

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL ART

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ABSTRACT

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Recently, there has been a strong tendency to use personal information as content in art. The term "Autobiographical Art" weaves itself into many discussions and appears to be the strongest, most common way to describe much of the work which deals with self-reflective content. This thesis attempts to compile a collection of autobiographical projects which serve as an indication of both its predominance and its format.

The paper defines an exiting area of contemporary art which has evolved out of Conceptual art. It reflects the widespread concern for personal investigation and revelation in society today. It is an art-based more on personal experiences, than on ideologies; concerned more with self-exploration, than with style and technique. This is in marked contrast to art of the sixties, which was highly formal, and generally, even consciously, impersonal.

There is no specific format for autobiographical work. While video is exceptionally appropriate, self-reflective content is used in a variety of ways. These include the use of photography, film, painting, sculpture and performance.

Dedicated . . .

To my Father . . . for his positive attitude and gentle pushes

To my Mother . . . for her faith in my abilities (and note cards from Woolworths)

. . . . To both I am grateful for my own autobiography.

To Annabel . . . for her critical wits and trusty fingers which translated my original scrawl into codable "picá"

and

To Donald . . . for his many hours of listening to my excited burble and fears about "Autobiographical art".

Also my thanks to Gary, Irene and Chantal, for their support and encouragement on this project.

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PREFACE

In the middle of last fall, (1977), I stopped working on my continual etching plate and made a diary-calendar piece for my wall at 118 St. Pierre Street, Montréal. As soon as I had finished installing it, a friend, and fellow M.F.A. inmate said, "Ah ha! . . . Autobiographical art!"

The phrase was new to me, but it seemed that a "coined" title for such an activity must mean that a substantial amount of autobiographical work was being done. I started to look around for it. To my astonishment I found several references to Autobiographical art right away.

My thesis stems from my own need to bring my art closer to my life and from my interest in its predominance elsewhere in current art. As this is a thesis on Autobiographical art, and one which grew out of changes in my own work, I will start with a brief history.

In 1972 I began as an idealistic art student thinking all one had to do was to learn how to draw in order to become an artist. I soon realized that it was just not enough. My work changed drastically each year and eventually I started working with etching and dry point on metal plates. Being a very practical person, I used my plates over and over, constantly changing the image, and pulling small editions at different stages. In time, I stopped the editioning altogether. I began to think of the plate as a constantly changing drawing surface from which I pulled daily records. I wrote on the plates; short stories about my life, bits of letters, attempts at poetry. However, with all the scratching and scraping on the plate from deleting previous information, combined with the fact that the writing came

out backwards on the prints, the words were lost and they became only visual material in the prints. Finally I made the decision to start with new plates, to make the diary calendar, and to hang a hand mirror beside the piece to allow people to read the writing. One problem: There is a big difference in consideration when you know that the words can be read! Terrified of exposure, I had to camouflage the material in some way. I made the images into puzzles and diagrams in order to protect myself.

The second calendar piece was more direct. I printed the paper with a graph, and then drew and wrote directly onto each daily card. This calendar piece was very personal, but still disguised in certain ways. I exhibited it along with a series of drawings called "Up against the wall". During one week in the M.F.A. gallery, I made seven daily drawings directly onto the wall recording information pertinent to each day. Included were portraits of my mother, my sister, Donald, and myself.

After the week was over, I opened the door and waited, perfectly prepared to just shut it again if the response was negative. That was one protection I didn't have to use. The other safeguard was that some of my audience appreciated the work only visually, and did not care to deal with its content. It became clear, right away, that this was a voyeuristic experience. For those who wished to take the time to read the pieces, and to look at them closely, everything that had happened to me in the past few months was available information. This was my trade off: if they were willing to invest the time, they were welcome to my secrets! Those who did not want to know, never knew - and dealt with the work on its formal merits.

I would like to add that I see the show as an important moment of my growth as a person and artist, and that I could not have acted otherwise at the time.

INTRODUCTION

Autobiographical art is a phenomenon of the mid-seventies within the larger category of Narrative art. I could not call it a movement; mainstream art has become too pluralistic for such restrictive labels. However, within the current "no boundaries" context in art, there appears to be a closely related group of similar "humanistic" sensibilities.

There is no contemporary artist I have found whose works exclusively with autobiographical material. I find autobiography combined with anthropological, sociological, political and ecological information, or narrative, fantasy, and fiction.

Another problem is, that having not experienced all of these pieces, first hand, I must rely on written and documented evidence, often screened by the interpretation of a critic. In this respect too, much of my research is limited to artists and works chosen for publication.

I have written the thesis in three parts. The first part is the bulk of the research. Descriptive in nature, it attempts to illustrate what Autobiographical art is, and the media and format of its expression. This "survey" is, of course, in no way complete. There is a great deal of Autobiographical art that is not making the pages of glossy art periodicals. I view this section, therefore, as a collection of autobiographical projects, by both major and minor artists, which serves as a selection of examples involving the use of personal information in art of the seventies.

Part II is more theoretical in nature. Certain questions arise when one considers autobiographical works. One is the question of authenticity, another the problem of exposing private information. It is also necessary to distinguish between Autobiographical art, and other anti-formal tendencies in contemporary art. These include self-representation in art, and non-autobiographical Narrative art.

The last part of the paper deals with the elements that I believe are the basic contributing factors to the autobiographical wave. It is my hope that the reader will find the pieces discussed interesting, and that the paper will prove useful to an understanding of this area of contemporary art.

PART I

In beginning this discussion of Autobiographical art, it seems that a good place to start is to try to come up with a concept of this activity. It may be defined this way: a conscious effort to record through art, the process of uncovering or revealing, who one is (or would like to be) to the viewer and to oneself. It must immediately be distinguished from the fact that all art is, in part, autobiographical; indeed a lifetime of work by an artist constitutes an autobiographical statement of a sort. However, this is not a conscious move by the artist towards personal investigation, nor is it part of this current phenomenon.

The art which I am trying to pinpoint is the result of a deliberate autobiographical statement, involving the use of stories, memories, or records of daily life comprising a visual biography. The interest in the self is widespread in the 1970s, and it is natural that it should appear in the visual arts as well. In Peter Frank's article called "Auto-Art: Self-Indulgent? And How!" he explains:

Current art activity is dominated not by the affirmation of well-developed ideas codified into movements, but by the exploration of properties and possibilities - the properties and possibilities of material, of physical activity, of entertainment, of imagery and, significantly, of the factors determining one's own individual existence.¹

¹Peter Frank, "Auto-Art: Self-Indulgent? And How!", Art News (September 1976), p. 43.

Carl Jung said ". . . the sole purpose of human existence is to kindle a light in the darkness of mere being."¹ It would seem that some humans become artists in order to search actively for something "more". It stands to reason that, in this search for meaning, an artist will occasionally need to turn inward, and to use him or herself as the subject of artistic investigation. And so self-portraits and personal works pop up now and again in an artist's life. This "pendulum" effect happens on a personal basis, but it also happens on a sociological one. Writer Malcolm Cowley said "Society . . . alternates between looking inward and looking outward. The pendulum will eventually swing outward."²

Autobiographical art is a manifestation of this inward swing in society today. The pendulum theory is one answer to the questions posed by Lucy Lippard.³

Why are so many artists, especially conceptual and performance artists, dealing with narrative and autobiographical material? . . . Why are others dealing with nostalgia for the distant past, archeological imagery? And others with fetishes, absurdity, once-removed religious content?"⁴

Though she asks these questions, she herself has outspokenly stated her ideas to why.

The turn of conceptual art toward behaviorism and narrative about 1970 coincided with the entrance of more women into its ranks, and with the turn of women's minds toward questions of identity raised

¹C.G. Jung, Memories, Dreams, Reflections (New York: Vintage Books, 1961), quoted by Calvin S. Hall and Vernon J. Nordby, A Primer of Jungian Psychology (New York: Mentor Books, 1973), p.30.

²"Why It's Called The 'Me' Generation", U.S. News and World Report (March 27, 1978), p.40.

³Lucy Lippard is a well known American art critic and strong supporter of the women's movement.

⁴Lucy Lippard, "One", Studio International (September 1973), p. 102.

by the feminist movement; What am I? What Do I Want to Be? I Can Be Anything I Like but First I Have to Know What I Have Been and What I Am.¹

While the content in much of contemporary women's art is personal and autobiographical, and while it is undisputed that many women use a great deal of information from their experience, it would be false to believe that it is only women who make Autobiographical art. It would likewise be a mistake to hold that all women artists deal with this content in their work.

Still, to examine who is doing Autobiographical art, it seems to be found mostly among younger, more experimental artists, who seem to be willing to drop the formal ideologies, and deal primarily with the ideas. Robert Pincus-Witten says: "Burton [Scott] rightly views the use of autobiography - content without form - as only a bridge, a transition out of conceptualism."² Form takes second place in much of this art, and often serves as an effective camouflage. For example, I offer the description of some of the pieces by British artist Judy Clarke. I should say here that the works described in this thesis are not chosen because I like or dislike them, but because they illustrate different aspects of Autobiographical Art.

Judy Clarke

Judy Clarke makes "works of art out of matter that is usually hidden or thrown away. She takes dust, urine, nail parings, menstrual blood, etc., and mounts them with clinical care, creating an effect not unlike a museum cabinet. Her self-portraits consist of hairs from all parts of her body,

¹Lucy Lippard, From The Center: Feminist Essays on Women's Art (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co. Inc., 1976), p. 102.

²Robert Pincus-Witten, "Scott Burton: Conceptual Performance as Sculpture", Arts Magazine (September 1976), p. 114.

and fluids from her nine orifices."¹ She herself explains the balance between her use of content and form.

... One of the reasons it is put out in an ordered way is that it is so dangerous that if it was out of control it would be totally unacceptable. It would be obscene and revolting, and no body would look at it. But because it is laid out so carefully, it creates a dualism between unacceptability and acceptability. That is one of the things that a lot of people commented on. They said, "It's so beautiful but Oh! isn't it awful!" [It is the] ... dualism between the intensely personal material ... your own menstrual blood, dust from your own home, etc., and the cold, detached, clinical way you lay it out."²

Clarke's work is similar to a lot of women's art being done, and I have chosen her work to represent that variety of autobiographical work, because of the availability of her own statements. The camouflage through presentation is obviously calculated so that her work can reach an audience, no matter how unconventional, unacceptable the content. As with most autobiographical pieces, she is playing with the voyeurism in the audience. "They are obsessed with the image of me doing it - particularly the semen pieces (semen stained tissues arranged in wood and glass boxes). It's as if people were more obsessed with the artist mixing the colors than the actual painting ..."³ All art is a three-point system; a relationship between the artist and the work, and between the work and the audience. Lucy Lippard believes it is "not possible to make important or even communicable art without some strong sense of source on one hand, and some strong sense of audience and communication on the other."⁴

¹R. Parker. "Bodyworks", Spare Rib (U.K.) (May 1974), p. 37.

²Parker, (1974), p. 37.

³Parker, (1974), p. 38.

⁴Lucy Lippard, From the Center, (1976), p. 148.

Vito Acconci

It seems that in Autobiographical art, voyeurism is a major element in the relationship between the artist and the audience. It is part of the appeal and also part of the revulsion to personal works. Take, for example, the notorious gallery piece by Vito Acconci called Seed Bed (1972), where the artist was "masturbating under a closed wooden ramp while fantasizing out loud (his mumblings broadcast by a sound hook-up) about visitors to the exhibition."¹

This kind of voyeurism borders on a feeling of intrusion into a private space, where the viewer is a witness to a very private act. Acconci further implicated his audience through his broadcast fantasies because he feels that the "I-ME-YOU-"² artist-meets-viewer (whether revealing oneself to the viewer, or hiding oneself from the viewer) is an important dynamic of his strategy. As Alan Sondheim points out, "Acconci's work is, for the most part, concerned with presence, with the residue of the self in a previously neutral space."³

Acconci first started using the "I" when he changed "from writing to art space in 1969 . . . I looked for a ground that would be an alternative to the page - so why not use me and any ground that serves at the time . . . I focused on myself, a person with a kind of history - an autobiography - to introduce myself to the viewer."⁴

¹ Rose Skoggard, "Vito Acconci: Stars and Stripes", Art in America (November/December 1976), p. 92.

² Presentation of the Self: Autobiography in Art Today (Seminar), College Art Association Conference, New York City, January 1978.

³ Alan Sondheim, Individuals: Post-Movement Art in America (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co. Inc., 1977), p. XI.

⁴ Presentation of The Self, C.A.A. Conference, New York, 1978.

It is difficult to say whether or not Acconci is a clear example of an Autobiographical artist. If one of the elements of Autobiographical art is self-investigation, then he surely qualifies. But there is a fine line between self-investigation and the self-representation of most Body art.

Vito Acconci had explained that when he puts a match to his chest, burning off the hair, he is acting in a performance that produces "reflexive information (turning in on myself -- turning on myself)". He sees performance as "a scheme for splitting oneself in two, with one self reacting to the inclinations of the other". For Acconci, the other self seems to belong to the opposite sex. One of his body acts consists of "extending the sex change (removing my penis) hiding it between my legs".¹

An excerpt in Acconci's own words describes a piece he did in Munchengladbach, Germany. It gives us further information about this self-reflexive behaviour. It is called Trappings, (one hour; October 14, 1971).

A closet space, inside a warehouse - toys, shawls, foam, splinters of wood (the closet space is crowded with color: something to sink into).

Withdrawing into the closet space - I have only myself to work with - turn in on myself - I'm dividing myself in two - turning my penis into another person.

I can address my penis here, wrap it in shawls, put on doll's clothes (I can see my penis as separate from the rest of my body) - the space is scaled to it: toy houses, toy animals - it functions side by side with them - I can throw myself into its world: my body's draped with color, smoothness.

I'm talking to it - my words are addressed to me (I have to believe in the terms I've set up) - my words are addressed to the penis (it has a life of its own, it's far enough away for me to talk to it).

I've divided myself in order to work myself back into a unity - I can act on, with myself while becoming someone else.

A viewer passed by the closet space - the closet is low, he has to look down - a place where I can regress, make a fool of myself - I have to: he shouldn't want to have anything to do with me - I'm something to throw off, withdraw from.²

Acconci has also used video for autobiographical works. In 1973 he made a series of tapes following the end of his long intimate relationship

¹Nicolas Calas, "Bodyworks and Porpoises", Art Forum (January 1978), p. 35.

²"Vito Acconci", Avalanche (Fall 1972), p. 57.

with Kathy Dillon. They included Home Movies, Air Time, and Walk-Over. In each of the tapes, Acconci attempts to rid himself of Dillon's attachment. "He tries to combat her criticism of him, his mistreatment of her . . ." In Air Time (see illustration 2) he cruelly compares Dillon to his new lover: " . . . You want to hear about her . . . her hair is blonde . . . your hair could never be like hers . . . she has her own life . . . I'm interested in what she's thinking . . . we could never have had a relationship like this."¹

These pieces in no way give a full understanding of the works of Vito Acconci; I chose them because they deal with autobiographical investigation more than others, which deal with "Presence".

A great deal of Acconci's recent work has been concerned in part with the "presence of presence" - various modes of charging a space as if the artist were present and undergoing an emotional crisis . . .²

. . . He has come to absent himself from his installations, leaving behind his voice and/or his video-image to speak in a less and less specific way about his personal traumas and desires.³

Walter Abish

The idea of the different "selves" mentioned by Acconci is another classic theme of Autobiographical art. It is handled in several manners. Walter Abish's Self-Portrait "proliferates self into selves that are "possessed" by the same individual. These selves never get the autonomy, which would lead to schizophrenia; they are literary, living in the writing."⁴ This Self-Portrait appeared in Alan Sondheim's Individuals.

¹ Ira Schneider, Beryl Korot, and Mary Lucier, Video Art: An Anthology (New York: Harcourt Brace Javanovich, 1976), p. 260.

² Sondheim, Individuals, (1977), p. XXI.

³ Frank, "Auto-Art", (1976), p. 47.

⁴ Sondheim, Individuals, (1977), p. XXI.

Each day, each hour, passports, marriage licenses, bank books, credit cards authenticate the existence of another "I", although with what amounts to great circumspection the "I" is never referred to in any of these documents that function as signifiers, attributing to each individual a gender, a first and last name, occasionally an initial for a middle name, as well as a name for each parent, a place of residence, an occupation, also political affiliation, credit rating, criminal convictions, if any, race, religion, education and age. Frequently the "I" scrutinizes these joyless documents for hours, boxed in and burdened by a proof that is at one and the and the same time remote and intolerably near.

An individual will use language to give shape to his "I"

A common investigation of the different selves is found in the study of "androgyny". It has been particularly explored in the work of European Body artists such as the Swiss, Urs Lüthi, "(Where photo self-portraits sing an inventive paean to transvestism or transexualism)"² and Katherina Sieverding in Dusseldorf, who has made photographs on "Aspects of Transvestism".

According to John Walker "The emergence of 'Body-Art' coincided with a wide-spread cultural interest in facial expression and in bodily gestures and attitudes, especially among psychologists."³ Lucy Lippard qualifies the expression.

Early on, the term body art was used too loosely, like all art labels, and it has since been applied to all performance art and autobiographical art rather than just to that art that focuses upon the body or body parts - usually the artist's own body, but at times especially in men's work, other bodies, envisioned as extensions of the artist him/herself.⁴

¹Sondheim, Individuals, (1977), p. I.

²Max Kosloff, "Pygmalion Reversed", Art Forum (November 1975), p. 37.

³John A. Walker, Art Since Pop (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1975), p. 53.

⁴Lippard, From The Center, (1976), p. 12.

Eleanor Antin

In the autobiographical vein, the artist not only depicts him/herself as a woman/man, but also investigates the role of being the other sex. In Eleanor Antin's work, she has adopted four different personae, two of them male. Antin states that "As an artist attracted to working with my own skin, I also need a mythological machine; but one capable of calling up and defining my self". She finally "settled upon a quadripolar system, sort of a magnetic field of four polar charged images" - the Ballerina; the King, the Black Movie Star, and the Nurse.¹

Antin uses video, still photography, painting, drawing, writing and performing "as mediums between me and myself so we can talk to each other."² She uses video as an "interrogation medium" as explained here in creating The King.

(This is) a videotape made with the intention of transforming myself into a man by adding hair to my face. But what man? The monitor gave back to me a succession of alternative images, other and not quite the same as my original expectations . . . each of which I tentatively accepted, refined, held in abeyance, rejected, to finally accept the me I found most appropriate to my facial structure and satisfying to my aspirations . . . The tape offered me a male role, a self, the king . . . Without the videotape I would never have known he was there and, in turn, his presence on tape led me to find him in me.³

With her four personae, Antin "has been creating living self-portraits that are autobiographical fictions, turning art into the documentation of intimate personal obsession . . ." ⁴ Through the performances, her

¹Eleanor Antin, "A Dialogue with a Medium", Art Rite (Autumn 1974), p. 23.

²Elizabeth Baker, "Report from Kassel: Documenta VI" Art in America (September/October 1977), p. 23.

³E. Antin, (1974), p. 24.

⁴Kim Levin, "Eleanor Antin (review)", Arts Magazine (March 1977), p. 19.

characters began to lead their own lives. "Autobiography in its fundamental sense" says Antin, "is the self getting a grip on itself . . ." ¹ For the personage of the nurse in a piece called Angel of Mercy Antin uses various props. (See illustration 6).

[Antin] appeared on stage dressed as Eleanor Nightingale, together with forty-two other members of the cast, life size - or almost so - cut-out painted figures mounted on rollers for rapid arrangement representing the characters in her saga of Victorian England and the Crimean war. Antin's movements and her "dialogue" talking to both as herself (a nurse), and, in altered voice on behalf of her masonite companions, constitute an amazingly elegant and polished presentation. ²

As well as the performance, she "gives us almost indisputable photographic evidence: a collection of old album photos, another of the Crimean war photos, 'These pictures are proof that I was there'". ³ Kim Levin describes the images.

The photographs are enchanting, the Series of 25 prewar photos, speckled with sunlight and sprinkled with Victorian frivolities, show nurse Eleanor's tranquil life - picknicking, playing croquet or blindman's bluff - before she found her vocation. The 40 war photos depict tender and tragic moments of Nurse Eleanor's life in the army camp - the aftermath of battle, a letter from home, the execution of a deserter . . . The photographs reproduce the styles, the moods, even the flaws of early photography, with slow exposures and fine silvery detail, with irregularities, faded tone, and sentimental titles . . . [they] are totally convincing in their pretense of being 19th century photographs. ⁴

As well as separate performances and videotapes of the four, Antin created an autobiographical piece in 1974 called Eleanor 1954. She explains the work as an attempt to "confront my four selves, trying to reach a real

¹Lippard, From The Center, (1976), p. 105.

²Moira Roth, "Toward a History of California Performance: Part II", Arts Magazine (June 1978), p. 122.

³Levin, "Antin", (1977), p. 19.

⁴Levin, "Antin", (1977), p. 19.

self!"¹ In this piece she used videotape "to show stills of her personae as well as glamorous cheesecake poses of herself as an aspiring young actress (authentic photographs of Antin in 1954) while in narration Antin shifted back and forth between her past and present selves, her attitude moving from mockery to analysis to passion toward her younger self."²

In an interview with Kim Levin, Antin said "A biography is an invention, not to tell a lie, but to set up a psychological machine." Levin himself goes on to say: "Past and present, life and art, continually overlap, drawing strength from discrepancies between history and fiction, fiction and background and Pirandellian confusions between reality and role, object and subject, image and self."³

Antin feels that "autobiography has a claim to truth, but Autobiographical art does not"⁴ When I talked with her at the College Art Association Conference (New York, 1978), she said she returned to autobiographical material out of desperation. "I had finished the 100 Boots and didn't want to remain a foot fetish! It was very difficult to know where to go . . . so I went back to my own life. I can't believe how far I can go into it."

One of the pieces she is most known for was Carving: A Traditional Sculpture. (See illustration 5). In it she "documented a ten-pound weight loss over thirty-six days with one hundred and forty-four nude photographs".

¹Roth, "California Performance: Part II", (1978), p. 122.

²Roth, "California Performance: Part II", (1978), p. 122.

³Levin, "Antin", (1977), p. 19.

⁴Towards Post-Modernist Form (Seminar), College Art Association Conference, New York City, January 1978.

Lucy Lippard said: "she peeled away the flesh in search of her own Michelangelesque core."¹

Irene Segalove

Irene Segalove is another artist who uses personages, but she does it for identity change rather than as the complex self. Her Close, But No Cigar is a "four couplet" work using doctored photographs. It "reveals the artist miming straightfaced the pose and costume (or no costume) of, respectively, Louis Deguerre, Isaac Newton, Joan of Arc, and a Barbie-doll".²

It is difficult to determine whether or not this is autobiographical in the way that Eleanor Antin's work is. It is dressing up, photographing, and doctoring the photograph to make an interesting set of images. One cannot immediately tell if it involves any pretense of self-investigation.

Nancy Kitchel, Laurie Anderson

Another artist who has worked with identity is Nancy Kitchel. Identity Piece is a series of photographs showing "gestures and mannerisms she had inherited from her 'rebel grandmother'". (See illustration 7). These pieces prompted Kitchel "to think that the mental processes of one person are available to another through physical clues and can be at least partially understood through re-enactments or re-creation of . . . physical attributes."³

Kitchel is a complex artist who has been dealing with many areas related to autobiography and memory. Obviously, memory is a natural element in autobiography, although most artists steer away from nostalgic reminiscences. One who does not is Laurie Anderson, a performance artist in

¹Lippard, From The Center, (1976), p. 105.

²Nancy Marmer, "Autobiographical Fantasies", Art Forum (April 1976), p. 77.

³Lippard, From The Center, (1976), p. 107.

her late twenties, living in New York. In one of Alan Sondheim's lists from his book Individuals, Anderson represents "the position of the self in terms of an emblematic personal history".¹ Sondheim describes one of her performances.

In the late spring of 1974, I saw one of Anderson's performances at the Clocktower (New York City). She sat (stood, lay) in the centre of what emerged as a sphere of projected images, sounds, and props. The "content" of the performance was based on her memories of her childhood - both as she actually was and as she was supposed to be . . .

The technological ingenuity Anderson displayed was incredible. At one point, for example, she reached into her purse and pulled out a sandwich, which she proceeded to "read" as if it were a Bible. Later, she again reached into what appeared to be the same purse. Three things happened: the lights went out; a movie suddenly appeared on the ceiling (projected from the purse!); and a record began to play. She had been talking about being a dream girl - the film image was herself, swaying back and forth, dressed in a prom gown, and the record was a popular high school graduation song . . . This cross-referencing, from one material or medium to another, results in a kind of audio-visual punning that is highly characteristic of her work.²

Sondheim does not find Anderson's work to be autobiographical, because the "emphasis is not on a factual account of things, but on the use of events, situations, emblems, etc. to present successions of mental states".³ As I see it, Autobiographical art need not be factual. Especially where memory is extensively used, for it is the nature of memory that we choose to remember certain things from the past, and rearrange our personal histories in the way we wish to see them. Autobiographical art is, after all, not documentation, but selection.

I have seen Laurie Anderson speak. She is very entertaining and it is hard to decide when she is lying and when she is telling the truth. Peter

¹Sondheim, Individuals, (1977), p. XXIX.

²Sondheim, Individuals, (1977), pp. XVI-XVII.

³Sondheim, Individuals, (1977), p. XVII.

Frank says she has a "keen humor, irony and wistfulness (if not nostalgia) in observations concerning herself, the people she knows, and the circumstances she has experienced".¹

Bill Beckley

The idea of truth and memory in autobiography was brought up in an article by Eric Cameron called "Bill Beckley's Lies". Bill Beckley is a narrative artist who mixes photographs and handwritten personal fantasies. He made a piece in 1974 called: First Sexual Experience, where "he and a girlfriend discuss where they first had sex, sandwiched between two photographs of the place where it occurred - an island in the middle of a river".² Another piece from a series of "poetic mixes" is Origin of And. The story is about "a girl who for no reason removes her clothes. An incredibly elusive photograph shows her standing nude outside a lift holding her clothes".³ James Collins in a review of "Story" (a narrative shown from 1973, where this work was exhibited), says:

Writing on walls, both public and private, as a curious mix of meaning and context are clearly not without interest. From timid confessions of concern for parts of the body, to full wall to ceiling essays on rainwear, such anonymous writings depend largely on a confessional context. Privacy heightens the impact.

He continues, with reference to Origin of And saying, "However, much as I like sexual fantasies, I don't understand Beckley's reasons for putting them on a wall or floor for that matter".⁵

¹Frank, "Auto-Art", (1976), p. 44.

²Eric Cameron, "Bill Beckley's Lies", Art Forum (February 1977), p. 60.

³James Collins, "Story", Art Forum (September 1973), p. 84.

⁴Collins, "Story", (1973), p. 84.

⁵Collins, "Story", (1973), p. 84.

It is impossible to distinguish fact from fantasy in Beckley's work, but this is not uncommon. Truth and fiction become inseparably overlaid creating ambiguity and suspense in this kind of work. Also dreams and fantasies which are creative parts of the human psyche, become appropriate material for Autobiographical art. In Eric Cameron's article he discusses this dynamic:

In the prevailing uncertainty as to powers of memory and concentration the "I" that figures in these stories is a very ambiguous quantity. It comes across as more than just a literary device, although there is no sense of truth to either the facts or spirit of his (Beckley's) own biography. The mood is regressive, constantly slipping back into vague sexual longing that sometimes steps over into pornography, or vague unease that seems to hover on the brink of panic.¹

Bill Beckley's work is not necessarily concerned just with autobiography. It is also about a "loss of ground line. It deals with insubstantial things, with rainbows, signs and symbols, coincidences, figures hiding in bushes, nursery rhymes, proverbs, myths, drips of water, shadows, cakes you have already eaten, dreams, superstitions about ground hogs, popsicles that melt in your mouth . . ." It is Cameron's view that Beckley's work "takes its place with the most original work of the '70s".²

Barbara Jo Revelle, Duane Michals, Barbara Astman

The use of photographs with texts is a familiar format for Autobiographical and Narrative art. It is employed in work by several artists, including Barbara Jo Revelle, Duane Michals, and Barbara Astman.

[Barbara Jo Revelle's] work is based on two principles which seem, on the face of it, contradictory. First, her work is totally autobiographical, even occasionally diaristic or nostalgic . . . she never seems to be a formalist, or in any way "cool". Second, she employs such a rich variety of techniques, and allows such radical disjunctions, as to drive straight photographers up the wall . . . Though some of her photographs are normal, single-image

¹Cameron, "Beckley", (1977), p. 60.

²Cameron, "Beckley", (1977), p. 60.

works, others are large black and white prints onto which she glues flanking rows of small color prints depicting a different kind of subject. Certain prints combine two contrasting images, which are then "explained" by handwritten texts, written on the photographs themselves.¹

Revelle assembles her images in these unconventional ways in order to deal effectively with this self-reflective content. "To increase the violation of traditional photographic verities, she often prints from old family snapshots and from negatives taken by friends when she wishes to include images of herself".² She uses writing in short texts or in captions such as Ed says being honest ain't the same as making art, (see illustration 9), which provides a clue to the arrangements of Revelle's images in the work.

In Duane Michals' art he "focuses his attention on internalized realities: dreams, sexual fantasies and his photographic self-consciousness".³ He is probably the pioneer of this "new territory for photography" that involves "fictional narrative made up of photographs [and] imaginative texts structured with visual units".⁴ He uses photography to create "visual fables". Jeff Perrone wrote about him saying: "To have faith in photographic information and then to confront Michals' purpose is to open a closet and find it empty. A photograph can neither imitate nor document a real situation or actual fact; it can only pretend to show a surface appearance. It can never hold up as 'court evidence'".⁵

¹Budd Hopkins, "A Note on Composite Imagery: The Photographs of Barbara Jo Revelle", Art Forum (April 1976), p. 64.

²Hopkins, (1976), p. 64.

³Jeff Perrone, "Duane Michals: The Self as Apparition", Art Forum (January 1977), p. 22.

⁴"Duane Michals (review)" Arts Magazine (December 1976), p. 25.

⁵Perrone, "Michals", (1976), p. 22.

Michals' narratives are not primarily concerned with the autobiography of Duane Michals'. In fact he sets up a false sense of autobiography. For instance, in This Photograph is my proof, (see illustration 13), is this Michals? Is it proof? fiction, fantasy, fact? He is a master of visual deception.

Barbara Astman's recent photographs use photographs and texts in a "story board" format. In these Visual Narratives, (see illustration 11), Astman makes a self-portrait using polaroid images of herself, which are arranged in "comic book" sequences with a typed narrative along the bottom of each print. In Gary Michael Dault's review he writes: [The] "resulting visual narratives have a haunting quality that takes them more effectively than would seem possible beyond one's initial feeling that these photos are free-floating bits of narcissism moving to the accompaniment of a sound track from daytime T.V."¹

Astman seems consistently to use content which closely relates to herself. Before Visual Narratives, she made "hand-tinted colour Xerox prints/in series of friends and family set unmoving and solid against wittily varying backgrounds".²

In their work, all three photographers have dropped the traditional norms of technique and presentation in favour of content. The practice of scribbling hand-written bits directly onto the photographic surface is a violation that has become accepted, as have colour-Xerox and Polaroid images. When words are used with photograph, the context is altered. Andy Grundberg says in a review of Michals: "Adding verbal narration to his sequences

¹Gary Micheal Dault, "The impure narratives of Barbara Astman", Saturday Night, June 1978, p. 56.

²Dault, "Astman", (1978), p. 56.

involves more than an identity crisis for the images: there are also literary implications. Is there a new form of poetry to be found here, one in which not only the gaps between words speak, but also the gaps between images and those between words and images?" He then asks: "When words and the image have no obvious relationships, which do we believe?"¹

William Wegman

Even when the photographs are not coupled with a text, in Autobiographical art, they are usually placed within some frame of reference. In an article entitled the "Post-Perceptual Portrait" (1975), Amy Goldin describes a piece by William Wegman that is "directly involved with shared family likeness". (See illustration 10). This is a work where Wegman uses photography to investigate "the mysterious tension between personal identity and family resemblance . . ." The piece is a "set of portraits consisting of photographs (unadorned, straight-on head shots again) of Wegman's father and mother and himself, followed by a composite photo of his father and mother, and then photographs of himself superimposed on those of each of his parents". Although this piece is about Wegman's identity, "equal time [is] given to the mutual assimilation that takes place in partners during a long marriage".²

Martha Wilson

"'How others see me' and 'how I see myself' are two of the basic themes that lend themselves to Conceptual media. Make-up (pretend) is in turn one of the basic tools".³ Martha Wilson did a facial-image piece in 1974 called,

¹ Andy Grundberg, "Duane Michals at Light", Art in America (May/June 1975), pp. 78-79.

² Amy Goldin, "The Post-Perceptual Portrait", Art in America (January/February, 1975), p. 8.

³ Lippard, From The Center, (1976), p. 106.

I make up the image of my Perfection/I make up the image of my Deformity.

(See illustration 14). In the performance she examined herself, showing her most beautiful and most ugly views. Wilson's experimentation with identity-image led her to do a piece on the "drag syndrome" with Posturing, a series of photographs in which she became first a man, then a man dressed up as a woman.

Wilson began in 1971 to concretize her fantasies through make-up, clothes, and facial expression. She dyed her hair, became a glamour queen, recorded the emotional grimaces made before a mirror and a camera, comparing these two images of self-consciousness. (She discovered during this period that "artmaking is an identity-making process . . . I could generate a new self out of the absence that was left when my boyfriend's ideas, my teachers' and my parents' ideas were subtracted".¹

Wilson has also done some Performance, including one based on "attracting and conquering men 'with the same set of gestures' as her father". Later she collaborated with Jacki Apple, an artist who works in a similar direction. Together they created Claudia, "a composite person who exists in the space between ourselves, a fantasy, self-powerful, gorgeous, mobile - who is the result of the merging of the realized and the idealized self".² Claudia existed outside of a gallery context. In Transformance, "she" (a composite of six women) dressed up and lunched at the Plaza Hotel in New York.

Adrian Piper

For some of these ideas, galleries and museums are not appropriate locations for the activity. This is true in the case of work by Adrian Piper, an artist who intrigues me. Her activity is so untraditional that it would be hard to fit it into any category. Nevertheless, I think it is

¹Lippard, From The Center, (1976), p. 106.

²Lippard, From The Center, (1976), p. 106.

definitely related to the tendency being discussed in this paper. In 1971, Piper did a series called Catalysis. They included:

Catalysis I, in which I saturated a set of clothing in a mixture of vinegar, eggs, milk, and cod-liver oil for a week, then wore them on the D train during evening rush hour, then while browsing in the Marboro bookstore on Saturday night; Catalysis VII, a recorded talk inducing hypnosis; Catalysis IV, in which "I dressed very conservatively but stuffed a large red bath towel in the side of my mouth until my cheeks bulged to about twice their normal size, letting the rest of it hang down my front, and riding the bus, subway, and Empire State Building elevator"; Catalysis VI, "in which I attached helium-filled Mickey Mouse balloons to each of my ears, under my nose, to my two front teeth, and from thin strands of my hair, then walked through Central Park, the lobby of the Plaza Hotel, and rode the subway during morning rush hours"; Catalysis III, "in which I painted some clothing with sticky white paint with a sign attached saying 'Wet Paint', then went shopping at Macy's for some gloves and sunglasses"; Catalysis V, "in which I recorded loud belches made at five-minute intervals, then concealed the tape recorder on myself and replayed it at full volume while reading, doing research, and taking out some books and records at the Donnell Library"; Catalysis VII, "in which I went to The Metropolitan Museum's 'Before Cortes' show while chewing large wads of bubble gum, blowing large bubbles, and allowing the gum to adhere to my face . . . (and) filling a leather purse with catsup, then adding wallet, comb, keys, etc.; opening and digging out change for bus or subway, a comb for my hair in the ladies' room at Macy's, a mirror to check my face on the bus etc.; coating my hands with rubber cement, then browsing at a newspaper stand . . ." And so on.¹

Piper's work "explores (among other things), the relationship between self and other". She says: "What it does is reaffirm my own identity as an artist to me. If you ask me what I'm doing, I'll tell you I'm doing this, rather than saying; well, you know, I'm not doing any work lately, but I've been doing some really weird things in the street".²

¹Lippard, From The Center, (1976), p. 167-168.

²Lippard, From The Center, (1976), p. 171.

Adrian Piper is an intelligent woman. She is a candidate for a philosophy doctorate at Harvard University. Although her pieces resemble a kind of kinky street theatre, she is investigating her psychological limitations as well as the "boundaries of my personality, and how much I intrude myself upon other people's realities by introducing this kind of image, this facade".¹ When she did the Catalysis performances, she "neither talked nor provided any explanation to passersby for her bizarre conduct, though later she substituted conversation for costume as her instrument. No immediate distinction was thus made between art and madness except in her writings, published in art contexts".²

Adrian Piper also has a male ego called the Mythic Being. Dressed as the Mythic Being, she "reenacts events from her own life but experiences them as a man . . . a therapeutic device for freeing me of the burden of my past, which haunts me, determines all my actions . . ." ³ She insists that the Mythic Being "does not stand for me. In some ways, he is me; but as an independent abstract object, he is only himself . . ." ⁴

Ed McGowin

In beginning my research, I went through the major art periodicals from 1970 to 1978 looking for examples and information to compile this thesis. In a 1974 issue of Art in America, I found a piece by Ed McGowin, an artist who was unknown to me. A two page reproduction showed twelve official name

¹Lippard, From The Center, (1976), p. 169.

²Lippard, From The Center, (1976), p. 107.

³Lippard, From The Center, (1976), p. 129.

⁴Sondheim, Individuals, (1976), p. 277.

changes from 1970-1972, each one supported by a description of the "personality" of the man who bore the name.

The first "request" of name change was for William Edward McGowin to "henceforth be known" as Alva Isaiah Fost.

Alva Isaiah Fost - shy, reticent with brown straight hair slicked back. He is tired but willing, and yet scared to death. He is constantly changing his prospects and moves from job to job. Knows a little about a lot of things.

Less than two months later he had his name changed again. This time from Alva Isaiah Fost to Lawrence Steven Orlean.

Lawrence Steven Orlean. From Louisiana. Son of a public official, he has three brothers and five sisters. Wants to make a movie that will exist in the mind's eye rather than on the retina. He has twice been arrested for child molestation. Both times his mother using the power of her office, was able to keep it off the record.

The name changes were all filed in the United States District Court For The District of Columbia and are all signed by a different judge. The twelfth "order" is for a name change back to William Edward McGowin, over a year and a half later. From the visual display of official documents and handwritten descriptions, it is impossible to be accurate about McGowin's intent. Initially I thought he had in part tried to adopt these "personalities". However the descriptions are too bizarre for that.

Edward Everett Updike. Homosexual father of four, who was blackmailed into amputating three fingers of his own right hand. He works as a conductor on the B.M.T., sees his life correctly as a series of dreary round trips.

As no explanation was given with the work, it can only be assumed that the artist wishes the mystery to be an integral aspect of the piece . . . We may never know!¹

¹Newton Harrison, "Three Projects: Harrison, Mock, McGowen, Art in America (January/February 1974), pp. 72-73.

Photography and video appear to be the most effective and the most common mediums for 'Autobiographical' art. "The camera obliges the artist to turn on himself in an act of self reflectiveness and narcissism".¹ However, video² is probably the more successful of the two. Video "can be done by one person. It lends itself to secret information. You can talk into a (video) camera the way you talk into a typewriter or a tape recorder; you can say things you'd find hard to say out loud with an audience, even an audience of one".² Jeff Perrone says: "Video has a way of turning itself onto the artist and becoming a mirror . . . Video brings out the exhibitionist in the artist".³ "Still" photography can give this "'mirror" relationship, too, but even Polaroid does not allow for simultaneous results, nor is it as revealing without the elements of sound and movement. The photograph is "low-level information", parallel to the difference between the impact of television newscasts and the newspaper photograph.⁴ I say this not to indicate preference for video, but to suggest that the different properties of media have an great effect on the art made within the boundaries of each.

Melissa Shook

Melissa Shook made a "self-portrait" out of a series of still photographs. Her reviewer, Shelly Rice says:

Shook's exhibition was comprised of a series of dated self-portraits, autobiographical documents from a period of nine months beginning December 1, 1972. The images vary widely, although

¹ Jeff Perrone, "The Ins and Outs of Video", Art Forum. (Summer 1976), p. 54.

² Peggy Gale and Sandra Shaul, "Light, Movement, Technology: New Tendencies in Sculpture", Art Magazine (June 1978), p. 44.

³ Perrone, "Video", (1976), pp. 54 and 56.

⁴ Hermine Freed, "In Time, of Time", Arts Magazine (June 1975), p. 82.

patterns can be discerned. The earlier prints are generally straight-forward self-portraits, often documenting mundane activities - Shook soaking her foot or writing. Then she becomes progressively bolder, she begins examining her naked body . . . Several of the later photographs show the artist making grotesque expressions . . . Friends and family appear and disappear throughout the series, as do household plants and pets. Finally, Melissa fades out, replaced by her daughter Crissy.¹

Rice's criticism is that "memory of learned expectations impinges on her attempts to confront her own image".² This is probably where video serves its best purpose. One can look in the household mirror and see what one wants to see. It is a subjective and limited view. Video operates as the unexpected reflection. As Eleanor Antin said, "Everyone has the experience of trying to sneak up on themselves in mirrors. I don't mean when performing a more or less formal set of preparations before a bathroom mirror, but in those one comes up against unexpectedly, in subways or lobbies of apartment buildings. You search your approach in the mirror for some truth about how you appear in the world".³

Video "cuts through idealized and distorted self-images . . . The playback experience forces us to see images that we have learned not to see". It is the ultimate tool for "self-confrontation and the observation of behavior". In this direction video has "assumed an important position within the general field of psychotherapy", as well as art.⁴ Emotional disturbances are commonly characterized by perceptual disorganization, in

¹Shelley Rice, "Melissa Shook at Foto", Art in America (November/December 1976), p. 121.

²S. Rice, (1976), p. 121.

³E. Antin, (1974), p. 23.

⁴Shaun A. McNiff and Christopher C. Cook, "Video Art Therapy" Art Psychotherapy (Vol. 2, 1975), p. 55.

that the individual's perceptions of the self and the surrounding world become unclear and distorted when (s)he is dominated by psychic disturbances

"¹

It is inherent in the nature of the video medium that it be used in self-exploratory art. The discovering self, though, should "not be confused with 'expressing self', which assumes that discovery has already taken place".² Because of the relative novelty of video tape as an art medium, the artist can work with it in a fresh, untrained way. They can use it as a "system of echoes, communications, reflections, and dialogues linking the self with what is outside of the self and back again".³ Jeff Perrone described the rapport between the artist and video medium this way.

The artist is traditionally involved with some kind of primal situation, where he is in contact with his materials and experience in some kind of firsthand, first time way. The painter has nothing separating him from the paint, canvas, and stretchers. He creates a vision which he experiences as the sole viewer. The video artist, in order to achieve this same kind of primal, fresh, firsthand experience, can only use his body as the subject of the videotape.

The artist, as autonomous creator, views a tape of himself as the first manifestation of the experience, whereas if he were to tape anything else but his own body, the tape would be a secondhand experience of what he had already seen through the camera's eye.

The Primary feature of Art video would not be the conversational give-and-take of the utopian video technicians, but an essential voyeur/exhibitionist dynamic.¹

Lisa Steele, Colin Campbell

Two young Canadian artists who have worked extensively with video in this manner are Colin Campbell and Lisa Steele. Lisa Steele's tapes include

¹McNiff, (1975), p. 57.

²Perrone, (1976), "Video", p. 57.

³Alan Kaprow, "Video Art; Old Wine, New Bottle", Art Forum (June 1974), p. 77.

⁴Perrone, (1976), "Video", p. 54.

A Very Personal Story (1974), Birthday Suit: Scars and Defects (1974),
Internal Pornography (1974-1975), Facing South (1975) and The Biography
of Tom Sherman (1976). For Lisa Steele:

Emotion is motion and drama is the passage of time. When I make my tapes, this is all that I can think about and consider. The structure is intuitively set up at the beginning. I just pour the content into it. But the content is the tape itself . . . My work is not about the present. The process of recording moves all of the content into the past, where the memory begins to filter it. I am a chronic liar trying to tell the truth. Sometimes this is possible.¹

The tapes vary in format, although they all act in part as a recording device to put memories, feelings, and dreams down on tape. It is obvious that Steele is doing this primarily for herself; for her records. They allow for intimate relationships with her. In A Very Personal Story, (see illustration 16), she sat alone facing the camera, and recounted in a quiet, calm manner the day in her youth when she came home and found her mother dead. Watching the tape in a room by myself at Art Metropole,² I felt very close to this person I had never met who was letting me know her now through the incident she described.

Facing South is more mysterious. It is an "intimate diary tracing growth of plants and personal awareness through the spring months".³ The Biography of Tom Sherman is her autobiography told through the life of a former lover. She tells his life story as part of her own - he is a part of her experience. "He surfaces through me often".⁴

¹ Peggy Gale, Video by Artists, (Toronto: Art Metropole 1976), p. 119.

² Art Metropole, (217 Richmond St. W., Toronto, Ontario) is an archive/agency established to document, collect, publish and disperse information on activities of artists working in new contexts and multiple media formats, including publications, recordings, multiples, film and video.

³ Gale, Video by Artists, (1976), p. 121.

⁴ Lisa Steele, (videotape) The Biography of Tom Sherman (1976).

Most of the image is of Sherman typing; the voice is hers. (It cuts to another room, presumably their bedroom, for just a moment, where she says, "We lived together for three years, we do not live together now". Then the tape goes back to his life story and the image of him typing.

It is a good tape. It contains a flavor of the information that only lovers tell one another while reminiscing about their childhood feelings and foolishnesses, late at night. It is, in part, that type of intimacy that forms a bond, and enables the two persons to merge and overlap as a couple. The tape ends with the feeling of the eventual separateness, and a long view of Steele's face in pain of loneliness and memory.

Peggy Gale writes: "Hers [Steele's] is a female sensibility, one fascinated by growth and natural processes, by identity and self-knowledge".¹ Female sensibility or male, for me it is not specific. It is a "human" sensibility. Colin Campbell's tapes have a similar feeling. He did several self-investigation portraits early in the seventies, including Real Split (1972), True, False (1972), Sackville I'm Yours (1972), Janus (1973), and This is the Way I Really Am (1974).

Janus is a fascinating tape where the "artist faces his double, a full-length nude photograph to explore the deceptive three-dimensionality of the television image".² Campbell made this tape while living and teaching in New Brunswick, but never showed it till later; "time" permitting a certain detachment. It is a private tape; possibly an investigation into homosexual feelings, and awareness of his own body. The life-size photograph is convincing, because the video is black and white. The two men appear alike;

¹Gale, Video by Artists, (1976), p. 202.

²Gale, Video by Artists, (1976), p. 189.

they are both nude. Campbell makes love to "himself", kissing and caressing the figure.

His more recent tapes include the Woman from Malibou (1976). "Nine Self-Portraits of the artist as his alter ego, in which the woman from Malibou tells her 'very personal story'".¹ The artist dresses as an eccentric woman, and describes scenes from "her" life. Actually, they are all real incidents taken from stories in magazines or newspapers. As with the work of Duane Michals, it has an element of "false" autobiography, where the actual autobiographical content is hidden or diverted in the stories.

Denis Oppenheim

Autobiography in video has been one of the many combinations of materials and formats used by Denis Oppenheim. Oppenheim is, "one of the most versatile of contemporary post-pictorial artists".² His work has been "presented in several forms, including photographic documentation, written documentation, film, video, and actuality". Because he often works with installation format, he utilizes "several media at once, either combined or sequential".³

One of Oppenheim's well-known pieces from 1974 is a combined video-sculpture called Recall, (see illustration 17), where the image of the "artist's mouth appears on an aluminum-bank video monitor at the end of a long oil-filled pan".⁴ As a viewer, one relates to the pan of oil as if it were filled with turpentine. The artist describes the piece . . .

¹Gale, Video by Artists, (1976), p. 189.

²Denis Oppenheim, Retrospective Works (catalogue), (Montreal: Musée d'Art Contemporain, 1978), p. 20.

³Oppenheim, (1978), p. 30.

⁴"Denis Oppenheim (review)", Art Forum (April 1976), p. 81.

In "Recall" - I'm using turpentine as a device to activate the memory, past experiences when the smell occurred. The material was actually inhaled - stuffed cotton saturated with turpentine into my nose, and like a drug, it induced an alteration of consciousness; as my senses are filled with this smell, my memory slowly uncovers images of a past region in which the smell prevailed, and I verbalize them in a kind of rambling stream of consciousness monologue. For me, that smell is associated with my art school years, the late fifties. What I find interesting is how a paint medium, when applied differently can still be said to be accomplishing a similar result . . . Instead of thinning down pigment, I'm absorbing the material into my sensory system and thinning out layers of repressed memory - I see it as as a different function of a traditional material!¹

(Partial transcript from Recall)

CALIFORNIA . . . FIRST YEAR OF SCHOOL . . . I REMEMBER HARRY KRELLS PAINTING CLASS . . . BEGINNING PAINTING, SEPT. 19th 1958. I WAS A SOPHOMORE . . . I REMEMBER HE ASKED US TO PAINT . . . TO PAINT A HEAD . . . A MALE HEAD . . . AND TORSO. WE HAD A MALE MODEL, I REMEMBER WHAT THE ROOM WAS LIKE . . . I REMEMBER THE SMELL. I COULDN'T DO WHAT HE WANTED US TO DO. HE WAS ASKING US TO USE WARM AND COOL COLORS IN JUXTAPOSITION . . . USING THESE COLORS IN KIND OF BLOCKS TO FORM CONTOURS OF THE HEAD AND TORSO . . . HE DIDN'T WANT US TO USE LINES . . . JUST THESE COLORS JUXTAPOSITIONS THAT WOULD, ACCORDING TO HIM, ALLUDE TO VOLUME . . . ADVANCING AND RECEDING COLORS . . . I REMBER I COULDN'T DO THIS . . . I COULDN'T UNDERSTAND THIS . . . BUT I REMEMBER SOME OF THE WORK . . . I WORKED ON THIS FOR A LONG TIME . . . I HAD DIFFICULTY IN THAT CLASS. I REMEMBER HOW FULL THESE CLASSES WERE . . . HOW HARD IT WAS TO FIND A SPACE TO PUT YOUR EASEL AND DRAWING BOARD. IT WAS ON THE THIRD FLOOR OF A BUILDING. I REMEMBER WALKING . . . WALKING UP THERE. I REMEMBER THE FIRE ESCAPE WHERE I USED TO SIT AND SMOKE. I REMEMBER SOME OF THE STUDENTS . . . TRYING TO REMEMBER THEIR WORK . . . CAN'T REMEMBER WHAT I DID. I REMEMBER MR. BORGE'S DRAWING CLASS . . . REMEMBER WE CALLED THAT CLASS DRAWING ORIENTATION . . . THE SAME YEAR 1958. CALIFORNIA COLLEGE OF ARTS AND CRAFTS. I REMEMBER THE RENDERING PROJECTS. THE EXCURSION . . . GOING TO THE OAKLAND.²

Oppenheim is best known as one of the first "Earthwork" - or "Land-Art" artists, from 1967. He then began doing pieces concerning the Body.

¹ Oppenheim, (1978), p. 76.

² Oppenheim, (1978), p. 76.

In an interview, Allan Schwartzman asks Oppenheim when he became less interested in his "body as object and more as a vehicle for autobiography?"

The body-related works began early in 1969 with a piece called "Ground "Manoeuvres", in which I had special grooves put in my shoes which would leave certain imprints in the ground. It was considered an ongoing work, which would evolve over the winter months . . . I did a series of pieces with my children in which the work needed to extend itself from the source. I began to consider aspects of heredity, the passing of energy outside the body . . . Body-related works become a profound alternative. It was a rich area . . . In the second stage, the work was fully internatized and needed to be released again, it needed to be extended . . . When I reached certain conclusions within that area of work I began to deal with autobiographical projects . . . In a way it was the third stage of the body works . . . It developed into areas I'm still concerned with, the area of interrogation of motive . . . When the work became autobiographical, it permitted this delivery of questions toward a self. The engaging of these questions in the work became the substance of the work . . . These works admitted things, showed procedures, uncovered secrets - things we usually keep camouflaged.¹

One of his earlier installations that dealt with autobiography was Adrenochrome (1972). The work "documented through historical material, medical definition, and projected microbiological imagery the chemical component involved in a schizophrenic episode Oppenheim endured in 1963". At this time, he started to use his family increasingly in his work "not just as extensions of himself, but as indicators that he himself was involved in a continuing process of extension and transmutation". A piece that results was "Polarities".

Polarities utilized the format of the words-in-landscape, but instead of single words or phrases, the ciphers Oppenheim transferred to the earth's surface were enlargements of what were his father's last graphic gesture and his daughter's first rendered in a Long Island field with magnesium flares, the first time Oppenheim used light-producing elements to write on the land.²

¹Oppenheim, (1978), p. 5.

²Oppenheim, (1978), pp. 25-26.

Oppenheim has done several peices involving his children. In

Documentation for 2-stage Transfer drawing - Denis to Erik Oppenheim, 1971

(returning to a past state), (see illustration 18), he used his son "as a means of overstepping his corporeal boundaries". The documentation reads:

As I run a marker along Erik's back he attempts to duplicate the movement on the wall. My activity stimulates a kinetic response from his sensory system. I am, therefore, drawing through him. Sensory retardation or disorientation make up the discrepancy between the two drawings and could be seen as elements that are activated during this procedure. Because Erik is my offspring and we share similar biological ingredients, his back (as surface) can be seen as an immature version of my own. In a sense, I make contact with a past state.¹

More recently, Oppenheim has been using marionettes as surrogate performers in his art. "They express the desire to have a stand-in, something to take the burden of still seeing room within the performance idiom, but not wanting to perform within it." He says that the marionettes are in a place between object and performance. "When the surrogate presences were not other living beings but fabricated representations of himself, Oppenheim was freest to transact his experiments and fantasies through them".²

One of his autobiographical puppet installations is Search for Clues from late 1975. "The installation itself consisted of a puppet figure lying at the edge of a large Persian carpet, seemingly suspended off the floor. A knife was embedded in the puppet's back . . ."³ The voice is his daughter, Chandra, speaking "incantation". Peter Frank says that: "Chandra has

¹Oppenheim, (1978), p. 11.

²Oppenheim, (1978), pp. 6 and 21.

³Oppenheim, (1978), p. 28.

figured in more recent Oppenheim environments and videotapes as a person substituted for Oppenheim himself or, at least, for his conscience".¹

(Partial transcript from Search for Clues) .

Dennis, you were pacing back and forth in my mind before I could talk. The sounds you made from thinking . . . forming something while I was sleeping with your thoughts . . . I was sleeping with your mind . . . and do you know what I could hear . . . past midnight . . . for you yourself could not tap these thoughts of yours . . . they were butterflies sent to my room . . . for only me to understand . . . I loved learning words later . . . so I could describe to myself the bursts of light you fed into me . . . long ago . . . I had this nightmare you now live . . . I've carried the image of you floating in space . . . floating on a carpet in darkness . . . a carpet that is still . . . going nowhere . . . an illusion of travel . . . you're on the edge . . . you wandered from corner to corner . . . until the limits were clear . . . the limits you so wanted to break down . . . so when I saw the knife . . . I felt I knew what you wanted . . . the knife was spinning in my dreams . . . It was so beautiful . . . it reflected all our hopes . . .²

Peggy Gale wrote: "Autobiography is a single voice. It is a memory, a document, a today captured for tomorrow. It is a private ritual, meant for some sort of public . . . Video is a perfect medium for autobiography".³ It "seems to attract experimentation like no other medium".⁴ The artist is freer to investigate the self, because he knows he can always erase the information, without cost. He can work alone and watch the monitor simultaneously, utilizing the "mirror" reflection. The equipment is technically simple. Most artists do not have access to fancy editing

¹ Frank, "Auto-Art", (1976), p. 45.

² Oppenheim, (1978), p. 28.

³ Peggy Gale, "I Am Here, This is Real", in Autobiography, Film/Video Photography (catalogue), ed. John S. Katz (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario 1978), p. 116.

⁴ Perrone, "Video", (1976), p. 53.

equipment, so most art-video has limited and rough editing.¹ Also video tapes are "boring if you demand that they be something else. But they are not judged boring by comparison with paintings or sculpture, they're judged boring in comparison with television, which for the last twenty years has set the standard of video time!"² One must remember that "no matter how different from television the works of individual video artists may be, the television experience dominates the phenomenology of viewing and haunts video exhibitions the way the experience of movies haunts all film".³

One widespread use of video has been in the documentation of live performance and theatre pieces, simply because it is cheaper, faster and more accessible than film. However, the pieces could just as easily have been recorded on celluloid. When the two mediums are used where they will be most effective, the separation is clearer.

Autobiography is difficult to use in film, because the camera must always be there to record meaningful footage. It is easy enough to have it there when you are eating breakfast, but not so easy when you are involved in a personal crisis and your world seems to be collapsing. Some autobiographical film is a moment captured on film; using cinema to articulate feelings and situations as they occur. Bruce Elder uses the

¹The video image is formed by a single electron which crosses to face of the tube 525 times, (300 times a second) for each image.

A basic port-a-pack video unit, microphone and monitor is available for about \$2,000. "This is the fundamental unit, but it allows no editing whatever. The most minimal editing - edge to edge assembling of tapes into units larger than 30 minutes requires access to at least another video tape recorder with a built in editing facility". This rough editing is "marked by a characteristic momentary breakup or instability of the image"; David Antin, "Television: Video's Frightful Parent, Part I", Art Forum (December 1975), pp. 42-43.

²D. Antin, (1975), p. 39.

³D. Antin, (1975), p. 36.

medium in this manner in She is Away (1975). Other autobiographical films requires the reenactment of a past situation, where original footage does not exist. This is the case with Clay Borris' Rose's House (1977). Here, the autobiographical statement is formed from memory and improvisation.

Roger Welch

Roger Welch composed a film called Welch, where he compiled twenty hours of home movies from five generations, spanning fifty years, and reduced it to a one and a half hour "collection of vignettes". The resulting family portrait is "not only a fascinating social document, but also interesting contemporary art". James Collins said: "With 'Welch' I felt like an intruder into private areas of family ritual and experienced similar pleasure and embarrassment".¹

Naturally it is amazing that there were home movies available from five generations of his family to use as material. Based solely on this description, one would question how valuable or interesting this kind of autobiographical nostalgia is to a stranger. Though it is certainly no less important for the artist, it is hard to know sometimes how far it can reach the audience. James Collins assures us that it does connect. The film is "full of fragmentary insights into the way culture affects people and people each other".²

Though Welch does not always deliberately work in the self-referential material, his art is part of this "humanist" context. In an interview from Flash Art, he says:

. . . I sense a change now towards art which is less pragmatic in attitude. Minimalist and Conceptual Art of the late sixties tended towards a romanticism of logic. Today, artists

¹James Collins, "Dear Roger Welch", Art Forum (April 1976), pp. 78-79.

²Collins, "Welch", (1976), p. 79.

seem less enchanted with exploring the realms of process, the nature of properties, and the logical construct of a thing. I have come to prefer an art less drained of emotion as subject matter. I believe that the Conceptual Artist is becoming more open to sentimentality and irrationality.¹

Yvonne Rainer

Yvonne Rainer is an artist who has been using film as a medium for her autobiographical content. She has "used autobiographical fragments as 'props' since 1962".² She has turned from dance, to performance, to film. Even though she has been moving away from using personal content recently, she originally used "narrative and autobiographical material in order to find 'ways to create more cohesion between isolated expression of emotional states'".³

During a trip to India in 1970, Rainer recognized "that Indian dance is wholly dependant upon narrative structures . . . impelling a reconsideration of the possibilities of narrative for her own work".⁴ She came to the conclusion that her own life was "as viable as any other material (more accessible, more useable at least)",⁵ and realized that its "as though my own life contains possibilities for a mythology".⁶

Rainer says: "I couldn't tell a convincing story if I tried, so again it's a matter of having little fragments of stories in a kind of wishful

¹"Roger Welch", Flash Art (November/December, 1977), p. 25.

²Lippard, From The Center, (1976), p. 266.

³Lucy Lippard, "Talking Pictures, Silent Words, Yvonne Rainer's Recent Movies", Art in America (May/June 1977), p. 86.

⁴Annette Michelson, "Yvonne Rainer, Part One: The Dancer and The Dance", Art Forum (January 1974), p. 31.

⁵Annette Michelson, "Yvonne Rainer, Part Two: Lives of Performers", Art Forum (February 1974), p. 31.

⁶Michelson, "Rainer: Part One", (1974), p. 65.

frame for a story into which I can put all kinds of authentic moments in a totally inauthentic frame".¹ In her films Lives of Performers and A Film About a Woman Who . . . there are "allusions to private and not-so-private problems and agonies - some of these articulated, one suspects, through quotations from private journals and/or psychotherapeutic revelations, and apperceptions".²

In the text from A Film About a Woman Who . . ., Rainer says: "This is the poetically licenced story of a woman who finds it difficult to reconcile certain external facts with her image of her own perfection. It is also the same woman's story if we say she can't reconcile these facts with her image of her own deformity!"³ (See illustration 19).

The film's underlying theme is "the inability of men and women to communicate and to love one another". The autobiography fades in and out. She uses the third person singular "SHE" to define a person that could be Rainer, or could be some one else. Rainer sees the function, "not to fully expose myself in a conventional way, but . . . as a "link to the self".⁴ She sees the story as "an empty frame on which to hang images and thoughts which need support. I feel no obligation to flesh out this armature with credible details of location and time . . . [The film is] essentially [a] series of tableaux connected by an unseen network of tensions and reference."⁵

Lucy Lippard writes: "Rainer's problem, and it is a central one to all of the arts, is how to connect private experience to a context; how to link

¹Lippard, From The Center, (1976), p. 277.

²Michelson, "Rainer: Part Two", (1974), p. 32.

³Lippard, From The Center, (1976), p. 268.

⁴Presentation of The Self, C.A.A. Conference, New York, 1978.

⁵Lippard, "Rainer", (1977), p. 86.

it all up with the kinds of conditioning and power structures that govern our lives".¹

Rainer received a lot of criticism for her film. "At the heart of Rainer's film lies an intentionally unresolved friction between word and image, the personal and the political formalism and emotional content". Cindy Nemsér continues:

In the case of . . . A Film About a Woman Who . . . form takes precedence over spontaneity. The artist desperately seeks to experience her feelings and herself but she puts barriers of form and style between herself and any kind of open expression . . . confusion is the result of Rainer's inability to reconcile her authentic feelings with her intellectualization about the validity of inauthenticity.¹

In comparison, Amelia Rothschild's Nana, Mom and Me uses "raw material of everyday speech as content to shape and mold itself spontaneously into the form it chooses to take". Rothschild has "pulled the barriers down, thrown away the old rules of what is acceptably 'avant garde' and is delving wholeheartedly into herself by investigating and validating her own roots. From the start, this film came out of the artist's personal needs".³

It is difficult for one who is camera-shy to realize that filmmakers, their families and friends, accept the presence of film equipment as a fact of life. Still, technical developments have greatly expanded the possibilities in nonfiction film.⁴ The mobility of new lightweight, quieter cameras and direct synchronized sound allow for a more informal rapport between filmmaker and subject. The artist can work alone without a

¹Lippard, From The Center, (1976), p. 279.

²Cindy Nemsér, "Editorial: Rainer and Rothschild, an interview", Feminist Art Journal (Summer 1975), p. 4.

³Nemsér, "Rainer and Rothschild", (1975), p. 4.

⁴Richard Meran Barsam, Nonfiction Film: A Critical History (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co. Inc., 1973), p. 249.

crew, producing good quality results and have the freedom to develop a film over a long period of time.

Performance is also an extremely rich area for autobiographical material. Here some distinction between Autobiographical art and Body art is necessary. Body art is "the earliest distinct form"¹ of Autobiographical art. "As the convention of presenting art in the form of durable objects became discredited in the late 1960s, sculptors increasingly turned to their own bodies as subject matter and as a medium of expression."²

Artists have moved from "concern with the physical fact of the body itself" to dealing with self-referential content. The more personal work often "bears a superficial resemblance" to Body art,³ although some artists move back and forth between the two points of reference, and it is difficult to draw a line down the middle. "If the body can be explored ecologically, erotically, obsessively, or geographically, it can also be used to illustrate ironic, comic, not necessarily autobiographical situations."⁴

Bodyworks have developed a reputation for self-destructive activity, everything from Chris Burden "who had himself stigmatized with real nails, set on fire, wounded by a bullet in the arm [and] . . . imprisoned, foodless in a small locker for five days"⁵ (among other things), to the extreme case of Rudolph Schwarzkogler, (1940-1969), the Viennese artist who killed himself in the "name of art" by successive arts of mutilation where he

¹ Frank, "Auto-Art", (1976), p. 40.

² John A. Walker, Art Since Pop, (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1975), p. 53.

³ Kozloff, (1975), p. 33.

⁴ Frank, "Auto-Art", (1976); p. 48.

⁵ Walker, p. 50.

proceeded inch by inch to amputate his own penis, while a photographer recorded this art event."¹ Max Kosloff wrote in his article "Pygmalion Reversed", ". . . the urge to dissociate and depersonalize the body, to split it from awareness, flirts with a more profound indecency - since it leads to considering others as less than human." He feels that "Crimes that violate bodies depend . . . on our propensity to turn people into things."²

Autobiographical art as a general development from earlier body art, is not rooted in such destructive activity. As a joke (or comment at least) Les Levine in his pamphlet Museum of Mott Art Inc., offers "A special service for the older 'body artist'". It reads: "After you've been doing it for a few years, you may feel the necessity of our body re-surfacing service. Bite marks removed, excessive sunburns treated, plastic artificial replacements for severed limbs, we match your skin and hair color."³

Unfortunately, I have seen very little performance. Unlike visual works, which can be reproduced in magazines, performances are not easily documented. I am left solely with the written interpretations available, and the odd photograph which is already so far from the actual live performance.

Geoff Hendricks

Geoff Hendricks performed Ring Piece as an "act of mourning for the end of one important chapter of my life . . . A wake for the death of my marriage".

¹Calas, (1978), p. 36.

²Kozloff, (1975), p. 34.

³Kozloff, (1975), p. 33.

I built a mound of black earth, about six feet high and eight feet in diameter, surrounded by eight lengths of red barrier cord . . . I sat in tails on top of the mound of dirt, writing in a small, dark red sketch book/journal . . . Buried under the dirt were relics from my "Flux Divorce" of June 24, 1971. They included both halves of the mattress cut at the "Division of Property", the remains of both overcoats - torn apart at the "Separation", and a small reliquary object "Cut/Caged" containing both halves of the "Certificate of Marriage" . . . "Ring piece" is also the title of a sealed wooden box containing my wedding ring and ten bells.¹

Ring Piece was "an action/non-action meditation" that went on continuously for twelve hours in the middle of the 8th Annual New York Avant Garde Festival of 1971. The writings from the journal later became a "book", recording the events and observations made by Hendricks during the piece.

Suzanne Lacy, Rachel Rosenthal, Stephen Laub

Performance art flourishes particularly in California. Suzanne Lacy is a west-coast artist. Moira Roth describes her art.

. . . from her earliest work in Performance Art up until her recent pieces, in which she transforms herself into an old woman, a fundamental concern has been "the exploration of what it means to be a consciousness trapped inside a physical, decaying, often unpredictable body . . . Her work has been shaped, above all, by her own reflections on what it means to live within one's body and how through our physical possession of our own bodies, we are all connected and related to each other."²

Another west-coast artist who has begun to use autobiography is Rachel Rosenthal. In a performance called Charm (1976), Rosenthal,

. . . and members of the Instant Theatre Group used the improvisatory techniques of their group to act out Rosenthal's "charmed" childhood. "Charm" referred to the literal and symbolic aspects of her three-storied childhood house in Paris.

The ground floor was the setting for the elegant and charming public life of her parents, the middle for the less charming, private encounters of the family; on the third floor the child, Rachel, lived in terror with the servants and the sadistic governess. Below, Rosenthal lived as the little princess; above

¹Geoff Hendricks, Ring Piece (Vermont: Something Else Press, 1973), no page numbers.

²Roth, "California Performance: Part II", (1978), p. 119.

servants dismissed her as stupid and an idiot. Throughout the piece Rosenthal told of her "charming" childhood, while bizarre figures appeared and disappeared, "enacting all the things I'm not talking about, all the underneath stuff, the nightmare. They're being sadistic and sadomasochistic". She accompanied her story by eating throughout the duration of the Performance. At the beginning she ate dainty little French pastries served in procelain and silver containers, but toward the end, her eating was more and more gluttonous, and animal-like, finally totally like a pig. (Charm was performed only once.)¹

Stephen Laub is a performance artist, who cleverly utilizes special effects in his work. (See illustration 2).

In 1972 Laub began his current series of performances, indeed began his Performance mode of "Projections with Live Performance", where he "enters" life-size projection of slides on a white wall . . . Dressed in white for the Performances he moves slowly, like a dancer, aligning himself to whatever image on the wall he wishes to enter.

A mirror to one side allows Laub to adjust his movements until he stands inside the projected image and has completely disappeared except for the imprint of his facial features . . . He moves into a set of slides of himself at various ages. Sometimes he aligns himself with his family - in Relations (1972 - 1973) or in Perfect Father (1976) - a performance done with his own father.

Characteristic of the work of Laub is a curious blend of magic, mystery, and meditative atmosphere . . . these performances evoke associations of "possession" of one person by another, but more often the main theme seems to be the ease of entering another time and identity, both for the artist and the audience. . . .²

Willoughby Sharp, Barbara Smith

Willoughby Sharp does video performances. "The primary aim of his work is to attain the most intense expression of psychological truth."

In "Sastria!" a performance at the Project exhibition in Cologne in July 1974, Sharp took LSD, worked himself into an obsessed, paranoid state over his daughter (whose mother permits her to see Sharp far less than he would prefer), and attempted to communicate with her by "occupying her space" - sitting in a playpen dressed in nothing but a diaper and holding a teddy bear. Sharp moaning for his daughter, banged his back on the playpen until the skin

¹Roth, "California Performance: Part II", (1978), p. 120.

²Moira Roth, "Toward a History of California Performance: Part I", Arts Magazine (February 1978), p. 98.

was rubbed raw, destroyed the teddy bear and stuffed the pieces into his diaper, and ultimately destroyed the playpen.¹

Of his work, Sharp has said: "I use the actual experience of each video performance to isolate aspects of my ego; I use the accumulation of resultant video works to reconstitute my developing personality. (Change is the only constant in this growing videography.)"²

Barbara Smith has developed a special interaction with her audience. She makes the viewer an integral part of her performance in Feed Me, a piece from the group show "All Night Sculptures" at the Museum of Conceptual Art in San Francisco (1973).

Smith created a comfortable room with incense, oils, pillows, rugs, flowers, music, food, and books. She sat in it nude. Participants entered one at a time. Each was confronted with the conflict of rumored sexual expectations and the reality of entering a room to find a real person on her own terms. Smith has set up the context to require acknowledgment and involvement of "all" the senses. Complex and subtle interactions occurred . . .

In 1977, after years of intense and psychologically draining Performance, Smith created "Ordinary Life", Part I and Part II". This two-part piece, performed in Los Angeles and San Francisco, was the outcome of Smith's examining the effects of her Performance on her personal life. "Ordinary Life" combines ritual, theatre, and plain talk. In it Smith told her audience of her erstwhile hopes that art would "repair my life, find me a lover, a home, and give me personally what I need."³

Chris Burden

Chris Burden, who is quickly identified with Body art and themes of "melodrama, violence, risk, control and threat within the performer - spectator situation",⁴ considers himself to be partly autobiographical. He says "I'm setting up situations to test my own illusions or fantasies

¹Frank, "Auto-Art", (1976), p. 47.

²"The Question", Art Rite (Autumn 1974), p. 14.

³Roth, "California Performance: Part II", (1978), p. 121.

⁴Roth, "California Performance: Part II", (1978), p. 115.

about what happens . . . How can you know what it feels like to be shot if you don't get shot? . . . I know that after each piece I feel different . . . on top of things . . . It's like having knowledge that other people don't have, some kind of 'wisdom'.¹ Hermine Freed describes the following piece.

Chris Burden's recent work (1975) at the Ronald Feldman Gallery emphasizes . . . [the performer-audience] anxiety. The exhibition appeared to be a minimalist-type platform crossing the corner of the room above eye level. The essence of the work, however, was believing that the artist was on that platform and would be there for a duration of twenty-two days with none but the most absolutely essential of his bodily functions being cared for by the gallery. It is an extreme sensory-deprivation situation, as there is no room for him to move, and nothing for him to eat or do except listen to the comments of the viewers (which is actually a rather insidious and reverse form of voyeurism). The viewer's time is almost incidental, a check that all is progressing. It is, rather, "the knowledge of the total duration that give credence to the work the stamina to withstand the deprivation for an extended period of time."²

It is really quite similar in some ways to the "Sensory Deprivation Tank" (used in psychotherapy) of John Lilly's or of extended religious meditation and fasting in an isolated situation.

It is difficult for one to understand Burden's work because "narcissistic sensationalism does not equate with a creative act."³ Burden did a similar performance in 1972, called Bed Piece, where he "lay in the white covered bed in the stark white gallery totally isolated from the outside world, with only his own internal resources to maintain psychic stability."⁴ His own words give an insight into the later isolation piece described above.

¹Kozloff, (1975), p. 39.

²Freed, (1975), p. 84.

³Kozloff, (1975), p. 37.

⁴Chris Burden and Jan Butterfield, "Chris Burden: Through The Night Softly", Arts Magazine (March 1975), p. 70.

BED PIECE, Market Street, Venice, February 18 - March 10, 1972. Josh Young asked me to do a piece for the Market Street Program from February 18 - March 10. I told him I would need a single bed in the gallery. At noon on February 18, I took off my clothes and got into bed. I had given no other instructions and did not speak to anyone during the piece.

I started to like it there. It was really seductive. That's why I considered just staying there - because it was so much nicer than the outside world. I really started to like it, and then that's when I started thinking that I'd better be pretty sure that when the end of the exhibition came - I got up.

About the death thing . . . I don't think so, no. It's just that the piece was very relaxing. It is very relaxing to do that and all the anxiety about everything, about what is going to happen, goes because there is nothing I can do to change it. And when that happens it is like a tremendous relief.

I had started liking it there, and seriously considered staying there, but I didn't because I knew I just couldn't. People were really getting upset towards the end. Stanley and Elyse Grinstein were afraid I had flipped out. Bob Irwin came in and asked me not to do anything crazy, not to let the whole thing come down on my head. I could feel this whole tension kind of building up outside. There was no outside communication and everyone thought I had gone over the edge. As the end came near I had a sort of nostalgia about it. In the same sense that it was boring in the beginning, but I had no control over it because it was inevitable, at the end I had this nostalgia, this deep regret at having to return to normal. But it was inevitable, and I couldn't do anything to prolong or shorten it. On a certain day I had to get up and it would be over, and it would be done.¹

Allan Kaprow

Allan Kaprow's work can be looked at as "psychologically" autobiographical. "His work since the late 1960s has been motivated by general interest and curiosity about his own and other's behavior in interactive situations rather than by a desire to filter overt autobiographical experiences into Performance."² Kaprow's work shifted about 1967 from routines involving "large groups of people to activities with smaller groups and then to pieces revolving around routines of

¹Burden, (1975), p. 70.

²Roth, "California Performance: Part II", (1978), p. 121.

domesticity, private life, and finally to sensitized, subjective and psychological pieces dealing with individual psychic responses."¹

Kaprow calls them "Activities" to distinguish them qualitatively from Happenings. Intrinsic to his conception of them are: the absence of an audience of any kind, that it is carried out in a physical environment without art world or institutional associations, and that there be no documentation of the event. Each activity has been performed only once . . .

Many of the activities investigate how various kinds of information are exchanged between individuals.²

Satisfaction (April, 1976) is an example of a Kaprow "Activity".

The core of the script calls for one person to demand specified responses from another, i.e., to receive "satisfaction". But in order to be praised, fed, kissed, comforted, he or she must demonstrate to the other person exactly how the satisfaction is to be given. So whatever is received in the way of satisfaction must first be given as a means of describing what is wanted. Once the request is made by means of demonstration, the other person has the option of refusing to comply with it. The piece is further complicated by the entrance of another pair who have also carried out the same preceding routine. The second couple, as a team, proceed to direct one member of the first pair to "satisfy" (praise, feed, kiss, comfort, etc.) his or her partner, but the second couple must demonstrate between themselves how this is to be accomplished. Again the participants are provided with the option of not complying . . .

Three of four units of people perform the same script so that the different experience of each group may be compared . . . The work becomes "research" in terms of the information acquired by each individual participant (of whom Kaprow is always one). Self-knowledge, then, is an important "practical yield" . . .

His Activities are like fictions about the substance in everyday life in which language and gesture are rearranged, recombined, and thus made strange . . . Kaprow's Activities seem designed to rouse their participants (and thus Kaprow himself) into consciousness by decomposing and recomposing the fabric of life. Put another way, they are sensitizing devices.³

¹Roth, "California Performance: Part II", (1978), p. 121.

²Johnathon Crary, "Alan Kaprow's Activities", Arts Magazine (September 1976), p. 78.

³Crary, (1976), pp. 79-81.

Kaprow is inflexibly opposed to spectators or audiences for these activities. "The kind of self-awareness and introspection he is after is possible only in an interactional situation where there is reciprocal exchange and reflection on a basis of equality."¹

Autobiographical art is not as easily found among the more traditional visual arts of painting and sculpture. Most autobiographical artists tend to work in areas where they can easily cross the boundaries between media. Peter Frank says: "All kinds of auto-artists are active nowadays. They exploit all the media available to them, but seldom exhibit fascination for the technical aspect of means and materials . . . The phenomena they wish to explore are not those of their tools, but of themselves."²

Painting generally demands a high degree of technical competence in order to be effective. This could be one reason why artists who are primarily interested in narrative and autobiography work with the more direct media of photography and video. It could also be because the more traditional media still carry more formal concerns, such as colour, line, form and balance.

In a questionnaire sent out to painters by Art Forum, in 1975, the editors stated the following:

It appears that painting has ceased to be the dominant artistic medium at the moment. And we assume that the debates between its two major ideologies, abstract and representational thinking here refers to the fact that neither side has triumphed over the other in historical verdict to which both had appealed. On the contrary, those understood to be making "the next inevitable step" now work with any material but paint.³

¹Crary, (1976), p. 81.

²Frank, "Auto-Art", (1976), p. 43.

³"Painter's Reply . . .", Art Forum (September 1975), p. 26.

This statement infuriated many of the artists who replied. They felt that Art Forum was "parcelling out fields" in a "seignorial way" (Rudolf Baranik). However all seemed to agree that there was a definite shift away from formalist painting of the fifties and sixties towards more individual expression. Painting has been "dealt its death blow" many times before in history. Painter Terence La Nove responded with: "Is painting dead? Again? I remember its more recent demise in the 60s, killed by a large gray Minimal monolith, I believe they are now extinct."¹ It is not likely that painting will ever die. Perhaps, "Those who have abandoned painting in favor of other mediums have done so in an effort to express that which is 'beyond painting', as painting reflects that which is 'beyond words'".²

It is difficult to include Painting in this current tendency of Autobiographical art. Painting is an area where the "pendulum" effect (described at the beginning of this paper) seems to be most evident. With this in mind, I would suggest that it is the needs of the individual painter, coinciding with the tendency of Autobiographical art in the seventies, that accounts for much of the works described here.

Freda Kahlo

There is an artist I feel deserves special mention in the area of autobiographical painting. Her name is Freda Kahlo, (Mexico 1910-1954). She is the only artist I have found who has dealt solely with autobiographical material. Although she is not part of the 1970's phenomenon, I wish to include her work in this discussion of Autobiographical art. Hayden Harrara describes her life briefly.

¹"Painter's Reply . . .", (1975), p. 28.

²"Painter's Reply . . .", (1975), p. 28.

Gregarious and venturesome, she was all too familiar with the loneliness and tedium of invalidism. She longed to have children, but her smashed pelvis [the result of a bus accident] led only to several miscarriages and at least three doctor-ordered abortions. And finally there was the anguish of being deceived and abandoned by the man she loved, her husband Diego Rivera (Mexican Mural Painter).

These misfortunes she transmuted into art with a remarkable frankness tempered by humor and fantasy.¹

During a trip to Paris in 1937, Kahlo became acquainted with Surrealist Ideas, although "Strictly speaking . . . Kahlo was not a Surrealist, but a Surrealist discovery." Herrera says "Her fantasy is a product of her temperament, life and culture . . . She wanted to set down images so painfully personal that a less primitivizing style could make them unbearable to the viewer. Her style distances us from the agnostic content without losing vividness."² She often depicted herself "footless, headless, cracked open, hemorrhaging or with heart extracted."

[This] may have been a form of exorcism. By projecting pain outward onto the canvas in the form of visual image she both admitted her suffering and turned it into fantasy. She created an alternative Freda Kahlo to bear the burden of invalidism . . . Indeed the peculiar intensity of her paintings convinces us that they were somehow therapeutic, crucial to the artist's well-being.³

[In] "the Broken Column", 1944, [see illustration] anguish is made vivid by nails driven into Kahlo's face and naked body and into the sheet wrapped around her hips . . . She uses the immense expanse of ravine-gashed desert as a metaphor for her own torn body, deprived of potential for creating life. By contrast, in her bust-length self-portraits, thick, succulent vegetation often surrounds her face and closes off space. The faults and fissures of the land speak of violence done to her body . . . "The Broken Column" depicts a cracked and crumbling Ionic column in the place of Kahlo's own injured vertebrae in the open hollow of her torso. Life replaced by a permanent ruin. The orthopedic corset that holds her body together suggest the imprisonment of invalidism.⁴

¹Hayden Herrera, "Freda Kahlo, Her Life, Her Art", Art Forum (May 1975), p. 38.

²Herrera, "Kahlo", (1975), p. 42-43.

³Herrera, "Kahlo", (1975), p. 39-40.

⁴Herrera, "Kahlo", (1975), p. 40.

From what I know of Freda Kahlo, I cannot imagine any Autobiographical art as intense. "Most painters begin from more innocent premises, and their development from these premises tends, therefore, to be more natural and certainly less painfully self-conscious than that of the individual in whose work the current varieties of avant-garde ideology play a predominate part."¹

Greg Curnoe

Greg Curnoe is an artist, whose work, I think has coincided with Autobiographical art of the seventies. For Curnoe, the "only genuine form of art springs from daily experience" and he wants his art "to be an integral part of his life, and to reflect as much as possible all that interest him". He has deliberately limited his "field of activity" to the area around London, Ontario, "and his themes are generally from this source".² One of his most well known paintings, View of Victoria Hospital, Second Series (February 10, 1969 - March 10, 1971), is an autobiographical record of experiencing the hospital through the window of his studio over a two year period. (See illustration). The work combines a painting, a text and a sound track. The text accompanying the painting begins:

0. SHADOW OCCURS AT 4:30 OR SO E.S.T.
1. FLASH OF A WINDSHIELD FEB. 27 - 1969. 5 P.M.
2. HEADLIGHTS GO PAST HOSPITAL MAR. 20 - 12 P.M.
3. OWEN MARKS THE PANEL HERE WITH A BLACK FELT MARKING PEN AND I GOT MAD MAR. 25 - 11:45 A.M.

¹"Painter's Reply . . .", (1975), p. 27.

²Venice (37th Biennale) Canada: Greg Curnoe (Venice: 37th Biennale, 1976), p. 128.

4. A GROUP OF PEOPLE WALKING IN FRONT OF BLACKWOOD LODGE MAR 25 - 5 TO 2 P.M.
5. A DROP OF WATER RUNNING DOWN THE OUTSIDE OF THE CENTER RIGHT WINDOW PANE MAR 24 - 12:45 P.M.¹

The painting is systematic, and has a paint-by-number look. In many of his paintings he uses block stencil letters, recounting stories from his home life.

In most painting and sculpture that can be presented as Autobiographical art, it seems that autobiographical material is being put into work, as justifiable content in otherwise minimal, conceptual or realist work. There is a new emphasis on content as a result of conceptual art. Sol Lewitt suggested that "the concept or idea was more important than the visual results of the system that generated the object."² It seems, however, with most painting and sculpture that "stories are only introduced into visual art as long as they don't rock the boat formally. 'New' subject matter is squeezed into culturally acceptable formal structures".³

The term Autobiographical art has become part of the contemporary art dialogue, and has been used to "package" groups of work together for shows such as The Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art (L.A.I.C.A.) show called, "Autobiographical Fantasies" (1976), although the criticism of this show was that in several cases the autobiographical content seemed insignificant.⁴ The expression "Autobiographical art" has also been used

¹Curnoe, (1976), p. 58.

²Lucy Lippard, Six Years: The dematerialization of the art object from 1966 to 1973 (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1973), p. 5.

³Collins, "Story", (1973), p. 84.

⁴Marmer, "Autobiographical Fantasies", (1976), p. 77.

as an all-over title to bring together a group of images for painter Lowell Nesbitt. Nesbitt, as I see him, is not an Autobiographical artist, because he is not doing anything more self-investigating than painting his clothes and his dog. Nesbitt explains his intentions when he says "in all honesty, the Autobiographical series began before I determined it to begin. It wasn't until 1973 that I chose to put together a group of disparate images connected only by the fact that they were from my life . . . I therefore conceived of autobiography as a unifying factor that would enable me to continue with a wide variety of structure and color possibilities and maintain overall coherence."¹

Stephanie Brody Lederman, Christopher Knowles

Stephanie Brody Lederman is one artist who successfully combines her delightful visual imagery and personal content. Lederman's pieces are presented with "childlike crudeness". "Her verbal agility goes hand in hand with visual skill".

Her "Cheri Tree" series employs a starkly divided paper with minimal text . . . Stating that "trees are easier to deal with than people" since they easily handle acceptance and rejection; the cheri-tree pictures go on to depict a progression of trees barren of leaf and flower. As sexual metaphors the blossoms turn from blushing pinks to fiery scarlets, increasing in hue with the passion of the memory documented in each text. Later references speak directly of pink as a metaphor for romance and sex, mixing in white proportionately to innocence in each picture. Phrases like, "please I want you to sit on my lap" appear with disconcerting directness - coupled with a seemingly childlike handwriting but a heavily sexual connotation repeated in the drawing.

. . . Most satisfying and refreshing of all, is what Lederman is content to leave out of her narrative - the self-indulgent, long-winded diaries that women's narrative often succumbs to. Her pieces zero in on a moment of thought to be conveyed and concentrated on that single thought with an ability to perceive

¹Lowell Nesbitt, and Gene Baro, Lowell Nesbitt's Autobiography Arts Magazine (November 1975), p. 83.

the essential information of each situation. Tempered with a personal point of view, Lederman's stories and admonishing are never boring. ¹

Lederman's stories are real or fantasized and often contain a "tongue-in-check nostalgia". In Zoes Paradise she says: "watch . . . watch . . . watch . . . ; do not be late for your life . . ." ²

Christopher Knowles also has a personal style to house his narratives. His new work consist of "typed paper pieces" which read as a sort of "exaggerated concrete poetry". The visual structures are highly elaborate combinations of typed words, which become beautiful geometric designs when viewed from a distance.

Knowles' work operates on many levels and is presumably autobiographical (the difficulty of describing and communicating that it depicts may well have been the same difficulty Knowles experiences as an autistic child). Beyond this most personal meaning, however, it is very much the story of a visual artist at work in a world where words, spoken or written, are virtually omnipotent . . . ³

On Kawara

On Kawara is an artist who used painting as a way to record the events of his day-to-day life, and as continuous documentation of his life. The paintings are extremely reductive in form. He is one of the earliest artist to emphasize daily routine as material for art.

In 1966 he began an immense and continuing series of "date paintings", small canvases with the stenciled date, executed almost daily and accompanied by a clipping from the day's newspaper, kept in notebooks. He also made a series of paintings marking location by longitude and latitude, a continuing series of "I got up" postcards and telegrams (sent to Sol Lewitt). The fascination exerted by Kawara's obsession and precise notations

¹Deborah Perlberg, "Stephanie Brody Lederman", Art Forum (April 1978), pp. 69-70.

²Perlberg, (1978), p. 70.

³Leo Rubinfien, "Christopher Knowles (review)", Art Forum (March 1978), p. 71.

of his place in the world (time and location) imply a kind of self-reassurance that the artist does, in fact, exist. At the same time, they are totally without pathos, their objectivity establishing the self-imposed isolation which marks his way of life as well as his art."¹

Everyday from 1968 to at least 1974, On Kawara has sent two postcards to people with the "exact time he got up" printed with his "exact address at the time". (See illustration 25). He recorded the names of every person he met, mapped all his daily movements on "photocopied local maps" and kept parts of daily newspapers that he had read. Here is an example of texts from telegrams and postcards which appeared as a catalogue entry.²

1. (Texts of telegram): I am not going to commit suicide
- Don't worry - 5 December, 1969. On Kawara.

I am not going to commit suicide - Worry. 8 December, 1969,
On Kawara.

I am going to sleep - Forget it. 11 December, 1969,
On Kawara.

2. One postcard sent each day since January 1st 1970.
(Sample: Jan 4 1970. I got up at 2:47 p.m.)³

Hanne Darboven

Hanne Darboven is another artist to whom I am drawn. Her work also emphasizes daily ritual. Often beginning with the day's date as a starting point, she develops numerical systems which are exhibited as drawings. "What she's concerned about is the system - as a way of focusing - a way of ritualizing her art experience."⁴ What is striking about her work is the obsessiveness of it. (See illustration 26).

¹Lippard, Six Years, (1973), pp. 49-50.

²Barbara Reise, "On Kawara at the Kunsthalle", Art in America (January/February 1975), p. 90.

³Lippard, Six Years, (1973), p. 162.

⁴Collins, "Story", (1973), p. 86.

"100 Years in One Year" for instance, was shown from day to day over a year at Konrad Fischer's gallery in Düsseldorf in 1970; each month consisted of thirty or thirty-one books, and each day a different book extrapolated the date . . . Darboven was executing the piece while it was being shown so that her personal calendar was synchronized with that of the work . . .

This system . . . the best known of which is based on a day, month, year, century - the digits added, multiplies and interwoven until they become too large to be manageable, at which point they are resystematized into progressively smaller areas, which then suggest new larger areas, and so forth . . .

It (Darboven's work) is double directional - expanding, then going back, "so I relearn where I came from. By doing it, it becomes not more and more because its already there, but clearer and clearer".¹

In an article from March 1977, called "Report from Toronto and Montreal", Amy Goldin separated Canadian art into categories. The first category was painters.

[The second was] artists who aim to shift the direction of normal artistic response and turn away from the work of art as a manifestation of skill or esthetic value. Working with untraditional materials or forms, they see what they do as a means to the redefinition of extra artistic experience. I take this category to include most of what, at an earlier stage, was called "Avant-Garde". Conceptual art belongs here, so does process art, most performance, some painting and sculpture.²

Her third category is called "Self-Reference", which she says could also be referred to as "alienated art". "The artist is present as a private person, primarily concerned with a self whose processes and guises constitute the work." She goes on to say: "Here one finds the biographical and autobiographical art so often encountered in New York."

Of course I was fascinated to see who she placed in the area concerning autobiography.

¹Lippard, From The Center, (1976), pp. 186-187.

²Amy Goldin "Report from Toronto and Montreal", Art in America (March/ April 1977), p. 43.

In this category, Esther Warkov's paintings are dainty and stale; Suzy Lake and Mary Janitch, who make eerie presences are noteworthy.

The chief representative of this third group is Ron Martin. . . visually his work is incredibly uneventful. He deals with one sort of minimally articulated field at one time and has produced several sequences over the last five years; one-color paintings, faintly gestural . . .

Martin's insistence that these are not pictures but manifestations of his inner self intrigues the Canadians like crazy, but having heard this sort of thing before, it didn't impress me. He says esthetic judgments are irrelevant to the works - the viewer is supposed to discard all cultural expectations and use these occurrences as opportunities to encounter his own creative experience.

If Martin's paintings are autobiographical, there is certainly nothing about them visually that would indicate this. I don't think Goldin looked very hard to find her "chief representative". Martin's paintings look extremely formal and tasteful, and unfortunately he is not standing under them to tell us otherwise!

Loren Ewing, Colette Whiten

In the area of sculpture, autobiographical sources are not easily discernable, although one of my earliest impressions of autobiographical art came from a sculpture piece by Loren Ewing (Rhode Island School of Design). Ewing presented slides of her work at the 1978 College Art Association Conference. Most slides were of large minimal floor constructions; the final one being a photograph of a wooden floor piece, made up of twenty-six lattice strips, assembled with a space between each strip. It resembled her earlier work, but there was a significant difference. The edge of each board had a bevelled edge where she had put a continuous piece of writing. Even without this knowledge, one was tempted

¹Goldin, "Toronto and Montreal", (1977), p. 45.

to fantasize as to whether or not the platform was strong enough to hold one's weight. With the addition of the words, the viewer attempts to judge whether the structure would allow him to reach the parts of the story "trapped" in the middle of the "floor".

In retrospect, it is interesting to know if the artist is just stuffing content into a clearly minimal form in response to a need to justify such work with the new shift away from minimalism.

Canadian, Colette Whiten makes plaster cast sculpture. Formally, she used people as "models" in executing her work. Now she has turned to using herself and family as subject. Her recent work shows similar attention to materials (plaster and wood) but each is a portrait of a family member. Whiten uses the negative impression left from the castings. "Plaster that has taken on such an uncanny and hallucinatory resemblance to Whiten's now absent subject that her sculptures become three-dimensional memories, Pods for the conjuring of human presence. Thus their primitivism. And their power."¹

Before the "family" series, Whiten made "three upright tombs which opened up to reveal perfect white intaglios of herself, Gernot, (her lover) and Stephen (her friend)." Adele Freedman writes: "The real proof that Whiten's thoughts had taken a metaphysical turn lay in the three mummies . . . stunningly naked. The front of each person is sunk into one half of the tomb; the back into the other. When a tomb is closed the cavity is the exact shape and volume of the person."² While I would not say that

¹Gary Michael Dault, "Sculptor Colette Whiten builds her work from air", Toronto Star, May 20, 1978.

²Adele Freedman, "Art: Colette Whiten's Humanizing Process: Transforming People into Fine Art", Toronto Life (April 1978), p. 160.

Whiten's major concern lies with autobiography it is a case in point that she has, at this particular time, chosen to make these pieces using herself and the people in her life.

Alan Sonfist

Alan Sonfist collected twenty odd "found organic objects" or "natural processes" and put them in a recent installation, which he called "Autobiography". They included Autobiography of an Abandoned Animal Hole (a twenty-foot plaster cast of an abandoned muskrat hole) and Autobiography of a Living Rock "(about the infinitesimal movement in a rock in a bed of similar rocks)".¹

Sonfist is using autobiography in a completely different way with this installation. Critic Ronald Ororato says "Every work in 'Autobiography' functions out of that fertile area between the natural and the artificial where Sonfist focuses his greatest attention . . ."² In a typewritten statement of intention posted on the gallery wall, Sonfist insisted that he, "like everything else, is a part of the natural world." Then in each of the pieces he "set out to prove or disprove it . . . This exhibition seemed to be dedicated to contradicting the long-held humanist notion that man is separate from nature by his ability to reason . . ."³

His recent objects and photodocumentations (including a series with Sonfist standing behind and embracing the trunks of various trees) have

¹Ann-Sargent Wooster, "Alan Sonfist (review)", Art Forum (January 1976), p. 67.

²Ronald J. Ororato, "Alan Sonfist (review)", Art Forum (January 1978), p. 75.

³Gerrit Henry, "Alan Sonfist as Ariadne", Art in America (January 1967), p. 102.

been accompanied by "an autobiographical chronology whose entries are always expanding." Among these are:

1946 - May 26 at 10:10 p.m.: my first experience was air./ 1950 - Planted my first seeds in a pickle jar and observed the growth./1951 - Sat on an anthill and was covered with ants./ 1954-59 - Visited all the museums in New York City./ 1954- Set my arm on fire!¹

In a similar work, Autobiography of Time Landscape (1975), Sonfist drew parallels between the evolution of New York City and his own growth."

Peter Frank says "Sonfist emphasizes the personal aspect of this interaction even further, beginning with the ecosystem of his own body and working outward."²

Alice Aycock

The idea of "emphasizing the personal", whether it is immediately apparent or not, is also found in Alice Aycock's art. Aycock does indoor and outdoor constructions that are architecturally and archeologically based. Some are created outdoors, under and above ground: crawling spaces and climbing spaces, all adapted to an intimate human scale. Others are designed to be shown indoors as is: Circular Building with Narrow Ledge for Walking (1976), which I saw at the Museum of Modern Art (February 1978). Beside the large construction, written information gave descriptions of the construction, followed by a personal reference by Aycock.

The hallway on the second floor is usually long. There are at least fifteen doors on either side of it. One door leads to a broom closet, one to a linen closet, and one to the backstairs. The rest of the rooms are bedrooms. The fifth door on the left

¹Frank, "Auto-Art", p. (1976), 46.

²Hayden Herrera, "Manhattan Seven" Art in America (July/August 1977), p. 53.

leads to a bedroom, the floor of which is missing . . . But in the middle of the wall opposite the closet there is a large water stain, and beside it, a little higher up, two greasy smudges, the kind that come from heads pressing against the wall.

The description serves as a link back into the "personal space", which is one of a number of levels associated with her work. Though Aycock is primarily concerned with "architectural structures", the curators wrote (in the exhibition material) that "Aycock's art is also deeply involved with autobiographical memories, feelings and reflections".

Lucas Samaras

It has been suggested that one of the basic premises for Autobiographical art is occupational therapy. The "narcissistic" element varies between artists to lesser or greater degrees; however probably the most obsessive autobiographical artist of renown, is Lucas Samaras.

For nearly two decades of his career, Lucas Samaras has figured personally in the various manifestations of his art activity . . . None has produced his self-image with such consistent obsession over so long a period as Samaras. The recent, ubiquitous appearance of themes dealing with self-exposure, self-revelation or self-examination in feminist, video and body art has placed Samaras' work in somewhat of a pioneering stance with regard to this widespread area of investigation . . .¹

Of the artists who emerged in the Sixties and continue to be creative forces today, Lucas Samaras is a peculiarly isolated figure. An artist whose involvement with body imagery, autobiography, and photography prefigured many of the concerns of current video, narrative and body art, Samaras does not fit conveniently into any of the journalistic classifications contrived to organize the chaotic jumble of styles characteristic of the art of our day.

Samaras has aggressively assaulted classical categories that distinguish high from low, major from minor art, painting from sculpture, object from environment. Working in the interstices between aesthetic categories, he manages to adulterate everything he touches - which has made his work anathema to formalist critics

¹Melinda Wertz, "Revelations of the Self", Art News (April 1976), p. 36.

... Samaras keeps his scale deliberately small. Indeed human scale is one of the common denominators of this work in all media, proving once again that the parameters of Samaras' style exist, but they are not formal but psychological . . . His works remain private, introverted - the record of a subjective experience generalized to the point that it is not merely the illustration of a casebook neurosis, but a totally recreated world view . . .

[His] autobiography is generalized to the point where content is general, not specific. [We are not] drawn into the vagaries and particulars of the artist's life. Indeed, given the amount of self-exposure Samaras has engaged in, we know little of his private life, since his disclosures are never literally confessional.¹

Early in the sixties, when Samaras first began painting, his works centred on himself.

Using a portable mirror, he began to do a series of self-portraits, each a ghostly image, in which the emotions of anxiety and terror dominated. This disturbing self-imagery was also incorporated in the artist's first small boxes, containing tiny mirrors that reflected images of his own face . . . Throughout the 1960s, increasing technical refinement yielded work of singular individuality. The obsessive aggregation of materials produced boxed encrusted by pins, feathers and tacks, that contained a wide assortment of objects - bits of mirror, cotton, photographs, jewels, strands of hair, mementoes of personal significance . . .²

Coupled with his visual work at the time, Samaras "began to write bizarre stories published in private editions, in which wartime memories combined with hallucinatory terror-filled fantasies, mirrored his psychic turmoil". Later, in 1965, Samaras exhibited Mirror Room at the Pace Gallery in New York. "Mirror Room" was a key work which, endlessly multiplied the viewer. It brought one into palpable contact with Samaras' own relentless and thrilling self-encounter, with its erotic overtones gave one access to the artist's search for the self . . ."³

¹Barbara Rose, "Lucas Samaras: The Self as Icon and Environment", Arts Magazine (February 1978), pp. 144 and 148.

²John Gruen, "The Apocalyptic Disguises of Lucas Samaras", Art News (April 1975), p. 34.

³Gruen, (1975), p. 34.

The search was continued in 1969 with a film called Self (made in collaboration with Kim Levin). Barbara Rose writes: "In his autobiographical film 'Self', Samaras explored the psychological implications of narcissism long before it became fashionable to exhibit pathology publicly".¹

The autobiographical works, for which Samaras has become well-known, are his Autopolaroids (early seventies) and his Photo-Transformations. (See illustrations 27, 28). "Autopolaroids, were, in effect, transformations of both the self and the photographic process. Samaras added colored inks - in dots, dashes, squiggles - to the colored photoemulsions."² He takes Autopolaroids of himself in "tortured or uneasy poses and then doctors them with characteristically opulent colours".³

The Photo-Transformations from 1975 are an expansion on the Autopolaroids using his new technological toy, the SX-70 Polaroid Camera. They show Samaras "straining the limits of the documentary conception of photography to find visual metaphors for various of his emotional states, to develop an ongoing fiction of himself . . ."⁴ The photo-emulsions are "manipulated in ways that create illusions as bizarre and terrifying as they are visually riveting and disquietingly gorgeous."⁵

¹Rose, (1978), p. 146.

²Gruen, (1975), p. 34.

³Frank, "Auto-Art", (1976), p. 47.

⁴Kenneth Baker, "Lucas Samaras at Pace", Art in America (July/August 1974), p. 85.

⁵Gruen, (1975), p. 84

His face and naked body are "seen in apocalyptic disguises". In her article called "Revelations of the Self", Melinda Wortz writes about the Photo-Transformations.

Whether in the guise of Satantic myth, autocannibalism or erotic horror, Samaras' images are undeniably compelling. Because of their scale we must move close to perceive the details and appreciate the lush, shining color and surface, unwittingly becoming voyeuristic addicts to the half-human, half-demonic images which comprise this remarkable body of work.¹

Since Samaras first used it, the Polaroid camera has become a favourable medium for narrative and autobiographical pieces. It is even more accessible than video, and has a very unsophisticated look and an intimate scale that some anti-formal artists are drawn to. There is even a convenient white border with a spacious bottom edge, that evidently serves as an excellent place to type out little texts. SX-70 snap-shots with bottom edge writing, makes a textbook example of Autobiographical art!

For Samaras, not only does the Polaroid camera provide privacy and convenience, but because of the properties of the film, he is able to manipulate the imagery as it is still developing.² When asked why he uses himself as the "exclusive subject of these disturbing pictures", he replied:

It has to do with the lack of information available on autobiographical portraiture. I have found for myself an uncultivated field to which I can go and do my stuff. That uncultivated field is the self.

¹Wortz, (1976), p. 36.

²"The process is described as a mylar sandwich containing a transparent sheet whose inner surface is the image receptor, an opaque, black sheet whose inside surface is a negative, and a pod containing the developing chemicals. As the emulsion pockets pass through the camera they break, adhere to the picture surface and develop the image. It is in the liquidity of the emulsion in its developing state that enables Samaras to manipulate the imagery as it is still in the process of forming"., Wortz, (1976), p. 36.

Most of us have evaded the body. There is a certain word which has negative connotations: narcissism. You know . . . Don't look in the mirror! Well, when you live alone and don't have people saying 'Don't do this' and 'Don't do that', you can do whatever the hell you like, and if you want to look in the mirror, it's not all that dangerous, not even all that erotic. For me, looking in the mirror produces a sense of wonder . . . And so, I started photographing myself, and found that I could see portions of myself that I had never seen before . . . When I see a side-view, I'm not used to it, and find it peculiar. Or the back of my head - it's very strange to see it. So, photographing myself and discovering unknown territories of my surface self, causes an interesting psychological confrontation. You face certain facts about yourself.¹

Barbara Rose refers to Samaras' objects as "icons devised for the worship of the artist; whose relics or image are enshrined". She says they are "distillations of the artist's experience condensed into an object or an environment so intensely personal that confrontation with it commits the spectator to join the artist in communing with himself".² Rose goes on to point out a relationship of pathology to current art which she views as a "moral issue".

Alienation, fragmentation and nihilism loom large in the art of today . . . Specific disorders, particularly of the psycho-sexual variety, including voyeurism and exhibitionism, which are aggravated by the reproductive technology which encourages the perception of the mechanically duplicated self as "other", are paramount themes. Samaras certainly deals with narcissism, sadomasochism, et al.; however he is an observer and conceivably a critic rather than a purveyor and salesman of these phenomena. The subject of his work may be pathological, but Samaras maintains the distanced stance of irony and implicit self-criticism.³

The use of photography for Samaras' body transformations operates as a somewhat protective device, separating him from his audience. The photographic medium allows for "greater liberties in manipulating the

¹Gruen, (1975), p. 35

²Rose, (1978), p. 144.

³Rose, (1978), p. 148.

imagery in the direction of nightmarish fantasies. Rather than a literal presentation of his body, Samaras offers fantastic visions".¹

In his newer pieces, (see illustration 29), Samaras has continued with his SX-70 format. This work resembles theatre sets, used in his tiny images. They are large "canvases" of patchwork exhibited also as "paintings". The fabric is luscious. Stripes, dots, metallic thread, electric colours and dark sinister blacks are sewn together in all directions. The recent article, "Lucas Samaras: The Self as Icon and Environment", (1978) traces his work through the 60s and 70s. Author Barbara Rose finds that the new works have moved away from self-exposure towards the very decorative, even gaudy, boxes and sewn cloth abstractions. However Rose says: "No matter how superficially abstract these new works, they still carry autobiographical messages. For it is impossible to forget how sleazy and repugnant their textures are, nor how their dazzling glitter and intricate pierced tracery recall Samaras' omnipresent Byzantine heritage".²

Autobiography is by its nature seductive. It offers "the promise of a peephole on another's psyche".³ The SX-70 (as with video) image, is perfect! Intimate in size - it is like a little window looking in. Where the artist's delight is in exposure, the viewer, likewise, loves to be given the opportunity to take a peek!

¹Wortz, (1976), p. 36.

²Rose, (1978), p. 149.

³Marmer, "Autobiographical Fantasies", (1976), p. 77.

PART II

Over and over, I see and hear the verdict: "Pluralism!" We have gone past the strongholds of ideology and formalism so influential in the fifties and sixties. Can art be so structured and contrived as history insists? Abstract Expressionism, Pop Art, Op Art, Minimalism and Conceptualism, all following carefully in line suddenly give way to total openness and acceptance of diversity? Is there really a tolerance between each faction at work? Or are we operating in tiny pockets of related interest in relative isolation? Perhaps the truth is more that there has always been pluralism and that, with distance, the seventies will show a progression, similar to the past decades.

Eric Cameron argues that: "The new pluralism of the '70s not only permits art to take many different forms, but accepts multiplicity and profusion as esthetic principles in themselves".¹ His statement confirms that there remain few definitions and clear boundaries in contemporary art.² And, he does not deny that there is a sensibility specific to current art which is grounded in such criss-crossing of elements. Though there will always be realists, formal colour painters and abstractors who continue to work regardless of fashion, I do not believe that current art is so undefined, so pluralistic. I suspect there is a definite move towards a

¹Eric Cameron, "Peter Hutchinson: From Earth to Story Art", Art Forum (December 1977), p. 32.

²Mayo Graham, "Performance Sculpture", Art Magazine (June 1978), p. 43.

humanist, anti-formal activity which is the new strength of seventies art.

I am certainly not alone in this opinion. Douglas David writes:

The most influential artist in the world in the early seventies was the German Joseph Beuys, whose work is redolent with a personal romantic trademake and a thorough commitment, to political action - through his political party, the Organization for a Direct Democracy. He is the antithesis, symbolically, of Warhol. At the very moment that some of my prophets were speaking and calling for a new visual culture, conceptual art was on the rise, soon to be followed by "story", or narrative art, a movement whose Physical embodiment is almost always devoted to word and text, not to image. At this moment (1976) we are passing through a period of intense concentration on the self (in painting, drawing, performance, and video), verging on the autobiographical and narcissistic.¹

Alan Sondheim has created an atmosphere for his humanism to thrive in Individuals. He says, "The following adjectives are useful in defining this stance: personal, eclectic, intellectual literary, antireductive, historical."² He continues to define his position:

The artist may choose to embed his or her work into the mainstream of contemporary art, which often results in a tendency toward formalism and the attempt to carry one particular aspect of already existing art "one step further". But the artist may also choose to turn inward, in a sense - to investigate the relationship between self and society, self and history. In short the artist may choose to examine the position of the self in the world . . . This examination can establish the notion of humanity, give it ground. There is still the tendency in both the sciences and the arts to qualify society, reduce everything to numbers and parameters. This tendency results in a misplaced clarity, a belief that it is possible rationally, analytically, to come to grips with the world.²

Not everyone, however is as sympathetic to this direction. Cindy Nemser refers to the new wave of post-conceptual art saying: "everyone is ready to let anything and everything hang out, so we have masochism and

¹Douglas Davis, Art Culture: Essays on the Post-Modern (New York: Icon Editions, Harper and Row, Publishers, 1977); p. 97.

²Sondheim, Individuals, (1977), p. VII.

³Sondheim, Individuals, (1977), pp. VII-VIII.

masturbation art, body exploitation art, political discussion art, philosophical discussion art, personal childhood documentation art, etc."¹

For the purposes of this thesis, it is necessary to distinguish Autobiographical art from other similar components of this new aesthetic. In another context, however, it should not be separated. It is part of a whole which Sondheim describes as ". . . a series of deep investigations into the texture of contemporary life, or . . . the position of the individual in relation to society, and the 'universe at large!'"² Therefore, it is only through restrictive definitions that one can pull Autobiographical art apart from the larger category. I see the separation more as a system of flotation.³ Superfluous layers of related material are siphoned off, thus eventually leaving a mass of pure material, rather than a "cut and dry" situation. In this case it is isolating Autobiographical art from Behavioral art, Body art, and self-portraiture (which are all forms of "self-representation" in art), and from Narrative and Story art.

Intent is one of the determining factors in this discussion. Where the intention of the artist is to investigate and define the self through the specific use of memories, dreams and reflections there is no problem. Where the investigation is explored through the body, it is more difficult to distinguish Autobiographical from Body art. According to Cindy Nemser, "bodyworks are undertaken by artists who pursue man's never-ending dialogue between himself and the world around him, by exploring the primary

¹Cindy Nemser, "Blowing the Whistle on the Art World", Feminist Art Journal (Summer 1975), p. 30.

²Sondheim, Individuals, (1977), p. XXIV.

³In Mining: A process of separating different elements by weight to leave pure ore without destroying the other materials.

source material, [man's] own body."¹ Psychologist James J. Gibson's basic thesis is that "man can only know his environment through the perceptual systems of his own body".²

Body art is an earlier manifestation of Autobiographical art.³ The emphasis has shifted from body as object to a fuller concept of "self". Robert Morris says, "If early '70s object-type art located itself within that space of basic, rationalized information systems, another type of art has been merging more recently, whose mode is not that of the logical icon. Rather, it is the space of the self which the latter work explores".⁴ This is evident in the work of Denis Oppenheim (as shown earlier in this paper).

Body works continue in themselves or develop into the other closely related area of "Behavioral art". This is especially noticeable with some European artist such as Arnulf Rainer, Marina Abramovic and Giogio Ciam. The two men who make up "Reindeerwerk" are examples of Behavioral artists; they use the body to examine behavioural conditions and extremes.

The areas of self-portraiture is also difficult to categorize. Once again there is the issue of intent and the use of "Autobiographical art" as a term to define this tendency in seventies art. Amy Goldin's terms "Post-Perceptual Self-Portrait" or "Conceptual Self-Portraiture" could be used to define self-portraits in this area too. Goldin says, "Self-portraits become a device for stripping oneself naked. Masks and disguises become

¹Calas, (1978), p. 33.

²Calas, (1978), p. 33.

³Frank, "Auto-Art", (1976), p. 43.

⁴Robert Morris, "Aligned with Nazca", Art Forum (October 1975), p.33.

signs of private fantasy."¹ An example of this was a recent exhibition at Montreal's Powerhouse gallery, called, "Auto-Portraits" (September 1978). A wide range of autobiographical portraits were displayed, including a piece by Bé Van der Heide. Here she combined recent photographs of herself with those taken eight years before, resulting in a portrait of facial changes through time. (See illustration).

Conceptual art is an influencing factor in all these later forms mentioned above. An "essential aspect of Conceptual art is self-reference";² Body art and Narrative art are both manifestations of one strain of conceptual activity, while other "styles expose systems of ostensibly pure reason".³ Conceptual art is probably the turning point and foundation for the newer work including Autobiographical art. John Walker says, "Originally, Conceptual art was a two-fold enterprise concerned with (a) theoretical examination of the concept 'art' and (b) putting forward concepts as art. The necessity for such an enterprise arose from the crisis in painting and the impasse of formalist and Minimal aesthetics."⁴

The advent of Conceptual art initiated radical changes by "its denial that the appearance of art is crucial".⁵ The movement "completed the break with traditional esthetics that the Dadaists, and notably Marcel Duchamp

¹Goldin, "Portrait", (1977), p. 80.

²Ursula Meyer, Conceptual Art (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co. Inc., 1972) p. VIII.

³Peter Frank, "Peter Hutchinson at Gibson", Art in America (July/August 1975), p. 100.

⁴Walker, (1975), p. 54.

⁵Goldin; "Portrait", (1977), p. 79.

initiated", by eliminating "the concern with 'style', 'quality', and 'permanence', the indispensable modalities of traditional and contemporary art."¹

The idea became the most important element. In number 13 from "Sentences on Conceptual Art" (1968), Sol Lewitt says "A work of art may be understood as a conductor from the artist's mind to the viewers. But it may never reach the viewer, or it may never leave the artist's mind."²

Many artists have rejected what appeared to be the extreme rigidity of early Conceptual art. Autobiographical art "incorporates the procedures and materials of conceptualism - verbal and photographic documentation, human action, new media such as video - while substituting personal, idiosyncratic, poetic content for Conceptual art's totally intellectualized procedures."³ An example of this is cited in an article on Alexis Smith by Nancy Marmer; "Smith's story-collages grow out of the conceptualist ambience; they retain a lean conceptualist look and the conceptualist's self-conscious, sometimes ironic mood. But their motivating energy is different. For Smith, the narrative is a springboard to thematic statement and sensuous experience, not a substitute for pictorial idea."⁴

Janet Katner's, "The Visceral Aesthetic of a New Decade's Art" gives another reference to the new conceptualism, when she discusses work by John Baldessari. She says: "Baldessari is considered a conceptual artist to

¹Meyer, (1972), pp. IX and XV.

²Meyer, (1972), p. 179.

³Frank, "Auto-Art", (1976), p. 43.

⁴Nancy Marmer, "Alexis Smith: The Narrative Act", Art Forum (December 1976), p. 31.

the degree that ideas seem more critical to him than images, composition, shapes, color, and texture, but many of his photographs are strong in image, proficiently and sensitively accomplished, often retouched."¹

Robert Pincus Witten describes the move into the area of Body art this way: "Another strain of Conceptual activity rejected the external embodiments of painting and sculpture for an internalizing self-referential urge that sought sculptural incarnation through the artist's use of the body itself."²

The manifestation of mixed media Narrative art grew out of Conceptualism, and revolves around fiction or "circumstantial incident".³ Ann Sargent-Wooster confirms this path. "Stories have always been told with words and/or images, so what is so new about the new mode called 'Narrative (or Story Art)?' Clearly it represents an innovation only as a sub-set of Conceptual art whose subject matter - or material - is narrative."⁴

There is a certain amount of overlap observed between Narrative and Autobiographical art. The format is often very similar; Geff Perrone points out this dicotomy in the work of Donna Lee Phillips:

Phillips is an example of a narrative artist whose works appear to be autobiographical or diaristic, but aren't. Her pieces are "fictions and fragments". Her art consist of "photo-text sequences" involving a fiction character. She explores "the relationship between remembering, knowing and substantiation through photographs - memory as a problem solved by device . . . The text is the thought process raw, in starts and stops, with

¹Janet Kutner, "The Visceral Aesthetic of a New Decade's Art", Arts Magazine (December 1976), p. 102.

²Pincus-Witten, "Scott Burton", (1976), p. 112.

³Frank, "Hutchinson", p. 100.

⁴Ann-Sargent Wooster, "Hanne Darboven and Bill Beckley (reviews)", Art in America, (July/August 1975), p. 98.

repetitions, dragging a certain idea along, holding it, scrutinizing it, perhaps lying to itself (but not us). In one, a man in the background waits for the woman to get made up to go out; in her mind's background is an inner monologue of memories and questions. The props are make-up, combs, mirror and reflection . . . She thinks of what she used to look like (plain, the way her husband married her, she was still pretty in an old photograph) and what she now knows (repression, anxiety, aging visage) . . . The photographs are like stills from a movie.¹

Alexis Smith, John Baldessair, Gilbert and George, and Peter Hutchinson are all relatively well-known artists, whose work operates in this ambiguous area between Narrative and Autobiographical art. Their work often teases us with the element of true/false. The question arises as to whether or not autobiography lends authenticity and credibility to narrative work. I have already insisted that Autobiographical art is not documentation and that memory and fantasy do not require accuracy. As Eleanor Antin says: "Autobiographical art makes mistakes, lies, because the claim to truth is infected by desire . . . desire does not become a documentary but an impoverished romance . . ."²

Peter Hutchinson

Peter Hutchinson's works are in part autobiographical. In Foraging, he provides a long account in words and photographs of a hike through the Rocky Mountains. This also incorporates another contemporary concern, which is sympathetic to the "natural ecosystem".³ His 1974 The Alphabet Series contained, "fragments of myth, proverbial wisdom and a

¹ Jeff Perrone, "Donna-Lee Phillips, Hal Fisher (review)", Art Forum (October 1977), p. 75.

² Toward Post-Modernist Forum, C.A.A. Conference, New York, 1978.

³ Hutchinson's earlier work involved "forays into process and land art", including a piece from 1970, where he "garnished the rim of a Mexican volcano with 450 pounds of breadcrumbs", David Bourdon, "Peter Hutchinson (review)", Arts Magazine (October 1977), p. 4.

lot of personal reminiscences, all interconnected by utterly incidental alphabetical associations".¹

Though Hutchinson is not strictly concerned with autobiography, he finds a way to personalize his content, without dwelling on sentimental nostalgia or self-indulgent narcissism. The text from one of a seven part serial work of 1975 called The Anarchist's Story illustrates this.

Daniel De Foe's "Robinson Crusoe", like "Moby Dick" has very different implications to the present day. Reading Moby Dick all I can think about is how whales are being exterminated. Robinson Crusoe seems to say something about socialization. Dealing with solitude and people different from oneself is supposed to be a trauma. Today we all dream of being isolated on a desert island. The sight of a footprint in the sand would send us running in the opposite direction. In today's world there are no longer any spiritual desert island!²

Eric Cameron writes about him saying: "Peter Hutchinson's strength lies in poignant trivalities that build up an image of a personality, communicating its warmth as well as its quirks and foibles. It is a very human personality, eccentric no doubt . . . Hutchinson represents a welcome alternative to the faltering academism of late Conceptual art."³

Gilbert and George

In Alexis Smith's narratives, she uses "text taken from literature and constructs the stories in a visual form . . . a personal hybrid indifferent to the boundaries between art and literature."⁴ Gilbert and George have also used texts extensively. They too fall into this space between definite Narrative and Autobiographical art forms. From an article called "Book as Artwork", Germano Celant writes: "Attention was . . . drawn in

¹ Levin, "Antin", (1977), p. 32.

² Davis, Art Culture, (1977), p. 140.

³ Cameron, "Hutchinson", (1977), p. 32.

⁴ Harmer, "Smith", (1976), p. 31.

1970 to English work by Gilbert and George whose books accompanies their actions and events. [They] professed from 1969, 'An Art for All, an Art to be Sung, to be Eaten, to be Read, to be Danced, to be Walked, for Coffee, for Philosophy'; and so on. Their whole way of life became a work of art. Every gesture, or piece of writing was intended to elucidate their living sculpture."¹

Lucy Lippard explains that "Beginning March 11, 1971, eight signed booklets [were] mailed out by Gilbert and George (Art for All, London); each one consist[ed] of a scratchy pen and ink drawing on the cover (after photographs and a brief text in couplets; each ends with Goodbye for Now: [examples of two]

Lost day 11 March 1971 (Gilbert and George leaning against the wall along the Thames, a lamppost to the right.) There were two young men who were tired/They were tired and a little bit lost. They thought they were kings of their best/and found out they were just like the rest. One day they went out for a day/though they risked falling down a drain. They smiled like two babies without fear/As you will be happy to hear.

Shyness, 29 March 1971 (Gilbert and George sitting and leaning against a large log in a quiet densely drawn woodland setting.) There were two young men who were crooked/They were crooked in the way you feel best. They gave them the answers to live/And left them with heads full of fizz. But their friends they all left behind/They became lonely artistic and shy. Be aware of these silly old heads/or you'll always look over the hedge.²

The work of these artists brings another question. Is there any responsibility on the part of the artist to comply with the literary standards of narrative and autobiography? I would argue that there is not. While some artists do take literary form into consideration, it need not be a criteria. One has only to look through publications of Avant Garde

¹E. Antin, (1974), p. 25.

²Lippard, Six Years, (1973), p. 223-224.

writing, and experimental fiction, such as in the publication Tracks¹ to see how the rules of traditional literary style have been broken. Often the form is very unconventional, using varieties of type, images and arrangements to make the work. In Breakthrough Fictioneers, author Richard Kostelanetz says:

What is new in contemporary art often deals inventively with the essentials of the medium; in fiction's case, the possibilities of language and narrative form, as well as the potentialities of both a rectangular printed page and the rhythmic process of turning pages; and "freedom" in any art means the uncompromised opportunity to use or fill these basic materials without restraint - without deference, to be more specific, to either literary conventions or "worldly realities".²

In Jeff Perrone's article "Words: when art takes a rest", he insists that "while conceptual art was words, we took it as art, not literature" and that "the kind of writing that visual artists used was a record of themselves talking or thinking alone".³ In my own work, when I began to use legible writing, I had to carefully consider the content, though not particularly the style. For me, it was far more important to deal with the problems of exposing personal information when writing is used. Is protection or disguise necessary?

How different artists disguise their content is a fascinating element of autobiographical work. It is usually hidden through the camouflage available in the "form". We see this in Judy Clarke's work, in her presentation of her objects. In Bill Beckley and Colin Campbell's work, there is ambiguity between fact and fiction, which operates as an

¹Tracks, a journal of artist' writings formerly published in New York.

²Richard Kostelanetz, ed., Breakthrough Fictioneers (Vermont: Something Else Press, 1973), p. XVI.

³Jeff Perrone, "'Words': When Art Takes a Rest", Art Forum (Summer 1977), p. 34.

alternative form of disguise. In Film About a Woman Who . . ., Yvonne Rainer uses written narrative. "Occasionally, the narrative is on the screen for too short a time for most people to read it . . . Occasionally, Rainers' voice is superimposed over the narrative, but the written image disappears before the voice has finished reading, or the 'page' changes before we can check her out."¹ Rainer uses another form of disguise here, when she uses "SHE" instead of "I" in her films. Most autobiographical works naturally use the first person, but Rainer's example stands to prove that it is not a must.

Of course, a classic mask is the use of barely legible handwriting, or by making the reading so difficult that the viewer is likely not to bother to sort out the messages. Thus a "sloppy" hand provides an effective cover, but may also keep the artist from communicating very much. Chicago artist, Thelma Headstedt, uses shorthand in her drawing which also affords a limited audience. One must come to terms with how much one really wants the viewer to know.

Eleanor Antin has herself "labeled her on-going four-faced saga 'autobiographical art'". It "hinges on an anachronistic mingling of self-revelation and historical put-on".² Antin says "you loose out in this world by being honest - the truth is very expensive".³

Autobiographical works are sometimes overtly open. Through words, images and the use of the body, the artist may totally expose him or herself. Even so, the viewer in this case may provide the protection. "Nakedness is an ambivalent state implying weakness and power

¹Freed, (1975), p. 83.

²Marmer, "Autobiographical Fantasies", (1976), p. 77.

³Toward Post-Modernist Form, C.A.A. Conference, New York, 1978.

simultaneously. The naked person is an image of helplessness and yet nudity is terrifying to the observer".¹ It should be pointed out that work which is personal in nature is not necessarily any more accessible than work which is not. "The results" says Roberta Smith are "often hermetic, inward, and literary . . ."²

There is another question: How far can the meaning of the art reach beyond the artist and the people who know him? There are two related queries: How far can one sacrifice form for content? And the question of self-indulgence.

Carl Andre feels that his art "meets needs of my own and I don't think I'm so peculiar a person as to have needs not shared by other people!"³ Admittedly, Andre is not known to be an Autobiographical artist, but his statement stands, none the less, as a point of view shared by many artists, particularly those who are working with human content.

Cindy Nemser says that respected transactional psychologists such as F.H. Allport and F. Fitzpatrick insisted that "perception is a two-way street, that we bring our experience, our special fantasies to our vision of what is out there and thus our cognizance of external reality is colored by our individual perceiving process".⁴ It would seem to be true then, that we get out of the work what ever we can "see" in it for ourselves, and naturally this perception is different for everyone.

¹ Heresies: patterns of communication and space among women (a feminist publication on art and politics, 105 Hudson St. New York, May 1977), p. 9.

² Roberta Smith, "the 1970s at the Whitney", Art in America (May/June 1977), p. 93.

³ Carla Gottlieb, Beyond Modern Art (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co. Inc., Toronto: Clark Irwin Co., 1976), p. 25.

⁴ Nemser, "Blowing the Whistle", (1975), p. 27.

Much of the criticism concerning Autobiographical art pertains to the whole area of Conceptual art. In traditional art-making, a painter or sculptor creates by a constant re-examination of his object, changing and rearranging until it is "right". How the work succeeded visually was of utmost importance. However Conceptual art rejects the value of the art object and places the focus on the idea and the activity. This has changed for many, the working methodology. Instead we now have: conceive, act out, document and display; without the same critical intervention. James Collins criticizes this way of working.

Ultimately, memory, religion, everyday occurrences, and theatrical events have to stand up as visual phenomena - theory laden or not. For my money they do not. Self-criticism, or a lack of it, is the problem. Just having an idea and carrying it out cold-bloodedly is no longer the innovative move it was once considered. Ideas, like problems have to be transformed in some way not just dished up.¹

Collins feels there must be more attention given to the visual if the new works can survive as good art. He uses Bill Beckley as an example.

"Beckley, by openly displaying his rather woodenly written fantasies ('I did this, she did this, then I did this') misses out contextually. Flashing is an on-off activity. I enjoyed reading his stories twice, after that I was only aware of the formal aspects of the work. And they're just not interesting enough."²

Douglas David, in his recent book Art Culture disusses the dilemma between form and content.

Form is incidental to the quality of the message. Which is to say that it serves content, not that it dictates form. Form distinguishes between levels of excellence - in this I thoroughly agree with the Greenbergians. But the distinctions operate on ascending levels of subject matter, levels that are indeed structured by content. The organization of a work in which both

¹Collins, "Story", (1973), p. 85.

²Collins, "Story", (1973), p. 85.

content and form are equal partners is thus always a mystery: we cannot separate one from the other. Nor is "style" the proper answer. A post-modern art must rid itself of the very notion of style, or trademark, because it implies that the organization (which defines the form) can be controlled by issues beyond content.¹

Lucy Lippard believes that "When an artist is truly 'inside' his or her work, when the art comes directly from the artist's needs and compulsions, the experience of that work is more direct and meaningful to others."² Cindy Nemser, for one, disagrees with this premise, arguing that content is the "rational these days for poor writing, over and underexposed photography, shakey video tapes and dull filmmaking."³

Peter Frank's view is that it may be self-indulgent, but also, "self-revealing, urgently communicative and as important a lesson in the ways of the world as are the exploration of form and substances in which non auto-artists continue to engage." Frank sees it as a valid "study of mankind" and says that it is logical that they "begin with the man or woman they know both best and least, and work outward from there."⁴

"Self-indulgence" is another area of criticism in Autobiographical art. To me, it is a cop-out to say, "It's just self-indulgence!". And to disregard the value of the work. To a point, this criticism is aimed at the entire area of self-searching activity found in the 1970s. In Tom Wolfe's article "The 'Me' Decade", he is extremely cynical of what he calls the "me, me, me" generation. He says this [self-searching] had always been an aristocratic luxury, confined throughout most of history to the life of the

¹Davis, Art Culture, (1977), p. 159-160.

²Lippard, From the Center, (1976), p. 195.

³Nemser, "Blowing the Whistle", (1975), p. 30.

⁴Frank, "Auto-Art", (1976), p. 43.

courts, since only the very wealthiest classes had the free time and the surplus income to dwell upon this sweetest and vainest of pastimes."¹

As I understand it "self-indulgent" is a negative expression, and I therefore do not attach it to this work, which I see as a positive form of creative expression. Self-searching and reflective it is. I would not call it self-indulgent except with the general acknowledgment that most of the world considers all art to be - in comparison to their own lives - self-indulgent.

¹Tom Wolfe, "The 'Me' Decade (And the Third Great Awakening)", New York, August 23, 1975, p. 32.

PART III

When I started out to do this thesis on Autobiographical art, my first interest was why? Why has there been such a strong move toward the use of personal information in the past few years?

I now attribute it to three main factors: The "Self-Search" Decade, The Reaction to Conceptual and Minimal Art, and The Photographic Arts. I have rejected a fourth element, the feminist view, which is The Women's Movement. Lucy Lippard is very insistent that women artists have provided a model and an opening for this new work. She says: "it is no coincidence that the women artist's movement emerged in a time of political consciousness, nor that the art world tendency toward behaviorism and content and autobiography coincided with the women's movement and its emphasis on self-searching and on the social structures which have oppressed women."¹

She feels that women have a more natural affinity with the content and form of Autobiographical art than men. She feels that women are "more interested in people, probably because you live vicariously if you're isolated. So women become more interested in soap opera and fiction. But women also care more about variety than men, and variety connects to fragmentation and to the autobiographical aspect too - as sort of defiance."²

¹Lippard, From The Center, (1976), p. 141.

²Lippard, From The Center, (1976), p. 188.

Heresies, a feminist publication on art and politics in New York, supports Lippard's view. Deena Metzger writes:

Performance is a natural form of expression for women whose history has been limited primarily to oral forms. . . Like gossip, performance can be seen as a form of social regulation which depends upon intimacy and association with the subject. Like journals, performance allows for the collective and public scrutiny of women's past and contemporary roles in order to create attitudinal and behavioral changes. Performances therefore often have a personal as well as a social didactic function. Performance is also a way of modeling, providing not only a critique of the past but alternative for the future.¹

I agree that most of women's art does "come out of their immediate experience as women",² and that much of it is personal or autobiographical. I do not, however, view that as a contribution factor, but rather think that the same conditions which have allowed women's art to unfold in the seventies have also made room for a more "humanist" art.

There are many names for this new tendency, including: "Autobiographical art", "autogeography", "self-transformational art", "conceptual self-portraiture", "Life art".³ They all denote a preoccupation with the self and its relationship to the world. Tom Wolfe says: "The old alchemical dream was changing metals into gold. The new alchemical dream is: changing one's personality - remaking, remodeling, elevating and polishing one's very self . . . and observing, studying, and doting on it."⁴

The interest in the self is everywhere. It reflects a broad current interest in autobiographical investigation and revelation. It manifests

¹Heresies, (1977), p.11.

²Cindy Nemser, "Towards a Feminist Sensibility: Contemporary Trends in Women's Art", Feminist Art Journal (Summer 1976), p. 21.

³Frank, "Auto-Art", (1976), p. 43.

⁴Wolfe, (1975), p. 32.

itself though the areas of psycho-therapy, body therapy, eastern mysticism and spiritualism, etc. Psychologist Burton Bradley says that "People are trying to cope with an insane world. The "me" idea is really more a question of survival than self-indulgence."¹

In "The 'ME' decade" Tom Wolfe shows the movement of society in the '70s towards the investigation of the individual in all areas of society. Therapy and psychoanalytic trends have combined with the "new religious sweeps" to become what he calls "The Third Great Awakening". He partially attributes this direction to the fact that the common man now has "the things he needed in order to realize his potential as a human being: a surplus (discretionary) income, political freedom, free time (leisure) and freedom from grinding drudgery."²

Other scholars believe that Vietnam, Watergate and other events in recent years disillusioned many artists of the 1960s, causing them to give up on societal improvement. "If you live in a society where you believe the public institutions are deeply flawed and not easily improved, that leaves the pursuit of individual happiness in a private way as the main challenge to your energies."³

Theodore Roszack, a recognized voice in the "Human Potential" movement, says: "both person and plant are threatened by the same energy: the bigness of things, the power mania of things - the bigness of industrial organizations, of world markets, and financial networks, of power and political alliance, of public institutions, military establishments, of cities, of bureaucracies. It is the colossalism of

¹"Why its Called the 'Me' Generation", (1978), p. 40.

²Wolfe, (1975), p. 30.

³"Why its Called The 'Me' Generation" (Keniston), (1978), p. 40.

these systems that endangers the rights of the persons, and the rights of the planet."¹ Rosack views "the passion for self-knowledge and self-recognition" as a search for an alternative to the "crushing-bigness".

My feeling about why art is reflecting this larger current interest in the self is based on "the spirit of times". Friends and people all around me utilize whatever necessary channels are available to explore themselves. In turn, I use the channels which are available to me. Because I make art, it is a primary source, an obvious outlet. I do not see it as jumping on a bandwagon, but rather as being in tune with a contemporary energy.

Lucy Lippard wrote in the winter of 1966-67 that "Overt human content in the visual arts in this century is rapidly diminishing . . . Thus the issue of introducing 'other experience' into art is in the context of rejective (Minimal) styles, and for better or worse, irrelevant."² Ten years later she wrote "Reading this over, I shudder at its narrowness." Obviously, at the time, she or few other critics were aware of the coming changes, involving a move away from formalist principles in art towards an emphasis on context. Douglas Davis asks:

What is content? It has been several decades since the question has even been raised, much less answered. Once content was held to be a natural component of the work of art, as natural as color or facture in painting, form or mass in sculpture. Since publication of Clement Greenberg's "Art and Culture", however, we have been led to believe that it is a corrupting agent in esthetic structures that are irreducibly visual and experiential, directed

¹Theodore Roszack, "The Manifesto of the Person", The World Symposium on Humanity, Vancouver 1976, p. 11.

²Lippard, From The Center, (1976), p. 3.

at the eye rather than at the intellect. We have been trained not to seek a meaning in art beyond its corporeal components.¹

This new concern for content is a result of the "idea" stressed by Conceptual art. It follows Sol Lewitt's proposal "that the visual results of the system that generated the object undermined formalism by insisting on a return to content."²

Autobiographical art is grounded in content. To an extent, it developed out of a reaction to the overdose of cold, geometric, impersonal art that dominated the sixties and early seventies. Peter Frank says: "The 'personalism' of 1970s art would seem to counter these earlier attitudes, but the progress of art shows us that every counter-movement is heavily influenced by the art it denies."³ Thus, Narrative and Autobiographical art show their strong resemblance to the often sparse, neatly packaged format of Conceptual and Minimal art.

There seems to be a growing attempt to reduce the great split between art and life. I am not saying that Autobiographical art reconciles the two. As we know it, art-activity is really only available and "significant to a very small, highly educated segment of the population."⁴ As such, no art can breach the tremendous gap. Painterly formalism of the 1960s was particularly limited to the privileged few. As Cindy Nemser points out, it was a highly specialized activity . . . "To understand the profound metaphysical significance of a Newman stripe, a Rothko blob, a Hofman patch

¹David, Art Culture, (1977), p. 144.

²Lippard, Six Years, (1973), p. 5.

³Frank, "Auto-Art", (1976), p. 43.

⁴Adrian Piper, "In Support of Meta-Art" Art Forum (October, 1973), p. 81.

or a Noland circle . . ." But it was also very large, public scale art. The new art is on a smaller, more private scale. "It has generally emerged from personal experience rather than ideologies".¹ This is the view of the curators of the 1977 Whitney Biennial. Roberta Smith concluded in her review of the exhibition that "If there's a thesis to the Whitney's exhibition, it is that the art of the '70s is characterized by a return to the personal."²

The new art reflects current society and the "turning-in" towards the individual, as the large canvases and sculpture in part reflected the "turning-out"; the hopes for large-scale social and political reform of the sixties. Nemser points to a large gap between the politics of the 1960s, and the work which appeared on gallery walls. She says ". . . the '60s and early '70s were a time of terrible social upheavals: race riots, war protests, Kent State, assassinations of liberal leaders, the revitalization of feminism, but no one could possibly have guessed that by looking at the contemporary art on display in our most prestigious museums during that period or from the way that art was interpreted."³ Even if the "content of the work did not speak to or for the people, I think the scale and impersonality can be seen to be representative of the times.

In contrast, "the '70s are a decade in which appalling truths have finally become clear to large masses of people, from the poisonous quality

¹One of the important factors determining this scale reduction, is the nature of works themselves, where texts or visual narratives are used. The viewer is confronted with an intimate range. One is invited to "read" these works with the same attention one would give to a letter or book, in the privacy of one's home. Because these works are viewed in a public space, the audience experiences a new sense of scale in making this transition between private and public.

²R. Smith, (1977), p. 93.

³Nemser, "Blowing the Whistle", (1975), p. 27.

of the air we breathe to the stupendous revelation of corruption that accompanied Nixon's resignation."¹ The population is disillusioned. World politics and big business is so great, that people no longer feel their voice can affect change through public demonstrations and protest. So they have turned inward, to investigate change where they know it can work: in themselves.

Artist Jim Roche voiced his aspirations for eventual meaningful art as the outcome of this return to the self. "Readily recognizable concern for human content is growing in American art as underlying premise for whatever you do. As this concern fully blossoms, the 'beginning of concern' will be studied closely, and implied ritual arrangements, understood by everybody on some level, will be sought and finished to show some respect of where art thinks 'man' is now."²

Cindy Nesser concludes that ". . . to have little awareness or concern for the needs and goals of the rest of society is to keep art as isolated and ineffectual as ever." Nesser's view is that it is "in this area that women are making real beginnings . . . moving ahead by their creation of a communicative art, and art that taps into authentic personal experience, into political and social commentary."³ It is my hope that all post-modern artists, will help to reconnect art and contemporary life by⁴ combining visual impact and relevant content.

The third area responsible for the turn toward Autobiographical art is the increased use of photography and video. The 35mm. camera, the instant

¹Douglas Davis, "The Size of Non-Size", Art Forum (December 1976), p. 48.

²"Painter's Reply . . .", (1975), p. 32.

³Nesser, "Blowing the Whistle", (1975), p. 30.

polaroid camera, and the video port-a-pack system, have in the past ten years become readily available and are no longer prohibitive in cost. Art-making possibilities have broadened tremendously.

Photography was virtually the "currency of Conceptual art". It was "crucial to the exposure (if not the making) of practically every manifestation of Conceptual art."¹ Nancy Foote says:

Though few make the pilgrimage necessary to see Earth-works firsthand, or preside over the machinations that comprise Body Art, photographic reports from the front tell it like it was to all the (art) world. And though the photographs started out as documentation, once the act is over, they acquire eyewitness status; becoming, in a sense, the art itself."²

It is not just that the photograph serves a purpose, but also the nature of the medium determines the direction of the art. Foote contends that "... photography offers certain specific qualities and possibilities that have done much to inform and channel artistic strategies and to nurture the development of idea-oriented art."³ Photography has become the mark of seventies art, "Cheap, flat and accessible, the photograph is the signifier of recent art, as canvas-stretcher and steel frame served its predecessors."⁴

Similarly, the properties of video have dictated new form and prompted new idea in art. David Antin suggests that "In principle, television (video) seemed to combine the photographic reproduction capacities of the camera, the motion capacities of film, and the

¹Nancy Foote, "The Anti-Photograph", Art Forum (September 1976), p. 46.

²Foote, (1976), p. 50.

³Foote, (1976), p. 46.

⁴Davis, "The Size of Non-Size", (1976), p. 49.

instantaneous transmission of the telephone."¹ Its "immediacy", its ability to act as a "mirror" and an element of self-confrontation, are also properties specific to video. Thus it plays an important role in Autobiographical art. There is a dialogue which "occurs between what we know personally and what the camera records." This "challenges our notion of what it is to study self."²

Photography's role in Autobiographical art is unmistakable. "Camera art"³, though, might be a more appropriate term for this work which often "exhibits little 'photographic' self-consciousness." It does not matter to many of these artists if the images are developed by hand, by the drugstore, or even whether they take the pictures themselves.⁴

It is difficult to judge exactly when this wave of Autobiographical art began, as it is not a "movement" pin-pointed by important dates. Lucas Samaras, of course, initiated his search in the mid-sixties and he was not the only one. Much documentation occurs in periodicals from 1973-77. From looking at more recent journals and exhibitions it seems that, if anything, its deliberate use is on the decline, but that it has left its mark.

As I see it, the concerns of Autobiographical art are not rejected, but are incorporated into newer work; work which is not based strictly on the artist's own life. I agree with Peter Frank when he suggests "the tendency lives on in the increasingly individual work of its

¹D. Antin, (1975), p. 38.

²Perrone, (1976), "Video", p. 57.

³Dault, "Astman", (1978), p. 56

⁴ Foote, (1976), p. 46.

[Autobiographical art] practitioners. The artists who now work, or have recently worked, in auto-reflective modes will incorporate the innovation of their work into their post-auto-art."¹

I would submit that Autobiographical art is a tendency, indeed an "outstanding factor"² in art of the seventies. It is quite possible in fact, that it may be the most outstanding factor of the decade, when the blanket of Pluralism is lifted.

After all - it is hard to believe - but we are almost in the art of the eighties!

¹Frank, "Auto-Art", (1976), p. 48.

²Frank, "Auto-Art", (1976), p. 48.

AFTERWORD

In compiling this thesis, I have isolated examples of artists' work in order to study a range of activity under the initial heading of Autobiographical art. A colleague, with a different motive, could easily scan the same resource material and isolate a totally separate group of work from the same period.

Similarly, in selecting pieces to assemble, I have not perceived the artist's work as a whole, but rather taken what I needed. This may, in some cases, give a false impression of the artist, because it's like seeing only one or two frames from a whole film.

These kinds of problems came to light, while writing an article for Parachute, following the thesis¹. It was a useful experience, in that it showed me the difference between writing an article, where the information is read by the artists themselves, and a thesis, which has the appearance of ending up in an academic closet. Even though the material was basically the same, and in some ways I was freer while writing the article, I had to be more conscious of my audience.

Regardless, the thesis has been valuable in coming to terms with basic issues. I think that each artist must constantly choose a balance between form and content. If the content is autobiographical, then it will develop along natural lines, possibly beginning in an inverted manner and

¹Landon Mackenzie, "Autobiography: Real by Reel", Parachute (Spring 1979), pp. 29-31.

eventually turning out, so that the ideas are universally relevant. Likewise, investigation of alternate forms, to present this information, will occur, and the resulting problems dealt with each time.

The thesis has clarified my own direction as an artist in many ways. It raised issues that required certain choices, and helped me to see clearly from a temporary, but unusual perspective. My new work is different in two respects. First of all, I do want the content to be read and understood "out there". Secondly, I want to work with subject matter that deals with relationships between people in a more general way.

The rewards of writing the paper are considerably more than I could have hoped for. With most people, the idea of doing a thesis is like standing beside a cold lake, trying to decide whether to jump in or put your clothes back on. "Jumping" provided a discovery of writing; it has in fact opened up a whole new area for me. I no longer find the image of the artist, inarticulate and attic-bound, to be a convincing one.

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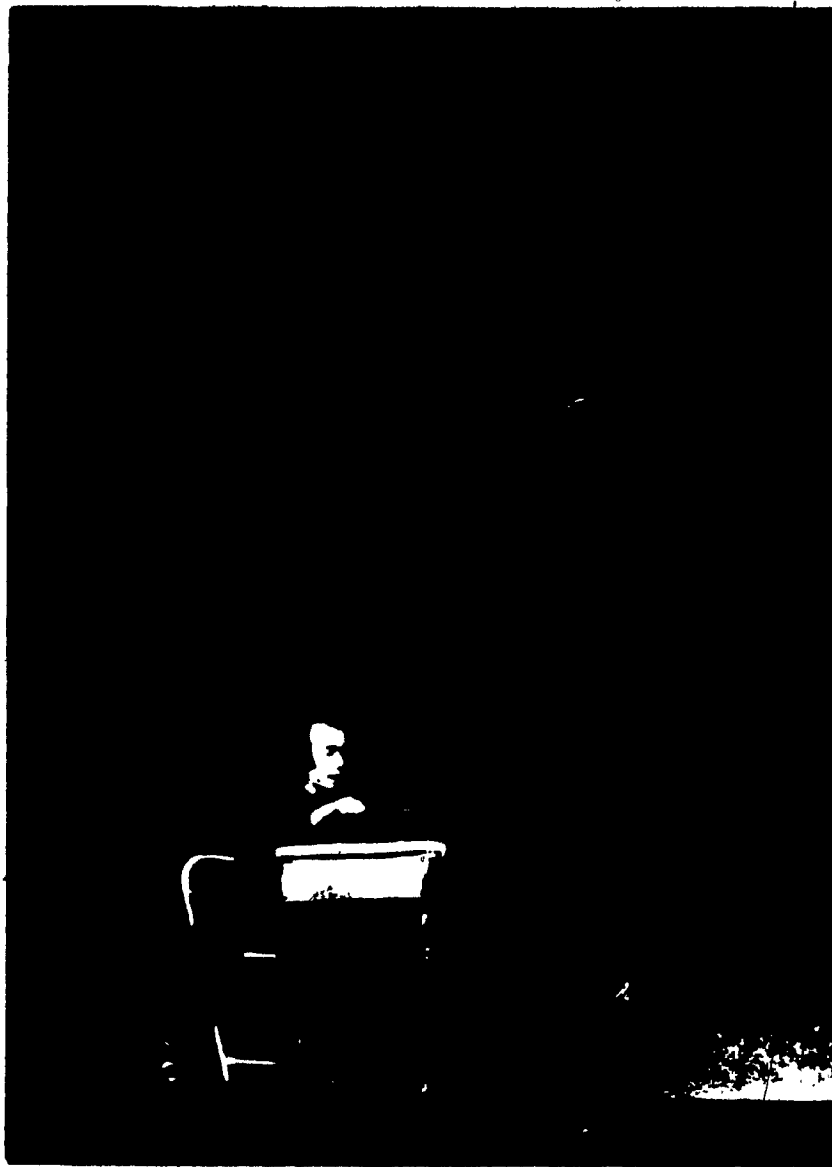
Seminar: Women/Nature. Panel: Michelle Stuart (Chairman), Lauren Ewing, Nancy Holt, Mary Miss, Barbara Novak, Pat Steir, College Art Association Conference, New York City, January 1978.

INTERVIEWS

Gale, Peggy. Director of Film and Video, Art Metropole. Toronto, May, 1978 and November 1978.

Katz, John Stuart. Associate Professor of Film, York University and organizer of Autobiographical Film Symposium, Art Gallery of Ontario. Toronto, November 1978.

ILLUSTRATIONS



1. Vito Acconci: Learning Piece, 1970. (performance)



2. Vito Acconci: Air Time, 1973. (video)



3. Vito Acconci: Manipulations, 1973.
(video with Kathy Dillon)



4. Eleanor Antin: Representational Painting, 1972. (performance)



5. Eleanor Antin: Carving: A Traditional Sculpture, 1972.



6. Eleanor Antin: The Angel of Mercy, 1976. (performance)



7. Nancy Kitchel: Covering My Face: My Grandmother's Gestures, 1973.



8. Laurie Anderson: For Instance, 1976. (performance)

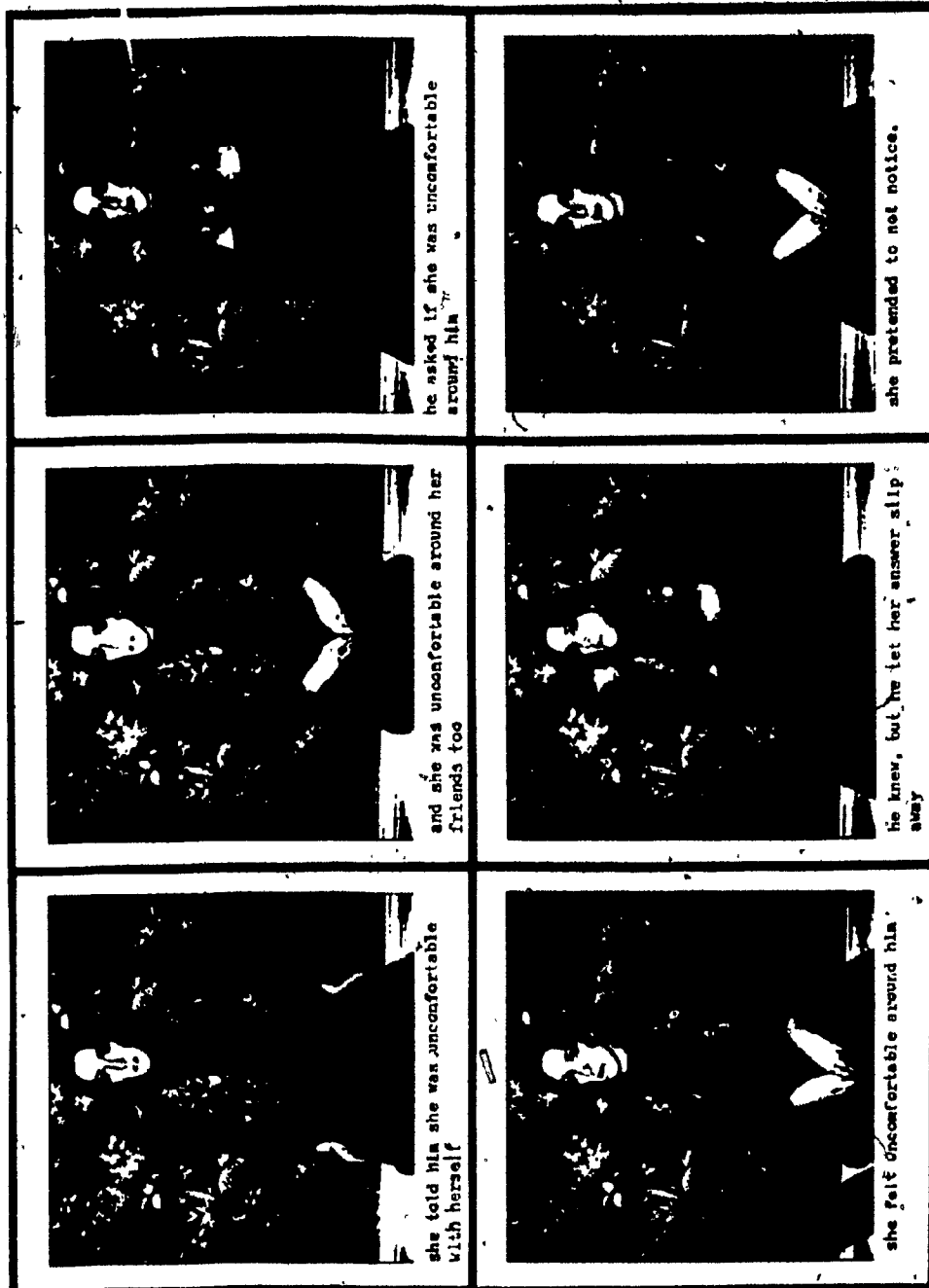


Ed Says Being Honest Ain't the Same as Making Art

9. Barbara Jo Revelle: Ed Says Being Honest Ain't The Same as Making Art, 1975.



10. William Wegman, Family Combinations, 1972.



11. Barbara Astman: Visual Narratives, 1978.

CERTAIN WORDS MUST BE SAID

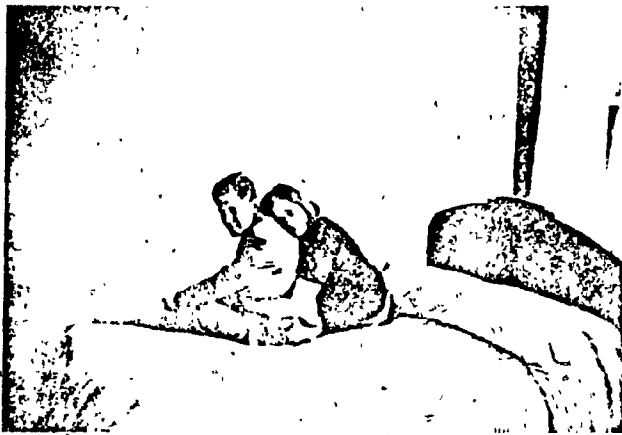
Things had become impossible between them and nothing could be said to
decide would have to be said. Certain words must be said. And although
each had said those words to herself a hundred times, neither had
the courage to say them out loud to one another. So they began to hope that



someone else would say the necessary words. Perhaps a telegram would arrive or
a letter from some stranger that would be delivered that would say it.
And so they waited. What else could they do.

12. Duane Michals: Certain Words Must Be Said,
1975 and 1976

THIS PHOTOGRAPH IS MY PROOF



This photograph is my proof. It has been that afternoon, after the
the first of the war, and the first of the war, and the first of the war.
It had happened, and so, and so, and so, and so, and so, and so.

13. Duane Michals: This Photograph is My Proof,
1967 and 1964.



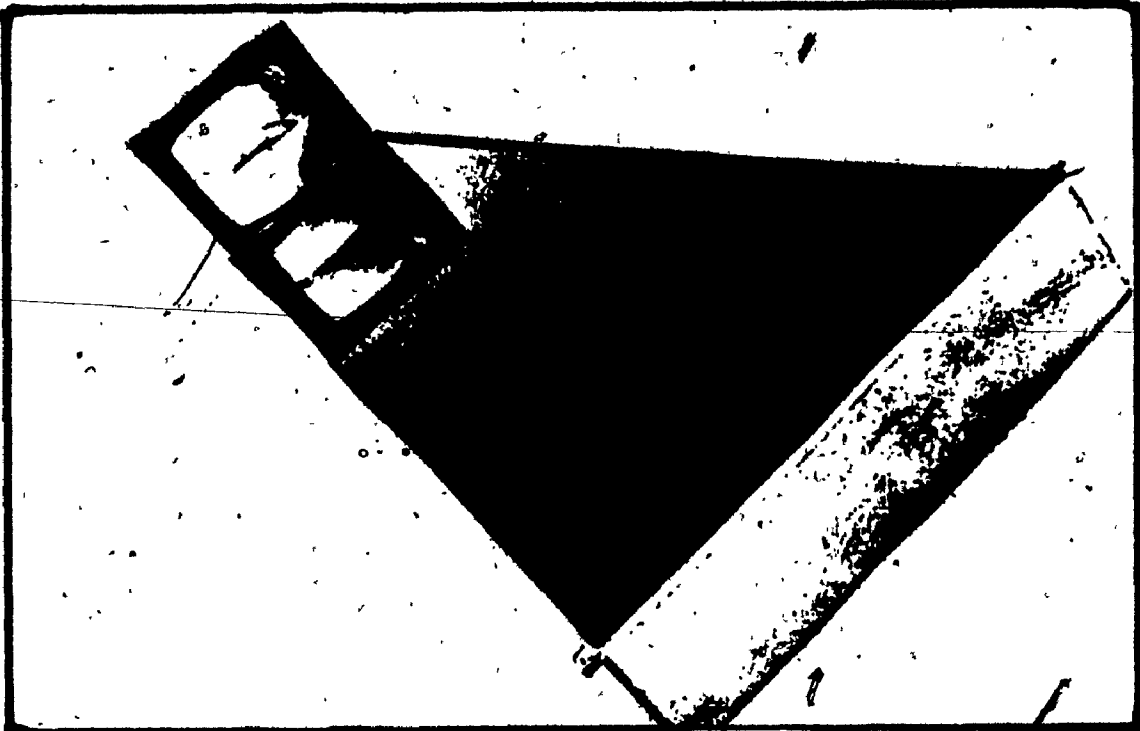
14. Martha Wilson: I Make Up the Image of My Perfection/I Make Up the Image of My Deformity, 1974. (performance)



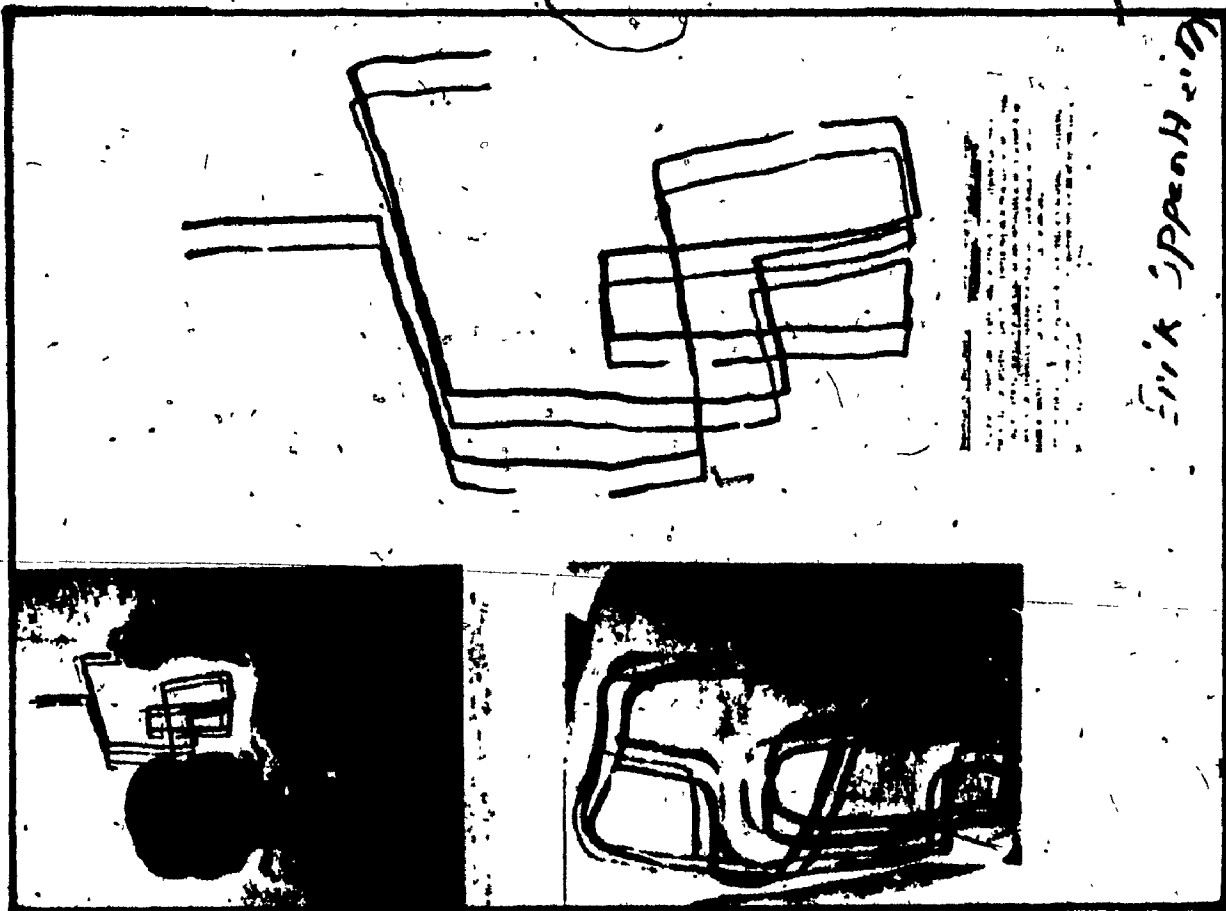
15. Adrian Piper: I Embody, 1975. (poster 18" x 24")



16. Lisa Steel: A Very Personal Story, 1974. (video)



17. Denis Oppenheim: Recall, 1974. (installation)



18. Denis Oppenheim: Documentation for 2-stage transfer drawing
Denis to Erik Oppenheim (returning to a past state), 1971.



Who is the victim here

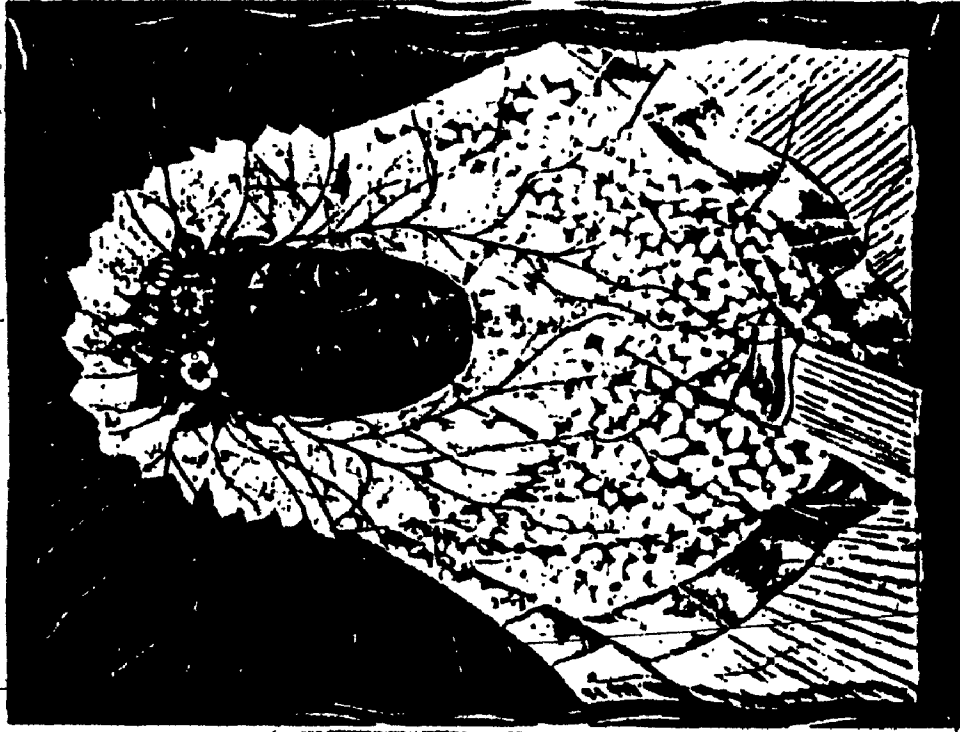
19. Yvonne Rainer: Film, About a Woman Who . . ., 1974. (film)



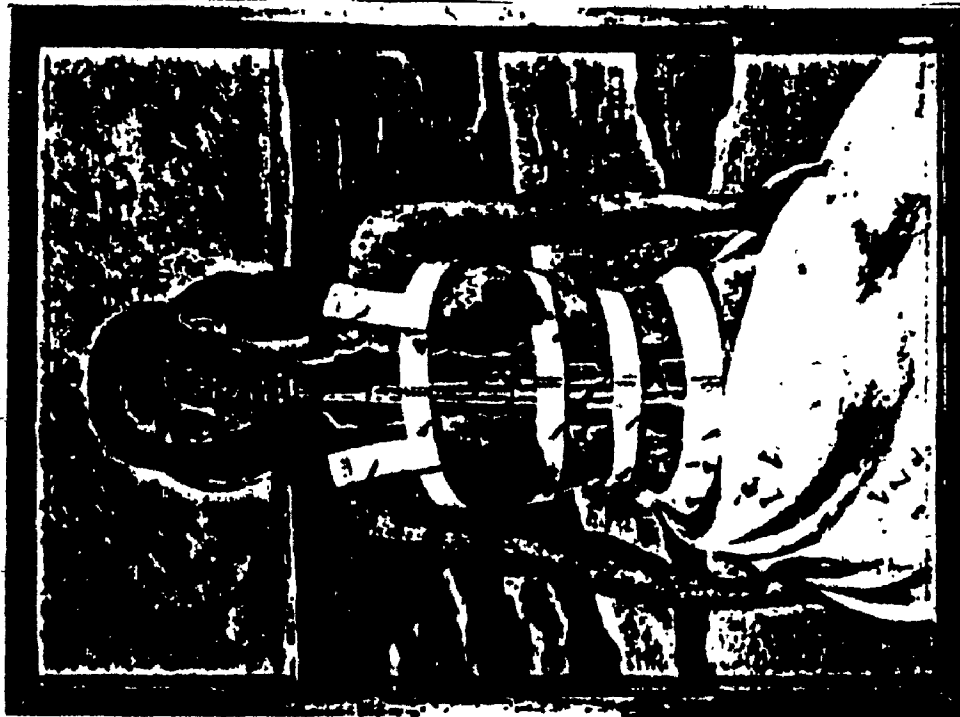
20. Stephen Laub: My Father at Age 3 with his Sister, 1975. (performance)



21. Greg Curnoe: View of Victoria Hospital, Second Series (February 10, 1969 - March 10, 1971).



23. Freda Kahlo: Self-Portrait as a Tehuana,
1943.



22. Freda Kahlo: The Broken Column, 1944.

2

**OWN'S
OWN**

(Story) of a woman's life

That was the first time she had been in the city since she had left her home in the country. She had been away for a long time, and she had been in the city for a long time. She had been in the city for a long time, and she had been in the city for a long time. She had been in the city for a long time, and she had been in the city for a long time.

She had been in the city for a long time, and she had been in the city for a long time. She had been in the city for a long time, and she had been in the city for a long time. She had been in the city for a long time, and she had been in the city for a long time. She had been in the city for a long time, and she had been in the city for a long time.

24. Stephanie Brody Lederman: On One's Own (Story), 1976.

Stephanie Brody Lederman

<p>NOV 25 1970</p> <p>I GOT UP AT 8.03 A.M.</p> <p>On Kawara 1-4-6 Tamagawacho Setagaya-ku, Tokyo, Japan</p> <p>URSULA MEYER 26 RIVERSIDE DRIVE NEW YORK N.Y. 10025 U.S.A.</p> <p>AIR MAIL</p>	<p>NOV 26 1970</p> <p>I GOT UP AT 8.25 A.M.</p> <p>On Kawara 1-4-6 Tamagawacho Setagaya-ku, Tokyo, Japan</p> <p>URSULA MEYER 26 RIVERSIDE DRIVE NEW YORK N.Y. 10025 U.S.A.</p> <p>AIR MAIL</p>
<p>NOV 27 1970</p> <p>I GOT UP AT 8.34 A.M.</p> <p>On Kawara 1-4-6 Tamagawacho Setagaya-ku, Tokyo, Japan</p> <p>URSULA MEYER 26 RIVERSIDE DRIVE NEW YORK N.Y. 10025 U.S.A.</p> <p>AIR MAIL</p>	<p>NOV 28 1970</p> <p>I GOT UP AT 8.01 A.M.</p> <p>On Kawara 1-4-6 Tamagawacho Setagaya-ku, Tokyo, Japan</p> <p>URSULA MEYER 26 RIVERSIDE DRIVE NEW YORK N.Y. 10025 U.S.A.</p> <p>AIR MAIL</p>

25. On Kawara: I Got Up, 1970.

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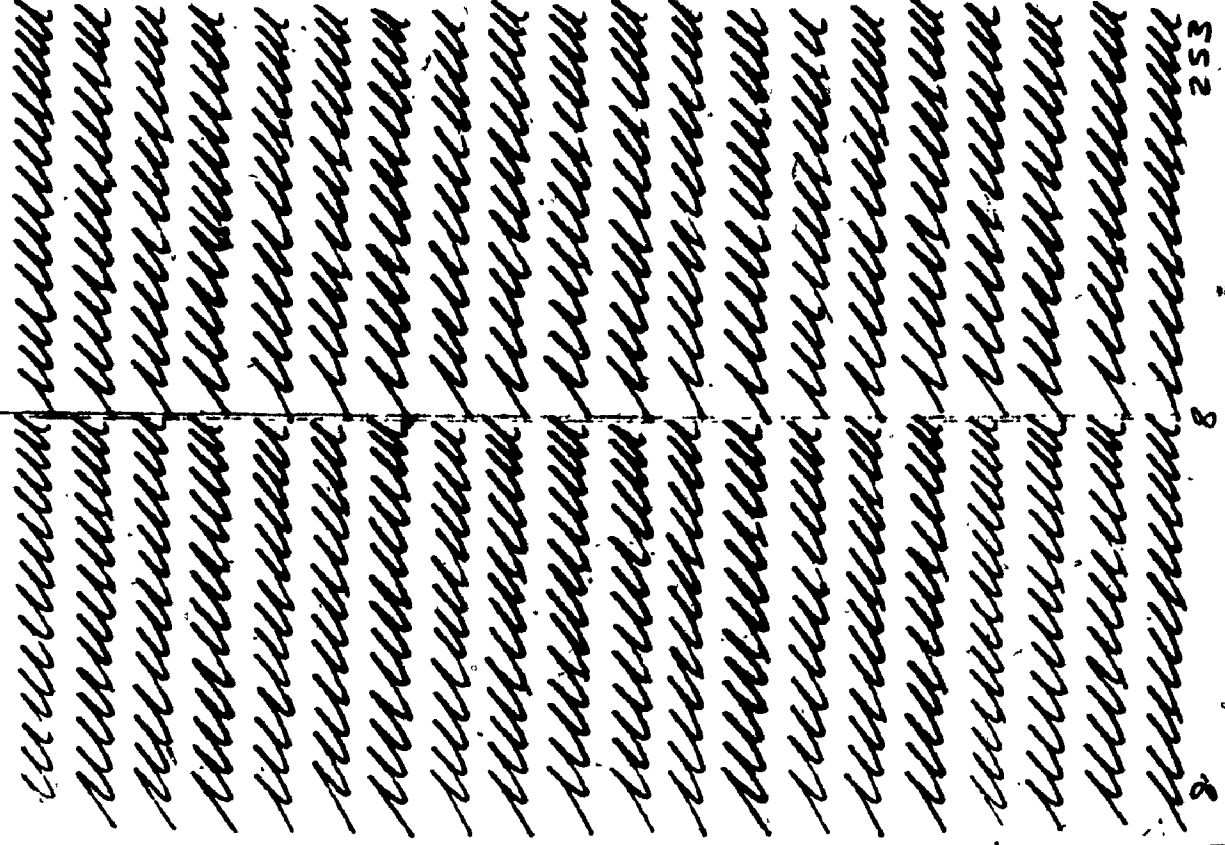
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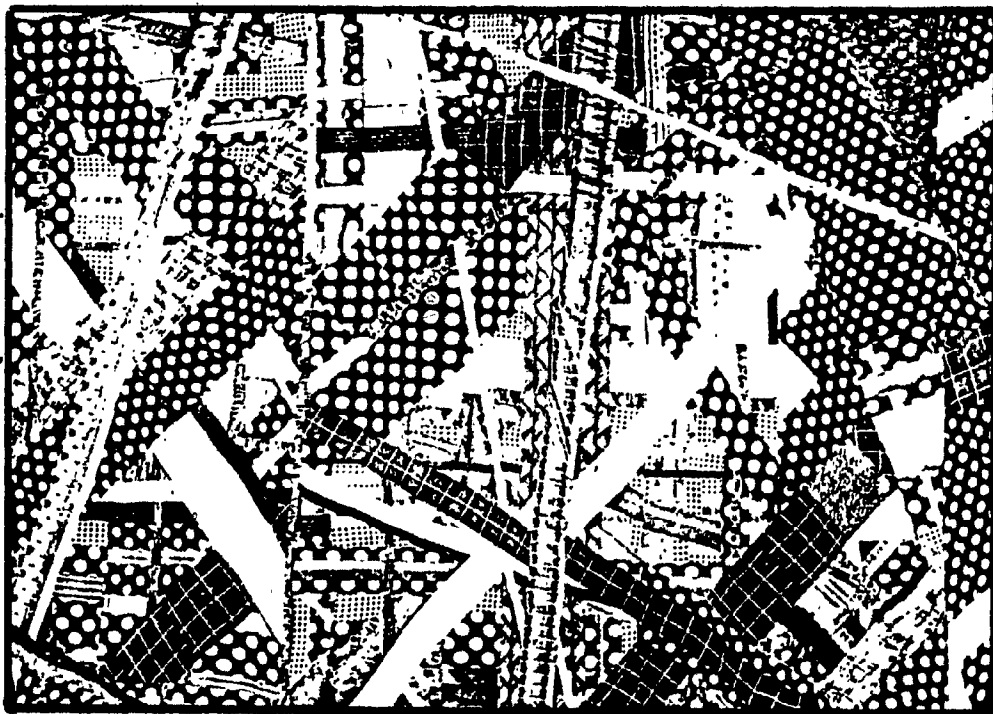
26: Hanne Darvoven: Two details of untitled drawings. (pencil on paper, 69 1/2" x 69 1/2" each) 1972-1973.



27. Lucas Samaras: Photo-Transformation, 1976.



28. Lucas Samaras: Photo-Transformation, 1976.



29. Lucas Samaras: Iphasmata, 1976.



30. Bé Van der Heide: Eight Years, 1978.



31. Landon Mackenzie: Print from 1st wall calendar, 1977.