



Working (Santos) from Ship of Fools (1999/2010) © Allan Sekula

THE DOCKERS' MUSEUM

ALLAN SEKULA

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Exhibition

From 6 April to 20 May 2012

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Screening of «The Forgotten Space»,

a film by Allan Sekula & Noël Burch

Tuesday 3 April 2012, 2pm

at le Tambour, Université Rennes 2

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Conference

Allan Sekula/Yvan Salomone

Tuesday 3 April 2012, 5:30pm

at EESAB - Rennes

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Opening

Friday 6 April 2012, 6:30pm

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Meeting

with Allan Sekula and Jürgen Bock

Saturday 7 April 2012, 3pm

at La Criée

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Guided Tours

Wednesday 11 April 2012, 5pm

Friday 27 April 2012, 5pm

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Curator

Jürgen Bock

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In partnership with:

Lumiar Cité, Lisbon, Portugal

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In collaboration with:

M HKA, Museum van Hedendaagse

Kunst Antwerpen, Belgium

Stills, Scotland's Center for Photography,
Edinburgh, United-Kingdom

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Press release

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Allan Sekula is a renowned photographer, theorist, photography historian and writer. Using colour photographs in conjunction with text, Allan Sekula's work focuses on economic systems, a subject often considered incompatible with the field of art. Cultural critics frequently see the economy to be a problematic issue that is of little interest for arts practitioners, although many artworks are under the unmistakable influence of market forces.

For Sekula, it is irrelevant that photography has finally been acknowledged as an artistic medium like any other, alongside painting or sculpture. He considers the modesty of the medium, and the possibility it offers to attain knowledge through keen observation, to be a more interesting characteristic. Relying on its ability to describe aspects of economic systems within the framework of the visual arts, through what is commonly called «documentary» practice, Sekula attempts to offer a clear alternative to the kind of photography usually shown by the contemporary system of museum and galleries. According to the artist this system in essence prepares the work for an «antiquarian future», which condemns art to conform with the museum's relics of the past.

In recent years, Sekula has worked on long documentary projects inspired by contemporary political events. These projects have given rise to sequences and major series that often culminate in the publication of a book. In these publications, the photographs are contextualised by the artist's texts - which are always present in his exhibitions - which emphasizes the fact that Sekula's practice also encompasses writing, alongside the production of visual work.

Sekula calibrates each exhibition through a careful selection of photographs and objects specific to the context of the given place, thus «re-writing» his own narrative via the re-arrangement of work. By developing his exhibitions from venue to venue, they in effect connect cities and harbours, which evokes the production and flow of goods via complex network relationships of harbour cities, the subject of Sekula's practice. La Criée in Rennes now presents the exhibition *The Dockers' Museum*. Photographs from the series *Ship of Fools* - which were previously presented in Antwerp, São Paulo and Edinburgh - constitute part of the exhibition.

Their configuration in Rennes is altered through an emphasis on the artist's collection of objects related to the world of dockers and seafarers, reflected in the exhibition title *The Dockers' Museum*. The collected «objects of interest» are not to be understood as artworks, but they contextualize Sekula's photography, while these in turn contextualize Sekula's ongoing activity of collecting these items. Sekula finds his «objects of interest» at online auction houses, contrasting the mystical «speed of light» of the Internet with the slow movement of cargo, 90 per cent of which is moved by sea.

A series of portraits of the crew of the Global Mariner forms one of the core works at La Criée. The International Transport Workers Federation adapted a cargo vessel in 1998 to host a mobile multi-media exhibition in its hold. It formed part of an 18-month campaign around the world against substandard shipping under flags of convenience, and the inherently abusive low wages paid to members of ships' crews who have limited rights. Sekula's participation in various stages of the journey resulted in a series of photographs in which the artist draws attention to the unknown protagonists of this predicament.

Through taking the «forgotten space» of the sea with its 100,000 ships and 1,500,000 workers as the subject for his work, Allan Sekula reflects on the effects of current neoliberal ideologies. His work questions their promises of a painless, endless flow of goods and capital with the emphasis on consumption and negating the work and working conditions behind it. It reveals the far-reaching impact of globalization on people's lives.

Jürgen Bock

Visuals for the press

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Good ship (Limassol), 1999 from *Good Ship Bad Ship* (diptych),
chromogenic print from *Ship of Fools* series (1999/2010) © Allan Sekula



From *Sugar Gang (Santos)* 2010, sequence of 6, chromogenic print
from *Ship of Fools* series (1999/2010) © Allan Sekula

Visuals for the press

Please, respect captions and copyrights



Japanese engine cadet 1999, from sequence of 10, *The Crew, the Pilot and the Russian Girlfriend*, chromogenic print from *Ship of Fools* (1999/2010)
© Allan Sekula



Ship Lesson (Durban) 1999, chromogenic print from *Ship of Fools* (1999/2010) © Allan Sekula

Works exhibited

Portraits from *Ship of Fools* and *Sugar Gang* series

1999-2000

Dimensions variable

Courtesy Allan Sekula, collection M HKA, Antwerpen, Belgium

The Docker's Museum

Artist's collection of objects related to the world of dockers and seafarers

Courtesy Allan Sekula, collection M HKA, Antwerpen, Belgium

Tsukiji

2001

DV, colour, sound, 44 minutes

Courtesy Allan Sekula

Biography and bibliography

Allan Sekula

Born in 1951 in Erie, Pennsylvania (USA)

Lives and works in Los Angeles (USA)

RECENT SOLO SHOWS (selection)

2012

Ship of Fools, Stills: Scotland's Centre for Photography, Edinburgh, United-Kingdom

2011

Polonia and... galerie Michel Rein, Paris, France

California Stories, Christopher Grimes Gallery, Santa Monica, California, USA

Polonia and other fables, Belfast Exposed, Belfast, United-Kingdom

Allan Sekula: Film Retrospective, Stills: Scotland's Centre for Photography, Edinburgh, United-Kingdom

Retrospective of Allan Sekula's films, Loop Festival, La Virreina Centre de l'Image, Barcelona, Spain

2010

Extra Muros: Allan Sekula: Ship of Fools, MuHKA, Antwerp, Belgium

Polonia and Other Fables, Ludwig Muzeum, Budapest, Hungary

Polonia and Other Fables, Media City Seoul, Seoul, South Korea

Allan Sekula: This Ain't China, e-flux, New York, USA

2009

Polonia and other fables, Zacheta Gallery, Warsaw, Poland

Polonia and other fables, The Renaissance Society, University of Chicago, Chicago, USA

Waiting for Tear Gas, Henry Art Gallery, Seattle, Washington, USA

2008

Travailler plus pour gagner plus, galerie Michel Rein, Paris, France

2007

Shipwreck and Workers, Christopher Grimes Gallery, Santa Monica, California, USA

2006

Allan Sekula, Fish Story Chapter One, FRAC Bretagne, Maison de l'Etudiant, Université du Havre, Le Havre, France

2005

Aerospace Folktales, Christopher Grimes Gallery, Santa Monica, California, USA

Titanic's Wake, Camera Austria, Graz, Austria

Titanic's Wake, galerie Traversée, Munich, Germany

2004

Prayer for the Americans, galerie Michel Rein, Paris, France

Secret Formula: Wealth without Workers, Galeria Filomena Soares, Lisbon, Portugal

2003

Performance under Working Conditions, Generali Foundation, Vienna, Austria

Black Tide/Marea negra, Deep Six/Passer au bleu, Christopher Grimes Gallery, Santa Monica, California, USA

2002

Waiting for Tear Gas [white globe to black], Camera Austria, Graz, Austria

Dead Letter Office & Irrational Exuberance, Christopher Grimes Gallery, Santa Monica, California, USA

2001

School is a Factory (1978/80), ERBA, Valence, France

TITANIC's wake, Galerie Michel Rein, Paris, France

Biography and bibliography

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RECENT GROUP SHOWS (selection)

2011

Oceans and Campfires: Allan Sekula and Bruno Serralongue, San Francisco Art Institute, San Francisco, California, USA

29th Sao Paulo Biennial, Ship of Fools, Museu de arte do Rio de Janeiro, Brasil

Foreclosed: Between Crisis and Possibility, Whitney Museum, New York, USA

Under the Big Black Sun: California Art 1974-1981, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, California, USA

All I Can See is the Management, Gasworks, London, United-Kingdom

Serious Games. War - Media - Art, Institute Mathildenhöhe Darmstadt, Germany

Not for sale, Passage du Retz, Paris, France

Angry, Young and Radical, Nederlands Fotomuseum, Rotterdam, The Netherlands

1979, a movement to radical moments, La Virreina, Centre de la Imatge, Barcelona, Spain

2010

Le peuple qui manque, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France

Les rencontres d'art contemporain, La Chantrerie, Cahors, France

Behind the fourth wall, Fictitious Lives - Lived Fictions, Generali Foundation, Vienna, Austria

This ain't China / Act VIII : Nether Land, Dutch Culture center, Shanghai, China

Antiphotjournalism, La virreina, Centre de la Imatge, Barcelona, Spain

How Many Billboards? Art in Stead, MAK Center, Los Angeles, California, USA

Global Design, Museum für gestaltung, Zurich, Switzerland

Les Tubes, Le Quai, Angers, France

2009

San Diego, Cardwell Jimmerson Contemporary Art, Culver City, California, USA

2008

Lost Paradise, Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern, Switzerland

The Way Things Are, Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary, Vienna, Austria

2007

10th Istanbul Biennial, Istanbul, Turkey

L' Europe en devenir, Centre Culturel Suisse, Paris, France

Documenta XII, Kassel, Germany

Existencias, MUSAC- Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Castilla y León, León, Spain

UN/ Fair Trade, Neue Galerie Graz am Landesmuseum Joanneum, Graz, Austria

The Quiet in The Land, Luang Prabang, Laos

Collection, Generali Foundation, Vienna, Austria

For a special place: documents and works from the Generali Foundation, Austrian Cultural Forum, New York, USA

World Factory, San Francisco Art Institute, San Francisco, California, USA

In the poem about love, you don't write the word love, Overgaden, Institut for Samtidskunst, Copenhagen, Denmark

MACBA in Frankfurter Kunstverein, Frankfurt am Main, Germany

Informacion contra informacion, Centro Galego de Arte Contemporanea, Santiago de Compostela, Spain

2006

Los Angeles 1955-1985, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France

Full House, Whitney Museum, New-York

Concept has never meant horse, Generali Foundation, Vienna, Austria

Carnets du Sous-Sol, galerie Michel Rein, Paris, France

From Mini-FM to hacktivists: A Guide to Art and Activism, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth, New Zealand

Biography and bibliography

RECENT GROUP SHOWS (selection)

2005

Occupying Space, Generali Foundation Collection, The Nederlands Fotomuseum, Rotterdam, The Netherlands

Die Regierung (The Government), Secession, Vienna, Austria

Be what you want but stay where you are, Witte de With, Rotterdam, The Netherlands

Critical societies, Badischer Kunstverein, Karlsruhe, Germany

Covering the Real, Kunstmuseum Basel, Switzerland

Kontext der Fotografie, Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Siegen, Germany

Facing the Music, REDCAT, Los Angeles, California, USA

Statement, galerie Traversée, Munich, Germany

Looking at America, galerie Hohenlohe & Kalb, Vienna, Austria

Transitions 2005, Biarritz, France

2004

Situations Construites, Attitudes, Geneva, Switzerland

How do we want to be governed?, Miami Art Central, Florida, USA

L'Ombre du temps, galerie nationale du Jeu de Paume, Paris, France

Paysages Invisibles, Musée départemental d'art contemporain de Rochechouart, France

U-topia, Frac Centre, Orléans, France

Diaporama 04, MACBA, Barcelona, Spain

Conditions urbaines, galerie Donzévaansanen, Lausanne, Switzerland

Die Universität ist eine Fabrik, Kunstraum der Universität Lüneburg, Lüneburg, Germany

2003

Histoires contemporaines, Les 20 ans des Frac, Frac Rhône-Alpes, Villeurbanne, France

Witness. Contemporary Artists Document Our Time, Barbican Art, London, United-Kingdom

VigiVisions. Coleccion fotografica do concello de Vigo, Museo de Arte Contemporaneo de Vigo, Spain

Singuliers voyages, Domaine départemental de Chamarande, Chamarande, France

The politics of Place, The Finnish Museum of Photography, Helsinki, Finland

2002

Fish Story, Dokumenta XI, Kassel, Germany

The Politics of Place, BildMuseet, Umea Universitet, Sweden

Stepping in and out. Contemporary Documentary Photography, Canon photography at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, United-Kingdom

Empire State, Whitney Museum, New York, USA
Sans commune mesure, Centre national de la photographie, Paris, France

Regarder la mer. Repenser le monde, Le Grand café, St-Nazaire, France

Trade - Waren, Wege und Werte im Welthandel heute, Nederlands Foto Instituut, Rotterdam, The Netherlands

Shadow Festival 3, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

2001

Yokohama 2001, International Triennale of Contemporary Art, Yokohama, Japan

Antagonismes. Casos d'estudi, Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain

Fin de la classe ouvrière?, Centre photographique de Cherbourg-Octeville, France

Contemporary moments, MACBA, Barcelona, Spain

Trade - Waren, Wege und Werte im Welthandel heute, Fotomuseum Winterthur, Switzerland

Biography and bibliography

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FILMS

2010 *The Forgotten Space*
(co-directed with Noël Burch)

2006 *A Short Film for Laos*

2006 *Lottery of the Sea*

2005 *Gala*

2001 *Tsukiji*

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COLLECTIONS

Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney,
Australia

ARCO Foundation, Madrid, Spain

Centro de Estudios Fotograficos, Vigo, Spain

Folkwang Museum, Essen, Germany

Fonds National d'Art Contemporain, Paris,
France

FRAC Bretagne, Châteaugiron, France

FRAC Basse Normandie, Caen, France

FRAC Centre, Orléans, France

FRAC Rhône-Alpes, Lyon, France

Generali Foundation, Vienna, Austria

Getty Research Institute, Resource Collections,
Los Angeles, California, USA

Harn Museum of Art, Gainesville, Florida, USA

Henry Art Gallery, Seattle, Washington, USA

IFEMA, Institution Ferial de Madrid, Spain

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, California,
USA

Musée des Beaux Arts et de la Dentelle, Calais,
France

Museo de Arte Contemporaneo de Castilla y
León, León, Spain

Museo de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid, Spain

Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona,
Barcelona, Spain

Museum Boymans van Beuningen, Rotterdam,
The Netherlands

Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles,
California, USA

National Museum of Contemporary Art, Athens,
Greece

Orange County Museum of Art, Newport Beach,
California, USA

Georges Pompidou Center, Paris, France

San Diego Museum of Contemporary Art, La
Jolla, California, USA

San Fransisco Museum of Modern Art, California,
USA

Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver, Canada

Washington University Gallery of Art, St. Louis,
Missouri, USA

Whitney Museum of American Art, New York,
USA

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AWARDS

2010

Special Jury Prize for *The Forgotten Space*,
Orizzonti Competition, Venice, Italy

2007

United States Artists Fellows Award

2001

Camera Austria Prize

Biography and bibliography

MONOGRAPHS (selection)

Polonia and Other Fables, Chicago: Renaissance Society; Warsaw: Zacheta Gallery, 2009

Constantin Meunir - A Dialogue with Allan Sekula, Lieven Gevaert Series, Vol, 2, Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2005

Performance Under Working Conditions, Wien: Generali Foundation, 2003

War without bodies, Wien: Generali Foundation, 2003

Titanic's wake, Cherbourg-Octeville: Le Point du Jour, 2003

Seemannsgarn, Düsseldorf: Richter Verlag, 2002

Calais vu par Allan Sekula. Deep Six / Passer au bleu, Calais: Musée des beaux-arts et de la dentelle, 2001

Allan Sekula: Dead Letter Office, Rotterdam: Nederlands Foto Instituut, 1998

Geography Lesson: Canadian Notes, Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1997

Dismal science. Photo works 1972-1996, Bloomington: University Galleries, Illinois State University, 1996

Fish Story, Rotterdam: Witte de With, 1995

Photography against the grain, Halifax: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1984

CATALOGUES (selection)

From Work to Text - Dialogues on Practice and Criticism in Contemporary Art, Lisbon: Fundação Centro Cultural de Belém, 2002

Culturas de archivo / Archive cultures, Barcelona: Fundació Antoni Tapies; Universitat de Valencia; Ediciones Universidad de Salamanca, 2002

Paradigma Fotografie, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2002

If you lived here. The city in art, theory, and social activism. A project by Martha Rosler, Seattle: Bay Press, 1991.

Five Days that Shook the World: Seattle and Beyond, London: Verso, 2000

Voyage, de l'exotisme aux non-lieux, Valence: Musée de Valence, 1998

Walker Evans & Dan Graham, Rotterdam: Witte de With, 1992

Dokumentarfotografie aus den Vereinigten Staaten, Essen: Fotografische Sammlung Museum Folkwang, Essen, 1984

Mining photographs and other pictures 1948-1968, Halifax: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1983

ARTICLES (selection)

Heiser Jörg «Analyze This», in *Frieze*, September 2010

Holschbach, Susanne «Critical Realism in Contemporary Art – Around Allan Sekula's Photography», in *Camera Austria International*, n°102, 2008

«Allan Sekula - Shipwreck and Workers», in *Daylight*, 2007

Baudson, Michel «Un Réalisme Critique», in *DITS*, n°2, 2003

Frank Peter «Allan Sekula at Christopher Grimes» in *Art in America*, December 2003

Claude Gintz «Allan Sekula, Generali Foundation» in *Art Press*, n° 295, November 2003

Manfred Hermes «Allan Sekula / Generali Foundation, Vienna, Austria» in *Frieze*, October 2003

Ollman Leah «Oil spill elicits Sekula's passion» in *Los Angeles Times*, 11th July, 2003

Campbell Clayton «Los Angeles - Alan Sekula», in *Flash Art*, 2002.

«TITANIC's Wake» in *Art Journal*, n°60:2, Summer 2001

Véronique Bouruet-Aubertot «Allan Sekula» in *Beaux Arts magazine*, n°200, January 2001

Jean-Max Colard «Allan sekula - Un homme à la mer!» in *Les Inrockuptibles*, December 2000

Pascal Beausse «Allan Sekula: réalisme critique/ The Critical Realism of Allan Sekula» in *Art Press*, n° 240, November 1998

Hervé Gauville «Fish Story» in *Libération*, 16th February 1996

Text:

Revised extract from Allan Sekula, *TITANIC's wake* (Cherbourg: Le Point du Jour Éditeur, 2003). Text revised as a part of Allan Sekula's solo exhibition *Ship of Fools* (28.05 – 05.09.10), organized by M HKA, Museum of Contemporary Art, Antwerp, Belgium, and presented in FoMu, Photo Museum, Antwerp.

Ship of Fools

1. The Floating Family

Not long ago I was able to see the recently restored traveling exhibition version of The Family of Man at its permanent home, the Château de Clervaux in Luxembourg, near the site of the Battle of the Ardennes. An old US Army Sherman tank, presumably a relic of that battle, welcomes the visitor at the entrance to the castle. What was most striking about the meticulous reconstruction undertaken by Edward Steichen's natal country is that now one can see how modest and slow paced the spectacle culture of the 1950s was by contrast with the Hollywood blockbusters, mega exhibitions and digital image streams of today.

By current standards, the scale of the photographs is far from superhuman, and I saw a group of German high school students slipping into a kind of solemn, attentive reverie as they moved patiently among the monochromatic panels, as if this were very different from their experience of going to the movies, playing a computer game, or clicking on a web link. Perhaps this is the ultimate museological destiny of The Family of Man: to become the immobilized relic of a global road show that provided the model for the traveling museum blockbusters of today. Does the very obsolescence of The Family of Man open up a plethora of possibilities?

Just for a moment, imagine that the restored Family of Man had been installed instead aboard a ship, and that the ship sailed around the world, visiting all the port cities that had originally taken the exhibition, from New York to Cape Town to Jakarta, and maybe a few others that weren't on the original itinerary. In some cities, a rich menu of competing cultural choices combined with general urban indifference to the waterfront would bring few visitors: maybe no more than fifty people in New York, despite the free admission. In others cities, maybe in Karachi, the ship would be so swamped with visitors that it would almost heel over and capsize at the dock: an audience of thirty thousand in one day. In the richer countries, caps and T shirts would be sold; in poor countries these would be give way to free souvenirs. It would be a simple no frills cargo ship, so there would be none of the connotations of protected luxury that accrue to a château or to the cruise vessel commandeered in Genoa by the frightened leaders of the rich nations. In many cities, dissident and human rights groups would be invited to convene public forums in a conference room built into one of the holds. These same groups would provide hospitality for the crew. A web site would track the vessel's progress. The ship would fly the flag of landlocked Luxembourg, or maybe that of the United Nations, or perhaps an unrecognizable flag, unrelated to any known sovereign entity, perhaps bearing a portrait of Steichen's mother holding a freshly baked apple pie. It would not fly the flag of the United States, nor would it display the ensign of the Museum of Modern Art, and there would be no Sherman tank lashed to the hatch covers.

Text:

Revised extract from Allan Sekula, *TITANIC's wake* (Cherbourg: Le Point du Jour Éditeur, 2003). Text revised as a part of Allan Sekula's solo exhibition *Ship of Fools* (28.05 – 05.09.10), organized by M HKA, Museum of Contemporary Art, Antwerp, Belgium, and presented in FoMu, Photo Museum, Antwerp.

2. Churning the Waters

This would be the ghost ship imagined by the New York Times: the aging cargo ship in the age of e mail. What I am describing here, taking only modest license, is the 1998 2000 circumnavigation of the *Global Mariner*, an 18,000 deadweight ton general cargo vessel carrying in its converted holds a remarkable exhibition about working conditions at sea, and -in a broader sense -about the hidden social costs and probable consequences of corporate globalization. Sponsored by the International Transport Workers Federation, a London based umbrella organization of over 450 transport workers' unions around the world, the ship was actually the brainchild of a group of German and British seafarer activists who also happened to be disaffected veterans of Greenpeace, interested in the problem of an international linkage of labor and environmental struggles. Their primary concern was the system of flag of convenience shipping, a lawfully ruse invented by American shippers in the mid 1940s that allows wealthy ship owners to register their vessels in poor nations offering what is often termed paper sovereignty: a flag for a fee. The system is rife with abuses, and indeed its very purpose is abuse: shielding exploitative labor conditions and substandard vessels behind a bewildering legal maze. The ITF has been waging a campaign against this system for fifty years, trying to enforce minimum standards of pay and safety for seafarers. The solution of the ITF activists was to connect this venerable and not always very successful fight to the broader campaign against corporate globalization. Here it is worth noting that since 1995 key working class resistances to neoliberal policies -reduced social security, casualization of work in the name of "flexibility," union busting, and privatization of public infrastructure -have come from workers in the transport sector: railway workers in France, dockers in Australia, Chile and Brazil, bus drivers and airline crews in Mexico, delivery drivers in the United States. These battles against the doctrine of the untrammelled market predate Seattle.

The *Global Mariner* was a floating version of the agit train, reconceived in the context of an eclectic and decidedly post Bolshevik left wing politics. (The ITF had its origins in solidarity actions linking Dutch and British dockers and seafarers at the end of the nineteenth century, and remained close to the traditions of the old socialist Second International for much of its history.) The quixotic agit ship was nonetheless indebted to the experiments of radical productivist art in the young Soviet Union, and also to the photomontages of John Heartfield and the workers' theatre of Erwin Piscator. Remember that Steichen had already borrowed from the big scale presentational techniques of Russian designers and photographers of the 1920s for his thematic photo exhibitions of the 1940s and fifties: there are ghostly shadows of El Lissitzky and Rodchenko in *The Family of Man*. Having witnessed the absorption of these once radical devices into the toolkit of corporate liberalism and advertising, one could say that now the *Global Mariner* has reappropriated this tradition to forge a new old weapon against the neoliberalism of the twenty first century.

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3. Renaming of Names

But before the exhibition, with its big computer-generated photomurals and its eerie post-Stockhausen soundtrack, there is the fact of the ship and the voyage in and of themselves, readymade-like in the subtlety of their ambiguous status as already existing but transformed object and context.

The Lady Rebecca (as “she” had been christened two decades before on the North Sea coast of Britain) had gone through five names, a series of superimposed reinscriptions of bow and stern, each prior name an increasingly obscure trace beneath the bright white paint announcing the new identity. The calculated amnesia of the world of international shipping offers a lesson to those who celebrate the postmodern flux of identity. One of the stranger stories of this common practice: in mid passage a captain receives a telex noting that the ship has been sold and must be renamed. The captain politely asks the new name and is told to send a crewman over the side -risky business when underway -to paint out every other letter of the old name. What would Mallarmé make of this? The concrete poetry of the contemporary maritime world, the nominative magic worked out between the telex machine and the paint locker: here we return to Melville's Benito Cereno, but confront not the ambiguities of insurrection and mutiny but a mastery that disguises itself. Whose ship? Which ship? A palimpsest of disguises and deceptions, a deliberate muddying of the waters.

Nearing the end of its/her working life, the ship formerly known as the Lady Rebecca entered a state of dangerous decrepitude, owned by a Hong Kong shipping company, flagged, I believe, to Panama, crewed by Filipinos, and finally -at the literal end of her ropes -moored at offshore anchorage in the bustling port of Pusan, on the southeast coast of Korea, waiting. For what? A shady buyer willing to squeeze out the last bit of profit from the laborious and plodding and dangerous journeys of an aging vessel, a death ship in the making. Or, the owner makes the final blunt decision, almost that of a farmer in its frank brutality, though less intimate than one based on veterinary observation, since this is a decision made at a distance -in Hong Kong or London or Zurich -without poking at the rust breeding on the ladders and the hatch coaming, or poking at the cracks in the hull, or reading the engine room log with its depressing catalog of failing valves and pumps. From the pasture of the anchorage, the ship embarks on the long voyage to the rendering plant. Send “her” to the gently-sloping beaches of India, to be run ashore at high tide by a skeleton crew: engines full ahead onto the oily sand, to be broken by the sledges and cutting torches of vast crews of gaunt laborers, the abattoir of the maritime world, the ship remanned for the last time by the last toiling victims in the cycle of oceanic exploitation.

Text:

Revised extract from Allan Sekula, *TITANIC's wake* (Cherbourg: Le Point du Jour Éditeur, 2003). Text revised as a part of Allan Sekula's solo exhibition *Ship of Fools* (28.05 – 05.09.10), organized by M HKA, Museum of Contemporary Art, Antwerp, Belgium, and presented in FoMu, Photo Museum, Antwerp.

Then miraculously -although here other metaphors, those of rescue and redemption, are also to be used as if this were fiction -the ship was purchased by the International Transport Workers Federation in the summer of 1998, reflagged to Britain and arduously refitted at the Mipo dockyards of Hyundai, just north of Pusan, and then sailed by a Croatian crew to the German port of Bremerhaven, where it was further fitted out with the exhibition, and then, only a few months after the initial purchase -all this was done at breakneck pace -it embarked with a new name on a twenty month circumnavigation, setting out to visit 83 cities around the world. The crew was a polygot mix: English, German, Icelandic, Filipino, Burmese, Scottish, Croatian, New Zealander, Ukrainian, Russian, Japanese, Dutch, Irish. Depending on the political situation of the local unions who invited the ship, the visits could be militant and combative. For example, the crew joined the dockers of Valparaiso in their fight against Chilean government plans for port privatization, demonstrated alongside exiled Burmese seafarers and other democracy campaigners outside the Myanmar embassy in Bangkok, and staged a protest in support of striking American shipyard workers in New Orleans.

Two fast launches were stowed on top of the rear hatch cover, and these allowed for rapid, Greenpeace style actions. In other instances, the ship was isolated from public contact by unsympathetic governments, as happened in Hong Kong, a city whose crypto "market Stalinist" chief executive happens to be the former head of an international container shipping line. A invitation to Greece scheduled for the very last day of the millennium was rescinded at the eleventh hour by a seafarers' union unwilling to challenge powerful Greek shipowners. Faraway political events could change the tenor of the ship's reception, as happened in Istanbul a few weeks after the Seattle protests against the World Trade Organization. For the first time, the ship was greeted at the dock by workers bearing banners specifically denouncing globalization. And indeed the ship's visit to Seattle in the spring of 1999 had been one of a number of local events leading up to the November protests.

If, as Michel Foucault has suggested, ships are the very exemplar of heterotopias (real spaces that call other spaces into question), the Global Mariner was the heterotopia of heterotopias. Or if you want, this was a meta ship, representing and figuring within itself, within the exhibition that was its only cargo, all the other invisible, ignored and silent ships of the world. The Global Mariner had to be real ship functioning in an exemplary way, to be the Good Ship that social justice demanded other ships should and could be, but it was also an empty vessel carrying nothing but ballast and a message. This "emptiness" may have provoked the hostile captain of one substandard vessel targeted by the ITF to refer to the Global Mariner as a "toy ship" as if it had been de realized by the absence of heavy cargo. And yet this was a vessel of old fashioned self sufficiency, equipped with onboard cranes that allowed it to load and discharge cargo at terminals without dockside equipment, the sort of vessel commonly seen trading in more remote third world ports. The Global Mariner functioned in marked contrast to the specialized container and bulk ships of today's shipping world, which only work by being integrated into a larger machine ensemble of dockside cranes and conveyors. Its functional autonomy and versatility allowed the Global Mariner to become a large mobile art space that could efficiently install, transport, and display its exhibition.

Text:

Revised extract from Allan Sekula, *TITANIC's wake* (Cherbourg: Le Point du Jour Éditeur, 2003). Text revised as a part of Allan Sekula's solo exhibition *Ship of Fools* (28.05 – 05.09.10), organized by M HKA, Museum of Contemporary Art, Antwerp, Belgium, and presented in FoMu, Photo Museum, Antwerp.

4. Magellan in Reverse

The Global Mariner was also embarked on what can only be seen as an ironic, counter enactment of an older project dating back to the very origins of modern imperial dominion, namely the first circumnavigation of the globe by Magellan. This was Magellan in reverse. Indeed, the ritual significance of circumnavigation should not be under emphasized. These epochal voyages were first re enacted in the epoch of high imperialism, serving as theatrical assertions of a naval power's emergence on the world stage, as was the case with the circumnavigation of Admiral Dewey's "White Fleet" after the decisive American victory over Spain in Manila Bay in 1898. In the American case, the grand, global naval parade, showing the flag, in naval parlance, put the muscle behind the geo strategic ambition expressed by the naval theorist Alfred Thayer Mahan.

In the later twentieth century, the solo circumnavigator ritually revitalizes the individualist underpinnings of the capitalist spirit of adventure, while simultaneously obscuring through the drama of solitary endeavor and extreme self sufficiency –the industrial and social dimension of the world–spanning project. The fascination with such voyages, manifested in the tragically ill fated work of Bas Jan Ader, or more recently in a number of intriguing projects by Tacita Dean, is entirely consistent with a return to a seemingly exhausted romanticism, and an effort to divorce adventure from its historical linkage with plunder and conquest. That romanticism should only seek its survival in oceanic immersion, hyper solitude, and the extreme extra territoriality of the middle passage is a sign of the desperation encountered in its rescue from generalized cultural debasement. Today this postmodern, quasi romantic "return" to the sea must be understood as fundamentally different from its Byronic precedent, since it contends with a sea that is both depleted of resources and sublimely threatening in a new way with the advent of global warming, a sea that kills and is being killed, a sea that is also subject -in the developed world -to a ubiquitous variety of hyper–real representations, from aquatic theme parks to the species rich aquariums that have become a fixture of every urban waterfront leisure complex.

The Global Mariner insisted, on the contrary, in its plodding ordinary way on the return to social questions. Speaking with the caution of a Cold War liberal, Steichen had claimed that *The Family of Man* was about "human consciousness, not social consciousness." The great strength of the Global Mariner experiment was to raise the question of society from the very space that is imagined to be beyond society. Nothing special: a ship like many others, so ordinary that one Seattle resident, seeing the ship being ceremoniously welcomed by the fireboats of that strong union city, wondered what the fuss was all about. In other words, here was the sort of welcome one would expect for an aircraft carrier or the QE2, but not for an old 'tween decker, presumably carrying coffee or pulp paper, or some other anonymous bulk commodity.

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It is all the more profound that this ship should seek to represent the workings of empire at a time when the global economy is assumed to be entirely virtual in its connectedness, magically independent of the slow maritime movement of heavy things. The arrogant conceit of the cyber economy, for that matter of the very idea of the post industrial era, is that we disavow our dim but nagging awareness that nearly all energy -whether converted to electricity or derived from direct combustion -comes from oil or other hydrocarbon fossil fuels, or on fissionable uranium refined from yellow cake ore: solids, liquids and gases that are extracted from the earth and transported in bulk. The very slowness of the Global Mariner's voyage, the twenty months of its circumnavigation, reminds us of the duration of early modern seafaring under sail, and also of the contemporary persistence of slow, heavy transport flows.

5. Anti-Titanic

This was the anti Titanic. The Glaswegian quartermaster aboard the Global Mariner, a wiry veteran seafarer by the name of Jimmy McCauley, made the point very succinctly, referring to the steady aggregate loss of life at sea, crews of twenty at a time on bulk ore carriers that mysteriously break in half, sometimes in calm seas, or the myriad Filipino passengers crammed onto decrepit ferries that capsize or burn in the Sulu Sea: "A Titanic happens every year, but no one hears about it."

The exhibition itself brought this home with a narrative program that took the visitor from a happy and optimistic view of seafaring -a mix of shipping industry propaganda and tourist fantasy -to an increasingly dark and dismal view of calamities and dangers at sea, culminating in a meticulous model of the ill fated Swedish ferry Estonia underwater in a fish tank vitrine, this last amounted to a morbid seafarers' joke on the display techniques of maritime museums. As one descended from upper to lower holds, and moved forward toward the bow of the ship, the use of archival images -of injured seafarers and atrocious living conditions, of shipwrecks, fires and oil spills -became more and more insistent, until one climbed to the upper hold dedicated to public discussion and debate. Many of the photographs used were taken by the ITF's ship inspectors in ports around the world, who are themselves dockers and seafarers. This documentary imperative brings openness to an industry traditionally veiled in secrecy. In fact, the current tendency to extend forensic investigations to non military shipwrecks, using deep submersibles when necessary, is largely traceable to precedents set by the ITF.

Miren del Olmo, chief mate aboard the Global Mariner, told me a story. A Basque from a poor fishing village on the outskirts of Bilbao, daughter of a retired shipyard worker, she recalled having crossed the Nervión river on her way to English class one Saturday in the late 1980s, preparing for the lingua franca of a life at sea. Hearing commotion in the distance, she glanced back at the bridge, just next to the soon to be closed shipyard that would ten years later provide the site for Frank Gehry's Guggenheim. The roadway and pylons suddenly disappeared in a fog of tear gas.

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Displaced welders and shipwrights -her father's comrades- were battling with the riot squads of the National Police. She told the story as she stood watch late one December night on another sort of bridge, as the Global Mariner made its way west across the Black Sea. It occurred to me that we were doubtless crossing the course taken almost a century earlier by the mutinous battleship Potemkin, as it zig zagged from Odessa to Constanza seeking shelter from the Tsarist fleet.

The ship shuddered through heavy winter swells, seemingly going nowhere. After a long silence, broken only by the intermittent crackle of radio voices speaking the terse and variably accented English of the sea lanes, Miren remarked that she had yet to spend enough time at home in Bilbao to be able to visit the new museum. But in her unprofessional opinion, speaking frankly to an American, it looked like it had been built from every can of Coke drunk in Bilbao."

As Melville's Bartelby, broken by the post office, put it to his boss: "I would prefer not to." On August 3, 2000, having completed its mission as a good ship, an exemplary ship, a ship representing all the other invisible ships of the world, the Global Mariner, bearing a cargo of steel coil, was rammed and sunk at the mouth of the Orinoco River in Venezuela, not far from the fictional refuge of Robinson Crusoe, a shipwrecked isolato from an earlier mercantile era. Thanks to Bill Gates and his minions, I received this news by e mail, but not in writing. Instead, without warning, a startling picture rolled downward on the screen of my computer: a ship I knew well, sinking, photographed from a lifeboat by one of the crew.

Material Resistance: Allan Sekula's Forgotten Space Jennifer Burris

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Winner of the Special Jury Prize at the Orizzonti Competition in Venice, [The Forgotten Space](#) (2010) is a film essay directed by Allan Sekula and Noël Burch. Sekula is an artist, writer and photography theoretician based in Los Angeles, where he teaches at the California Institute of the Arts. Burch is a film theorist and a filmmaker who has directed over twenty titles, as well as being co-founder and director of the Institut de Formation Cinématographique from 1967–71.

The filmed conversation between Benjamin Buchloh, David Harvey and Allan Sekula followed the New York premiere of [The Forgotten Space](#), in association with the Whitney Museum of American Art Independent Study Program's exhibition, [Foreclosed: Between Crisis and Possibility](#). In the context of this exhibition, the conversation attempts to explore the complex spatial networks through which capitalism operates. Jennifer Burris, a Curatorial Fellow of the Whitney Independent Study Program, elaborates below.

A panoramic vision of a cargo ship at sea is the central image of Noël Burch and Allan Sekula's film *The Forgotten Space* (2010), a project that grew out of Sekula's previous photographic work *Fish Story* (1988–94). The film-makers return to this shot of the cargo ship again and again as they move between the four port cities of Rotterdam, Los Angeles, Hong Kong and Bilbao. This constant evocation of multi-coloured metal boxes, which stretch towards the horizon and connect past centres of maritime power with future sites of cultural tourism, underscores the systemic nature of the film's narrative while simultaneously foregrounding the container itself as the central protagonist of this story. For although the film focuses on individual accounts of displacement, exploitation and loss – the micro-narratives of the global labour force – its primary intention is to show the wide-reaching effects wrought by the development of international cargo shipping and the concomitant globalisation of the world's material economy. By tracing these effects across multiple geographic locations, deploying a documentary approach that integrates archival film footage with interviews and media reels, the film showcases the maritime world as the ultimate 'forgotten space' of global capitalism.

The first development that brought about this so-called forgetting was the rise of the container. Pioneered by the United States in the late 1950s, 'containerised' shipping set a world standard for general cargo by the end of the 1960s. These uniformly sized boxes, capable of being mechanically transported from the berths of ships to a wide variety of land transport systems, quickly made possible a dramatic increase in economies of scale. This expansion led to the rise of the super-ship as well as the super-port, city-like structures located at an unbridgeable remove from metropolitan consciousness. The second development facilitating this rapid growth was the creation of a 'flag of convenience' system of ship registry in the late 1940s. Roughly akin to a deregulation of international labour markets, this system created a loophole for industrialists in the developed world by allowing them to register their ships in particularly permissive countries like Panama, Honduras and Liberia, thereby evading national labour and safety legislation.

Such bureaucratic and technological changes dramatically impact the socio-economic conditions of those who depend on shipping for their livelihood; while the rise of containerised shipping significantly reduces the required workforce, the flag of convenience system allows labour conditions to remain at standards set in the nineteenth century. Through his extended project *Fish Story*, which was exhibited in full at Rotterdam's Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art in 1995, Sekula created a vast photographic archive of this terrain of 'gargantuan automation but also of persistent work, of isolated loneliness, displacement and separation from the domestic sphere'.¹ Divided into seven distinct chapters, *Fish Story* reveals how the romanticised world of seafarers has disappeared alongside the mythical space of harbours. Replacing the oceanic dream of revolution and freedom, the current system of international container shipping embodies a different myth: 'a world of uninhibited flows'.² This fantasy – which reaches its apex alongside the financial manoeuvrings of the shadow banking system – spills over and saturates the realm of shipyards and loading docks. The more rationalised and automated the maritime world becomes, the more it both conceptually and materially resembles the international stock market, Burch and Sekula argue. Foreclosed from

Text:

Jennifer Burris, «Material Resistance: Allan Sekula's Forgotten Space», in www.afterall.org, 24 juin 2011

this myth of wealth without workers is the experience of countless manual labourers, rendered superfluous by the ceaseless drive towards further mechanisation. For just as standardised systems strip the sea of its tempestuous indeterminacy, the de-territorialising operations of empire eradicate the image of the ship as both prism and engine of escape.



Allan Sekula and Noël Burch, still from *The Forgotten Space*, 2010, digital film, colour, sound; 112 min. Produced by DocEye Film, Amsterdam, in co-production with WildArt Film, Vienna. Courtesy DocEye Film, Amsterdam

The film-makers' decision to orient *The Forgotten Space*'s otherwise discontinuous narrative around the image of a horizon-bound ship seems to be not only strategic but also highly symbolic in that it brings the representational iconography of the cargo box to the centre of the film's structure. In the concluding section of his essay 'Dismal Science',³ Sekula describes the container as the 'single object that can be said to embody the disavowal implicit in the transnational bourgeoisie's fantasy of a world of wealth without workers [...] the very coffin of remote labour-power'.⁴ By comparing the formal characteristics of these metal structures with such Pop age emblems as Warhol's *Brillo Boxes* (1964), Dan Graham's *Homes for America* (1966–67), and Robert Smithson's *A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic* (1967), he effectively reintroduces the submerged concept of labour to a formalist language of high Modernism. The art world's embrace of perfected geometries and minimalist abstractions, which often results in the exclusion of ideology or politics, is positioned in parallel to the segregation of the uncontrollable 'messiness' of labour from post-industrial fantasies of standardisation and instantaneity – what Sekula calls 'the illusory uniformity imposed by packaging, a uniformity that hides the chaotic restlessness and indifference of the profit motive'.⁵ By making a film that exposes the dominant beliefs of post-industrialism as pure myth, Burch and Sekula not only reintroduce the material intractability of global trade to the story of international capitalism, they also make visible the integral importance of labour within a discourse of artistic modernism and the filmic avant-garde.

Formal Space

The other central characteristic of this image of a ship at sea, beyond the minimalist structure of the metal box, is the panorama. A clouded sky cast in late afternoon light hovers above a gently sloping horizon line that marks the receding edge of a pallid sea. This arrangement recalls the pictorial tradition of ocean painting, a history that Sekula chronicles throughout 'Dismal Science'. Describing maritime space as inherently panoramic in its formal representation, he writes that this imaginary construct is paradoxical in that it is 'topographically "complete" while still signalling an acknowledgement of and desire for a greater extension beyond the frame. [...] The psychology of the panorama is overtly sated and covertly greedy, and thus caught up in the fragile complacency of disavowal'.⁶ Such a conceptual framework helps us understand how the film-makers use the panorama not only to position their work within a history of work about the sea, but also to highlight the representational logic of capitalist expansion. Through this engagement with the political implications of formal space, Burch and Sekula show how sometimes the most significant insights derive not from linear arguments, but from implied correspondences and visual allusions.

Text:

Jennifer Burris, «Material Resistance: Allan Sekula's Forgotten Space», in www.afterall.org, 24 juin 2011

The Forgotten Space's repeated evocation of a limitless sea of movement and exchange also illustrates, in relief, the claustrophobic and profoundly immobile social conditions of the maritime world's primary workforce. We encounter Los Angeles-based truck drivers whose 'entrepreneurial' (read: non-unionised) status obscures the fact they work for less than minimum wage and we meet an ageing couple struggling to maintain a grocery shop in a deserted port city outside Rotterdam. In one particularly uncomfortable scene, which toes the line of spectacularisation, we hear the stories of three people living in a makeshift 'tent city' outside Ontario, California. Nothing more than a sparse collection of nylon tents, the tent city occupies a sliver of public space caught between the automated tracks of transport trains. Recounting heartbreak and frustrated possibilities, these monologues reveal a glimpse of what it means to inhabit paralytic circumstances. In the words of one of the interviewees: 'I don't want to be like this any longer, I've been like this for years'. Cutting to a shot of a plane flying directly overhead, the directors foreground the distance between the myth of twenty-first century cosmopolitanism and the foreclosed narratives of those who have either nowhere else to go or no way to get there.

This explicit contrast between the fantasised freedom of air travel and the paranoiac enclosure of certain living conditions re-stages a pivotal moment in *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1884), Friedrich Engels's study of living and labour conditions during the height of the Industrial Revolution. This moment, with which Sekula also introduces his 'Dismal Science' essay, begins with a reverie on the majestic appearance of London from the perspective of a ship entering the Thames:

The masses of buildings, the wharves on both sides, especially from Woolwich upwards, the countless ships along both shores, crowding ever closer and closer together, until, at last, only a narrow passage remains in the middle of the river, a passage through which hundreds of steamers shoot by one another; all this is so vast, so impressive, that a man cannot collect himself, but is lost in the marvel of England's greatness before he sets foot upon English soil.⁷

Though Engels later appends this passage with an asterisk, bemoaning the transition from this romantic époque of sailing vessels to a dismal collection of polluted steam ships, he initially sets the expansive, panoramic passage of the sea in direct opposition to the straitened alleys of London's slums and tenement housing. This distinction helps him differentiate the accelerated development of sea transport as a force of production from the stalled impasse of the social relations of production evidenced by urban crowding and squalor, thereby introducing an insight of historical materialism. The glorious vision of imperialism from a distance dialectically contradicts the experience of it from within: odorous streets befouled with the smell of flesh and animal refuse.

If, as Sekula writes, Engels's 'radicality was his ability to break with the fatalism of this emerging romance of the sea's isolation, and to step from the deck of the ship onto the streets of the city at the centre of the global circle of power',⁸ the truly remarkable nature of this film lies in Burch and Sekula's ability to once again step back from the alluring myths of cosmopolitanism and a global economy of instantaneous communication and immaterial exchange. The film proposes forms of material resistance that not only reintroduce the maritime world as a space forgotten within the hypertrophied narratives of electronic trading and consumption-driven economies, it also argues for an understanding of the current financial crisis not as an aberration of global capital, but as a pathology intrinsic to capitalism itself.

Footnotes

1. Allan Sekula and Debra Ringer, 'Imaginary Economies: An Interview with Allan Sekula', *Dismal Science: Photo Works 1972-1996*, Illinois: University Galleries, 1999, p.247.↑
2. Allan Sekula, *Fish Story*, Düsseldorf: Richter Verlag, 2002, p.137.↑
3. 'Dismal Science' is the main essay within the body of work comprising *Fish Story*; it is also the name given to the abovementioned retrospective collection of Sekula's photography, as published by the University Galleries of Illinois State University. In this article, I refer to the essay 'Dismal Science', the translation of which into French by Noël Burch was the initial in-depth engagement that inspired the film.↑
4. *Ibid.*↑
5. *Ibid.*, p.135.↑
6. *Ibid.*, p.43.↑
7. Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (ed. Victor Kiernan), Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1987, p.68.↑
8. A. Sekula, *Fish Story*, op. cit., p.48.↑

Text:

Manfred Hermes, «Allan Sekula / Generali Foundation, Vienna, Austria, in *Frieze*, Issue 78, October 2003

As an art student around 1970 Allan Sekula realized that numerous American photographers of the early 20th century had escaped his notice. In the postwar period the socio-critical work of Lewis Hine or Dorothea Lange, some of which was state-commissioned during the New Deal, was sidelined with lasting effect as part of an equally state-sponsored campaign of anti-communism. Sekula identified a process of canonization that gave preference to, for example, Paul Strand's images of the Modernist sublime from the same period. This process seemed guided not by criteria of quality but by the dictates of cultural policy, and, according to Sekula, the Museum of Modern Art played no small part in it.

For Sekula this and similar insights were a revelation, causing him to abandon his previous artistic approaches in favour of photography. The quasi-retrospective at the Generali Foundation tracks this development. In *Gallery Voice Montage* (1970) Sekula was still playing on painting issues such as monochromism and seriality: the two white canvases hung side by side turn out to conceal a pair of loudspeakers over which secretly recorded comments by visitors to the gallery are played back. Soon after this, Sekula made his pictures speak in other ways. He began by documenting actions of his own: stealing steaks and throwing them on to the motorway as a pun on consumerism in *Meat Mass* (1972). A job at a restaurant led to his critique of exploitation in *This Ain't China: A Photonovel* (1974), while his work as an art lecturer spawned *School is a Factory* (1978-80), where education is exposed as a joyless holding facility, its social promises mere camouflage. When advances in productivity are planned, the losers are always already part of the equation.

To avoid the pictorialism of early documentary photography Sekula explores various sequencing techniques. In *Untitled Slide Sequence* (1972) workers leaving their workplace are shown as a succession of movie frames, while *Portraits of Salespeople* (1973) is an experiment with the 'sociological' frontality of August Sander. Since *Aerospace Folktales* (1973) Sekula has made increasing use of text. This story was supplied by his own family: his father had lost his job in the arms industry due to post-Vietnam redundancies. Until this point his social ambitions had been more or less fulfilled, but even during his unemployment he clung unwaveringly to his neo-liberal ideas and petty bourgeois sense of guilt. It becomes apparent that for Sekula political radicalization and the creation of a multi-faceted narrative are not mutually exclusive, but interdependent.

This piece saw Sekula revealing his own biography to an unusual degree. His sympathies, however, lay less with those who revelled in feelings of individual guilt than with those who had at least the remnants of a pronounced political will. *Freeway to China* (1998-9) documents the upheavals in ports following the introduction of containers and factory ships. Sticking to the theme of the transportation industry, the high seas have almost become a leitmotif in Sekula's work since the 1980s: globalization not only affects the flow of capital, but also potentially facilitates solidarity between workers in the ports of Liverpool, Los Angeles and Sydney.

Such descriptions may suggest that Sekula's work primarily involves well-meaning documentation of injustice. One way to appreciate the fact that a more complex story is being told is to sit down and read the information material provided, a pleasure that is only slightly dampened by the clumsily themed seating arrangements, like the camp bed in front of *War Without Bodies* (1991-6). In this series Sekula refers to the ideology of a supposedly 'clean', remote-control, disembodied warfare launched during the first Gulf War of 1991. The photographs present a contrasting picture: visitors at a military show stick their fingers down the muzzle of a multi-barrel artillery gun with almost erotic delight. One of the accompanying texts tells the story of the USS Iowa, whose gun turret exploded in 1989. Although it was caused by ageing equipment, the public was sold a story of homosexual vengeance - which was about as accurate as describing the film *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) as a piece of homophobic pulp fiction.

art press 240
photo

interview par PASCAL BEAUSSE

ALLAN SEKULA

réalisme critique

The Critical Realism of Allan Sekula

Depuis le début des années 70, Allan Sekula réalise une investigation des conditions politiques, économiques et sociales du capitalisme avancé. En réactivant la forme documentaire au sein d'un système photo-texte narratif, il s'est affronté aux déficits de représentation frappant les mondes du travail, des flux économiques, de l'éducation ou encore de la guerre. Une exposition rétrospective itinérante a récemment permis de reconsidérer l'ensemble de son travail en mettant au jour la grande actualité d'une procédure d'enquête approfondie face à la complexité du phénomène de mondialisation. Il nous a accordé cet entretien à l'occasion d'une résidence à l'Atelier Calder, à Saché.

■ Je n'ai pas commencé par la photographie. En 1970-71, je pratiquais la sculpture et les «performing actions» : voler de la viande dans un supermarché et la jeter sur l'autoroute, passer dans un train de marchandises devant un lieu où j'avais travaillé. Très tôt, j'ai donc essayé de provoquer des conflits avec de grands systèmes techniques et économiques. Mais l'action-art

semblait de plus en plus mettre l'artiste en avant. J'ai fini par me détourner des déguisements romantiques du petit criminel et du vagabond, pour m'intéresser à la documentation, en particulier à l'ambiguïté de la fonction documentaire, à l'effacement esthétique et à l'ouverture sur le monde de la photographie. J'étais attiré par une conception assez commune du documentaire : quelque chose de très direct, exempt de tout traitement esthétique apparent. Je commençais aussi à penser qu'il devrait être possible de photographier la vie de tous les jours – la sortie de l'usine, les travaux ménagers – comme s'il s'agissait de performances.

A l'époque, repenser le style documentaire constituait une démarche peu banale.

Au début des années 70, le documentaire était en passe de devenir un genre décadent ; plus précisément, il traversait une phase maniériste et subjectiviste sur la voie de la décadence, qui n'arriva que dans les années 80. Le vieux mythe voulant que les photographes disent la vérité était supplanté par un nouveau mythe selon lequel ils mentent. Ce qui passe pour la conscience mo-



«Deep Six / Passer au bleu», 1998. Diptyque. Gare marit

Allan Sekula began investigating the economic and social conditions of late capitalism in early 1970s. Reactivating the form of the documentary within his system of photo-texts, he has confronted the prohibitions that weigh the representation of work, economic flux, education and war. This interview was given during a residency at the Atelier Calder, in Tours.

■ I didn't start as a photographer. In 1970-71 I was making sculpture and performing actions: stealing meat from a supermarket and throwing it on the highway, riding a freight train past a place where I used to work. So early on I was trying to provoke a clash with large technical and economic systems. But action-art seemed to devolve into artistic self-aggrandizement. I became less interested in the picturesque and more interested in documentation, especially the ambiguity of the documentary function and the aesthetic modesty and worldliness of the photograph. I was drawn to a very mundane idea of documentary: something very direct, uninflected by obvious aesthetic treatment. I began to think that it might be possible to photograph everyday life—leaving a fact or housework—as if it were performance.



«Fish Story». Le village de pêcheurs d'Ulsan condamné à terme, près du chantier naval Hyundai. Ulsan, Corée du Sud. Septembre 1993. Diptyque. From "Fish Story." Doan

Text:

Pascal Beausse, «The Critical Realism of Allan Sekula», in *Artpress*, 240, November 1998

art press 240

photography survey



désaffectée, Douvres. (Coll. Musée des beaux-arts et de la dentelle, Calais). Abandoned marine station, Dover. 1998

rale de la photographie contemporaine n'est qu'une sempiternelle réitération du paradoxe crétois, avec toutefois un aspect hiérarchique : «Tous les photographes sont des menteurs. Je suis un artiste qui utilise des photographies. Par conséquent, je suis plus malin que cette crétoine de photographe qui s' imagine qu'elle dit la vérité.» Durant les années 80, un scepticisme épistémologique quelque peu théâtral est donc venu s'ajouter au concept, proposé par Walker Evans en 1971, d'un «style documentaire» distancié et maniéré. N'oubliez pas que dès 1967, John Szarkowski avait annoncé la mort du documentaire social dans son exposition *New Documents* au MoMA, qui réunissait Diane Arbus, Lee Friedlander et Gary Winogrand. En concevant cette exposition, qui exerça une énorme influence, Szarkowski déclarait explicitement que la photographie sérieuse ne pouvait avoir qu'une relation ironique et fataliste avec le monde réel ; qui plus est, il le faisait, tout à fait intentionnellement, à une époque d'énormes bouleversements sociaux. A l'inverse, ce qui m'intéressait en 1972, c'était de trouver un moyen de redonner

vie à la dimension sociale du documentaire. Cela exigeait d'accepter la nature hybride des matériaux ; jouer sur la relation entre mise en scène et événement quotidien, et même réaliser que l'événement quotidien contient déjà en soi un élément de fiction ou de théâtre. Je m'inspirais diversement du sociologue américain Erving Goffman, de la notion de «geste social» de Brecht, ainsi que de mes propres observations sur l'inversion symbolique des rapports de force, banal équivalent dans le monde du travail de la pièce de Jean Genet, *les Bonnes*. Je m'orientais vers un modèle dialogique de l'interaction sociale. Plus généralement, il était impossible de repenser la tradition documentaire sans contracter une dette intellectuelle envers la pensée sociologique, de Marx à Durkheim et Weber, et tout particulièrement envers les études sociologiques extrêmement fouillées de Marx, telles que *le 18 Brumaire*.

En même temps, vous commencez à écrire sur l'histoire de la photographie. Mon premier travail sérieux, en 1974, consistait à comparer Lewis Hine et Alfred

To rethink the documentary style was quite original at that time.

By the early 1970s, documentary was becoming a decadent genre; more precisely, it was passing through a mannerist and subjectivist phase on its way to a decadence achieved only in the '80s. The old myth that photographs tell the truth was being supplanted by the new myth that they lie. What passes for self-consciousness in contemporary photography is an endless reiteration of the Cretan paradox, but with a hierarchical twist: "All photographers are liars. I am an artist who uses photographs. Therefore I am smarter than the cretin-photographer who thinks she is telling the truth." So throughout the '80s a theatricalized epistemological skepticism was being added to Walker Evans' 1971 idea of a dandified, distanced "documentary style." Remember that John Szarkowski had already, in 1967, announced the death of social documentary in his MoMA exhibition "New Documents", featuring Diane Arbus, Lee Friedlander, and Gary Winogrand. With this enormously influential exhibition, Szarkowski stated explicitly that serious photography could only have an ironic and fatalistic relation to the social world, and he did so—quite pointedly—at a time of enormous social upheaval. What interested me by 1972, to the contrary, was a way of reviving the social dimension of documentary. That meant embracing a hybridity of materials, playing with the relation between staging and the everyday event, understanding even that the everyday event already embodied an element of fiction or theater. I was drawing variously on the American sociologist Erving Goffman, on Bertolt Brecht's notion of the "social gest," and on my own observations of the informal symbolic inversion from below of power relations, the common everyday equivalent in working life of Jean Genet's play *The Maids*. I was moving toward a dialogic model of social interaction. More generally, there was no way to rethink the documentary tradition without incurring an intellectual debt to the lineages of sociological thought, to Marx, Durkheim and Weber, and especially to Marx's very precise sociological studies, like the 18th Brumaire.



«Dead Letter Office». 1997. Décor de la Twentieth Century Fox pour «Titanic» et pêcheurs de moules, Popotla, Baja California. Diptyque. (Court. galerie Michel Rein, Tours). From "Dead Letter Office". Twentieth Century Fox set for "Titanic" and mussel gatherers, Popotla, Baja California. 1997. Diptych

art press 240
photo

Stieglitz, en imaginant ces deux figures comme les partenaires mythiques d'un système sémiotique binaire, un méta-discours photographique opposant la «photographie d'art» au «document social». Le modèle de Stieglitz d'une photographie métaphorique néo-symboliste a produit un art moderniste autonome, tandis que le modèle de Hine, le reportage réaliste, aboutissait finalement à un projet d'amélioration sociale, celui-là même dont Szarkowski avait annoncé la mort à la fin des années 60. Pour être provocateur, je dirais aujourd'hui que Hine était davantage que Stieglitz prêt à regarder la modernité en face, et que dans cette mesure il était une figure plus moderniste, bien qu'il lui manquât un véritable programme moderniste. Si Hine paraît maintenant anachronique, c'est notamment parce que son réformisme de l'ère progressiste a été récupéré par le New Deal, puis oublié pendant la guerre froide et les attaques contre la gauche syndicaliste américaine. Les conditions de travail dans les usines-bagnes que Hine documentait sont revenues en force à la fin de notre siècle, mais sa niche au panthéon est couverte de toiles d'araignées. Stieglitz, lui, est régulièrement dépoussiéré, car il est plus facile de s'inspirer de ses lamentations élégiaques sur une civilisation mercantile corrompue. Produire des écrits historiques m'a permis de poser indirectement des problèmes qui seront repris dans ma pratique photographique.

La représentation du travail est un de vos principaux sujets. Dès vos premiers travaux, vous vous êtes confronté à l'impossibilité – du moins à la réelle difficulté – de photographier les lieux de travail et les ouvriers. Ayant appris l'amère leçon des révélations de Hine et des premiers journalistes «remueurs de boue», les capitalistes ont limité la circulation des images concernant la vie interne de l'entreprise. Les bureaucrates socialistes avaient retenu la même leçon, comme le montre le film de Krzysztof Kieslowksi sur un curieux ouvrier équipé d'une caméra, *l'Amateur*. La transparence est par conséquent relative. Et la transparence, lorsque l'on y parvient, est elle aussi illusoire, comme Brecht l'a suggéré en faisant observer qu'une photographie des usines Krupp ou AEG ne nous dit «pratiquement rien» sur la réalité des relations de production ; il recommandait au contraire de «construire» quelque chose «d'artificiel, de posé». En ce qui me concerne, mon point de départ est, non pas l'aspect purement positif du travail (perspective commune au réalisme socialiste et au sentimentalisme libéral de *Family of Man*), mais la constatation que le travail existe dans une condition essentiellement négative, car il est objectivement et psychologiquement hanté par le spectre du chômage et de la recherche de

bénéfices à son détriment. C'est même devenu une question de langage : on nous incite à croire que nous vivons dans une «société post-industrielle», alors qu'en fait la fonction industrielle a simplement été globalisée.

Oui, de même que certains penseurs parlent actuellement de la «disparition du travail», en confondant travail et emploi. Avec Untitled Slide Sequence (Séquence de diapositives sans titre, 1972), vous avez donné votre propre version de la Sortie de l'usine. Comme Straub et Huillet le feraient par la suite dans Trop tôt, trop tard (1981), vous avez cherché l'emplacement juste pour la caméra face à la foule des ouvriers.

L'œuvre comme intervalle

L'œuvre consiste en toutes les images que j'avais prises en me postant sur une passerelle desservant une grande usine aérospatiale, à la sortie de l'équipe de jour. Je me tenais à peu près à la place où se mettrait un militant vendant des journaux, mais en fait à l'intérieur de l'entreprise, ce qui fait que mon projet a pris fin lorsque les vigiles se sont aperçus de mon intrusion. Le rouleau de pellicule a été découpé en diapositives et projeté dans l'ordre, comme un rush cinématographique brut, à la différence près que les clichés ont été choisis sur une base plus ou moins «physiognomonique», pas simplement en déterminant le moment du début et de la fin. L'œuvre se situe entre la photographie et le cinéma. Cet aspect de la projection de diapositives m'a toujours intéressé : c'est une sorte de cinéma primitif, incapable de synthétiser le mouvement. Le projecteur de diapositives est un appareil quasi-industriel, analogue à ce que l'on voit sur de nombreuses chaînes de montage, par exemple les machines à embouteiller. Le rythme du projecteur de diapos est le rythme de l'usine automatisée, bien que les images ne soient pas anonymes : elles reflètent l'individualité à la fois du photographe et du sujet. La séquence est une sorte de raccourci de l'invention du cinéma : Muybridge poussé dans la direction du mouvement social, loin de l'espace du laboratoire ou de la piste d'essais ; les frères Lumière repoussés vers l'immobilité. L'œuvre exprime une certaine nostalgie de l'espace piétonnier de la classe ouvrière, bref intervalle collectif entre l'immense intérieur fonctionnel de l'usine aérospatiale et l'isolement de l'automobile particulière : l'intervalle entre le travail et le *home*. Par la suite, j'ai découvert une affinité avec les photographies de Dorothea Lange montrant des ouvriers des chantiers navals d'Oakland pendant la Deuxième Guerre mondiale, et qui mettent en évidence ce mouvement, à la fois de masse et individuel, de l'espace de production vers l'espace de consommation.

At the same time you began to write about the history of photography.

My first serious effort, in 1974, was to set the figure of Lewis Hine against the figure Alfred Stieglitz, imagining the two as mythic partners in a binary semiotic system, a metadiscourse of photography which pitted the "art photograph" against the "social document." Stieglitz's model of metaphoric neo-symbolist photography led to an autonomous modernist art, while Hine's realist reportage model extended outward to an ameliorative social project, the project Szarkowski had pronounced dead by the late '60s. To be provocative, I would say today that Hine was more willing to look modernity in the face than was Stieglitz, and was by this measure a modernist figure, even if he lacked a modernist program. One reason Hine seems anachronistic now is that his Progressive-era reformism was appropriated by the New Deal, then forgotten during the Cold War assault on the American labor left. The sweatshop fact conditions Hine documented have returned with a vengeance at the end of our century but his niche in the pantheon is covered by cobwebs. Stieglitz gets a regular dusting, his elegiac laments for a corrupt business civilization are easier to emulate. History-writing has been for me a way of indirectly posing problems to be taken up by photographic practice.

The representation of work was one of your subjects from the beginning. With your first series you faced the impossibility—or real difficulty—photographing work sites and workers.

Taking a bitter lesson from the exposé of Hir and the early "muckraking" journalist capitalists learned to restrict the circulation—images of the inner life of the factory. Socialist bureaucrats learned the same lesson, as evidenced by Krzysztof Kieslowski's film about curious worker with a camera, *The Camera-Buffer*. So transparency is restricted. But transparency, when achieved, is also illusory, a Brecht famously suggested when he said that a photograph of the Krupp works or the AE tells us "next to nothing" about the actual relations of production, requiring instead something "artificial, posed" be "built up." For my part, I begin not with a pure positivity of labor, (a prospect shared by socialist realism and the corporate-liberal sentimentalism of *The Family of Man*) but with the understanding that work exists in a fundamental condition of negativity, haunted objectively and psychologically by unemployment and by the extraction of surplus value. It's a problem even in language: we are encouraged to believe that we live in a "postindustrial society," when in fact the industrial function has been globalized.

Yes, some thinkers are now talking about the "disappearance of work," but, in reality, it's the complete opposite. With Untitled Slide Sequence (1972), you gave your own version of the "Sortie de l'usine" (Workers leaving a factory). As Straub & Huillet did later, in Trop tôt, trop tard (1981) you searched for the right place to put the camera in front of the crowd of workers.

The work consists of every picture I make while standing on a pedestrian overpass lead-

Text:

Pascal Beausse, «The Critical Realism of Allan Sekula», in *Artpress*, 240, November 1998

art press 240

photography survey



«Dead Letter Office». 1997. Fabrique de cercueils, Tijuana. Diptyque. (Court. galerie Michel Rein, Tours). From "Dead Letter Office". 1997. Coffin factory, Tijuana. Diptych

Dans *Aerospace Folktales* (*Contes populaires aérospatiaux*, 1973), vous examinez l'influence de la macrostructure économique sur la microstructure de la famille. L'œuvre a également un aspect autobiographique : vous explorez le vécu de votre père, qui était alors au chômage. Nous pouvons aussi y déceler une similitude avec *Numéro Deux* (1975) de Godard.

En voyant *Numéro Deux*, lorsque j'ai entendu la réplique : «A mon avis, Maman c'est un paysage, Papa c'est une usine», cela résumait pour moi un phénomène que j'essayais d'analyser : la disparition de la séparation entre ces deux univers que sont l'usine et la maison. Si la maison est une usine, si elle reste encore et toujours l'usine des travaux ménagers, et si à cause du chômage elle devient une usine à attendre le travail ou à travailler pour trouver du travail, tout se mord la queue. Je me disais que le documentaire social avait toujours eu tendance à regarder vers le bas, sans examiner directement la situation sociale de l'auteur, en l'occurrence l'univers du tra-

vail intellectuel de niveau universitaire. *Aerospace Folktales* est une autobiographie voilée, cachée sous un style distancié, «objectif» ; pourtant les tensions subjectives sont présentes, on peut les déceler. L'œuvre consiste principalement en une succession d'images montrant l'espace domestique d'un logement ouvrier propre à rendre claustrophobe, habité par une famille d'employés de bureau. Le montage est ponctué par des intertitres de film muet, et accompagné d'une cacophonie d'enregistrements sonores qui se recouvrent : ma voix, la voix de ma mère, celle de mon père. Ce n'est qu'en s'installant dans un des fauteuils de metteur en scène en toile rouge proches des haut-parleurs que l'auditeur parvient à différencier les diverses voix. J'ai qualifié cette œuvre de «film démonté», libéré de la «dictature de l'appareil de projection». La polyphonie et le mixage para-littéraire d'éléments oraux et visuels, alliés à des déplacements ou modifications de la tonalité d'ensemble, ont fourni un modèle fluide pour des œuvres à venir.

ing from a big aerospace factory at the end of the day shift. I was standing more or less where a militant selling newspapers would stand, but actually inside the company property, so that my project ended when the guards detected my trespassing. The roll of film was cut into individual dias and projected in the same sequence, like un-edited motion picture footage, but different in that one is choosing individual exposures on a somewhat "physiognomic" basis, not just selecting a beginning point and an ending point. It's really a work between still photography and cinema. This has always interested me about slide projection: it's a kind of primitive cinema, unable to synthesize movement. The slide projector is a quasi-industrial apparatus, similar to what one finds in many assembly lines: bottling machines for example. The rhythm of the slide projector is the rhythm of the automated factory, but the individual frame individuates both the photographer and the subject. The sequence effects a bracketing of the invention of the cinema: Muybridge pushed in the direction of social movement, away from the space of the laboratory or test track, and the Lumières pushed back toward the still. The



«Dead Letter Office». 1997. Conserverie de thon, Ensenada. Diptyque. (Court. galerie Michel Rein, Tours). From "Dead Letter Office". 1997. Tuna cannery, Ensenada. Diptych

art press 240
photo

Fish Story (1989-1995) est une œuvre très importante, synthèse d'une grande partie de vos recherches. Je pense que vous avez cherché à travailler comme Melville, en essayant de restituer un savoir global de l'économie maritime et de la mondialisation. C'était un véritable défi.

Le point de départ thématique de *Fish Story* était d'examiner le monde maritime contemporain, un monde qui souffre d'une injuste réputation d'anachronisme. Comment lutter contre le fantasme, courant au sein des élites, selon lequel l'information est la denrée essentielle, et l'ordinateur, l'unique moteur de notre progrès ? La mer est peut-être un espace oublié, mais elle n'a pas perdu sa signification, et elle n'est pas simplement l'espace «intermédiaire» du capitalisme. Le monde maritime joue un rôle essentiel en cette fin de l'ère moderne : c'est en effet le container, une invention américaine du milieu des années 50, qui rend possible le système global de fabrication à l'échelle planétaire. Le navire porte-conteneurs et le pétrolier sont les ultimes et tristes réincarnations du *Pequod*. En 1947, le poète américain Charles Olson avait observé, non sans préscience, que Melville avait déjà découvert un siècle auparavant «le Pacifique en tant qu'usine-bagne». Le monde maritime m'intéressait parce que c'est un gigantesque univers d'automation et, en même temps, un monde de travail acharné, de travail isolé, anonyme, invisible, de grande solitude, de déplacement et de séparation de la sphère domestique. Pour cette raison, il est important de révéler la dimension sociale de la mer, comme l'a fait Melville. *Fish Story* est également une étude «d'histoire de l'art», qui suit toute une tradition de représentations de l'économie de la mer, de la peinture hollandaise du 17^e siècle au «lien objectif» mais non reconnu avec le porte-conteneurs que l'on peut observer dans l'art minimaliste et le pop art, qu'il s'agisse de la *Brillo Box* de Warhol ou des cubes sérieux de Donald Judd. Une différence capitale existe cependant : la mobilité du conteneur opposée à l'inertie dramatique de l'objet d'art. Pour les transitaires, qui parlent d'«inter-modalité» – entendez «modalité intermédiaire» –, la boîte est plus importante que le véhicule. L'emballage se trouve peu à peu investi d'une vie autonome, d'une sorte d'animation fantôme. A ce propos, nous pouvons revisiter la parabole de Marx sur le fétichisme de la marchandise : la table en bois qui se met sur la tête et commence à avoir des idées bizarres. J'appelle le conteneur «cercueil de la main-d'œuvre absente», car le travail qui produit les biens transportés se situe toujours ailleurs, dans des lieux sans cesse différents et interchangeables, déterminés par l'incessante quête de salaires toujours plus bas. Ce travail



Extrait de «Untitled Slide Sequence», 1972
From "Untitled Slide Sequence", 1972

n'est plus un travail de proximité, même dans un sens métonymique, à moins d'effectuer mentalement un énorme bond géographique, d'avoir l'étrange et inquiétante faculté de porter des baskets Nike tout en se transportant en imagination jusqu'à une chaîne de fabrication en Indonésie.

Après Fish Story, vous avez continué à vous intéresser au monde maritime – je pense à vos dernières séries. Vous continuez à réfléchir à la notion de frontière, aux flux de biens de consommation et d'êtres humains, et à l'idée de nationalité à une époque de mondialisation de l'économie.

work exhibits a certain nostalgia for working-class pedestrian space, the brief massed interval between the vast functionally dispersed interior of the aerospace factory and the isolation of the private automobile: the interval between work and home. Later, I discovered an affinity with Dorothea Lange's photographs of shipyard workers in Oakland made during the Second World War, which stressed this mass and individual movement from the space of production to the space of consumption.

*In Aerospace Folktales (1973) you investigate the impact of the economic macrostructure on the microstructure of the family. The work is also autobiographical, exploring the experience of your father, who was unemployed at the time. There is a similarity here with Godard's Numéro Deux (1975). When I saw Numéro Deux, and I heard the line "A mon avis, Maman c'est un paysage, Papa c'est une usine," it summed up for me something that I had been investigating—the collapse of the separation of the two worlds of the factory and the house. If the house is a factory, always the factory of housework, and with unemployment it becomes the factory of waiting for work or working to get work, everything spirals inward. My idea was that social documentary had tended always to look downward, not straight across at the social circumstances of the author, in this case at the world of college-educated intellectual labor. *Aerospace Folktales* is actually a veiled autobiography, embedded in a distanced, "objective" style, and yet the subjective tensions are there to be detected. The work consists first of a picture sequence describing the domestic space of a claustrophobic working-class apartment inhabited by a white-collar family. The montage is punctuated by silent-film style intertitles, and accompanied by a triangulated, overlapping cacophony of audiotape recordings: my voice, my mother's voice, my father's voice. Only by sitting in red canvas director's chairs adjacent to the speakers can listeners discern the individual voices. I described the work as a "disassembled movie," lacking the "dictatorship of the projector." The polyphony and paraliterary mixing of verbal and visual elements, combined with shifts in overall tone, provided a loose model for future work.*

Fish Story (1989-1995) is a very important work, where you synthesized a lot of your research. I think you tried to work as Melville did, in the sense of trying to restore a global knowledge of the maritime economy, and of globalization. It's a very challenging way of working.

The thematic impulse behind *Fish Story* was to examine the contemporary maritime world, a world with an undeserved reputation for anachronism. How to counter the fantasy, common among elites, that information is the crucial commodity, and the computer the sole engine of our progress? The sea may be a forgotten space, but it's not an irrelevant space, nor is it simply the "in-between" space of capitalism. The maritime world is fundamental to late modernity, because it is the cargo container, an American innovation of the mid-1950s, that makes the global system of manufacture possible. The container ship and the oil

Text:

Pascal Beausse, «The Critical Realism of Allan Sekula», in *Artpress*, 240, November 1998

art press 240

photography survey

Ces deux dernières années, j'ai réalisé quatre nouveaux travaux, dont trois découlent directement de *Fish Story*. Dans *Dead Letter Office* (Le Bureau des lettres mortes, 1997), j'ai donné une forme littérale à la métaphore du conteneur-cercueil, en photographiant la grande usine de conteneurs Hyundai à Tijuana, sur la frontière entre le Mexique et la Californie, ainsi qu'une petite fabrique de cercueils de la même ville, dont les propriétaires sont mexicains. J'ai également photographié : le décor du film *Titanic*, monté – avec des conséquences néfastes pour l'environnement – près d'un village de pêcheurs situé à environ 80 kilomètres de la frontière ; les événements entourant la convention républicaine de 1996 à San Diego ; et des manœuvres des *marines* U.S. simulant une invasion. Le tout mis dans le tout, le genre d'amalgame qu'aucun photographe de presse ne serait autorisé à effectuer : la coûteuse réitération de l'histoire de la rencontre entre la modernité et l'abîme ; la non moins coûteuse répétition de la prochaine invasion d'un pays plus faible ; un spectacle politique inepte ; le labeur quotidien à trois dollars par jour. Cette région frontalière est unique est le seul endroit de la planète où le «premier» monde urbanisé et le tiers-monde entrent directement en collision, où l'on peut percevoir directement cette métonymie affaiblie ou détruite que j'ai mentionnée. L'œuvre tente de décrire la géographie locale d'une nouvelle machine à apartheid transnationale. Je pensais à deux précédents indirects : *Bartleby* de Melville, cet employé de bureau qui refuse de travailler ; et un film tourné en 1933 par Arcady Boytler, *la Mujer del puerto*, adaptation rocambolesque – située à Vera Cruz – d'un conte de Guy de Maupassant, *le Port*, dont les thèmes sont la division due au capitalisme, l'anonymat et l'inceste. Pour dire les choses clairement, il est difficile d'envoyer une lettre de Tijuana à San Diego ou inversement, alors que la distance n'est que de quelques kilomètres. Comme j'avais le choix entre plusieurs sites, j'ai tenu à exposer l'œuvre à Tijuana, mais pas à San Diego. De fait, Tijuana est la plus cosmopolite des deux villes, en dépit de son sous-développement et de la violence démente qu'entraîne l'industrie frontalière.

Deep Six / Passer au bleu (1998) part également d'un prétexte littéraire.

A Douvres et à Calais, ainsi que sur le ferry *Renoir*, j'ai réalisé deux séries de photographies proposées comme illustrations pour des éditions fictives des *Droits de l'homme* de Thomas Paine et du roman de Catherine Porter *Ship of Fools*. Paine et Porter appartiennent respectivement à la première et à la dernière génération des écrivains américains formés par les voyages en mer. Au



Extrait de «Aerospace Folktales». 1973. From «Aerospace Folktales», 1973

début, je voulais faire une œuvre contre le tunnel, en hommage à la traversée en ferry. Chacun de ces livres semblait exiger un discours photographique différent : Porter, la virtuosité physiognomonique d'un «photographe de rues» maritime ; Paine, un tableau plus solennel du travail et du paysage.

Dans Deep Six/Passer au bleu, vous jouez sur les couleurs bleu-blanc-rouge des drapeaux américain et français. Métaphore ironique de la vision sociale perdue de Thomas Paine, le drapeau américain est

tanker are the last dismal reincarnations of the *Pequod*. The American poet Charles Olson remarked presciently in 1947 that Melville had already discovered, a century before, "the Pacific as sweatshop." The maritime world was interesting to me because it's a world of gargantuan automation but also of persistent work, of isolated, anonymous, hidden work, of great loneliness, displacement and separation from the domestic sphere. For that reason it's interesting to find the social in the sea, as Melville did. *Fish Story* is also an "art historical" study, tracing a lineage of representations of the sea economy, from Dutch 17th-century



«Dead Letter Office». 1997. Soudeur d'un chantier naval découpant de l'acier destiné au châssis d'un camion Hyundai, Ensenada. (Court, galerie Michel Rein, Tours). Shipyard welder cutting steel for Hyundai truck chassis.

art press 240
photo

dans une poubelle, à New York. Une autre image lui fait écho, avec la médaille militaire d'une partisane du Front national lors d'une manifestation à Paris.

N'oubliez pas l'Union Jack, le drapeau sous lequel Paine était né, et le seul des trois qui ne soit pas l'emblème d'une république. Le drapeau de Burke, le grand adversaire conservateur de Paine, resté jusqu'à ce jour un héros de la droite. J'ai structuré l'œuvre autour de cette triple trichromie.

Vous utilisez plusieurs styles à l'intérieur de chaque série, comme une actualisation des différentes conventions photographiques. Comment abordez-vous cette notion de style ? Par exemple, dans *Dead Letter Office*, il y a plusieurs façons de photographier une même chaîne de montage. D'abord au flash : deux femmes au travail, vérifiant l'étiquetage de boîtes de thon, un triptyque de trois clichés consécutifs. C'est «cinématique», mais l'éclairage direct au flash est anti-cinématographique, c'est une pratique «photojournalistique». Les codes se confondent. Les deux autres images montrent une femme plus isolée travaillant sur la même chaîne, aux côtés d'un homme à peine éclairé ; ces deux photos ont été prises à la lumière ambiante, avec une très faible profondeur de champ, le point étant fait sur la main de l'homme et sur celle de la femme. Il y a donc un nouveau déplacement du codage. Les images accolées du triptyque simulent une conception pragmatique du travail, alors que les images séparées du diptyque évoquent des moments d'inattention, d'autant que sur l'une des deux photos, la femme lève les yeux. Pour moi, ce «montage» constituait une façon de m'opposer – d'une manière phénoménologiquement évocatrice – à ce que Roland Barthes avait appelé l'«éternelle esthétique des gestes laborieux» en voyant *Family of Man*. Le problème du réalisme critique est le suivant : comment découvrir l'intervalle dans lequel réside l'idée de liberté ? En étant attentif au temps, en étant conscient que, trop souvent, l'appareil photo tue et obscurcit le temps vécu. A cet égard, Photoshop ne nous est d'aucune utilité. ■

Traduit par Frank Straschitz

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Expositions récentes / Recent personal shows:

1996 Moderna Museet, Stockholm ; Tramway, Glasgow ; Le Channel et musée des beaux-arts, Calais ; SM Museum of Art, Santa Monica ; Museum Boymans van Beuningen, Rotterdam ; Illinois State University, Normal 1998 Palmer Museum, Pennsylvania State University, State College, Pennsylvania ; Daadgalerie, Berlin ; Camerawork, Londres ; Nederlands Foto Instituut, Rotterdam ; Kunstverein, Munich ; Curtin University Art Gallery, Perth (Australie) ; Atlanta College of Art, Atlanta ; Galerie Michel Rein, Tours (4 juillet - 3 octobre) ; Palais des Beaux-Arts, Bruxelles (31 octobre - 3 janvier 99) 1999 Henry Art Gallery, Seattle

26

painting to the unacknowledged "objective correlative" of the cargo container found in Minimalist and Pop Art, whether it be the *Brillo Box* of Warhol or the serial cubes of Donald Judd. The radical difference lies in the container's mobility, against the theatrical inertness of the art object. For shippers, who speak of "intermodality," the box is more important than the vehicle. So, the package begins to take on a life of its own, a kind of ghostly animation. Here we can revisit Marx's parable of commodity fetishism: the wooden table that stands on its head and begins to evolve grotesque ideas. I speak of the container as the "coffin of remote labor power" because the labor that produces the transported goods is always somewhere else, located in fluid, reassignable sites determined by the relentless quest for lower wages. This labor is no longer proximate, metonymically accessible, except through some great imaginative geographical leap, the uncanny ability to wear Nike sneakers and jump in the imagination to an assembly line in Indonesia.

A Unique Border

It seems that after Fish Story, you continued to have a great interest in the sea, the maritime world. I'm thinking of your recent series. You continued to think about liminality, the fluxes of goods and peoples, and about the idea of nationality at a time of the globalization of the economy. In the last two years, I've made four new works, three of which follow directly from *Fish Story*. With *Dead Letter Office* (1997) I literalized the metaphor of container-as-coffin, photographing a large Hyundai container factory in Tijuana, on the Mexican border with California, as well as a small Mexican-owned coffin factory in the same city. I also photographed the set for *Titanic*, located—with bad environmental consequences—next to a fishing village on the coast about 80 kilometers south of the border, and events surrounding the 1996 Republican convention in San Diego, as well as invasion exercises conducted by the U.S. Marines. All in all, a very tendentious list of choices, the sort of combination that no photojournalist would be permitted to bring together: the expensive retelling of the story of modernity's encounter with the abyss, equally expensive rehearsals for the next invasion of a weaker country, fatuous political spectacle, everyday work at three dollars a day. This border region is unique, the only place on the planet where the urban first and third worlds collide, where the attenuated or broken metonymy I mentioned before is actually accessible to everyday experience. So the work tries to describe the local geography of a new transnational apartheid-machine. I was thinking of two indirect precedents: Melville's *Bartleby the Scrivener*, with the truculent clerk who refuses to work, his spirit broken by prior employment in the "dead letter office," and Arcady Boytler's 1933 film *La mujer del puerto*, a carnivalesque adaptation, set in Vera Cruz, of Guy de Maupassant's tale of capitalist dispersal, anonymity, and incest, "The Port." To put it bluntly, it's difficult to send a letter between Tijuana and San Diego, a distance of only a few miles.

Given the choice of several sites, I made a point of exhibiting the work in Tijuana, but not in San Diego. Tijuana is actually the more cosmopolitan of the two cities, for all of its underdevelopment and crazy industrial-frontier violence.

Deep Six, in French Passer au bleu (1998), is also a work with a kind of literary pretext.

On both sides of the Channel, in Dover and the Pas-de-Calais and on the channel ferry *Sea France Renoir*, I made two sets of photographs offered up as illustrations for imaginary editions for Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man*, and Katherine Porter's novel *Ship of Fools*. Paine and Porter belong, respectively, to the first and last generations of American writers to be formed by the experience of sea travel. I wanted initially to make a work against the Tunnel, a work of respect for the ferry crossing. Each book seemed to dictate a different photographic rhetoric: for Porter, the physiognomic agility of a kind of maritime "street photograph"; for Paine, a more solemn tableau of labor and landscape.

There is in Deep Six/Passer au Bleu a play with the colors—blue-white-red—of the American and French flags. As an ironic metaphor of Thomas Paine's lost social views, the flag is amidst the garbage in New York. Another image echoes this with the military medal of a member of the National Front during a demonstration in Paris. Don't forget the Union Jack, the flag under which Paine was born and the only one of the three not to stand for a republic. The flag of Burke, Paine's great conservative antagonist, and a hero to the Right even today. I structured the work around this triple trichromy.

It would seem that you use different styles in your series as an actualization of the different photographic conventions. How do you work with this notion of style?

For example, in *Dead Letter Office*, there are different ways of photographing the same assembly line, first with direct flash: two women working, checking the labels on cans of tuna, a triptych of three consecutive frames. It's "cinematic" but direct flash-lighting is anticinematic and "photojournalistic." So the codes are mixed. And the second pair of images shows a more isolated woman working on the same line, with a nearly obscured man beside her. These two photos are made with available light and very shallow focus on his hand and her hand. So there's a further shift in the coding. The continuous triptych simulates an instrumental view of work, the separated diptych suggests moments of inattention and daydream, especially as the women look up in one of the two frames. For me this "montage" of several views was a way of countering—in a phenomenologically suggestive way—what Roland Barthes spoke of as the "eternal aesthetics of laborious gestures" when he looked at *The Family of Man*. The problem of critical realism is this: how do we find the interval within which the idea of freedom resides? By careful attention to time, realizing that the camera too often kills and obscures lived time. Photoshop is of no help here. ■

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