

Earthworks, Video, Performance

seeing or finding in written form or in some similar form

Learning from what one has seen or found in such form

Vito Acconci, 'Pinpoint (Point of View): 1

That day, the pen I used was made of plastic you see.

The writing could be stretched in any direction—“elastic,” – they said.

That didn't refer to the words so much

As to me, while writing, at my desk, with desk-chair, desk-blotter,

desk-top, desk-toy, desk-ball, etc., I mean.

Craig Dworkin (ed.) *Language to Cover a Page: The Early Writings of Vito Acconci* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2006), p. 4.

I'd put poetry at the bottom of a hierarchy of the arts- not because it's lesser, but because it's the base, the undercurrent, the sub-structure of the arts. But, as a base, it's only a beginning. Poetry has nothing to do with concentration of language, or distillation of language; poetry is an attempt to get through language and arrive at a state of pre-language- it's a cry, a gasp, a screech. Poetry is thinking—or maybe it's only feeling—in opposites; poetry is fluidity between opposites. Then, later, poetry, throws the voice into spaces, events; poetry grows up to become a novel, or a movie, or music, or architecture. But: once a poet always a poet-or, at least, once a language-user always a language-user. I don't know how to think-more exactly, I don't know how to know I'm thinking- except by language. I start a project by naming the conditions and playing with words, punning on these names. Or I start a project by subject-verb-object: I parse a space, I use sentence-structure to plot possible movements through that space.

Vito Acconci interviewed by Mark Taylor, in Frazer Ward, Mark C. Taylor, Jennifer Bloomer, *Vito Acconci* (London: Phaidon Press, 2002)



Three Adaptation Studies

[Vito Acconci](#)

1970, 8:05 min, b&w, silent, Super 8mm film on video

In these early film exercises, Acconci exhibits an almost childlike vulnerability that is at once comic and oddly affecting. In *Blindfold Catching*, a blindfolded Acconci reacts, flinching and lunging, as rubber balls are repeatedly thrown at him from off-screen. In *Soap & Eyes*, he tries to keep his eyes open after dousing his face with soapsuds, resulting in a tragicomic clown face. In *Hand and Mouth*, he repeatedly forces his fist into his mouth until



Vito Acconci. Following Piece. 1969.



Acconci. Following Piece. 1969.

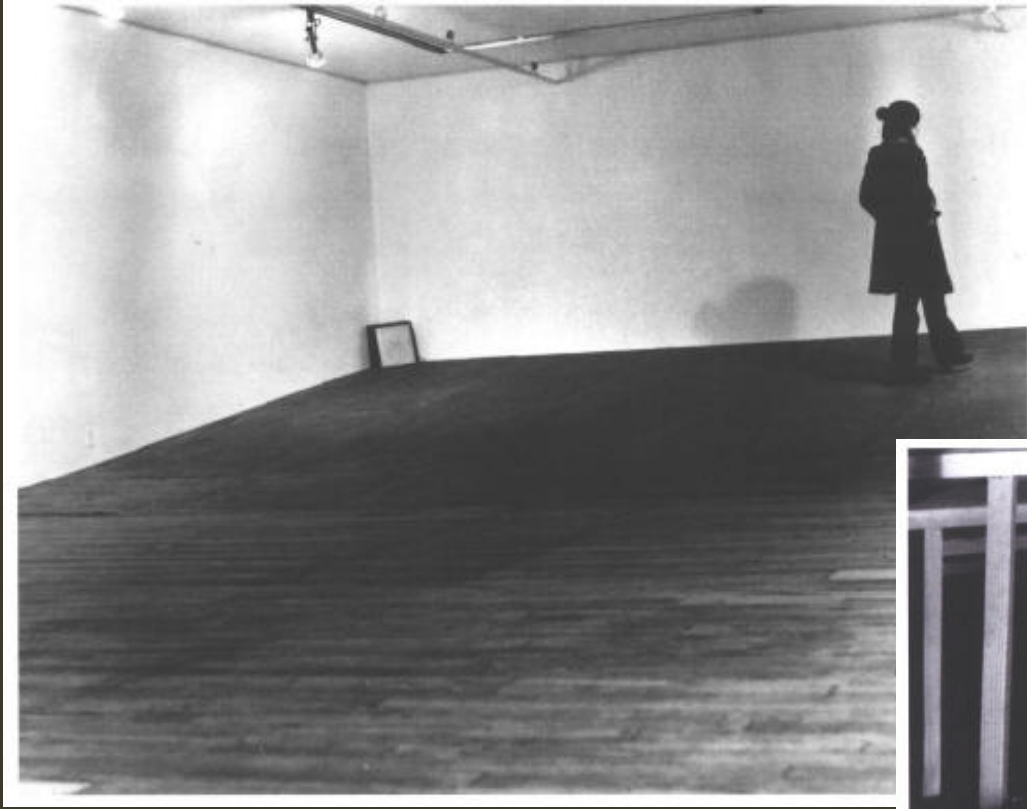


Vito Acconci, Blinks, 1969



- FROM Vito Acconci's 'Notes on Blinks' (1969)
- Keeping in sight: having in view, holding in view (camera as a means to 'keep seeing' - when I blink, I can't see - when I take a photograph, while blinking, I have a record of what I couldn't see - see it later, feel it now).
- Delayed reaction: postponement: anticipation (when I blink, I know I will be seeing, later, what I am missing now).
- Performance as 'double time': I see what's before me in the present - now and then, I know I will see, in the future, what was before me in the past.
- Art-work as the result of bodily processes (my blink 'causes,' produces, a picture).

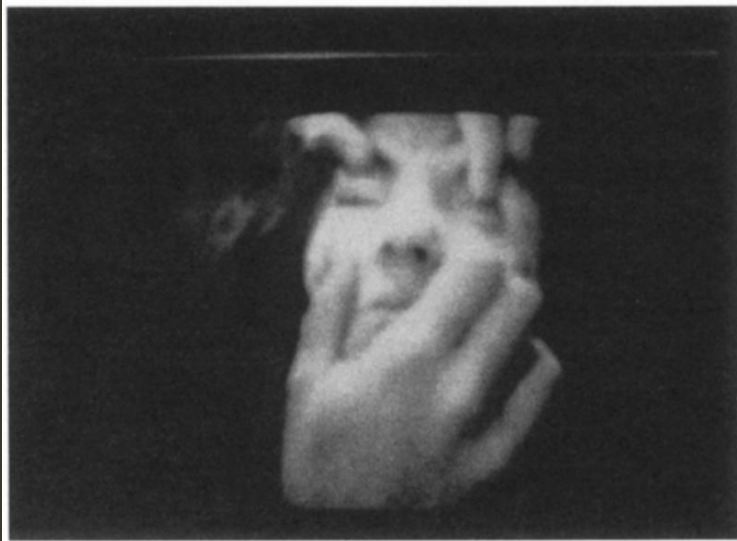
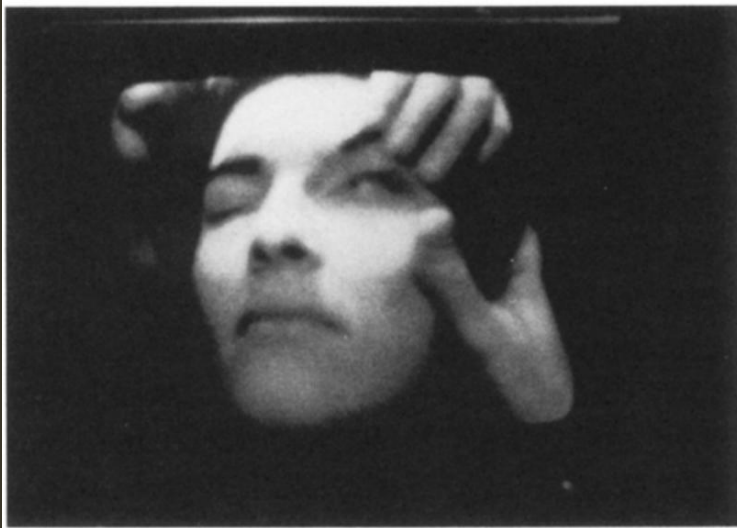
Vito Acconci, Seedbed, 1972



Performance art turns out to be therapeutic. It's something that people do at the beginning of their careers. Its function is to per-form art as we know it at the time and, thereby, re-form and trans-form it. Performance art is a space in between, a kind of halfway house that cures an addiction to objects and products and allows people to function on their own power and to depend on their own persons. Sooner or later, however a person has to get out of therapy and get on with his/her own life. The problem with performance art is that it has no place it can call its own: if it's in a theatre, if it's in a gallery or museum, if it's in the street, then it fades out of its own classification and slips into the categories of those arenas. This 'problem' with performance art is also the benefit of performance art: it destroys itself as it is being made- it can never be pinned down because it has already disappeared—as soon as it exists in fact, in an actual place and in an actual situation, it isn't itself, because it shares the place of something else, it breathes the air of whatever alien place it's in, it starts to become the thing that lives in that place.

Vito Acconci, 'Performance After the Fact,' April-August 1989, in Gloria Moure (Poligrafa: Barcelona, 2001), p. 357

Aconcci. Pryings. 1971. Performance with video, performed with Kathy Dillon



Vito Acconci, Security Zone



(Untitled) *Project for Pier 17* (1971)

Installation/performance, 29 days, 1 hr. each night
West Street and Park Place, NY

Every night, I'm at the pier at 1 a.m.: I'm alone—I'm waiting at the far end of the pier, for one hour.

If someone comes out to the pier to meet me, I confess to that person something about me that hasn't been revealed before, something that I'm ashamed of and that under normal circumstances I wouldn't tell a soul, something that—if it were made public—could be used against me.

In exchange for keeping the secret, the visitor can demand something from me: the visitor can blackmail me. (Volk, Gregory. Ed. *Vito Acconci: Diary of a Body, 1969-1973*. Milan: Charta, 2006. 258-9)

SEE THE MONUMENTS OF PASSAIC NEW JERSEY

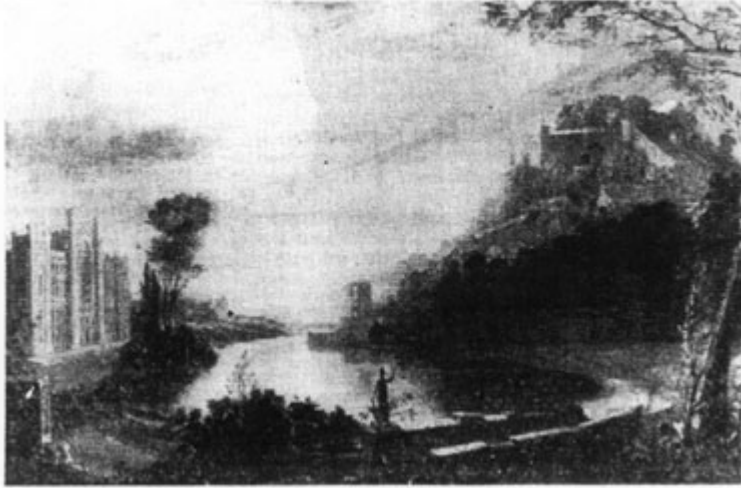
(1967)

What can you find in Passaic that you can not find in Paris, London or Rome? Find out for yourself. Discover (if you dare) the breathtaking Passaic River and the eternal monuments on its enchanted banks. Ride in Rent-a-Car comfort to the land that time forgot. Only minutes from N.Y.C. Robert Smithson will guide you through this fabled series of sites . . . and don't forget your camera. Special maps come with each tour. For more information visit DWAN GALLERY, 29 West 57th Street.



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Art: Themes and the Usual Variations



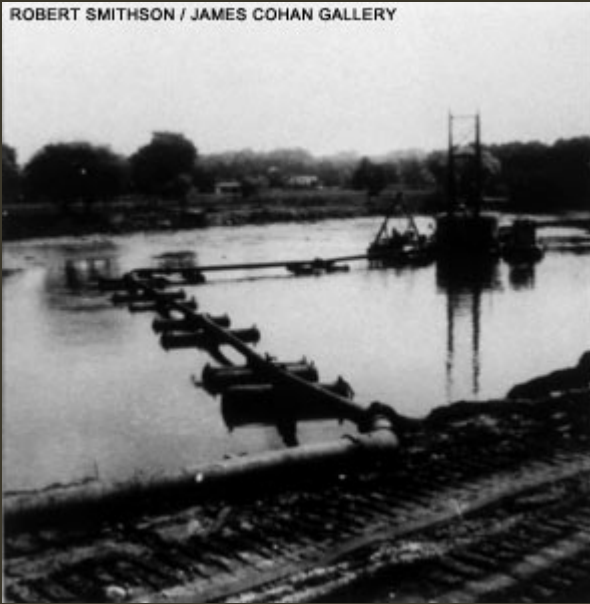
The New York Historical Society

"Allegorical Landscape" by Samuel F. B. Morse, displayed at Marlborough-Gerson Gallery



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Rozel Point, Great Salt Lake, Utah
April, 1970

<http://www.robertsmithson.com/>



A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey

He laughed softly. I know. There's no way out. Not through the Barrier. Maybe that isn't what I want, after all. But this—this— He stared at the Monument. 'It seems all wrong sometimes. I just can't explain it. It's the whole city. It makes me feel haywire. Then I get these flashes—'

—Henry Kuttner, *Jesting Pilot*

... today our unsophisticated cameras record in their own way our hastily assembled and painted world.

—Vladimir Nabokov, *Invitation to a Beheading*

On Saturday, September 30, 1967, I went to the Port Authority Building on 41st Street and 8th Avenue. I bought a copy of the *New York Times* and a Signet paperback called *Earthworks* by Brain W. Aldiss. Next I went to ticket booth 21 and purchased a one-way ticket to Passaic. After that I went up to the upper bus level (platform 173) and boarded the number 30 bus of the Inter-City Transportation Co.

I sat down and opened the *Times*. I glanced over the art section: a "Collectors', Critics', Curators' Choice" at A.M. Sachs Gallery (a letter I got in the mail that morning invited me "to play the game before the show closes October 4th"), Walter Schatzki was selling "Prints, Drawings, Watercolors" at "33 $\frac{1}{3}$ % off," Elinor Jenkins, the

"Romantic Realist," was showing at Barzansky Galleries, XVIII—XIX Century English Furniture on sale at Parke-Bernet, "New Directions in German Graphics" at Goethe House, and on page 29 was John Canaday's column. He was writing on *Themes and the Usual Variations*. I looked at a blurry reproduction of Samuel F. B. Morse's *Allegorical Landscape* at the top of Canaday's column; the sky was a subtle newsprint grey, and the clouds resembled sensitive stains of sweat reminiscent of a famous Yugoslav watercolorist whose name I have forgotten. A little statue with right arm held high faced a pond (or was it the sea?). "Gothic" buildings in the allegory had a faded look, while an unnecessary tree (or was it a cloud of smoke?) seemed to puff up on the left side of the landscape. Canaday referred to the picture as "standing confidently along with other allegorical representatives of the arts, sciences, and high ideals that universities foster." My eyes stumbled over the newsprint, over such headlines as "Seasonal Upswing," "A Shuffle Service," and "Moving a 1,000 Pound Sculpture Can Be a Fine Work of Art, Too." Other gems of Canaday's dazzled my mind as I passed through Secaucus. "Realistic waxworks of raw meat beset by vermin," (Paul Thek), "Mr. Bush and his colleagues are wasting their time," (Jack Bush), "a book, an apple on a saucer, a rumpled cloth," (Thyra Davidson). Outside the bus window a Howard Johnson's Motor Lodge flew by—a symphony in orange and blue. On page 31 in *Big Letters: THE EMERGING POLICE STATE IN AMERICA SPY GOVERNMENT*. "In this book you will learn... what an Infinity Transmitter is."

The bus turned off Highway 2, down Orient Way in Rutherford.

I read the blurbs and skimmed through *Earthworks*. The first sentence read, "The dead man drifted along in the breeze." It seemed the book was about a soil shortage, and the *Earthworks* referred to the manufacture of artificial soil. The sky over Rutherford was a clear cobalt blue, a perfect Indian summer day, but the sky in *Earthworks* was a "great black and brown shield on which moisture gleamed."

The bus passed over the first monument. I pulled the buzzer-cord and got off at the corner of Union Avenue and River Drive. The monument was a bridge over the Passaic River that connected Bergen County with Passaic County. Noon-day sunshine cinema-ized the site, turning the bridge and the river into an over-exposed picture. Photographing it with my Instamatic 400

was like photographing a photograph. The sun became a monstrous light-bulb that projected a detached series of "stills" through my Instamatic into my eye. When I walked on the bridge, it was as though I was walking on an enormous photograph that was made of wood and steel, and underneath the river existed as an enormous movie film that showed nothing but a continuous blank.

The steel road that passed over the water was in part an open grating flanked by wooden side-

The Bridge Monument Showing Wooden Side-walks. (Photo: Robert Smithson)



axis in order to allow an inert rectangular shape to pass with its unknown cargo. The Passaic (West) end of the bridge rotated south, while the Rutherford (East) end of the bridge rotated north; such rotations suggested the limited movements of an outmoded world. "North" and "South" hung over the static river in a bi-polar manner. One could refer to this bridge as the "Monument of Dislocated Directions."

Along the Passaic River banks were many minor monuments such as concrete abutments

Monument with pontoons: The Pumping Derrick. (Photo: Robert Smithson)



Art: *Themes and the Usual Variations*



"Allegorical Landscape" by Samuel F. B. Morse, displayed at Marlborough-Gerson Gallery

walks, held up by a heavy set of beams, while above, a ramshackle network hung in the air. A rusty sign glared in the sharp atmosphere, making it hard to read. A date flashed in the sunshine... 1899... No... 1896... maybe (at the bottom of the rust and glare was the name Dean & Westbrook Contractors, N.Y.). I was completely controlled by the Instamatic (or what the rationalists call a camera). The glassy air of New Jersey defined the structural parts of the monument as I took snapshot after snapshot. A barge seemed fixed to the surface of the water as it came toward the bridge, and caused the bridge-keeper to close the gates. From the banks of Passaic I watched the bridge rotate on a central

that supported the shoulders of a new highway in the process of being built. River Drive was in part bulldozed and in part intact. It was hard to tell the new highway from the old road; they were both confounded into a unitary chaos. Since it was Saturday, many machines were not working, and this caused them to resemble prehistoric creatures trapped in the mud, or, better, extinct machines—mechanical dinosaurs stripped of their skin. On the edge of this prehistoric Machine Age were pre- and post-World War II suburban houses. The houses mirrored themselves into colorlessness. A group of children were throwing rocks at each other near a ditch. "From now on you're not going to come to

our hide-out. And I mean it!" said a little blonde girl who had been hit with a rock.

As I walked north along what was left of River Drive, I saw a monument in the middle of the river—it was a pumping derrick with a long pipe attached to it. The pipe was supported in part by a set of pontoons, while the rest of it extended about three blocks along the river bank till it disappeared into the earth. One could hear debris rattling in the water that passed through the great pipe.

The Great Pipes Monument. (Photo: Robert Smithson)



Nearby, on the river bank, was an artificial crater that contained a pale limpid pond of water, and from the side of the crater protruded six large pipes that gushed the water of the pond into the river. This constituted a monumental fountain that suggested six horizontal smokestacks that seemed to be flooding the river with liquid smoke. The great pipe was in some enigmatic way connected with the infernal fountain. It was as though the pipe was secretly sodomizing some hidden technological orifice, and causing a monstrous sexual organ (the fountain) to have an orgasm. A psychoanalyst might say that the landscape displayed "homosexual tendencies," but I will not draw such a crass an-

thropomorphic conclusion. I will merely say, "It was there."

Across the river in Rutherford one could hear the faint voice of a P. A. system and the weak cheers of a crowd at a football game. Actually, the landscape was no landscape, but "a particular kind of heliotypy" (Nabokov), a kind of self-destroying postcard world of failed immortality and oppressive grandeur. I had been wandering in a moving picture that I couldn't quite picture, but just as I became perplexed, I saw a green

The Fountain Monument: Side View. (Photo: Robert Smithson)



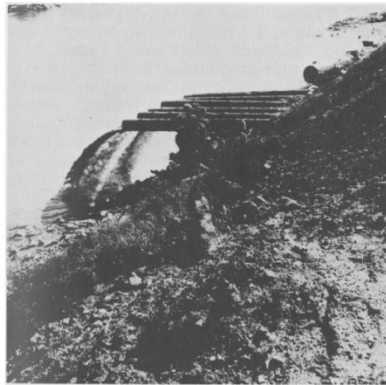
sign that explained everything:

YOUR HIGHWAY TAXES 21 AT WORK	
Federal Highway Trust Funds 2,867,000	U.S. Dept. of Commerce Bureau of Public Roads State Highway Funds 2,867,000
New Jersey State Highway Dept.	

That zero panorama seemed to contain ruins in reverse, that is—all the new construction that would eventually be built. This is the opposite of the "romantic ruin" because the buildings don't fall into ruin after they are built but rather rise into ruin before they are built. This anti-romantic

mise-en-scene suggests the discredited idea of time and many other "out of date" things. But the suburbs exist without a rational past and without the "big events" of history. Oh, maybe there are a few statues, a legend, and a couple of curios, but no past—just what passes for a future. A Utopia minus a bottom, a place where the machines are idle, and the sun has turned to glass, and a place where the Passaic Concrete Plant (253 River Drive) does a good business in STONE, BITUMINOUS, SAND, and CEMENT.

The Fountain Monument—Bird's Eye View. (Photo: Robert Smithson)



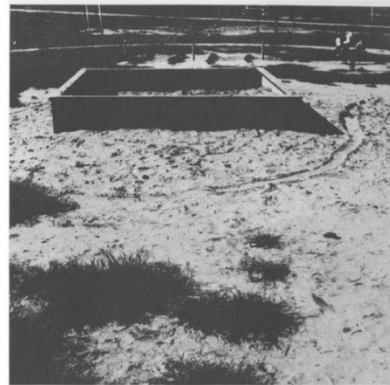
Passaic seems full of "holes" compared to New York City, which seems tightly packed and solid, and those holes in a sense are the monumental vacancies that define, without trying, the memory-traces of an abandoned set of futures. Such futures are found in grade B Utopian films, and then imitated by the suburbanite. The windows of City Motors auto sales proclaim the existence of Utopia through 1968 WIDE TRACK PONTIACS—Executive, Bonneville, Tempest, Grand Prix, Firebirds, GTO, Catalina, and LeMans—that visual incantation marked the end of the highway construction.

Next I descended into a set of used car lots. I must say the situation seemed like a change.

Was I in a new territory? (An English artist, Michael Baldwin, says, "It could be asked if the country does in fact change—it does not in the sense a traffic light does.") Perhaps I had slipped into a lower stage of futurity—did I leave the real future behind in order to advance into a false future? Yes, I did. Reality was behind me at that point in my suburban Odyssey.

Passaic center loomed like a dull adjective. Each "store" in it was an adjective unto the next, a chain of adjectives disguised as stores. I began

The Sand-Box Monument (also called The Desert). (Photo: Robert Smithson)



to run out of film, and I was getting hungry. Actually, Passaic center was no center—it was instead a typical abyss or an ordinary void. What a great place for a gallery! Or maybe an "outdoor sculpture show" would pep that place up.

At the Golden Coach Diner (11 Central Avenue I had my lunch, and loaded my Instamatic. I looked at the orange-yellow box of Kodak Verichrome Pan, and read a notice that said:

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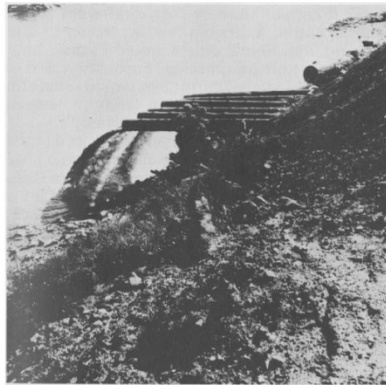
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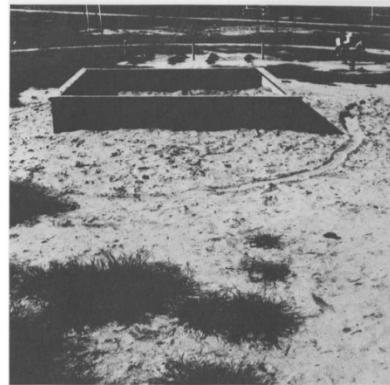
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Organic Honey's Visual Telepathy

1972

http://www.moma.org/collection/artist.php?artist_id=2930



Σημείωμα Χρήσης Έργων Τρίτων

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