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Faction: An Critical Exploration of Autobiographical Impulse in Contemporary Art

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Chapter I: Faction: Historically Documenting Autobiographical Art

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Abstract

This dissertation is an explorative study to analyse and learn about autobiography. Why did autobiography become such an important component to contemporary art? Why do we create stories from 'true' events? Why must we know or learn about the artist? The 'autobiographical impulse' is driven by subjective and objective motives. Autobiography is a complex subject that questions autobiographical writings and artistic practices in order to establish the 'truth' and identity. Autobiography has completely altered our understanding of recording our existence and our individuality in the contemporary world. Artists now, try not to only express themselves through self-portraits alone, but use their 'truths' and experiences to redefine the everyday and their self-awareness, for example factual memoirs by artists like On Kawara and Gerhard Richter. The first chapter is an attempt to discover the historical importance of autobiography and traces the origins of the autobiographical impulses in art. Albrecht Dürer's work will be the point of discussion in chapter one. There is confusion when narrating 'life stories'. The second chapter explores further into the autobiographical impulse in the works of traditional but contemporary artist Napachie Pootoogook, fictional artist Paula Rego and conceptual artist Andy Warhol. The blur between fact and fiction come into play and the term fact and autofiction are born. The third chapter learns that the use of experiences and past events derived from selective 'truths' can be made universal and be re-constructed by the viewer. Sophie Calle's work demonstrates some key ideas of mixing her life with other people. She provides the reader to invent and imagine stories using her life experiences in order to create fictionalised stories. She gives them the space to describe and re-construct a narrative for themselves. In this dissertation it will mention many critical writers and thinkers such as Philippe Lejeune, Elizabeth Heale, Janet Catherine Berlo, Johnnie Gratton and others, who examine the boundaries of autobiography and autobiographical impulses in literacy and art.

Introduction

The main aim of this research paper is to explore why artists have a certain 'impulse' to capture 'real' events of a person's life and to then use that account as an autobiographical narrative. 'Faction' is a term used to describe a blend of both fact and fiction in literature and photographic genres. Fictional autobiography involves made up or invented stories based on someone's 'life story'. In this paper, faction will be considered in relation to photographic and paintings in autobiographical art.

Autobiographical art deals with the history of a person life experience(s) and is concerned with 'what has been used' in the past tense e.g. the use of memories. The purpose of autobiography is not only to communicate information about the artist, but also to allow other individuals to reflect on their own lives. When discussing about autobiographical accounts, we focus on what we perceive or believe to be the true form of that story. This means the subject questions authenticity, subjective editing and invented thoughts on what is 'true'. The artist is the main modifier when presenting his or her narrative. Subjective editing involves extracting and modifying one's own memories, thoughts and ideas of their 'experiences' in a personal way. One of the reasons for 'subjective editing' in autobiography, is we can never present the whole 'truth' due to fragmentation of subjectivity. Fragmentation is the process of broken parts separated from something, in this case for autobiography, broken thoughts and ideas of information on someone's memories and their 'truths'. Autobiography itself remains incomplete due to relying on fragments of individual memory.

'It corresponds towards the native truth or identity represented by the artist'.¹ The native 'truth' is associated with the artist's ideas based on the basis of their individual 'life stories'. This 'identity' we speak of, is the state of being true to the self-i.e. how we see ourselves. For example this 'native' term for autobiographies originates from their childhood,

¹ Steiner Barbara, Jun Yang, *Autobiography: Art Works*, (Thames and Hudson Ltd), (27 Sep 2004). P.15

relationships or experiences. Experiences are factual observations of personally encountering something that occurs in someone's life time. It is argued that the authenticity represented of the 'artist story' is projected 'truthfully' and not as a copy of their 'reality'. The dissertation attempts to understand and investigate the genuine idea of autobiographical impulses such as authenticity, so that they show the public their 'reality' as 'truth' and not a copy i.e. presenting 'private' details of someone's life story through personal expression. If we accept that the autobiographical impulse in contemporary art is based on 'truth', where do we stand when retraining the truth, subjectively? Do we acknowledge subjectivity when we view narrative in order to relate? Do we try to understand the purpose of their autobiographical impulse? Is there a crucial point that undermines the purpose of autobiography? Is fiction pointless or meaningless when pursuing autobiography? Nevertheless the concept of 'fiction' challenges and raises significant questions. For example, fiction involves the construction of narrative and the bias of the artist; can we ever build a narrative of ourselves that is realistic to 'true' events of what we experience? Or can we only record fragments of these life experiences subjectively?

Heilbrun says '*autobiography is not the story of a life; it is the recreation or the discovery of one*²'. Her comment suggest that, autobiographical art explores re-creation and existence as a process of past events being modify according to memories. This could mean that we treat the situation, 'the act' and 'the now', as an on-going 'truth', which is then documented as stories. Stories are archives being made. Artists have the habit of using the everyday and their experiences as a basis for narrative.

This research paper represents a range of autobiographical impulse in the works of Paula Rego, Gerhard Richter, Sophie Calle, Andy Warhol and On Kawara. Exploration of these sources will enable us to learn further about the diversity and the significance of the autobiographical impulse in contemporary art.

² Carolyn G. Heilbrun, *Autobiography: Art Works*, (Thames and Hudson Ltd), (27 Sep 2004). P94

There is a growing phenomenon for artists who use the everyday experience as a way of sharing their life stories as narrative.

Chapter One will explore the areas of historically recording autobiography in art. The many ways artists document their attempt of retrieving memory, self-awareness and narrating their life stories. Chapter One will investigate where the need for autobiography comes from and what are the autobiographical impulses in art. The discussion will start with the Renaissance, Postmodern and contemporary accounts of autobiography and autobiographical artists.

The thought of engaging with an inner 'impulse' of resembling 'the truth' causes a discussion. This will be explored in Chapter Two where there are different types of impulses that different artists encounter and have. Artists are allocated with one type of these impulses, which mirror their ideology and desire of telling their stories of human life such as persona, the self. I will find out both the personal and objective reasoning of pursuing (impulse) autobiographical art. 'Faction' draws a debate between inventing and believing what we are seeing is 'true' or not. Self-invention and narrative will also be discussed in Chapter Two.

Finally, Chapter Three extends the debate of understanding the relationship between the reader and author. The 'blur' between fact and fiction are unclear when the audience approach 'fictionalise stories' and 'autobiographical impulses'. What does it mean for audiences who come across works about individuals who express ideas of autobiography? How do audiences make sense as a viewer when accessing autobiographical impulses such as the self? Do they try to relate to the story or do they create a different impression of that narrative? What does it mean to look at something knowing that it might be 'true' or 'fictional'? This chapter is about critically reflecting on autobiographical impulses from the perspective of the audience and the artist. I will explain the mirror stage discussed by Lacan. Jacques Lacan was a French critical thinker who said *'autobiographer observe themselves, and open themselves up to observation by their readers. The process equates with looking*

*in a mirror*³. He suggests that 'looking in a mirror' is like comparing yourself to society and identifying yourself with the reader. This interpretation fits well with artist Sophie Calle.

The conclusion will close the debate with evidence of concepts and theoretical ideas of autobiographical impulses in contemporary art.

³ Steiner Barbara, Jun Yang, *Autobiography: Art Works*, (Thames and Hudson Ltd), (27 Sep 2004).P.15

Chapter I

Faction: Historically Documenting Autobiographical Art

'Autobiography is the product of various factors – real experiences, together with things heard, seen, read, narrated and invented. Fact and fiction are inextricably woven together'⁴ (Barbara Steiner and Jun Yang, 2004). Historically documenting autobiographical art stems from generally recording human self-awareness. Self-awareness is a term used by psychologists', where the individual person has conscious knowledge of one's own character, feelings, motives and desires. In this chapter, there will be an exploration into the approach of recording the autobiographical impulse in art. I will be exploring references to the past and establishing where the autobiographical impulse(s) originate in contemporary art.

The autobiographical impulse deals with ideas that are associated with both the past and present. Autobiography also deals with trying to retrieve memory in order to show the past and reflect on the present. The autobiographical impulse is based on a personal search for social history and identity. Social history puts emphasis on studying the experiences of everyday people and their past events. Identity is the person's idea of their individuality, where autobiography continues to explore as an 'impulse' for contemporary art.

We can start the discussion by questioning where and how autobiography emerges and where this 'impulse' comes from. The 'self' continues to be a subject matter for contemporary art. The 'self' is the preliminary point of understanding the autobiographical impulse in art. The 'self' is the point of one's individual awareness. The 'self' is one's own perception, persona, identity and personality. This term is not only used in art, but also in philosophy and psychology. Many artists seek out from a logical standpoint such as philosophy and psychology to describe their experience. Autobiography can be of anything that corresponds from a first-person perspective and constructed into various forms such as

⁴ Steiner Barbara, Jun Yang, *Autobiography: Art Works*, (Thames and Hudson Ltd), (27 Sep 2004).

diaries, memoirs or a brief account painted or photographed. These forms can be used as frameworks in narration and fiction.

The early traces of autobiographical studies in art and within autobiography itself emerge during the mid-fifteen century and early sixteen century. The reasons among communicating autobiography started with drawing out the 'truth'. The 'truth' was not about the accuracy of the events based on someone's life but what the 'truth' could present as something that was significant. For example, most autobiographers discuss the 'truth' as factual information for documenting important events from a personal view point.

German painter and photographer Gerhard Richter documents historically and artistically the autobiographical impulse as a collection of images that demonstrate archival 'truths' such as important events that interest him. The term 'archival' means having or containing a collection of historical documents that record information about people and places based on fact. Richter used images from newspapers and magazines to blend fact with subjective representation. Subjective representation is an issue in autobiographical art as it uses multiple influences from the media along with personal ideas or feelings in order to communicate autobiography. This 'impulse is also known as the 'archival impulse', usually we associate archives with intuitions such as libraries and museums that put together and collect information. However Richter collected information that made his own personal archive as his autobiography. His personal images, snapshots and photographs of his friends and family are combined with historical events from Atlas magazine, which he creates and articulates a distinctive record of narrative 'truths'. He demonstrates significance of his private life (for example his relationship with his wife and child) with public events to extend his experiences and the limits of his personal identity and self-awareness.

The images below portray his self-awareness combined with narrating his objective 'truth' (clippings and snapshots from magazines) and personal life such as his friends and family.



(Fig 1)Gerhard Richter, Atlas: Albumfotos, Tafel Nr.2, (1962-66). Black and white photographs, 51.7 x 66.7. Courtesy the artist and Lenbachhaus, Munich



(Fig 2) Gerhard Richter, Atlas: S, mit Moritz, (1995), Tafel Nr. Plate no. 605, Colour photographs, 51.7 x 66.7. Courtesy the artist and Lenbachhaus, Munich



(Fig 3) Gerhard Richter, Atlas: S, mit Moritz, (1995/96), S. mit ella Plate no 606, Colour photographs, 51.7 x 66.7. Courtesy the artist and Lenbachhaus, Munich

Philippe Lejeune is a French expert, who writes about 'the autobiographical pact' and puts autobiography in context of literary genre. He discusses historically the theoretical part of recording autobiography via analysing the definition of what autobiography is. Lejuene definition on autobiography is 'retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality'⁵. Lejuene suggests that referring to the past in any style by first-person is

⁵ Lejeune, Philippe, The Autobiographical Pact, Educational Department, Seuil (1989/1996) P.3-30

autobiographical. However according to German author Gudmundsdottir, who compares and challenges autobiography from an postmodern perspective, states that the 'structure' of autobiography is a complex subject and difficult to therefore pin down from a first-person's perspective. This is because autobiography is always borrowing from other genres. These other genres identified by Gudmundsdottir include biography, memoirs, and family histories; He continues to explain these into several categories such as self-portrait, gender and individual's past. The idea of autobiography in contemporary art is the constant re-examination of the past and extension of representing the 'truth'. In this case of autobiographically documenting the impulse is self-portraiture.

Self-portraiture is a representation created of one's individual manifestation that is captured by the same individual (artist). From an historical point, the Renaissance was one aspect of exploring the autobiographical impulse in art. There are other aspects of cultural disciplines that the Renaissance also explored such as poetry, philosophy and literature. For example Englishman Thomas Whythorne, historically was known as a musician, poet and writer. He was attributed as creating 'the first autobiography in the English language'.

Elizabeth Heale the writer of '*autobiography and authorship in Renaissance Verse; chronicles of the self, 2003*', shared ideas about how writers in the mid-sixteen century seek out to promote their 'constructive self' and express their inner self in autobiography. She uses a range of examples to discuss her ideas of the self. Whythorne who is one of the authors she uses as an example, was able to demonstrate his life story that communicated his individual awareness; not only as a writer but also one who was a musician and poet. Additionally, Whythorne establish himself, his purpose, his experiences and his 'identity' as the autobiographical impulse.

Jacob Burckhardt, an historian of art and culture once said that '*..Man was conscious of himself only as a member of a race, people, party, family or corporation....Not until the*

*Renaissance that 'man became a spiritual individual and recognized himself as such'*⁶. Burckhardt thoughts towards autobiography tell us that from the fifteen and sixteenth centuries, the status, the authority and the self of a man's own existence changed from what he was 'socially' acknowledged as e.g. race, family, to the self-conscious individual e.g. identity, perception of the self.

The condition derives self-portraiture as a manner of speaking towards documenting autobiographical impulses, which can be found within the works of Jan van Eyck and Albrecht Dürer. Eyck was an important European painter of the fifteen-century. He may have possibly be one of the earliest self-portrait artists of his time. Yet famous German painter, Albrecht Dürer's work illustrates self-portraiture but as an autobiographical timeline. The autobiographical impulse involves recording 'the self' and creates different meanings about presenting one's story or individual identity. Many sources point to self-portrait as a primary basis for documenting the autobiographical impulse in art.

Dürer, as an example of pursuing 'the self', shows a unique engagement of his autobiographical impulse. The first three portraits are composed with similar compositions, but the presence of the hand gestures change. The paintings continue to demonstrate a particular condition, appearance and standards of what an 'artist life' of the fifteen century should be. His presence renders a very powerful status of what he can do as a painter and his potential aspects of being an artist. The autobiographical impulse he presents is authorship and recognition. Authorship in autobiography means narrative ownership, where the artist has the right of telling his or her own story. In terms of 'recognition' in autobiography means being known for or what 'identity' you hold to the self, which also links with status. For example Durer's paintings continue to symbolize his 'self-awareness' and 'self-promotion' throughout the years as an artist, which is the 'autobiographical impulse' (these are identity, authorship and recognition). Meaning drawing out the 'truth' is about being aware of one's story, talent and self-awareness.

⁶ Heale, Elizabeth, *Autobiography and authorship in Renaissance Verse: Chronicles of the self*, introduction P.5



(Fig 4) Albrecht Dürer, Self Portrait at the age of thirteen, (1484), Pencil on Paper, size unknown, Open Culture,



(Fig 5) Dürer Albrecht, Self Portrait with a Thistle, (1493), Oil on Vellum, 56.5 x 44.5 cms,

Open Culture



(Fig 6) Dürer Albrecht, Self Portrait with Gloves, (1498), Oil on Panel, 52 x 41 cms,Open

Culture



(Fig 7) Dürer Albrecht, Self Portrait at the age of Twenty-Eight, (1500), Oil on Panel, 67 x 49 cms, Open Culture

There is a huge amount of deep thoughts put into each portrait. From this case study, we can get a sense of Durer's life, his identity and his status as an artist. The Renaissance was a time of expressing stories and looking into the past, but also to reassure ourselves through rational thought. Dürer was paying attention to his persona and image as well as expressing his identity and the self. The stages of Dürer self-portraits give the impression that he is trying to remove himself from religious principles and developing his own 'story' as an individual. Part of his autobiographical impulse is having individual rational thought. To explain further, he was a man of science as well as a creative thinker, which could indicate his desire of seeking out his individual status as an artist. The Renaissance was also a time for worldly pleasures and desires in art.

Speaking of desires, Heale indicates that in autobiography we '*Disjunction of imperfection of the world and the vanity of seeking satisfaction in it....seeking the 'self'*', another autobiographical impulse that emerges, is trying to achieve the desire of an outer image, a persona of one's true self. This suggests that eventually artists of the mid-sixteen century started to think about not just writing about someone or painting an individual portrait or story in particular, but to rethink 'who I am in this world?'. But also, to 'seek' the 'truth' logically and achieve fulfilment between yourself and telling a story from the individual view point is the main criterion of autobiography.

Autobiography may be a subject that continues to argue about 'status' and the 'identity' historically. But the autobiographical impulse is beyond 'identity' or 'status' in contemporary art. The importance of autobiography has changed and now it's not only about discovering the 'self'. Autobiography may be a surviving mechanism, another piece for creating and redefining the self. But searching for certain 'truths,' is not the only autobiographical impulse in modern art. Autobiography is not only about self-awareness, it is also about retrieving memory. Memory shows the importance of how human-awareness looks into the past and sharing fragment 'truths' of what's was true and fiction (imagined).

Autobiographical memory reflects a personal narrative that expresses individual awareness. '*Childhood memories don't determine adult personality; rather adult personality determines what will be remembered from childhood*'⁷ Kihlstrom claims that memories such as childhood help us remember and record what we wish to portray or chose in order to create an autobiography. The autobiographical impulse of retrieving memory and creating narratives came from ideas of drawing out conscious and unconscious thoughts conducted from Freudian studies. Sigmund Freud was an Austrian neurologist who specialised in developing our understanding of human personality, which involved studying the brain and the nervous system. His work is very influential to autobiography, in terms of presenting one's self and

⁷ John F. Kihlstrom, *Autobiography : Art Works*, (Thames and Hudson Ltd), (27 Sep 2004) P180

discovering past memories that share personal traits of someone's identity and 'impulse'. Autobiographical impulses are complex 'truths' from memory that we still don't know or understand completely because they are subjective. The overwhelming 'truths' from memory seem meaningless until we create a narrative that makes sense otherwise the autobiographical impulse of drawing out the 'truth' is pointless. Without narrative, there is no meaning to that specific memory or experience. Then the autobiographical impulse of presenting the 'truth' crosses boundaries between fact and fiction.

Faction is an unexpected term in autobiography. 'Faction' is a process that can be developed from mental representations of the 'self' and present an 'impulse' that shares a life narrative from memory. However, we need to consider objectivity and subjectivity also, as fact and fiction are two different concepts that have changed historically and contemporary in art. This is because the terms are very broad in literature and theory. Also because we as humans tell stories that seem closer to fiction than fact. Autobiographical memory and 'impulses' are distorted variations of the 'truth' and are selective accordingly.

Nevertheless, some artists identify certain 'truths' through documenting factual information. History itself is full of factual information that fulfills to tell some form of the 'truth' in a concise, straightforward manner that is understood by many. There are objective areas of study where autobiography can relate with just facts. For example, On Kawara, a Japanese conceptual artist, who exhibited and created between thirty and two hundred and forty one 'date-paintings' each showing a specific date, time and place. He is an artist who ignores personal accounts and promotes existence objectively. His works suggest that we can view the autobiographical impulse as archival and not as personal documentation. However this idea of dealing with one's life existence objectively contradicts being worthless and hollow. This is because in order to accurately represent any experience that is 'true' to fact, we can only be able to include or show the date, time or place i.e. Statistics. But then again how much of being objective is true, if we mixed the autobiographical impulse with subjective

reflections? Does recording information always change from the moment you experience something? Can we ever live in world of redefining any 'truth'?



(Fig 8) On Kawara, Date Paintings, Walker art Centre, Print-Screen Image, (13 April 2014)

Even though many artists such as On Kawara separate themselves from subjectivity and try to tell their story, in the way the experience occurred. Autobiography continues to rely on perspective and subjectivity alone. At the same time, the authenticity of the 'truth' deliberately changes. These details of one's individual self will always be influenced or interpreted differently and not fixed to something specifically, for instance self-image.

At the beginning it was about establishing and understanding the definition of autobiography. Learning and exploring autobiography through literature and connecting contemporary ideas in art, which constantly involved redefining the self. But documenting autobiographical impulses started with self-portraiture during the mid-fifteen and continued to change from self to persona to memory. There are so many autobiographical impulses presented historically that makes autobiography so complex that representing the 'truth' blurs between fact and fiction (faction). The 'impulse' is the reason behind the artwork, helping us to tell stories about ourselves, our self-awareness and individual existence in the way we live. We see this in Durer's self-portraits as an example of individual existence and redefining identity.

Chapter II

Desire: Intention of Invention: Many Kinds Of Narrative Impulses

Subjectivity plays a huge part when discussing the many kinds of 'narrative impulses' in autobiographical art. Narration is used as the main function of expressing autobiographical contemporary art. Narrative art is storytelling in a visual form. Art thrives on narrative. Autobiographical artists tend to use this method to provide an opportunity to reflect or rethink on their life experiences. Reconstructing and 'editing' aspects of their everyday life 'scenes' for the purpose of imagination and storytelling. There are many desires, 'impulses' that hold a strong feeling of wanting to pursue this intention in autobiographical art. There is an endless list of the autobiographical impulses in contemporary art. In this chapter, there are many artists that capture the autobiographical impulse(s) through painting and photography. The autobiographical impulses that were discussed in chapter one continues to imply with the self, identity, persona and memory.

Paul Ricoeur points out *'we tell stories because in the last analysis human lives need and merit being narrated'*. This remark takes on its full force when we refer to the necessity to save the history of the defeated and the lost. The whole history of suffering cries out for vengeance and calls for narrative.⁸ Ricoeur was a French philosopher who specialise in mythology, narrative and metaphor theory. He tells us that 'narrative impulses' in autobiography (also in general with literacy and art) generate and remind us that everyone has a life story and artistic practices allows us to deal with these past events in order to celebrate or reflect what was once forgotten and remembered. The role of history creates a huge purpose for storytelling and drives human awareness into a 'desire' and an 'impulse' of remembering the past and reflecting on the present.

⁸ Gudmundsdottir, Gunnthorunn, *Borderlines: Autobiography and Fiction in Postmodern Life Writing: Postmodern Studies* 33, (Rodopi, Amsterdam), (2003)

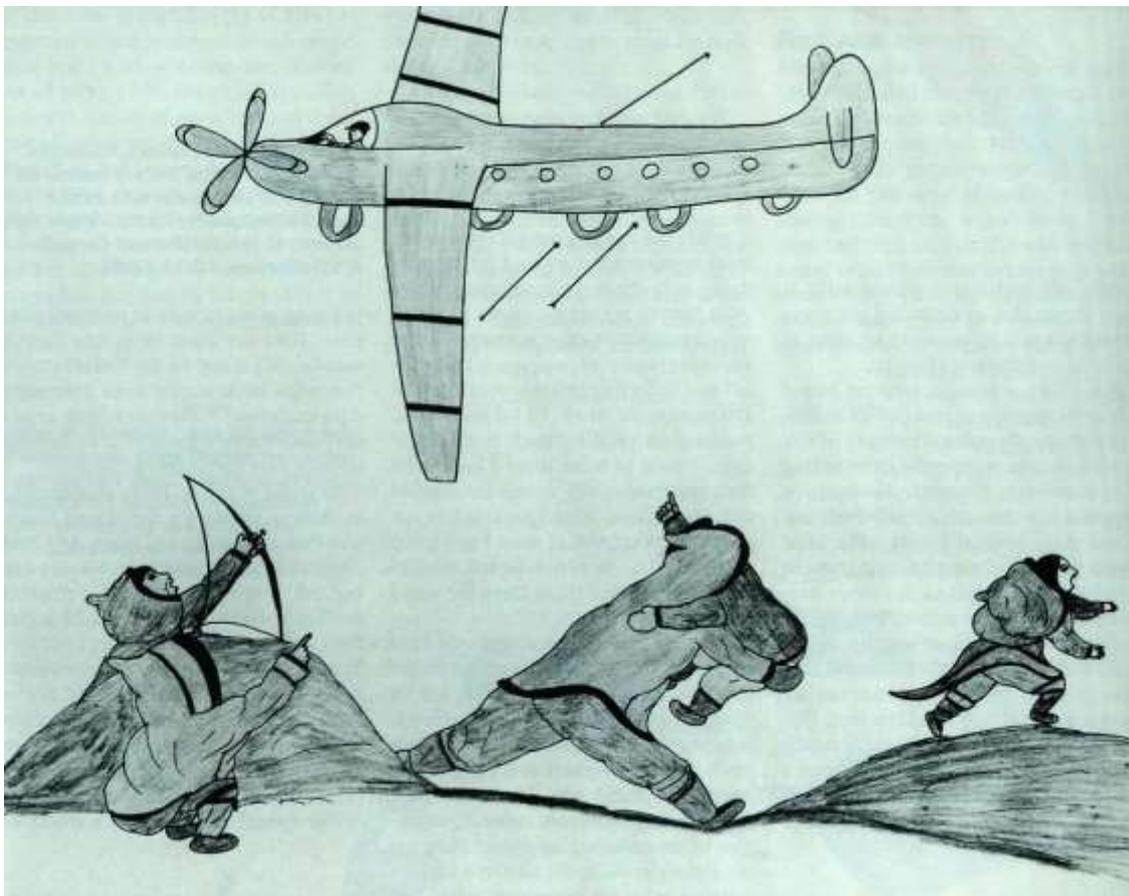
Johnnie Gratton commented on narrative and fiction how it is necessary when invention come into play with autobiography '*...fiction as making and not just making up: fiction as the controlling of imagination, fantasy and desire; fiction as the supplement of memory*'. Gratton seems to point out, that fiction is either good or bad when constructing our own narratives as it encourages us to pursue that treasured memory or experience through intention rather than just inventing.

When we discuss the different impulses in autobiographical art, one of the issues that drive contemporary artists to make their work is gender and specifically the female identity (very common in autobiography). Janet Catherine Berlo is a professor of art history and currently works at the University of Rochester. Berlo notes about art and identity as well as 'autobiographical impulses'. She states that we overlooked autobiography impulses by written narrative. We forget that autobiography and history is also engaged in other ways such as painting, speaking or performing. She uses the examples of Inuit art from the Cape Dorset archive to illustrate a rich source of visual autobiography and northern life. The artist Pootogook, born in 1938 and the daughter of best-known Inuit artist Pitseolak Ashoona, tells her life story of traditional life through contemporary drawings. Berlo investigates that both contemporary and traditional life are important for the cultural 'invention' of Inuit identity. The 'invention' of female identity is developed through cultural memory and fiction.

Her drawings create a narrative that is able for us to understand some sense of culture that is different. The cultural memory is the centre of the 'impulse' she creates from her experiences of her family and every-day life. We could relate her drawings as dream-like adventures that are fictional, which could be an informal narrative about gender, identity and individual desire (fig 9). Fiction is 'invented' in her work by making her own interpretations of the stories she heard from her mother such as hunting for food, visitors you came to the villages, made her draw them and thus creating an autobiographical impulse, which is her identity.



(Fig 9) Napachie Pootogook with her mother, Black and white photograph, Pitseolak Ashoona



(Fig 10) Untitled, 1978-79, Napachie Pootoogook, Cape Dorset (coloured pencil, felt pen; collection of the west Baffin Eskimo Co-operative Ltd, McMichael Canadian Art Collection)



(Fig 11) Untitled, 1980-81, Napachie Pootoogook, Cape Dorset (coloured pencil, felt pen; collection of the west Baffin Eskimo Co-operative Ltd, McMichael Canadian Art Collection)

Christian Boltanski a French photographer, painter and film maker who uses human existence and memory to reconstruct his narrative says ‘..My reality is disappearing more and more.....it’s partly like that for everyone, artist or not. You decide what bit of yourself is to show or not’⁹. He suggests that artists play with autobiography and invent fictional experiences to reinvent themselves. Self-invention is the act of creating fabricated conceptual ideas of a person’s character and nature i.e. the self. For example, Andy Warhol created several different self-portraits, where he continued to ‘reinvent’ himself and discover ways to extinguish himself as an artist. Like Duer, he presented a dialogue between personality and image. Re-invention means creating or changing something from its original,

⁹ Christian Boltanski, Steiner Barbara, Jun Yang, *Autobiography: Art Works*, (Thames and Hudson Ltd), (27 Sep 2004) P68

everyday state. In this case, Warhol is re-inventing his identity into many different selves to force away the attention of his 'real life'. His autobiographical impulse is a 'narrative impulse' that tells the story of his persona as the 'art'. The impulse can be about locating an artist and their work within autobiography like Warhol. *'....creating an autobiography always means creating an identity – constructing one's story, not just telling it..'* Jun Yang who wrote about autobiography as an collaborative writer suggested that 'the intention' for inventing (constructing) identities is the desire for creating certain realities are regarded as the 'truth' but constructed narratively.



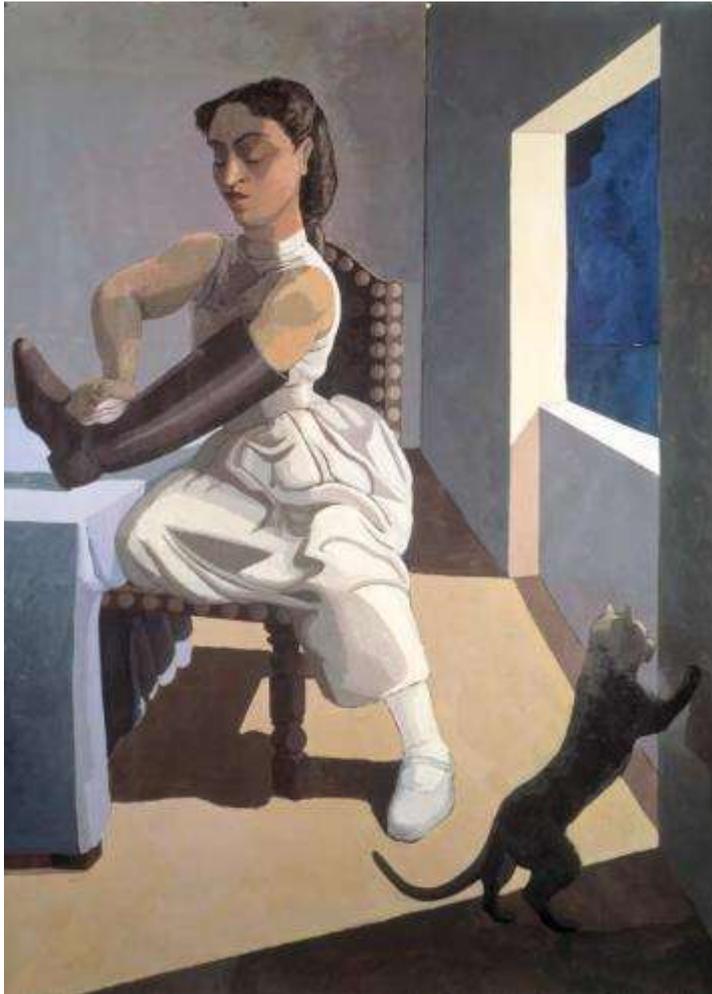
(Fig 12) Andy Warhol , Self-portrait in Drag (with Bouffant Wig), (1981/82), Polaroid photograph, 10.8 x 8.6 The Andy Warhol foundation for the visual arts, Inc/ ARS, NY and DACS, London 2004

Berlo comments that 'autobiographical impulses' are '*Obsessive evocation of the old ways*'¹⁰, which could mean that 'impulses' in contemporary art continue to trace the importance of the past and personal situation. Paula Rego uses features of subjectivity of her past and personal situations to construct narrative impulses. She continues to invent characters that show a range of female stereotypes and characters. This is because her work is not about self-portrait; her work is about capturing identities that communicate 'roles' placed narratively. To explain further, Rego extracts herself from the individual and presents herself as an 'actress' playing various roles. Her intention of the autobiographical impulse seems to be on the basis of archiving 'images' rather than 'one's individual self-image, which is her true self.

Speaking about constructive identities and narratives, Paula Rego is best known for her narrative and folklore art, where she creates every piece of work to tell a story. Rego said 'Most folktales are terrifying and full of warnings...telling children how they should behave, tasks you have to accomplish to get to the rewards...and I quite like that.'¹¹ Her driven autobiographical impulse seems to point towards making meaningful 'truths' based on her life experiences and her family history. Like Pootoogook, we can tell she plays a lot with inventive 'identities' (fig 13), where the imagery looks stage for fictional purposes. For example this painting is based on family relationships. She is using some 'truth' to create an invented autobiographical account that drives her narrative impulse to show a character's presence or story.

¹⁰ Berlo, Catherine, Janet, *Autobiographical Impulses and Female Identity in the drawings of Napachie Pootoogook*, Inuit Art, University of Rochester, Research Education, Canada, P9

¹¹ *Telling Tales* Dir. Jake Auberbach.Perf. Paula Rego, Jake Auberback Films Ltd (2009)



(Fig 13) Paula Rego, The policeman's daughter, (1987), oil on canvas, 213 x 152 cm, Saatchi Gallery

Overall, the term 'narrative' is broadly used individually and seems to explore aspects of thriving on experiences and past events. Mostly the narratives seem to relate universally and change accordingly to the person, which also means the 'impulse' changes in autobiography. This is because 'one story' can be differently to someone else who has also experience something similar, therefore does the 'truth' alter the perception of fictionality and autobiographical art? Is there only room for re-inventing the 'truth'? Not only does the autobiographical impulse change in narrative, but the fabricated identity of the artist may no longer exist and disappear within the art. Autobiographical impulses in art tend to acknowledge the 'self', but now the identity of the artist seems to float in-between making

stories and revealing 'one self' as a disguise. Uniquely how self-invention plays in narrative impulses and desires of the artist's autobiographical.

Chapter III

Blur: Audiences mirroring fictionalise Stories

'...The really interesting autobiographies are those that do not talk about the author, but about every reader.' Boltanski, he archives individual identity and record the lives of others as part of his autobiographical impulse. He suggests that autobiography is not only about discovering or understanding the 'self', it is also about illustrating the viewer.

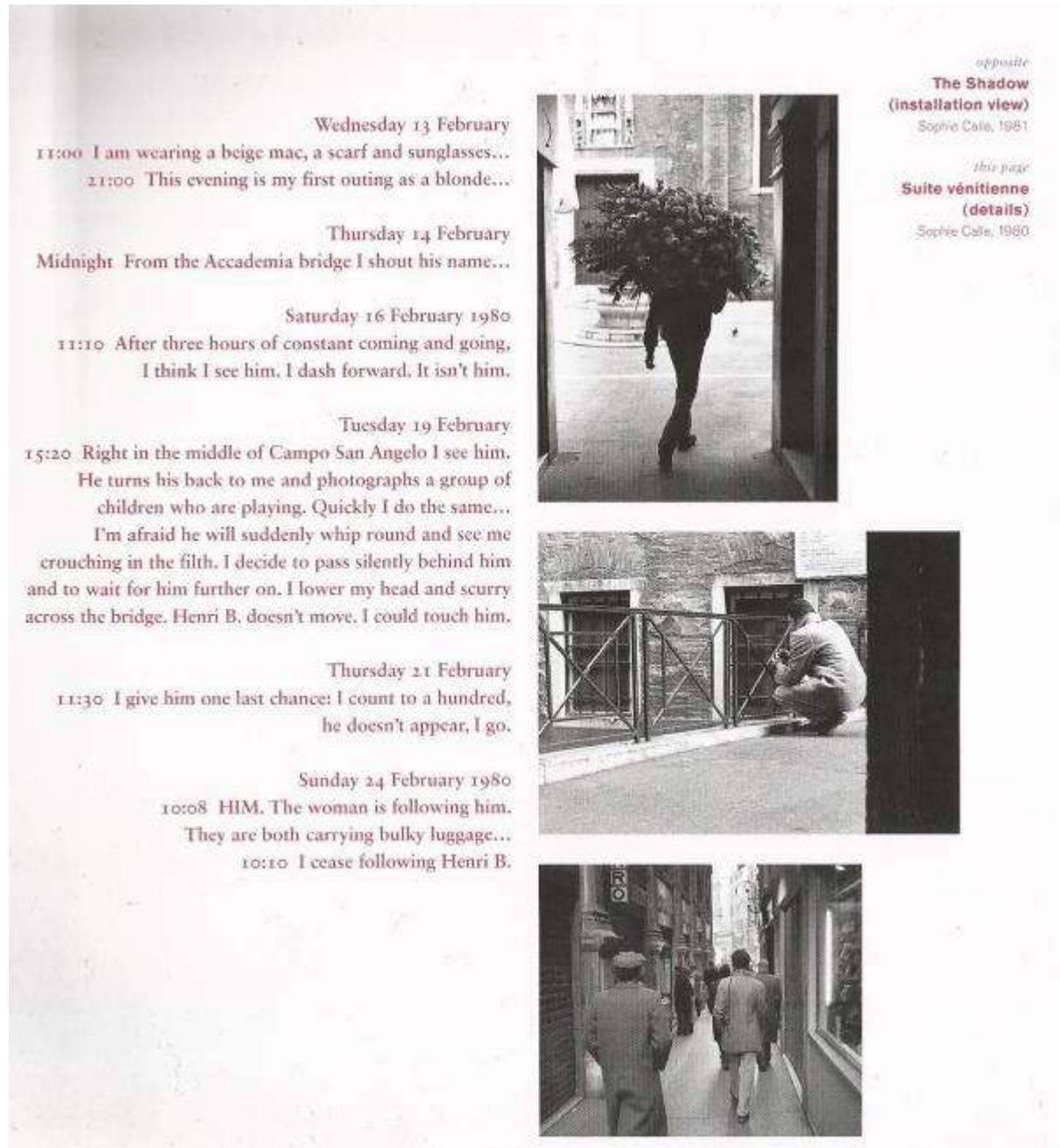
Within contemporary art, autobiographical artists find new ways of engaging and reflecting their stories upon other people. William James was an American philosopher and psychologist who wrote various ideas about memory, emotions and experiences. 'The community stagnates without the impulse of the individual. The impulse dies away without the sympathy of the community'. He states that without the 'impulse' of the individual, the community, which is the audience, does not begin to evolve, learn or change. The 'impulse' James suggests, 'dies away' because the audience has not reflected or 'mirror' to understand the individual 'story', therefore the need for both is essential for autobiography. In this chapter it will discuss findings on how autobiographical art reveals the impulse of pursuing a story that can be interpreted differently from the viewer's perspective.

Mirror stage argued by Jacques Lacan, is a form of identification of recognising the self-image. Autobiography identifies the subject based on first-person i.e. 'I', 'self'. One of the reasons for pursuing an autobiographical 'impulse' in autobiography was to be both the author and the protagonist of one's narrative according to Philippe Lejeune. This means that autobiography is mainly about the individual. But Lejeune suggests that, autobiography can also have social or political aspects that enable the person to construct a narrative as well as focusing on the individual. Meaning autobiography can reflect on other individuals in society.

Sophie Calle is a French artist who blends her own accounts of her life with those of other people. She continues to mix fact with fiction, as well as searching out for her identity. Calle's work in terms of using 'the mirror stage' as a form of exchanging fictionalise stories

towards the audience plays with a process of exposing individual narratives that can be applied to anyone. For example, in *Suite Venitienne* (details), you can literally jump into the timeline of the story (scene) (fig 14) and construct a 'mirror image' or form an 'identity' that isn't our own. Basically fictionalising yourself, as if you are walking behind this person or walking down the same street. The blur between fact and fiction gives the viewer the endless possibility to access someone's autobiography into their own life. The viewer has access to Calle's autobiographical impulse which reveals and allows others to describe her persona, memory and identity from their perspective. The artist gives the audience the opportunity to reinvent the self and construct a whole new narrative. Paul Auster is an American author who describes Calle's work as 'autofiction'. French literary uses the term 'autofiction' to articulate autobiography and fiction together in 1977. This is because Calle's work creates a hybrid of both fact and fiction; observing others and herself. She makes fictionalised stories that 'mirror' our understanding of our own individual awareness.

Foucault suggested that *'authorial is not located in the fiction of the work...but is a question of genre and the conventions attached to that genre by society'*. This could mean that autobiography is not about having the author present in any fictional works, but what the experience, subject or category displays that make the audience create a connection. For example, Calle gives the audience the space to describe for themselves what the moment is documenting, which then makes us create a story because we are relating to the evidence she presents as part of her 'life' existence. As then we are creating a scenario of a fictional story. But also for ourselves we are trying to understand her 'impulse' and gathered 'truth' by reflecting, which is the 'mirror-image' process.



(Fig 14) Calle, Sophie, Suite venitienne, 1980, black and white photographs, installation view, scan image, Courtesy the artist and Emmanuel Perrotin, ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London, (2004)

Conclusion

Throughout this study, we have looked at autobiography historically and the many types of autobiographical impulses in art. In locating these impulses within autobiography and contemporary art, we have come to some aspects of autobiographical life-writing and postmodern literacy. At first, autobiography was about drawing out the 'truth' and seeking to promote 'the self'. However there were some artists who challenged and changed the autobiographical impulse such as Gerhard Richter and Sophie Calle. Autobiography is not merely about the self and the premises of identity. Autobiography is also about making sense of the world and understanding our human awareness. Autobiography is like a surviving mechanism. Yet the autobiographical impulses undermine the originality of what autobiography is about. Autobiography by definition was about drawing out past and the certain 'truths' from the first-person view. But accordingly to several writers such as Gudmundsodottir, autobiography does not have a define meaning due to the complexity of containing more than one genre such as biography. The autobiographical impulse starts with subjective reasoning where we gain some form of 'truth'. If done to some extent honestly or truthfully the account is genuine. However faction ultimately in autobiography takes its view as being pointless and meaningless. Then again, having the many uses of fact and fiction combined together actually helps us make sense of an image or text such as Richter wife and child pictures. Someone can easily understand or relate to associate with that personal experience. We might assume straightaway that they are his wife and child and not just pictures from a magazine. Autobiography opens doors for discussion and continues to debate for individuals to express themselves, as everyone has a story to tell. The autobiographical impulse allows any ordinary person to relate themselves through an artist's expression. The autobiographical impulses encourage autobiography to be explored by artists, because the need to project one's image and story has become an important component in modern art. This is because autobiography and the impulses behind, develop a unique area for artists to explore faction, distorted memories, insecure 'truths' and

individual awareness. These impulses change and continue to start with the self and identity and develop into something specific impulses such as having several identities like Warhol. The role of faction, autofiction and narrative ownership are new concepts and play a great deal in autobiographical impulses. Even though autobiography is difficult, we can still learn from the artist and the world around us. Autobiography can be about the writer, but still remain open to others like archive of document information that can be useful or meaningless. Autobiographical impulses in relation to faction is still a 'slippery hybrid', this is because with any art form; photograph or painting, these are at the end of day still just historical documents record by someone else at a specific moment accordingly to 'the self'. Autobiographical contemporary art does not give us any information elsewhere, except judging the appearance. Autobiography depends on whether the artist or writer is being objective or subjective to their work. Does this mean we have to look at the work according to how the artist made it out to be? Must there be a define 'truth' to say that the work is exactly fact or fiction?

Angold, Michael, 'The Autobiographical Impulse in Byzantium', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, Trustees for Harvard University, Vol.52 (1998), pp.225-257

Bell, Julian, *Mirror of the World: A New History of Art*, (Thames and Hudson Ltd), (15 Mar 2010)

Berlo, Catherine, Janet, 'Autobiographical impulses and female identity in the drawings of Napachie Pootoogook', University of Rochester, Research Education, Canada, (1997/2007)

Blois, de, Joost, 'Introduction. The artists formerly known as...or, the loose end of conceptual art and the possibilities of 'visual autofiction'', *Image [&] Narrative Online magazine*, Issue 19, November 2007

Dika Vera, *The (Moving) Pictures Generation: The Cinematic Impulse in Downtown New York Art and Film*, (Palgrave Macmillan), (27 Mar 2012)

Doherty, Claire, eds, *Situation (Documents of Contemporary Art)*, (White Chapel Art Gallery), (2009)

Dowling, C William, *Ricoeur on Time and Narrative, An Introduction to Temps et récit*, (University of Notre Dame Press), (Notre Dame Indiana), (2011)

Farr, Ian, eds, *Memory (Documents of Contemporary Art)*, (White Chapel Art Gallery), (2012)

Gudmundsdottir, Gunnthorunn, *Borderlines: Autobiography and Fiction in Postmodern Life Writing: Postmodern Studies 33*, (Rodopi, Amsterdam),(2003)

The number of issues and concerns involved about autobiography is unlimited. There is a huge relationship between autobiography and fiction. The chapters' articulate such great depth into the many different kinds of documentation of life writing. It clearly invites an awareness of autobiographical and fictional components. In the book, it doesn't mention 'faction' but you get to understand the use of the term 'fiction' towards postmodern theories. Even though the text focuses on both literature and art, there is a real essence of investigation about not only narrative but also experimentation of autobiographical practices. He examines self-invention, personal mythologies and projecting identity, especially in women's autobiographies but also the relationship of Fictionality and self-image. He looks into memory and the use of photographs has in autobiography, not only written accounts but illustrating or describing a story from a photograph. There is a borderline between representing the past in terms of theme and structure. By this he follows into the roles of presenting different his choice of text is very postmodernist and tend to reflect critically on understanding the genre of autobiography. With dealing with narrative in particular, its about 'the organisation of time', which is linked with subjective editing of presenting meaning and knowledge on the past, otherwise it would be meaningless. Yet, he continues to provide insight into the importance between autobiography and fiction.

Harrison Martin, *In Camera – Francis Bacon: Photography, Film and the Practice of Painting*, (Thames & Hudson), (5 Jun 2006)

Heale, Elizabeth, *Autobiography and authorship in Renaissance Verse; Chronicles of the Self*,(Palgrave Macmillan),(13 Dec 2002)

Heale provided a foundation of understanding the beginnings of autobiography. She discusses about the many kinds of writing within the periods of 1520-1740. She shares an historical awareness of presenting and documenting 'the self'. However the works and case studies she presents follow the route of literature rather than art e.g. poetry, written stories. Nevertheless the information discussed plays a huge part in exploring autobiographical narrative in the past and in today's influence over modern culture. There is a huge amount of examples on the basis of the first-person. Taking into account ideas of twentieth-century theorists and the continuation on the uses of language and meaning. This text reflects the uses of the autobiographical impulse(s) in a range of models and discourse. She identifies socially and historically many individuals attempt of documenting their life stories and analysing their human awareness and engagement with 'one's self'. She mentions about subjectivity and the extent of significant versions of 'the self' and 'inner judgment'. The further you read the more you understand the conditions of autobiography. Recording of a 'self-image' or 'persona', poses issues on narrative existence and survival based on self-representation and experience. There is a real overall sense of critically exploring self-expression and desire of narrative in autobiography.

Kirk Kara, *Public Information: Desire, Disaster, Document*, (San Francisco Museum of Modern Art), (31 Dec 1995)

Lacan, Jacques, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytical Experience." In *Écrits*. Translated by Bruce Fink. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006.

Lejeune, Philippe, *The Autobiographical Pact*, Educational Department, Seuil (1989/1996)

Marin, Louis, *On Representation*, Trans.by Catherine Porter, (Stanford University Press), (2002)

Lejeune, Philippe, 'The Autobiographical Pact', *On Autobiography*, (1989/1996)

https://edocs.uis.edu/Departments/LIS/Course_Pages/LNT501/RN/Rosina's_on-ground_course_storage/Rosina's_LNT_501_Readings/On%20Autobiography%20pp3-30%20%20by%20Philippe%20Lejeune.pdf.>

Marin discusses a range of contemporary representations in art and theatrical narrative. It's extraordinary how striking he involves specific artists and examples that define the very discourse between image and text. He draws upon narrative tales as a discourse that is applied to history and religion. Meaning there's a symbolic significance and an emphasis between fiction and fact. The image itself is representational no matter what or where the figure(s) or character(s) are in the painting. They are seen as reflections of narrative that enable us to read the image. Contemporary theories have demonstrated that the visual image is seen as a process. It mentions that 'all representation is narrative by nature', semiology, limits of painting and relations of communication in art.

Masschelein, Anneleen, 'Can pain be exquisite? Autofictional stagings of douleur exquisite by Sophie Calle, forced entertainment and Frank Gehry and Edwin Chan', *Image & Narrative Online magazine*, Issue 19, November 2007

Miller, K, Nancy, *But Enough About Me: Why We Read Other People's Lives* (Gender and Culture Series), (Columbia University Press), (2002)

Myers, R ,Terry, eds, *Painting (Documents of Contemporary Art)*, (Whitechapel art gallery), (2011)

Even though the essays and theories in this book are concern with 'the death of painting' and moments of 'painting' in today's society, it still involves points that are relevant, as it discusses ideas connected to representation of situations and pictorial language between image and social space. It's interesting how or what we see and convey. How photography creates the event and painting appears as an illustrative representation of narrative. It opens up debates from both ends of the scope. In addition, there are writings that compare notes about a range of artists not only partaking in painting, but also about the account taken in a picture. Its disguised words like 'abandon' and 'pictorial deformation' which draw to a point and question the narrative of autobiography in images. Painting grabs our attention and it brings self-representation and a process of unfolded events.

Self, Will, 'Art for fiction's sake: The art of writing' Tate Articles, Issue 8, (Autumn 2006) <
<http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/articles/art-fictions-sake>> [accessed 15/04/2014]

Selz, Peter and Stiles, Kristine, 'Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists' Writings',(University of California Press 2012), 'An interview with Francis Bacon and David Sylvester (1966,1971-73) Interview 1-3, P222-227

Selz, Peter and Stiles, Kristine, 'Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists' Writings',(University of California Press 2012) , 'An Essay and Statement' Fischl, Eric, 'I Don't Think Expressionism Is the Issue', (1982), P290-291

Internationally commended American painter and sculpture, historically discusses painting as a broad identity that has been influenced and changed throughout history, in many cultures and in different countries. He describes his feelings towards the work of Max Beckmann and other artists; for example he mentions O'Keeffe and Kandinsky. The main significant idea he brings to the conversion of figuration and abstract painting is that he finds that the narrative is much more important than knowing what or who the figure represents (in the works of Beckmann). He emphasises a lot on image, style, craft, psychology and social values portrayed in painting. In a way this source is useful to autobiography in terms of 'narrative'. Even abstract paintings can address autobiography and fiction.

Steiner Barbara, Jun Yang, Autobiography: Art Works, (Thames and Hudson Ltd), (27 Sep 2004)

The term autobiography used is regarded as establishing an identity of the self and referencing the boundary between objective and subjective (public and private) in contemporary art. The so called 'function' of autobiography in contemporary art has certain features that have strongly changed over the past years which is explored by Curator Barbara Steiner and Jun Yag. They present a range of artists who inform the many ways

why and how we create stories about ourselves The debates grow from being a complex description of narrating an subject to the very process of capturing fragments of reality e.g. extracts personal experiences. The attitude of autobiography art presented in this book is so unique as if you are entering a hotel that each room has their own individual private details of their life experiences documented as sectional stories. Its extraordinary how there are many kinds of autobiographies in contemporary art both reflecting and interpreting a mixture of narrative concepts.

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Pootoogook, Napachie, Inuit Art, Untitled, (1980-81), Coloured Pencil, Berlo, Catherine, Janet, Autobiographical Impulses and Female Identity in the drawings of University of Rochester, Research Education, Canada, P.9

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