

# AUTOBIO ANTHROPO LOGRAPHY



**Robert Zverina Short Films DVD + Lecture Notes**  
**Henry Art Gallery Thursday March 29 2007**



I started shooting microdocumentaries in Feb 2003, more or less by accident. How many since then? Haven't counted. Tens of 1,000s.

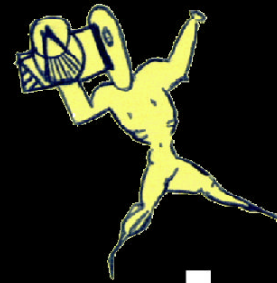
Around 4,000 have been prepared for showing. Preparation = selection. No editing. Just playlists. They have been screened at Howard House, Priceless Works, Consolidated Works, Northwest Film Forum, Dorkbot, bars & clubs.

In 2006, Seattle Cable Access Network TV, every Sat. at midnight. So maybe you have seen them. One place they are not is online. Best in large doses, I favor communal and/or ritualized viewing in theaters, galleries, and the home.



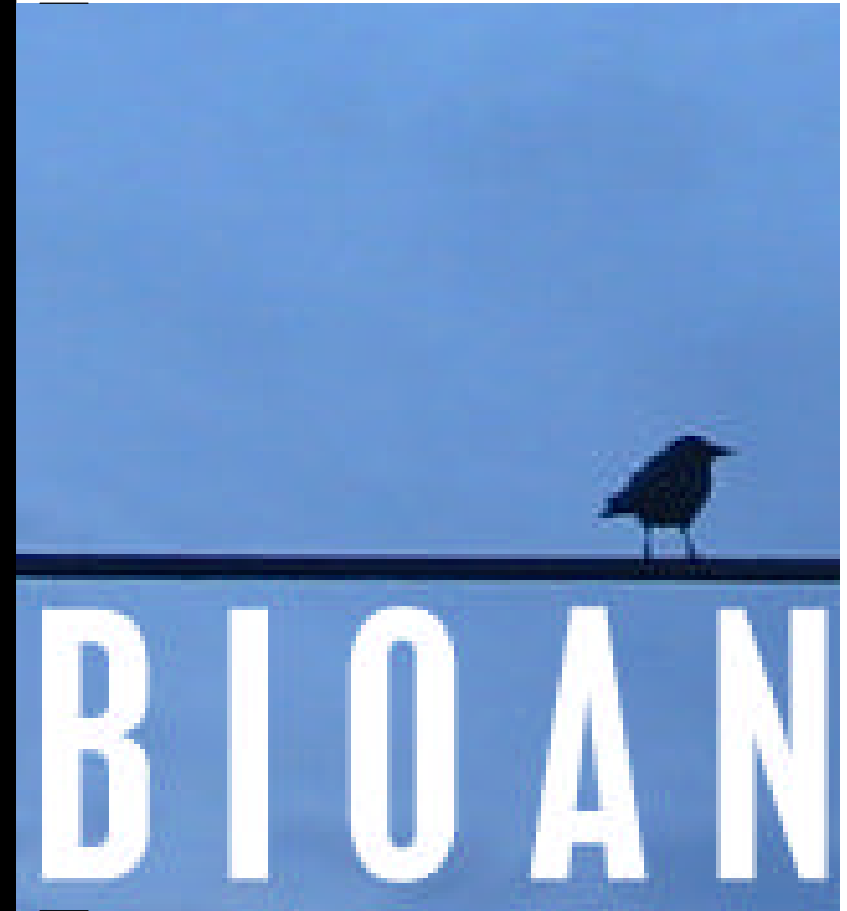


All shot with this camera: Canon S200 digital  
Elph. 320x240 pixels .avi, 30-second max, a  
useful limit. Full-frame, no edits. Everything  
one needs to know can be found in the manual.



# Photography

For the sake of simplicity, I say photography.  
To me, the movies are essentially extended  
snapshots. I take my cues from the “decisive  
moment” school of street photographers.



AUTOBIOANTHROPOLOGY

whimsical title hints at two sides of the work

AUTOBIOGRAPHY + ANTHROPOLOGY

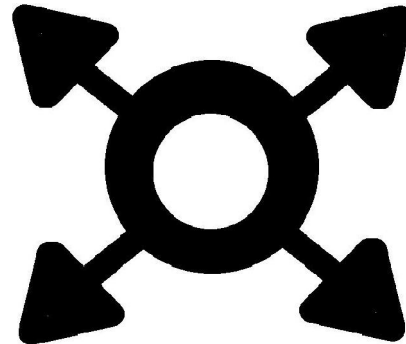


BIOANT



## AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Greek roots: self-life-writing



Camera vs. writing: with camera, presence  
only implied; one observes, but is unseen



"curiosity, tenderness,  
kindness, ecstasy..."



**vladimir nabokov's idea of**  
***aesthetic bliss...***

autobiography: adj. personal, reflexive, aesthetic  
autobiography: v. to register and (re)create beauty



Kurt Vonnegut wrote that artists tend to either  
respond to life or the tradition of their art so far.  
I've seen some movies, but I'm not schooled.  
You've got naive painters; I'm a naive filmmaker.

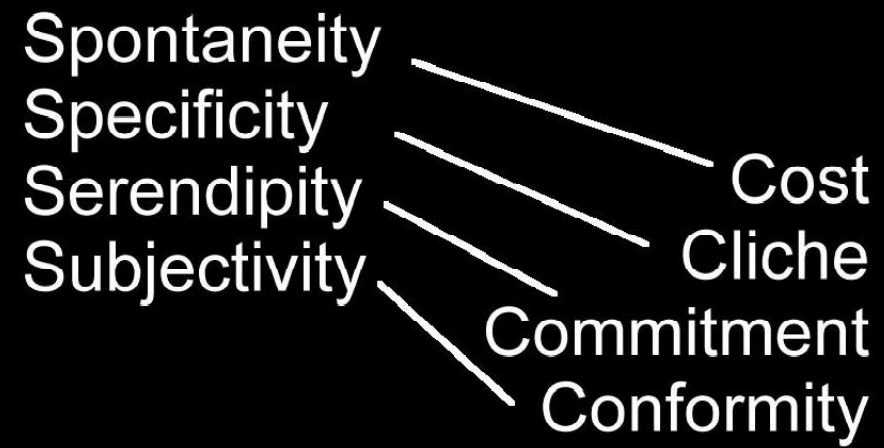




# Spontaneity Specificity Serendipity Subjectivity

...Basic principles I struggled to learn

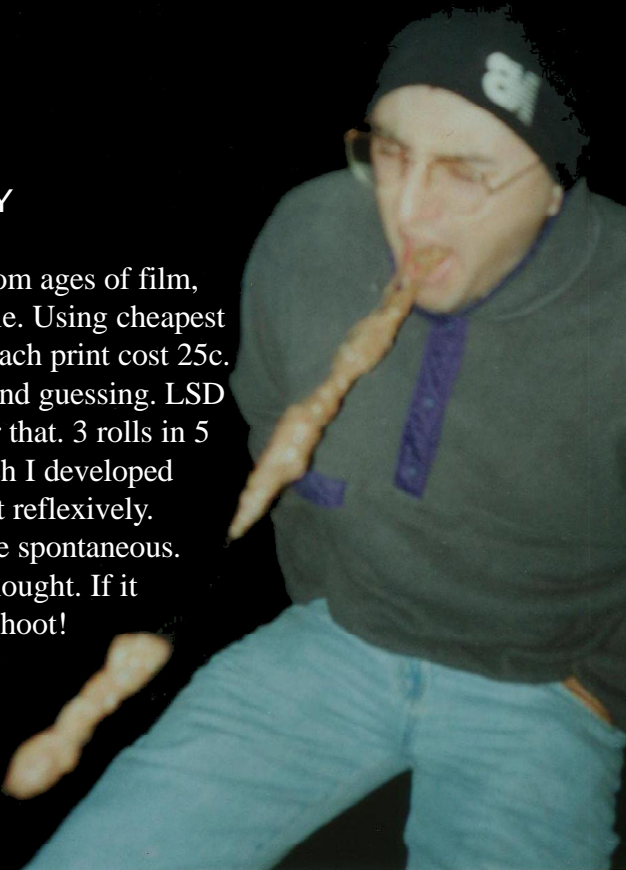
I say struggle because there were four  
corresponding impediments to overcome:



These inhibitors dominated just 10 years ago. Now the  
technology & culture have changed so much that many  
more people practice the 4 principles intuitively....

## SPONTANEITY

Back in the darkroom ages of film, cost was an obstacle. Using cheapest available service, each print cost 25c. Cost + scarcity = 2nd guessing. LSD helped me get over that. 3 rolls in 5 minutes, after which I developed confidence to shoot reflexively. With digital, people spontaneous. 1st thought, best thought. If it catches your eye, shoot!



## SPECIFICITY

1st thought, best thought was an idea propounded by Beat poets. As a searching 21 y.o., I studied w/ Allen Ginsberg, who was a good photographer. Back in early '90s, idea was still current that to be a photog you did darkroom. AG said all you needed was a camera. Principle of his poetics was SPECIFICITY. He wrote long captions to his photos--time, place, who, why. Very journalistic approach. That applied to looking: "Notice what you notice," he said. Now, date stamps + GPS = built-in specificity.



Sally - Portrait on my Savannah birthday in O'Neals hat and black shirt with white shirt from  
John & Susan Thompson's time in the 1970s. I'm from Savannah about 1970-1975. I'm a writer  
and I've stayed here. I worked on Savannah from 1971-75. I'm a writer after returning from Vietnam and Center  
Reading - but not in the weekend. Monday June 3, 1975, N.Y. Alison - June 3-1975



**SERENDIPITY** Luck = opportunity + preparedness. Street photography relies on serendipity, but you have to be ready. 1994, I decide to always carry a pocket 35mm camera. It was a choice and somewhat unusual at the time. Now, cameras are attached to phones. So most people are always ready without making much effort to be.







**SUBJECTIVITY** In this case, subjectivity means not being self-conscious. I almost didn't take this picture. Stranger in a strange land, wanted to fit in, not draw attention to self. But I snapped. Do it once & it gets easier. Now I see people taking ridiculous photos all the time. Once technology was ubiquitous, behavior became common.

So we have all these people packing cameras,  
shooting spontaneously, unselfconsciously...



Now what?





The same qualities which make it easy  
also make it more ephemeral than ever.

Instant gratification is followed  
by instant dissatisfaction.

I've already spoken about aesthetic bliss,  
but there's another side to my work--  
the urge to preserve, collect, organize.

To not exactly make sense of it, but to  
at least provide some semblance of context  
and leave behind a historical record:

AN ARCHIVE



“The struggle of humanity against power  
is the struggle of memory against forgetting.”  
~Milan Kundera





ICE FIRST, SIGNIFICANCE LATER. MEANING IS AN EXERCISE IN HINDSIGHT.



Photography is a poignant art.  
It records a moment that is gone.  
Painting might represent, but it is  
more about itself, less “real.”



With photography, there is more  
empathy with the subjects.





Photography is always saying goodbye.  
Part of my motivation is to record  
that which is disappearing.  
I don't find it hard to imagine  
that in 10 years no more birds.  
So maybe my bird films will  
remind people what was once and  
get them to examine what went wrong.

This is not a prediction.  
I'm just trying to imagine how  
this work might relate to people  
further down the line. I think  
the social value of all this  
documenting -- mine and yours --  
is yet to be revealed.

# Organizing Keywording Annotating



But if it is going to have any value or use, the work needs to be ARCHIVED.

Which brings me to the ANTHROPOLOGY side of the work

--the organizing, keywording, and annotation of what are essentially field recordings.

Digital media are really fragile.



Formats become obsolete, files get corrupted, or--most commonly--they get lost in the shuffle. They're shared once, forgotten, or deleted. Even uploading is temporary. Blogs, myspace, youtube--the files are out of your hands. Don't trust them.

I do a few simple things to keep track of my files, and I urge you to do the same so that together we can build a populist archive:

- 1) Date & Name your folders  
YYMMDD-context
- 2) Keyword your files, leaving prefix intact  
Mvi\_5034-water-loview-tracking-retreat-stream-cataract-flow.avi
- 3) DON'T modify datestamp when renaming file

Back up your files. All formats are fragile. I make VHS tapes, DVDs, CD-Rs. Ultimately I'd like to have them transferred to film or some as yet uninvented analog system.



Additionally, I annotate each clip, which is slightly insane, but I like to write and there's something to it that is like recording a dream.

The text is a supplement, but it also stands on its own as a poem.

Print will probably outlast motion pictures.

## 792 Short Films

shot on the west coast of north america  
february 8 – august 23, 2003

dates and addresses given in the interest of history  
most films recorded in seattle unless otherwise noted

all films copyright robertzverina@yahoo.com  
if showing publicly, please cite [www.zverina.com/movies](http://www.zverina.com/movies)

specialthanks to jesse paul mullex, without whose  
prompting & encouragement this dvd would not exist

**TRACK ONE** (1) FEB 8 2003, 1st movie with canon s200 digital elph, party at dave benham's, fremont fine arts foundry, 154 n 35th st. at the time i didn't know the camera recorded audio. the laughter sounds like gobbling turkeys (2) dave benham's german shepherd anna (3) dave benham multitasking with cel phone headset and sony vaio laptop—"are you going there?" (4) FEB10, working as landscaper, dumptruck delivers 7 yards of topsoil to alley, bill c. in foreground (5) feb 11, bicycling to work on burke-gilman trail, university of washington tree shadows (6) bill bangs dirt off dumptruck tailgate (7) moving dirtpile one shovel at a time, bill misses the wheelbarrow (8) FEB12, looking up into a winter tree at dusk, sound of I-5 in background (9) vehicles inch south on I-5 at 100 feet per second (10) relative motion of moon moving around sky (11) miso maria consuela cabeza the cat turns circles on kitchen floor, 3955-b fremont ave n (12) FEB13, shaky streetscape mistake (13) using transparent tape to lift images from newspaper at mighty-o vegan organic donut shop, 2110 n 55th st (shot by ryan kellner) (14) FEB 14, view from diner on highway 2 en route to leavenworth, WA (15) sarah kavage shares her potatoes (16) truck's flapping blue tarp (17) sunny day roof snowmelt gutter drip (18) a single candle reflected on italian restaurant table (19) handing soap to sarah kavage in leavenworth motel red aura shower (20) FEB 15, mountain highway hard left (shot by sarah kavage) (21) swirling coffee bubble in index diner (22) feb 15 2003 global day of protest peace



I name names, place places, date dates, and explain circumstances.

As files climb into tens of 1,000s, cross-referencing is necessary for retrieval.

I am a slow learner. Took me years to develop this process and it's still evolving.

I hope you'll consider adopting some of these techniques so the past doesn't slip through your fingers.

We'll all be the richer for it.



