

---

Kelli Moore

*Photographie Féminine*  
Exile and Survival in the Photography of  
Ana Mendieta, Donna Ferrato, and Nan Goldin

Introduction

This essay examines the politicization of domestic violence through women's photography, in particular, the photographs of Ana Mendieta, Donna Ferrato and Nan Goldin. The history of domestic abuse in the U.S.A. involves silencing battered women's private experience, and the suppression of the issue from public discourse. This essay considers the disciplinary nature of these silences around women's camerawork in Mendieta's installation series *Tableaux of Violence*, in Ferrato's documentary photo essay *Living with the Enemy*, and in Nan Goldin's self-portrait, *Nan One Month After Being Beaten*.

Mendieta's performance art has recently been taken up by feminist scholars because of the ways it has been excluded from exhibitions, while the minimalist sculpture of her husband and accused murderer, Carl Andre, enjoyed a firm presence in the museum system; yet, this scholarship is largely confined to Mendieta's brilliant *Siluetas* series. Ferrato's controversial images of domestic abuse were originally commissioned by Japanese *Playboy* and meant to capture a different editorial thematic – libertine love; the magazine viewed her images of domestic abuse as obscene and fired Ferrato, who was subsequently 'exiled' from publication. Goldin's self-portrait *Nan One-Month After Being Beaten* is under-theorized as a powerful commentary on battered women's temporality, and on their complex identity reflected through female masquerade.

American Studies professor Laura Wexler uses the term "photographic *anekpbrasis*" to describe "an active and selective refusal to read photography – its graphic labor, its social spaces – even while, at the same time, one is busy textualizing and contextualizing all other kinds of cultural documents".<sup>1</sup> Wexler argues that photographic *anekpbrasis* occurs within nineteenth-century histories of photography. I extend her analysis to what I think is a similar occurrence within contemporary feminist art history and criticism, that has either exiled scholarship on images of battered women from critical discussion by avoiding this important research area altogether, or by refusing to engage such discussion in multi-disciplinary debates. This is a form of photographic *anekpbrasis* that has resulted in a missed opportunity to embark upon a critical project of understanding the *mutual* struggles over the female body in representation within the disciplines of feminist art history and criticism and critical legal theory and practice. I suggest that the practice of photographing battered women came into the world through the photography of an exiled form of feminist avant-garde that

<sup>1</sup> Laura Wexler, *Tender Violence: Domestic Visions in an Age of U.S. Imperialism* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 58.

---

includes photojournalism. I consider Mendieta, Ferrato, and Goldin as ‘proto’ photographers of domestic abuse, whose work prefigured the official legal ways in which battered women’s bodies are made to ‘survive’ through the affirming capacities of the evidentiary photograph. Images such as those of Mendieta, Ferrato and Goldin have become the ‘bodies that matter’ in the courtroom adjudication of criminal charges of domestic violence.

Survival is defined in the West as: remaining alive after the death, cessation or occurrence of some thing; to survive means to endure or live through.<sup>2</sup> Trinh T. Minh-ha has observed that, in the genocidal aftermath of twentieth and twenty-first century political displacements, the “achievements of exile as an artistic vocation” are incomprehensible.<sup>3</sup> As Minh-ha notes, often the exiled writer uses language to creatively and painfully assimilate the trauma of exile or displacement. Images of battered women, I propose, are one form of such assimilation, a *photographie feminine* conceptually linked to the literary mode of *écriture feminine*. Survival is an important thematic in the photographic and installation work of Mendieta, Ferrato, and Goldin. The notion has a temporal and autobiographical valence that is discursively linked to identity and psychoanalytic understandings of battered women’s subjectivity. I claim that the works of Ferrato, Mendieta and Goldin each contributed to the emergence of a genre of photography of battered women by producing these subjects as a particular temporal ‘look’ that survives by silently organizing courtroom adjudication of domestic violence, and by supporting services marketing campaigns around the issue. Images of battered women are the texts that assimilate privately experienced violence into the public domain of judgment. It is my contention that the work of these exiled women photographers *survives on* – albeit in multiple standardized forms – in state institutions, popular culture, and municipal spaces.

Each image pushes the ethical boundaries between art and legal evidence. In this way the politicization of domestic violence is a history written through feminist photography practices that contested the disciplinary domains of art and law. Claiming that images of battered women signify an exiled genre of photography, my discussion is an act of recovery of a kind of portrait image that transgresses the boundaries between art and evidence of law. By considering how the image of the battered woman moves into and out of art and legal practices, I inquire about the significance of feminist protest that critiqued the paucity of women’s art work at the Whitney Museum on the one hand and all but ignored the increasing numbers of incarcerated women and men, exposed to exile in the prison industrial complex often for crimes related to domestic violence. A similar institutional quandary emerges when we consider the position of anti-essentialist feminist art critics, who wanted to evacuate the female body from representation at the very moment violence against women came to the fore as a political issue adjudicated in U.S. courts precisely by circulating photographic images. In this context, I argue, the work of Ana Mendieta and Donna Ferrato and later, Goldin, remained off the radar because of their ethically challenging content and the disciplinary frames organizing feminist art work and writing.

<sup>2</sup> OED definition, paraphrased.

<sup>3</sup> Trinh T. Minh-ha, “Other Than Myself, My Other Self”, in George Robertson et al., eds., *Travelers’ Tales: Narratives of Home and Displacement* (London; New York: Routledge, 1994), 28-42.

---

<sup>4</sup> Images of Mendieta are photographs taken of her art installation, and thus constitute a portrait of her self portrait. Ferrato's image is caught in a mirror, and Goldin took her own picture.

<sup>5</sup> Amelia Jones, *Body Art: Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 36.

My discussion proceeds along two axes: the first demonstrates how the photography of Ana Mendieta, Donna Ferrato and Nan Goldin gave presence to the figure of the battered woman in art and photojournalism in ways that are challenging to the ethics of art and legal disciplinary boundaries. Secondly, I suggest the ethical challenge born from their respective photographs as codifying the 'look' of battered women. Here, the conditions of production of photography in Mendieta, Ferrato and Goldin require an important clarification. Each of their works technically conforms to the self-portrait convention.<sup>4</sup> The photographs are thus a "supplement of a supplement: a seemingly rigorous, visual, indexical marker of a body's having 'been there' before the camera/audience".<sup>5</sup> Art and legal practices have placed the body in representation at the center of both disciplines in ways that reinforce and productively efface the distinction between legal photographic evidence and art object. In U.S. courts, contestation over domestic abuse criminal charges occurs over the photographic image; the image conditions the aesthetic experience of the courtroom for battered women, jurors and law professionals.

### Situating Images of Battered Women within Feminist Art History Debates of the 1980s

<sup>6</sup> For a study addressing the increasing dependence of contemporary adjudication of law on visual techniques of display in addition to the tradition of words, see Jonathan Finn, *Capturing the Criminal Image: From Mug Shot to Surveillance Society* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

<sup>7</sup> Anti-essentialist feminist criticism, exemplified by the work of Mary Kelly and Griselda Pollock, rejected the representation of the female body in/as art. Particularly when the female artist deployed her own body in art representation and performance, the anti-essentialist view argued that it reified women's gender oppression by the male gaze.

Making this argument requires pivoting away from nineteenth-century scholarship on the invention of photography, and its role in promoting distinctions between the bourgeois individual and the deviant and criminal person through visual culture. This work, while foundational to the forthcoming arguments, has been heretofore preoccupied with the invention of the criminal mug shot.<sup>6</sup> Instead, we must hone in on other enactments, production, and displays of the portrait image that cross the institutional boundaries between art and law in order to bring together the historiography on deviance and criminology and the debates about representation of women's bodies in art history and criticism.

The work of Amelia Jones is crucial to the development of images of battered women as a genre of photography that challenges the limits of legal evidence and art. In *Body Art: Performing the Subject*, Jones mapped feminist art intellectual history within a post-modern cultural politics. She examined the schism that occurred during the 1980s in art history and criticism in which the discipline witnessed a break-up between feminists who retained forms of essentialism to read the female body and subjectivity and an anti-essentialist position that refused a stable, knowable feminine ontology.<sup>7</sup> This debate rhetorically organized feminist art criticism, establishing a problematic role of the body in feminist aesthetics.

The trajectory of the female body in art representation and performance illustrates the body's presence at the center of a major struggle toward and against exile within the discipline of art history and criticism. Although prominent feminist art historians during the 1980s located women's art collective associations within the larger cultural work of the women's movement, the artistic details of women's

---

experience were generally confined to motherhood, domestic labor and female masquerade. The political reality of violence against women seems to be handled symbolically through artwork and performance that critiqued the male obsession with the female nude in Western art and the misogynistic repudiation of the vagina and the menstrual cycle. Female beauty conventions and their commodification as pornography appear as another preoccupation. Criminality and mental illness were less explicitly discussed. All contributed to a repression of domestic violence in art history and criticism. Thus, a key problem I point to in this essay concerns how and why feminist critiques of the female artist and the art she produced and attempted to publicly exhibit, remained within the structure of the museum, gallery, and professional arts establishment. Guided by Marxist antipathy toward uncritical experiences of pleasure of the text, anti-essentialist feminist critics accused the female body artist of undermining herself (as an individual) and women (as a class), becoming, essentially, a fetish object commodified by the museum system.

Mary Kelly, Griselda Pollock, Sandy Flitterman and Judith Barry and others articulated this prominent mode of 1980s art history and criticism that rejected the representation of the female body in/as art in order for the spectator to apprehend the illusionary and ideological functions of representation.<sup>8</sup> This resulted in several critical dismissals of women's body art and performance. The treatment of Hanna Wilke's early work is a prominent example. Accusations of narcissism read certain female body art performances as inchoate critiques of the structure of gender oppression. The anti-essentialist program that avoided representing the female body was visible in the work of Barbara Kruger and Mary Kelly.<sup>9</sup>

Meanwhile struggles occurred around publicly representing the battered woman in ways we currently take for granted. Today images of battered women are part of post-modern affective politics of the city; such images organize a variety of enclosed public spaces, creating official settings of moral decision-making and the contemplation of the same – what critical geographer Nigel Thrift has called “spatialities of feeling”.<sup>10</sup> The U.S. courtroom is one form of Thrift's concept.<sup>11</sup> Recent scholarship on courtrooms has focused on the role of cameras and photography in the aesthetics of legal adjudication. The courtroom is a crucial archive of American domestic photography. Images of battered women function in the courtroom as a shadow archive because they problematize the history of sentimental and idealizing photography of the domestic sphere, offering instead a troubling and even gruesome view of domestic relations. They, however, differ from nineteenth-century images of domesticity in that primarily institutions, rather than private individuals, jealously cling to their meanings and movements. In this sense, photography of battered women functions within the shadow archive, while also participating in “a new age intent on producing various kinds of captivity through the cultivation of *atmosphere* or *presence* or *touch*”.<sup>12</sup>

My argument is that in Mendieta, Ferrato, and Goldin images marked pathways to the emergence of the genre of photography of battered women that are constitutive of our current affective politics and reasoning around domestic violence. I employ

<sup>8</sup> See Griselda Pollock, “Screening the Seventies: Sexuality and Representation in Feminist Practice – A Brechtian Perspective”, *Vision and Difference: Femininity and the Histories of Art* (New York and London: Routledge, 1988); Judith Barry and Sandy Flitterman, “Textual Strategies: The Politics of Art-Marking”, *Screen*, 21.2 (1980), 35-48; Jane Roland Martin, “Methodological Essentialism, False Difference and Other Dangerous Traps”, *Signs*, 19.3 (1994), 630-657.

<sup>9</sup> For a comprehensive survey of women's art from the 1970s through the 1990s, see Lucy Lippard, *The Pink Glass Swan: Selected Feminist Essays on Art* (New York: The New Press, 1995). Lippard's commentary on Suzanne Lacy's “Auto: On the Edge of Time” is relevant to artistic production around domestic violence.

<sup>10</sup> Nigel Thrift, *Non-Representational Theory: Space, Politics, Affect* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

<sup>11</sup> For examples of how images of battered women are organizing medical and legal spaces, see Crystal Garcia, Sheila Suess Kennedy, and Barbara Lawrence, “Picturing Powerlessness: Digital Photography, Domestic Violence, and the Fight over Victim Autonomy”, *Hamline Journal of Public Law & Policy*, 25 (2003); Deborah White and Janice Du Mont, “Visualizing Sexual Assault: An Exploration of the Use of Optical Technologies in the Medico-legal Context”, *Social Science & Medicine*, 68 (2009), 1-8.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 23 (emphasis original).

---

Derrida's concept of the "supplement" to theorize the effects of images of battered women that travel between the institutional milieus of art and law. As Wexler observes:

[b]ecause of what Sekula calls the 'shadow archive' is inseparable from the general archive, there are urgent questions to pose about the work of nineteenth-century white women portrait photographers. We need to know why and how each of these women made the *particular* portrait images she made and what kind of cultural consolidation her vision underwrote in the social formation to which they were addressed and into which they were accepted.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 182.

I would argue the same is true of twentieth-century women's photography in the Anglo-American tradition.

### Ethical Challenges to Capturing Battered Women on Camera in Mendieta, Ferrato and Goldin

In addition to criticism of 1980s feminist art history debates, the commonalities between autobiography and photography are germane to my discussion of the exiled images by Mendieta, Ferrato and Goldin. Their photography each involved iterations of self-portraiture; thus, their images highlight the writerly aspect of autobiography and photography. Theater professor Deirdre Heddon refers to autobiography as "the graphed auto".<sup>14</sup> Autobiography and photography both share the root, *graphē*, which usually concerns the written text. Philosophy professor Patrick Maynard has used "marking" to characterize the work of photography as a technology that reveals and conceals surfaces.<sup>15</sup> Autobiography has a similar technical function of revealing and concealing the self, one that also tracks the representational and indexical elements of the photograph. As English professor Timothy Dow Adams notes, "[t]ranscription could apply as well to the way autobiography emphasizes the existence of its author, often including within the text examples of the autobiographical act."<sup>16</sup> The self-portrait is an example of the autobiographical act. As I read the self-portraits of Mendieta, Ferrato and Goldin, the truth and fiction, art and evidence marked by their images, is the figure of the battered woman.

<sup>14</sup> Deirdre Heddon, *Autobiography and Performance* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), 11.

<sup>15</sup> Patrick Maynard, *The Engine of Visualization: Thinking through Photographs* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 20. See also Timothy Dow Adams, *Light Writing, Life Writing* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2000), 225.

<sup>16</sup> Adams, *Light Writing, Life Writing*, 21.

Autobiography is a coproduction between photographers and photographed. The work of Ana Mendieta, Donna Ferrato and Nan Goldin each performs autobiographical narratives across several visual media forms: photographs, solo performances, diaries and slide shows. As 'proto' photographers of battered women, they produce, with their images, autobiographical collaborations. Photographs and text constitute autobiographical acts in which photographer and battered woman collaborate. Often, the photographer and the photographed are the same person. In Mendieta, Ferrato and Goldin self-portraits thus emerge as social representations of battered women and the real law-enforcement agents who acquire evidence from them. Deirdre Heddon aptly specifies the relationship between autobiographical act and photography: "[t]he lived experience that pertains to a certain identity position



---

provides the foundation for the autobiographical act, but at the same time that foundation is strategically (and politically) unsettled *through* the autobiographical act.”<sup>17</sup>

The photographs I consider thus raise a number of problems regarding the representation of battered women, who in many ways have functioned as global feminism’s truly disadvantaged subjects. First, I argue that Mendieta’s, Ferrato’s, and Goldin’s photographs produced battered women in specific temporal moments, making the normal practice of violence against women chiefly legible through specific contexts and encounters with particular affective expressions that survive in contemporary legal practices. Their images produced the space and time in which battered women’s experience could be fixed. The challenges their photographic gazes present, then, implicate the common strategy of applying representational theories to the image. This tradition interprets the image, asking what a given photograph *means*. I suggest a non-representational approach to images of battered women that concerns what the photographs *do*, what they accomplish for battered women, for the courts, and for us, spectators.

Second, the creation of each of the photographs I discuss generates questions about the nature of complicity, and about what constitutes complicity in violence against women in a political moment organized by U.S. neoliberal discourses of self-help and the reinvigoration of the individual through privatization. Theft, aggression, and performances of appropriation have characterized the photographer as a parasite following his or her subjects over time and poaching images from the ‘hosts’ life witnessed behind-camera.<sup>18</sup> It was Susan Sontag who pinpointed the complicity of the photographic process – photography’s maintenance of the status quo. In contrast, within the embedded photography of Ferrato, Mendieta and Goldin, the question of complicity in domestic violence emerged in different ways.

Ana Mendieta’s *Tableaux of Violence* refers to a series of mostly untitled actions performed indoors, on city streets and green spaces.<sup>19</sup> The *Tableaux* installations disclosed a tension between two poles about the specularly of blood, one in which blood is figured as purely instrumental, a liberating primal force of vitality and another view in which blood is a means of repression and control through its confirmation of mortality.<sup>20</sup> Mendieta’s photographed performance series mimicked the *mise en scène* of police forensic investigation descriptions to the press of the murder of nursing student Sara Ann Otten. Mendieta reproduced the look of law’s surveillance of women’s bodies as a photographed work product that could masquerade as art object. Her work thus posed questions about the perception of violence in everyday settings, and about the possibilities of action taken in response to witnessing violence performed. Mendieta offered a glimpse of the psychological stakes of her endeavor in this piece when she explained, “I would really get it, because I was working with blood and my body. The men were into conceptual art and doing things that were very clean.”<sup>21</sup> What punishment did Mendieta think she might bear and from whom in the aftermath of “Untitled (*Rape Scene*)” – part of the *Tableaux of Violence*? I would argue that the contours of

<sup>17</sup> Heddon, *Autobiography and Performance*, 13.

<sup>18</sup> Another example of the stakes of parasitism and photography, and the ethics of enunciating the subject of human rights, might be the case of South African photojournalist and “Bang-Bang Club” member Kevin Carter, who photographed a vulture surveilling a severely emaciated Sudanese girl mid-crawl. Carter left the scene after taking the image.

<sup>19</sup> I borrow the series name from art historian and critic Julia Herzberg who addresses the series of performances as a collection similar to the *Siluetas* title. Performances lacking an official organizing title or theme are a testament to the critical preoccupation that has made legible and accessible the *Siluetas* series.

<sup>20</sup> Curator and author James Bradburne has argued that the specularly of blood includes the visualization of its magical qualities and its rational scientific examination. See his *Blood: Art, Power, Politics, and Pathology* (Munich, Germany: Prestel, 2002).

<sup>21</sup> Guy Brett, “One Energy”, in Olga Viso, ed., *Ana Mendieta: Earth Body Sculpture and Performance 1972-1985* (Washington, D.C.: Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution; Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz Publishers, 2004), 181-202. See also William Wilson, “Haunting Works From Cuban Exile Mendieta”, *Los Angeles Times*, February 18, 1998.

---

<sup>22</sup> Brett, "One Energy", 181-202; see also William Wilson, "Haunting Works From Cuban Exile Mendieta", *Los Angeles Times*, February 18, 1998.

<sup>23</sup> Though commissioned by *Playboy*, Ferrato's assignment to document libertine marital relations oddly fits within the genre of family portraiture, whose sentimentalism was popularized in the nineteenth century. *Playboy's* Japanese edition was created in 1975, and specialized in erotic images of national celebrities.

<sup>24</sup> Jay Prosser, *Light in the Dark Room: Photography and Loss* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2004), 163. Prosser is Reader in the Humanities at the University of Leeds. His work on the body in representation intersects autobiography and photography studies; thus I refer to him here as a theorist of body narrative.

<sup>25</sup> For Derrida, the supplement may be interpreted in different ways; it is ultimately undecidable and ambiguous. See Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976).

Mendieta's words were shaped by relations of affiliation among her fellow artists on one hand and the possibility of abjecting those relationships on the other by staging her dead bloodied body. Her words spoke to the fragility of the female body artist and the relationships of affinity that wrest her work from exile, creating an opening for many valences of survival. Mendieta risked something of herself in the *Tableaux of Violence* series that the *Siluetas* would only ghost in comparison.<sup>22</sup>

Donna Ferrato's photography of domestic violence recalls another series of images in exile, photographed a decade after Mendieta's *Tableaux of Violence*. Ferrato's images were taken while she was on a photojournalism assignment to research and record on camera an example of the libertine for a photo-essay for Japanese *Playboy* magazine.<sup>23</sup> Instead, Ferrato's research devolved into witnessing the cyclical contours of domestic abuse in a family – Garth and Lisa, and their five children living in New Jersey. Ferrato produced a primal scene of domestic abuse in which Ferrato herself is captured in a mirror reflecting Garth hitting Lisa. It is an ideal image of domestic abuse as we see a by-stander both witnessing and capturing the event of violence on camera. The moment rendered in this image speaks to the heart of our contemporary desire and institutional contestation over images of battered women; it is the ideal image of the moment of violent contact that never (or, rarely) circulates in court. Ferrato's photography was a crucial, though largely ignored, instantiation of our desire for images of battered women as proof.

Ferrato's images were acquired through being embedded in Garth and Lisa's home. The resulting images of the couple's violent relationship were labeled obscene by Ferrato's publishers who fired her over the work. Ferrato subsequently published *Living with the Enemy*, a collection of diverse images of battered women that I argue functions as a palinode, an ode in reverse, to her documentary interaction with Garth and Lisa. Here, I draw on the concept of the "palinode" as elaborated by theorist of body narrative Jay Prosser:

The palinode is a doubling back, a return to the ode. Yet in recovering what the ode left out the palinode makes as its subject what should have been in the first. Indeed it goes back before the original. The palinode is take two but more authentic than take one. And as a return the palinode creates a new kind of text.<sup>24</sup>

Or, in the language of Derrida, the palinode is a *supplement*, an assuredly undecidable one by virtue of its sheer existence.<sup>25</sup>

Nan Goldin's portrait produced yet another aspect of battered women's temporality. Goldin's image of herself after being beaten prefigures the aesthetic conventions of state marketing campaigns for battered women's support services. Goldin's image offers another dangerous supplement concerning the reality of domestic violence. Through her self-portrait image, *Nan One Month After Being Beaten*, Goldin produces herself within battered woman's temporality – the stress between clock time and biological time that transforms the battered woman's image into criminal evidence upon its display. Yet, she also wears heavy cosmetics that are juxtaposed against her black eye. Goldin's explicit use of cosmetics creates

---

a compression between violence against women and female masquerade. *Nan One Month After Being Beaten* enacts *aletheia*,<sup>26</sup> the absence of forgetting, while, at the same time, suggesting a path for battered women to move past traumatic experience through masquerade – the very processes associated with women’s complicity and response to oppression. The self-portrait further complicates the relationship between complicity, witnessing, and survival, asking that feminists return to the role of photographic evidence in the current adjudication of gender violence.

### Ana Mendieta: *Tableaux of Violence*

The *Tableaux*, executed in 1973, simulate police forensics in order to experiment with the casual viewer’s ability to read visual evidence of violence occurring in public. Mendieta used red paint and animal blood in the *Tableaux of Violence* series to stage her body around city spaces as a homicide victim. Such documentation included photographs of bystander’s reactions to the presence of blood in public settings.

“Untitled (*Rape Scene*)”, in particular, emphasized the intertext, exploring the relationship between official police knowledge, Mendieta’s body art performance, and the subsequent production of images by her colleague-spectators.



Fig.1: Ana Mendieta, *Untitled (Rape Scene)*. Still from *Tableaux of Violence*. Courtesy of Mendieta Estate

<sup>26</sup> On the role of *aletheia* in Nan Goldin’s photography, see Nan Goldin and Eric Mézil, *Love Streams* (Paris: Galerie Yvon Lambert, 1997). However, for a systematic elaboration of the concept, see Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany: State University of New York: [1927] 1996).

The photographs, which are the supplement of the performance, cannot claim truth. However, the repetition of the violent consumption of the female body, contributes to the repertoire of such images Lacan defined as the screen. For Lacan, the screen is the space of political contestation.<sup>27</sup> As Jones and others argued, dominant art history and criticism discourse in the 1980s focused on production, leaving explorations of subjectivity, the politics of identity, undertheorized. Mendieta brings both issues – subjectivity and production – to bear in the *Tableaux of Violence* of which “Untitled (*Rape Scene*)” makes the most direct link between violence and the private sphere.

<sup>27</sup> See Jacques Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1987).



---

<sup>28</sup> Patrick Anderson, *So Much Wasted: Hunger, Performance and the Morbidity of Resistance* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 93.

<sup>29</sup> See John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988); Sandra S. Phillips, Mark Haworth-Booth and Carol Squires, *Police Pictures: The Photograph as Evidence* (San Francisco, California: San Francisco Museum of Art, Chronicle Books, 1997). Jonathan Finn, *Capturing the Criminal Image: From Mug Shot to Surveillance Society* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Herzberg, in Viso, ed., *Ana Mendieta*, 256, n. 60.

Performance theorist Patrick Anderson argues that body art, though explicitly designated as aesthetic production, exceeds that designation as performance.<sup>28</sup> Mendieta's staging of the abused woman who is consumed through violence, appears as a recorded crime scene, a counter-part to the criminal mug shot whose iconic status emerged during the nineteenth century. Several scholars have traced modern developments of representing criminals through police photography.<sup>29</sup> *Tableaux of Violence* is an important counter-point to literature on police photography and surveillance because it emphasizes the subjectivity of the attacked.<sup>30</sup>

Mendieta's installation lasted approximately one hour. Her pose in the staged scene conformed to how the crime was reported in the press. Invited to her apartment, Mendieta's colleagues found her door ajar. In an exploration of the durational aspects of performance, the artist's prone, half naked and bloodied body produced a most interesting response from her audience: the scene was photographed, and Mendieta's colleague-guests began to discuss the piece; these events resonate with police and forensic teams arriving at a murder scene to evaluate material evidence. Mendieta staged the abused woman's body using her own. The rehearsal, in her home of the violent struggles of an in-home attack and murder, has multiple affective valences that become a study of women's subjectivity produced through violence. Her work in *Rape Performance* was unannounced (as were a few others of the *Tableaux* series), and this element contributed to the realization of the 'live' through physical endurance. Herzberg notes that there is no evidence that these works were seen by anyone.<sup>31</sup> In this way, the photography of Mendieta's body art installations, the supplement of the supplement, masquerades as police evidence. Simulation troubles the way in which evidence structures the adjudication of domestic violence. The documentary photography of the *Tableaux* explores subjectivity *and the conditions of production* of the art object, critical approaches at odds with each other in art critical discourses of the 1980s and 1990s.

### Donna Ferrato: *Living with the Enemy*

<sup>32</sup> See Carol Squires, *Body at Risk: Photography of Disorder, Illness and Healing* (New York: International Center of Photography; Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Ken Light, *Witness in Our Time: Working Lives of Documentary Photographers* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2000); Christian Caujolle and Mary Panzer, *Things as They Are: Photojournalism in Context Since 1955* (London: World Press Photo, 2005).

Ferrato's images, for their part, have few interlocutors and respondents.<sup>32</sup> The few commentaries on her work address Ferrato's subsequent book, *Living with the Enemy*, released a decade after her unpublished magazine piece with Garth and Lisa. The photographs – which pushed the limits of research, performance and ethnography – survive in this book of documentary photographs of battered women's lives. As a palinode, Ferrato's images perform the ambiguity of the supplement through a double movement, highlighted by Jay Prosser: an author returns to the original not to retract or reject the first text, but rather to confirm a loss in the original that the new second text helps teach. *Living with the Enemy* is a representation of Ferrato's learning. As such it too becomes available for interpretation, for a litany of returns.

In 1993, an image that appears in *Living with the Enemy* was used by Eva Rivera Castro in a group show called "The Subject Rape" at the Whitney Museum of



Fig. 2: Donna Ferrato, still from *Living with the Enemy*. Courtesy of the artist



Fig. 3: Donna Ferrato, still from *Living with the Enemy*. Courtesy of the artist

American Art. The image of a boy screaming at his father, as he is being arrested for beating the child's mother, was incorporated into a collage by Castro, who did not credit Ferrato's copyrighted image. Castro's appropriation raises interesting questions not only about copyright in the area of feminist photography, but also about the ethics of representation of battered women – an issue Ferrato was clearly intimately aware of. Discussing the "The Subject of Rape" collage, Ferrato pointed out that "[t]hese women [photographed for *Living with the Enemy*] agreed to release their photographs because they knew how the photographs were going to be used ... they didn't know that the images were going to wind up on a piece of art in the Whitney Museum in a show about rape."<sup>33</sup> Interestingly, Ferrato's editor also observes that the women in *Living with the Enemy* are described as victims of domestic abuse, not rape. Castro's incorporation of the images into

<sup>33</sup> William Grimes, "A Question of Ownership of Images", *The New York Times*, Friday August 20, 1993.

---

a show about rape asks us to ponder domestic violence in terms of erotics, a set of affective flows that open out to a variety of gestures and relations of force. Her appropriation of Ferrato's images suggests the ways in which Ferrato's gaze codified the ideal 'look' of domestic abuse and the battered woman, in particular.

### Nan Goldin: *Nan One Month After Being Beaten*

The self-portrait photograph, queer theorist Akiko Shimizu argues, is a mode through which identity may survive and/or be subversive.<sup>34</sup> Goldin's self-portrait as a victim of violence is an instance in which battered women's subjectivity is given a space to survive through the portrait image. The self-portrait was taken in 1984, just two years after Ferrato's chronicles of Garth and Lisa.<sup>35</sup> Goldin's self-portrait is a close-up depicting two black eyes she received from her boyfriend. The white of one eye is filled with blood and the intensity of the red is matched by Goldin's application of radiant lipstick. The viewer is asked to consider the truth of violence against women – the privacy of wounds received – against the public ruse of cosmetics. The lipstick, coupled with the swollen and bruised skin of Goldin's face, conjures the work of gender masquerade theorized by Joan Riviere where the use of cosmetics is a form of Camp enabling women to publicly neutralize their capacity for male castration.<sup>36</sup> Extending Riviere's logic, the bruises left on Goldin's face are a trace of her boyfriend, his act of violence through which he "neutralized" female aggression. In this reading, then, Goldin's application of her radiant red lipstick performs a Camp upon Camp. Both markings, the co-presence of bruise and rouge may thus be seen as battered woman's mask eternally vacillating between authenticity and artificiality, pride and shame.

*Nan One Month After Being Beaten* details the role of gender masquerade in women's biography, and the discourses of beauty and cosmetics that shape strategies of feminist art practices.<sup>37</sup> Goldin's portrait is an autobiographical attempt to reconcile her sense of self after a violent attack; the pain of which Elaine Scarry has so beautifully argued, unmakes the world of the attacked.<sup>38</sup> Goldin's self-portrait, then, reveals as it conceals, capturing the indeterminacy of her figuration as a battered woman. In this way, the image returns us to feminist critiques of the lone male artist's body that achieves transcendent coherence through action painting and performance.<sup>39</sup> Amelia Jones is an important force arguing that the radical narcissistic practices of posing by female body artists demonstrated a rejection of the possibility of any subject achieving transcendence; she illustrates how feminist artists explore the contingency of the body/self. Similarly Goldin's self-portrait brings into conceptual alignment the sexualization of women and the destruction of their corporeal integrity through violent force. The specularity of blood *in* Goldin's skin and eyes is matched by the cosmetics *on* her face. Thus, in addition to ideas about the body in performance and the rhetoric of the pose, interpretive frames discussed at length by Jones, Nan Goldin's self-portrait incites a reading of the skin's surface, the irregularities of its compromised tissues, and judgments

<sup>34</sup> Akiko Shimizu, *Lying Bodies: Survival and Subversion in the Field of Vision* (New York & Washington: Peter Lang, 2008).

<sup>35</sup> Another version of the image appears in Goldin's 1992 exhibition, entitled *Désordres*, at Galerie Nationale du Jeu de Paume.

<sup>36</sup> Joan Riviere, "Womanliness as a Masquerade", in Victor Burgin, James Donald and Cora Kaplan, eds., *Formations of Fantasy* (London and New York: Methuen, 1986), 35-44

<sup>37</sup> *Nan One Month after Being Beaten* is submerged by discussions emphasizing the visual culture of punk and other lifestyles that are coded as different or counter-cultural. I read a single self-portrait by Nan Goldin in order to shift her work in this self-portrait from critical exile.

<sup>38</sup> Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

<sup>39</sup> See Amelia Jones, *Body Art: Performing the Subject*. In particular, Jones discusses the criticism of Harold Rosenberg and Hans Namuth's photography of Jackson Pollock to develop her point about the "Pollockian Performative."

---

about battered women's identity. The image proposes a close reading or perusal of the flesh as bare life that mimics the now common practice of juries using photographic evidence to adjudicate domestic assault court cases. Here Goldin's self-portrait survives – supplements – in the form of visual evidence of domestic violence, the shadow archive of all women's representation in the visual arts.

## Conclusion

Exiled from critical inquiry and reproduction, art historians, cultural critics and legal theorists alike have not lingered long upon these images of Nan Goldin, Donna Ferrato, and Ana Mendieta. The work of these women, though largely ignored, has nonetheless played a crucial role in the politicization of domestic violence and the visualization of battered women. Formulated as a problem of institutional milieu, we see in Mendieta's exiled images a critical emphasis placed on her most publicized work – the *Siluetas* series – and not the 'juvenilia' she produced in art school – the *Tableaux of Violence*, discussed in this essay. Ferrato, for her part, was a photojournalist whose work did not occupy the space of art history during the 1980s. Finally, Goldin's self-portrait photography, emerging during the 1990s, was subsumed in the visual politics of the punk movement. Critical writing on feminist art practices fosters a capacity within those art objects to travel in alternative institutional milieus; the result is survival stored as exile's potential energy.

Mendieta, Ferrato and Goldin each politicized the question of violence against women by producing images of domestic abuse outside official networks of police investigation. Art curator and media theorist Ariella Azoulay has proposed that the exchange of traumatic images calls into being a "citizenry of photography" who obligate themselves through the demands of a "civil contract" to bear witness to violence, to discuss the Realpolitik they capture even if that is all one can immediately do.<sup>40</sup> For Azoulay, the controlled exclusivity with which state corporate media circulates war and crime scene photography constitutes a hegemonic framing of the political. The untitled art installation of Ana Mendieta, suppressed photojournalism of Donna Ferrato, and under-theorized self-portraiture of Nan Goldin offered a counter-hegemonic framing of state representations of domestic violence. The photographs enact Jane Blocker's concept of *seeing* witness, drawing our attention to the mediatization of cultural knowledge and laws about violence against women. Through *photographie feminine* these women see witness, light-writing their bodies into the image of abused women. In this way, their portraits encourage us to ask how photographic evidence negotiates controversy about battered women's behavior, which is often marked by resistance and refusal to participate in legal action.

<sup>40</sup> Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography* (New York: Zone Books, 2008).