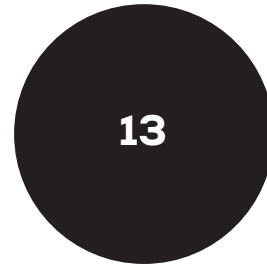




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## **View. Theories and Practices of Visual Culture.**

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## **Auto-photo-biography**

What is auto-photo-biography? To answer this question one must confront numerous contradictions and deal with aporia—concerning relations between photography and its object, between I and Other, present and past, fiction and document, text and image—to become involved in many problems and doubts. Auto-photo-biography's status remains uncertain, while its form has always been hybrid. It is thus something undefined and undefinable – a set of discrete visual and textual

practices which, by deriving their artistic and theoretical power from a rupture, simultaneously problematize the photographic medium and deform its object; the one who talks about him/herself. One could risk a hypothesis that in this case theory as such does not exist, that there are only singular cases, micro-histories and specific narratives; that theory is being conceived before our very eyes – in motion – somewhere between text and image, between somebody's story and its reworking, and that it is always secondary vis-à-vis the fascinating process of narrating/assembling the story.

Despite many problems with the theoretical situating of auto(photo)biography, a clear framework in which to consider it appears to exist. It is no coincidence that the relationship between photography, autobiography and text became more intense in the 1970s and 80s. It was then that such female artists as Francesca Woodman and Cindy Sherman made their intervention in the field of photography, and the voice of Georges Perec sounded loud and clear in the field of literature; historiography made a turn towards micro-historical practices, anthropology (and humanities, more generally) – a turn towards theoretical self-reflection (as a part of broader textual turn), and it opened up to affects. Also at this time emerged texts crucial for understanding autobiography such as Paul de Man's *Autobiography as Defacement*, and possibly the most influential, Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida*



Aneta Grzeszykowska, *Album*, detail, 2005. Courtesy of Modern Art Museum, Warsaw

(recurring in references in this issue and surfacing as a central point in its labyrinth of texts and images). In Poland also, such female artists (gender needs to be stressed here!) as Teresa Gierzyńska and Ewa Kuryluk, either began or continued working with their own image(s) and their own history. The full meaning of these projects seems to reveal itself only now. It is also at this time that Anna Beata Bohdziewicz conceived her *Fotodziennik (Photojournal)*, a unique life-work. Looking back to the time of the historic avant-gardes one can also find works and figures which fit perfectly into the frame of what is here being called auto-photo-biography; above all, Claude Cahun (and it seems important to be reminded here that her uncle was Marcel Schwob, author of *Imaginary Lives*), who worked on her monumental theatrical-literary-photographic project in the interwar period. However, it is precisely at the turn of 1970s that feminism enters the discussion on photography, autobiography and modes of writing history. The process of regaining oneself (and one's image), so strongly emphasized by Chantal Akerman, becomes a moment when photography is reclaimed as a medium which – as already suggested in 1840 with Hippolyte Bayard's *Self Portrait as a Drowned Man* – exposes its power to produce autobiographical fictions and to question itself.

The thirteenth issue of *View* is devoted to auto-photo-biographies and designed as a collection of, at times very peculiar, case studies of artists and works, and readings that accompany them. Each one of them can be seen as a vigilant example of a close reading: a reading that by following tangled paths and avoiding traps, opens up yet another level of relationship between the object and the subject of these narratives. Seemingly disparate cases: Chantal Akerman, Evgeniy Pavlov and Tatiyana Pavlova, Teresa Gierzyńska, Vladimir Nabokov, Roland Barthes, Roni Horn, Dorota Masłowska, Georges Perec (and we could add: Francesca Woodman, Sophie Calle, Ewa Kuryluk – artists who were supposed to feature in this issue, but ultimately and for various reasons don't, or emerge only at the margins, as a point of reference or an inspiration), are connected, however, by a set of ideas that at first sight seem contradictory. These ideas force them to ceaselessly tell their his/herstories with no belief in truth which could possibly consolidate them; these ideas make them believe in photography as a privileged tool in the narrative process and which simultaneously make them doubt in photography's autonomy; and finally, these ideas escape History towards the everyday, private, intimate microhistories only in order to return to it however, this time as "somebody else"...

This issue is complemented by a conversation between critic Katarzyna Bojarska and photographer, Wojciech Wilczyk – an artist who explores remnants of 20<sup>th</sup> century history left in the Polish landscape – revealing that this seemingly transparent, conceptual documentary photographic record has its powerful biographical context. We also publish the first part of a fascinating narrative on Jacek Krzyszkowski, a unique artist who – again in the 1980s! – succeeded in doing away with the division between life and death. The issue is closed by **Points of View** including a passionate exchange on Piotr Seweryn Rosół's book on Gombrowicz and Genet (and especially important in the above context, on looking and peeking).

## **Editorial team**