

E. P. 35 (1)

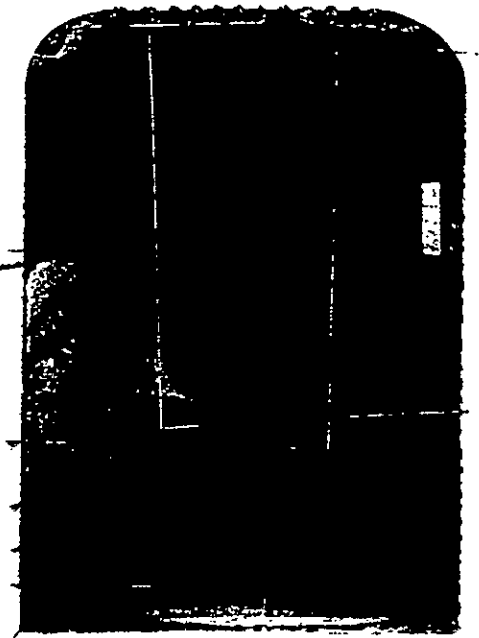
Paolo Gioli: Publication

Strictly speaking, private experiences cannot be exhibited, because everything private is unique (concrete), and everything public is repeatable (codified). Whatever is private cannot be articulated; it is unutterable. Political commitment is the attempt to overcome this. It is the attempt to articulate (to codify) private experience, in order to make it available for others. Art is political commitment in its most evident form. In art both poles of the impossibility of articulating private experience are clearly apparent. If one codifies the private experience in a sketchy fashion, in order to preserve its concreteness, one runs the danger of its inaccessibility (undecipherability) for others. And if one codifies the private experience well, in order to put it at the easy disposal of others, one runs the risk of losing its concreteness. Gioli undertakes the extraordinary attempt to publish in spite of this, and to do so by publishing what is most private in the present cultural context.

The series "autoanatomy" publishes one of the most private, most concrete experiences of all, a highlight of life. It is, as are all concrete experiences, unutterable. If one does try to put it into words, utterances like this one may result: "the Self is broken up within it, and it fuses with a Thou to form a We." This is not the usual way to say it. One says instead "sexual act" or "orgasm." One publishes the unutterable through those codified formulae, and thus one loses its concreteness, one desacralizes it, renders it vulgar. Gioli attempts the opposite: he wants to preserve the unutterable concreteness in its unique sanctity, and still make it available for others.

He does not use words, but, rather, pictures. We possess at present an apparatus (Polaroid) which permits automatic and instantaneous capturing of private experiences. An automatic pornographer. A politician in the evil sense of the term. Gioli works with it and against it. He wants to force that demagogical and kitschy apparatus to turn into its opposite.

He uses two stratagems to achieve this. First he transfers the vulgar unsavory Polaroid material to silk and drawing paper, and then he cuts and recombines the highly conventional and fully codified Polaroid picture into pure, geometrical, unconventional shapes. This demands to be considered more closely: Silk paper and drawing paper may have symbolic meanings. Silk implies rarity and preciousness; it is in contradiction to mass culture. And drawing paper implies the gesture of drawing, of projecting meanings and forms. But those two materials do not only have a symbolic impact, but an esthetical as well. Within them, the Polaroid colors, which are brutal and "naturalistic" (meaning: true to nature according to convention), are transformed into pastel colors. By this transference of the picture from vulgarity into the uncustomary alone, Gioli succeeds in preserving the uniqueness of his concrete experience, but this is only the first step toward his purpose. He cuts the picture and thus executes a double gesture: he distances himself from his concrete experi-

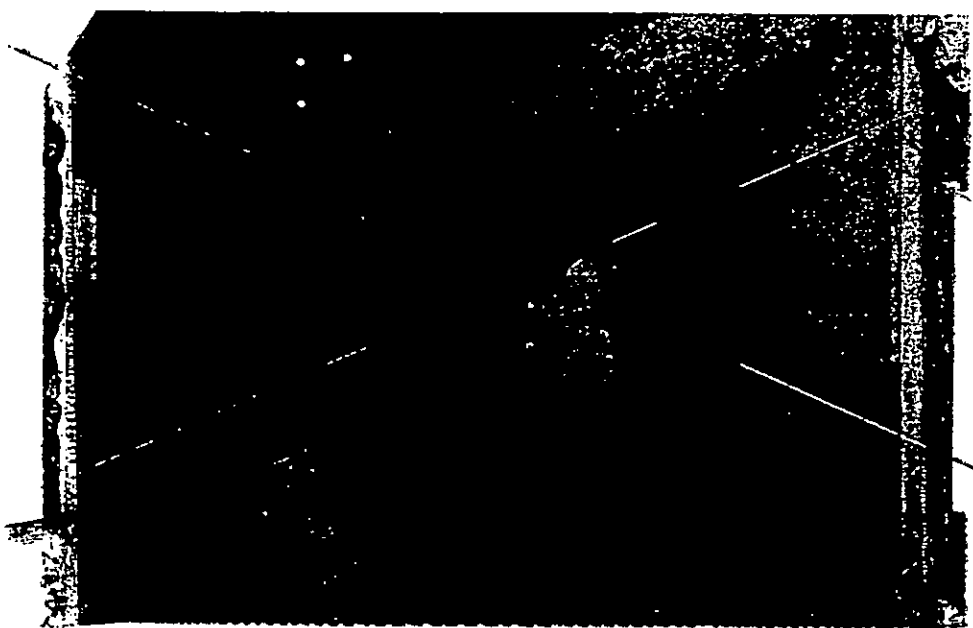


Autoanatomy, Polaroid on silk, 1987

ence, withdraws from it, and then reaches back into it, denies it. He now holds his experience in his hand, albeit cut up, but still concrete, and he re-combines it (computes the bits he had calculated it into). This is the gesture of imposition of forms (of "ideas") upon what is concrete; it is the gesture of "informing." Through those two gestures the private experience is somehow kept concrete, but it has been articulated somehow. It may be published, and then it is at the disposal of others.

One may object that every political commitment whatsoever (every art) uses stratagems comparable to those just enumerated. That what Gioli does has been done by all previous artists. Such an objection, however, loses sight of the present cultural context. Gioli publishes a concrete private experience which is no longer being silenced or prettified as before, but which is now being widely published in the form of pornography which renders it vulgar, or in the form of scientific explanations which devalue it. And Gioli uses a Polaroid, which is a typical kitschy apparatus. It is true: he does what art has always done, he publishes his private experience in the hope of keeping it concrete. But he does so for us here and now, for those who are plunged into the vulgarity and devaluation of mass culture. His autoanatomies are models for us to emerge from the kitsch of mass culture, and to experience with him the unutterable instant of merging with the other.

Vilém Flusser



Autoanatomy, Polaroid on silk, 1987

Courtesy: Galerie Michèle Chomette, Paris

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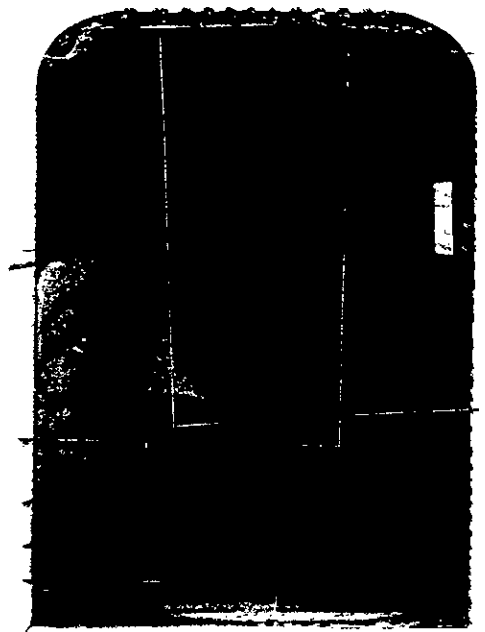
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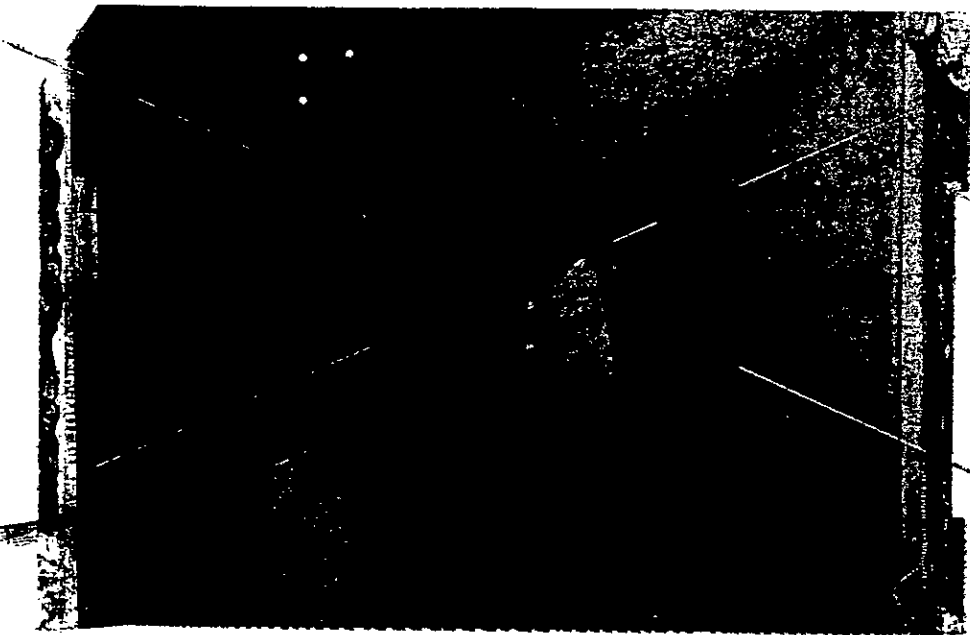


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