

A proliferating literature about self-mutilation, including its British dimensions, creates a context which may now be seen to intersect with the absolutely alternative axis of an international, second generation of live arts performers.²² The contemporary medical and psychiatric professions were slow to take the long history of tattooing, cutting and body modification on board within its anthropological perspectives.²³

Franko heard of Fakir Musafar’s “Modern Primitives” movement in the spring of 1990; he encountered the work Stelarc and Orlan between 1992 and 1995, the year he met Annie Sprinkle and Ron Athey - at the wake of a mutual friend who had run the Milch gallery, where the FIST club started (the setting for Franko’s first performance). Lois Keidan’s “Rapture” festival of Live Art at London’s ICA, in late 1995, which brought so many artists together must be acknowledged here. Shows such as Rosso Vivo, 1999, in Milan connect this performance generation with artist such as Louise Bourgeois, Cindy Sherman, Andres Serrano, Jan Fabre, Pierre et Gilles, and Jana Sterbak, for whose work Franko has a particular admiration. At Rosso Vivo, Franko’s piece, *I Love Mr Woodcock*, consisted of a very large installation of his objects – the first time his work as sculptor/installation artist had been seen internationally on a large scale.

Skin to the wind

But a dimension is missing here in our engagement with Franko’s work: the dimension of sound, voice and music. The first flayed body in art was Marsyas’s, stripped of its flesh and nailed to a pine tree: a punishment for attempting to rival, with his magic flute, the God Apollo’s lyre-music. The flaying itself – origin of the classical *écorché* (and Jana Sterbak’s *Meat Dress*) relates both to the fabrication of musical instruments – hence art itself – and to the ritual flaying of a sacred king (Orpheus with his lute ripped apart by the maenads of his cortege).²⁴ Body, music, torture – always intimately linked. Just as torture itself, its involvement with the imperative of the Question, is linked to the sound of the sob, the scream, the confession.²⁵

Just as Orlan sites her identity not in her mutating appearance but in her voice, so Franko's voice, coming from his mouth of golden teeth – terrifying and precious – is quintessential. Like his body, his voice is a hybrid, a mixture of languages, accents, elisions, very sensual - brutal if needs be.

And beyond the voice, music. My first experience of Franko's performance work, *I'm Not Your Babe*, in Cardiff, was an overwhelming sensory experience: Franko came on stage to the sounds of the techno-industrial music of his long-time collaborator, Gavin Mitchell. Upright at first, Franko, his body whitened, bled from tubes in his arms onto a darkened, square-shaped stage fringed with silent, squatting onlookers. His own ebbing pulses beat in our ears with Mitchell's music, whose counter-strains insistently echoed Franko's will to stand and not to stumble, to kneel and not to fall, to lie still in a spreading pool of blood – while liquid nitrogen was released intermittently on stage in pillars of cloud, blurring our vision of the body, creating visual passages as space seemed to collapse around the collapsing body, turning the red blood grey. The blood itself mixed with the white pigment on Franko's body, as he moved and rubbed himself on the floor, frantic at first, then limp. "I'm painting it" says Franko. His special effects turn every performance into a *Gesamtkunstwerk* – a total work of art, mirroring a life.²⁶

Yet *I Miss You*, at Beaconsfield, Vauxhall, in a space under the railway arches, played deliberately, in contrast, with silence. The silence was orchestrated by the apocalyptic rumble of trains overhead, a rumble that made the dank, brick walls vibrate as Franko bled. One recalls the debt Gina Pane acknowledged towards John Cage. In this performance, silence was timed and made space, as Franko, bleeding again from the arms, paced down a white, floor-level catwalk. Sitting on the cold floor, I looked up as he approached, finally seeing the body in close-up, the two raised gashes on his side, aware first of the sound of his feet, then steady breaths through the nose, finally the muffled pat of drips of blood onto the linen as he walked past. The sound of breathing intensified our compassion, our sense of helplessness.²⁷ Occasionally he would raise his arm to his face, to clear his vision, wipe his nose; as he weakened he held himself, his left arm clasped across his chest. And this was another painting: cold colours at first, the white body illuminated by the blinding spiral fuses of oversized lightbulbs; the catwalk darkening gradually, red blood becoming brown as the splashes broadened, caked, hardened.

Haute Couture / Home

Spotted with the black and crimson trails of so many performance pieces, the canvas paths have been gathered, like so many Turin shrouds; raw material to be recycled into new collaborations that create a bridge between Franko's performance works and his objects as relics. "Beauty functions like a bridge" says Franko. Following a catwalk performance in Antwerp, the used canvas on the floor was carefully rolled up, dried, cut and nailed onto wooden stretchers, like paintings. The idea of recycling the material from performances was born here.

Sewing had been previously a sewing of the skin, a question of suture, Franko's lips sewn up with curved needles in protest against the censorship surrounding the Spanner Case. Now sewing becomes healing and making. Home, this spring, will show the miraculous transformation of the catwalk cloth into clothes and furniture: from the public spectacle of the fashion show detourne, to the domestic, from Franko's experiences at their most extreme and most transcendental, back to the family narrative and a real house.

Home, in Camberwell, will house on one floor the costumes created from Franko's canvas performance relics; his pinball machines will be installed in the living room with the neon piece, *O Lover Boy*, his drawings will be pinned up in the nursery.²⁸ A sense of Pirandello will surely haunt this house: costumes on display in search of characters, rather than characters in search of an author... The creators behind the costumes are also invisible presences: Hiroyuki Oyoshi from Tokyo, Anne-Sofie Olrik from Copenhagen, Lorna Lee Leslie, Ian Wallace, Kova Katak, Lee Benjamin and Mayu from London; these are friends from art school, friends from the club scene, famous designers: a strange convergence. There will be a bed with bedsheets, a sofa, chairs, a wardrobe, even a clock, to set the scene of a blood-spattered crime: the classic *Lustmord*?, a contemporary *Passion Play*? There is a strange sense of anachronism: the tear of the seamless robe; the struggle over; blood spilt before the superbly elegant garments are inhabited. The mood will vacillate constantly between the decorative, the forensic and the uncanny – the absent hand which stained the bloody glove... Wallace's stocky suit, made to measure for Franko, certainly gives him the air of a mafia Godfather; but Leslie's outfit, displayed on a rack or stand, headless, disembodied, with strangely extending legs dragging on the floor and Mayu's suit cut with holes and extravagantly sequined, suggest more sinister and elaborate scenarios. Katak's elegant and asymmetrical ball dress seems stifled, arrested in its movement, longing to shed its rough material which smacks too much of the hospital. It is superbly complemented by Ogden's simple nurses' uniform, the red cross replaced with dalmation spots of blood. The most disturbing work is surely Benjamin's straitjacket, measured onto Franko's body. An anachronism? There is a disturbing suggestion of recidivism here: might the violence implicit in the before or after of the piece's fabrication break out? Might Franko, himself, have to be restrained? We feel the threat of the asylum, Artaud's pain again, Franko's pain; yet a sense of both redemption and the insistence on artifice as dripping blood is transformed into this procession of figures, this masquerade awaiting a libretto. Another London melodrama?

Back in the East End, Spitalfields, not so far from Toynbee Hall and Franko's studio, the Great Eastern Hotel, Liverpool Street stands refurbished – constructed upon the site of London's original madhouse, Bedlam.²⁹ A neon sign above the bar will soon read:

I feel lonely, please call me 0775 992 4581.30

It's Franko.

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¹ Artaud, Antonin, 'Saint Francis of Assisi', 1922, *Selected Writings* introduced by Susan Sontag, Berkeley: University of California Press, (1973), 1988, p. 5.

2. White, Edmund, *Genet*, London: Chatto and Windus, 1993, p. 182.

3. Genet, Jean, *Haute Surveillance*, Paris: Cinéastes-Bibliophiles, 1947, an erotic play with three male characters in prison.

⁴ See the parallels with the club universe of *Torture Garden. From Bodyshocks to Cybersex... A Photographic Archive of the New Flesh*, London: Creation Books, 1996. The name comes, of course, from Octave Mirbeau's colonial parable of 1899, *Le Jardin des Delices*, irrevocably linked with Rodin's erotic watercolours – 'blood wipes' *avant la lettre* - which appeared with a luxury edition of Mirbeau's text in 1914.

5. See Brigid Brophy's essay: "Our Lady of the Flowers", pp 69-70 in Brooks, P. and Halpern, J., eds., *Genet, a Collection of Critical Essays*, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc, 1979, pp. 69-70.

⁶ Couturier, Père Marie-Alain, in *Les chapelles du Rosaire à Vence et de Notre-Dame du Haut à Ronchamp*, Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1955.

⁷ B. Franko,, *Shelf Life*, London, Two10 Gallery, The Wellcome Trust, 2000, pp. 6-7.

⁸ Deho, Valerio, "Corpo d'amore / Body of Love" in *Gina Pane, opere 1968-1990*, Milan: Charta, 1998, p. 35.

⁹ See Douglas Gray, "The Five Wounds of our Lord", *Notes and Queries*, February – May, 1963, pp. 50-1, 82-9, 127-135, 163-168, with an extensive bibliography.

¹⁰ Pane (my translation), quoted without a reference by Anne Tronche, "Les enneigés blessés" in *Gina Pane*, p.30, Le Mans: Beaux' Arts, (Ecole supérieure), 2,000, p. 30. Compare also Pane's use of the truncated and elongated red cross in the minimalist sculptural installations, such as *The Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian after a Composition by Memling, Score for a Body*, 1984, pp. 70-71.

¹¹ *Nourriture / Actualités T.V. / Feu* 1971, involving a dedication to fire, in *Gina Pane*, 1998, p. 27.

¹² Laure (Peignot, Colette) *Écrits*, Paris: J.J, Pauvert (U.G.E.), 1978. See Nicole Schwarz in "Gina Pane et l'enseignement artistique" in *Gina Pane*, 2,000, pp. 102-3.

¹³ P. Doncoeur, *Livre de la b. Angèle de Foligno*, 1925; See also his *Devotions et Pratiques mystiques / symboliques du Moyen Age*, 1925.

¹⁴ Nicole Schwarz, on seeing photographs of *Action sentimentale*, in a show at the Palais des Congrès, Le Mans, in *Gina Pane*, 2000, p. 105.

¹⁵ Aydemir, Murat, *Images of Bliss, Ejaculatory Masculinity and Meaning in Literature, Film, Art and Theory*, ASCA Research bulletin, (work in progress, Amsterdam).

¹⁶ Paul Ricoeur, quoted without date in the original French in Mary Douglas's classic: *Purity and Danger. An analysis of the concepts of purity and taboo* (1966). London: Ark, 1984, p. 31 (my translation: *souillure* is linked to ideas of defiling, staining, body wastes etc.).

¹⁷ Paul Schimmel, "Leap into the void: performance and the object" in *Out of Actions, between Performance and the Object, 1949-1979*, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, London, Thames and Hudson, 1998, p. 25.

¹⁸ Martin Scorsese, *The Big Shave*, USA, 1967, 6 minutes: a young man (Peter Bernuth) shaves his face again and again, until it is covered in blood.

¹⁹ William James, "The Moral Equivalent of War", (1910) in *The Writings of William James*, New York: Random House, 1967, pp. 661, 666, quoted in Franser, John, *Violence in the Arts*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976 (2nd edition), p. 105.

²⁰ Renata Salecl, "Cut in the Body, from Clitoridectomy to Body Art", in *(Per)versions of Love and Hate*, London: Verso, 1998, pp. 140-168.

²¹ Bob Flanagan, *supermasochist*, PLACE: RE/Search Publications, 1993, pp. 64-5. In terms of a certain infantilism in Franko's work, compare Flanagan: *The Kid is the Man*, Bombshelter Press, 1978.

²² See Favazza, Armando A., *Bodies Under Siege, Self-Mutilation and Body Modification in Culture and Psychiatry*, Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, (1987), 1996. His account ranges from Karl Menniger's pioneering *Man against Himself*, 1938, to accounts of the British scene: Edward Morgan's *Death Wishes*, 1979. See also Strong, Marilee, *Bright Red Scream, Self-Mutilation and the Language of Pain*, London: Virago Press, 2,000.

²³ Fakir Musafar founded *Modern Primitives* in 1985, after his personal "coming out" at the first international tattoo convention, Rena, Nevada, 1978. See his "Body Play: State of Grace or Sickness" in *Bodies Under Siege*, 1996, pp. 325-334.

²⁴ Graves, Robert, *The Greek Myths*, vol. 1., pp. 80-83; Athene's double-flute, found by Marsyas, was made of stags' bones; the bark of an alder-shoot is flayed to make a

shepherd's pipe.

²⁵ See Elaine Scarry's classic discussion in *The Body in Pain, the Making and Unmaking of the World*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985, pp. 140-141, 281.

²⁶ *I'm Not Your Babe*, Chapter, Cardiff, 24 October 1997, and Franko in conversation, 2 March 2001. Mitchell was attached to the group Identical, and will be working with Franko in Denmark for *You Make My Heart Go Boom, Boom*, summer 2001. Here Franko will collaborate on special effects for the first time, with the installation artist Hans E. Masden, who will light the piece including Franko's light box/bed. See also Franko's CD by Philip Walsh with dogs barking - produced by Franko B and Gilles Jobin, 1998.

²⁷ See Didier Anzieu's concept of the *moi-peau* ("skin/me") as "the sonorous envelope of the self" in *Psychanalyse et Langage. Du corps à la parole*, Paris: Dunod, 1977

²⁸ *Home*, at 1a, Flodden Road, London SE5, 4 May – 3 June, 2001.

²⁹ The Priory of St Mary Bethlehem, was founded in 1247 by the Bishopsgate Sheriff, Simon Fitz Mary. It moved to palatial new buildings in Moorgate in 1676, then to Lambeth (now the Imperial War Museum), and today functions as the Bethlem Royal Hospital Archive and Museum in Kent.

³⁰ The group show, *Please Disturb Me* will run at the Great Eastern Hotel from 23 March through April, 2001.