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Social Documents

**The Mediation of Social Relations in Lens-based
Contemporary Art**

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DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis has been composed by me and that the work is my own. None of the material within this thesis has been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Kirsten Lloyd
12 December 2016

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the trajectory of the 'social document' in contemporary art since 1989. Though art's turn towards documentary modes has now been widely noted, this study establishes a longer, more complex engagement with the dialogue between the lens and the situational immediacy of artists' social interventions. I argue that the social documents that arise through the reconfigured artwork can be connected with the demand for the circulation of social knowledge and increasingly urgent questions of realism, a methodology that divided the avant-garde and neo-avant-garde of the 20th century. Central issues broached by the thesis include the demand for the extraction and re-articulation of truth, the role of visual representation in the address to totality and the emergence of (independent) knowledge and (critical) pedagogy as key sites of struggle.

My analysis begins, in Part I, with a selective mapping of the historical terrain through which I offer re-readings of prescient works produced in the 1960s and 1970s in a range of capitalist and state socialist contexts including Mary Kelly, Grupo de Artistas de Vanguardia and Sanja Iveković. I then move on to a more detailed appraisal of the ascendancy of the social document in art following the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the consolidation of global capitalism, situating its various calibrations in relation to what I call biopolitical globalisation. Part II takes a thematic approach to the material, using case studies to examine a) the curatorial narrativisation and production of social documents, b) the relevance of feminist elaborations on theories of social reproduction to analyses of the social document and art history, c) the persistent invocation of ethics in discussions of works that document the social subjects of the new economy, d) the implications of addressing the social document as a realist enterprise. Artists discussed in Part II include Anton Vidokle, Martha Rosler, WochenKlausur, Dani Marti and Pilvi Takala.

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INTRODUCTION

0.1 *The rise of the social document*

In 2000 art came to be marked by the production of lens-based documentation of social relations and realities. Far from a passing phenomenon, the proliferation of documentary materials, processes and tropes has since become one of the most significant tendencies in contemporary art practice. This has been acknowledged in the curatorial sphere through the presentation of numerous survey exhibitions including *Documenta 11* (2002) in Germany, *The Need to Document* (2005) in Switzerland and *The Greenroom* (2008) in the U.S. Yet despite this curatorial visibility of the ‘document trend’ (which, as I will argue, is not to be conflated with the ‘documentary turn’), the fields of art history and theory have been very slow both in registering the practice and in negotiating its historical roots, development and purpose.

Across the same time period it has been claimed that art has been undergoing turns – variously labelled as ‘social’ or ‘political’ – that privilege the situational immediacy of artists’ encounter-based experimentations which explicitly set out to engage with social life itself.¹ Including ‘participatory’ works as well as re-energised community and activist practices, they are often discussed in contradistinction to the image. This position is exemplified in a framing of ‘the first truly global movement in art’ offered by the art historian Nikos Papastergiadis who discusses a ‘shift in artistic practice away from image production to the initiation of scenes for the replaying of social relations.’² While I agree that recent developments indeed do not appear to be anchored by one geographic centre, I dispute his implicit contention (reflected in much of the literature) that their importance and originality is connected to, or indeed necessitates, a marginalisation of the visual.

In this thesis I seek to examine the interrelation of these two dominant tendencies that respectively privilege the lens and the relational encounter. The term ‘social document’ is advanced and elaborated to account for particular types of *realist* practices in which

¹ Claire Bishop, “The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents,” *Artforum* 44, February 2006, 178-83.

² Nikos Papastergiadis, “The Global Need for Collaboration,” *Collaborative Arts – Conversations on Collaborative Arts Practice* (2008), no longer available online.

photography and moving-image technologies mediate art's engagement with social relations.³ In using this appellation it is worth emphasising three things: first, that – as a Google search quickly reveals – the noun 'social document' holds relevance well beyond the field of art. The Oxford English Dictionary emphasises its connection with literature, defining it as: 'a literary work embodying an authentic and informative description of the social conditions of its time.'⁴ The early appearances the dictionary recorded also point to connections with oral histories and anthropology. Second, that my usage is not intended to draw associations with the well, and more narrowly, defined 'social documentary' genre. Instead, I am seeking to work with the social document specifically in the context of art theory. Third, that while not all art documents are social documents, the latter very often appear as part of artworks and as art documentation. The processes of mediation noted above may involve making a visual record of a durational art encounter or artificially constructed scenario, or using documentary modes as one tool among many in activist and interventionist endeavours. In doing so, the *heterogeneous* social document cuts across and through the segregated categories outlined above. Furthermore, and to be clear, my intention in this thesis is not to advance definitive criteria or to identify precise characteristics that would ascribe a photograph or video as a social document. Rather, I set out a possible definition as a beginning, in the hope that others will take up its elaboration in the future. I see the formation of the social document as one that aspires to chronicle, speak about or contribute to social phenomena in ways that expand the notion of the social and even of the document. Put another way, it retains a capacity for evolution.

My interest in this topic developed through the *Social Documents* curatorial programme that I devised for Stills (Edinburgh) as well as through a few isolated appearances of the term. The earliest usage I can find in relation to artistic practice is in *Social Process/Collaborative Action: Mary Kelly 1970-1975*, Judith Mastai's catalogue of the exhibition of the same name presented at Vancouver's Emily Carr Institute of Art in

³ While on the one hand 'social relations' denotes relationships between humans (specifically relevant here as a site of artistic production), it incorporates a variety of positions, drawing in Marx's assertion that 'capital is not a thing, but a social relation between persons' as well as Debord's later comments on the spectacle as a specifically historical formation. The latter's visual emphasis is particularly salient here: 'The spectacle is not a collection of images; rather it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images.' Karl Marx, *Capital Volume 1*, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 932. Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1995), 12.

⁴ *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., Vol XV, s.v. "social document."

Design in 1997.⁵ In 2002 the curator Susan Ferleger Brades noted that Ann-Sofi Siden's video installation *Warte Mal! Prostitution after the Velvet Revolution* managed to operate both as an artwork and a 'comprehensive social document' implying the irreducibility of the one to the other.⁶ Some 11 years later Angela Dimitrakaki then employs it in her 2013 monograph *Gender ArtWork and the Global Imperative* in which she examines the function of gender in a global art paradigm turned to labour. This time, examples of works of art functioning as social documents were said to include *particular aspects* of Renzo Martens' documentary-style film *Episode III – Enjoy Poverty* (2008) as well as the exhibition/art project *Women and Work: A Document of Women's Labour in Industry* (1973-75) – instances in which artistic strategies notably employed intensive research as well as (in the case of the latter) curatorial methodologies.⁷ Once again, then, the author sought to differentiate the production of social documents from representational 'art' as such.⁸ Brief though these appearances of the term were, they nevertheless registered enduring and salient tensions regarding conceptualisations of the 'artwork' itself as well as artistic entanglements with 'life'. Furthermore, they appeared to point in the direction of other (art) histories and connections that had hitherto been left unexamined in established accounts of art's so-called documentary turn. Why, then, was the term 'social document' not more widely deployed? What 'difficulties' prevented its broader acceptance and usage? Was this reticence perhaps due to its connection to a certain approach to contemporary art that undermined the latter's predication on – indeed assumed obsession with – 'the new'? These were some of the questions that initially drove my interest and encouraged me to dedicate this thesis (and the associated exhibitions) to experimenting with a concept with which art history and theory apparently felt uncomfortable.

My intention, however, is not simply to develop yet another new and delimiting category for artistic production. Instead, I hold that an examination of the social document and its conditions of emergence raises questions of both political and art historical urgency. The analysis – attempted heretofore the first time – undertakes a mapping of the social document's trajectory in art from 1968 to 2015 using a close examination of selective

⁵ Judith Mastai, ed., *Social Process/Collaborative Action*, (Vancouver, B.C.: Charles H. Scott Gallery, Emily Carr Inst. of Art and Design, 1997).

⁶ Susan Ferleger Brades, "Preface," in *Warte Mal! Prostitution after the Velvet Revolution* (London: Hayward Gallery, 2002), 6. Cited in Angela Dimitrakaki, *Gender, ArtWork and the Global Imperative* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 135.

⁷ These works will be examined in more detail in Chapters 7 and 1 of this thesis respectively.

⁸ Dimitrakaki, *Gender ArtWork and the Global Imperative*, 114.

instances to relate current formations to art historical precedents. The present study also identifies key issues and themes broached by the social document that further illuminate the understandings of art history it can motor. And so, though I place a clear emphasis on developments since 1989 (for reasons that I will elaborate in due course), I do not wish to frame the social document as an entirely new tendency in art practice. Rather, just as conceptualisations of art as a social practice can be said to *re-emerge* around this time, experimentations with the formation of the social document undertaken previously in the twentieth century once again gain traction – this time accepted and indeed *propelled* by the institution and its agents. The reasons behind this support/influence will constitute a central strand of enquiry for this thesis.

Two things are important to note from the outset; first, I am particularly concerned to connect contemporary practice to the question of *realism*, a methodology that divided the avant-garde and neo-avant-garde of the 20th century.⁹ What is at stake in articulating the strength and urgency of a renewed narrative realism in twenty-first century art? Is it possible – or indeed politically useful – to argue that the social document is an enquiry into the possibility of realism? Second, I acknowledge a particular reliance upon feminist theory, politics, art histories and practices. Though the motives underpinning this focus are manifold, the most salient from an art historical point of view is that the social document's evolution as such is most clearly discernable within practices that have been either intentionally positioned or later interpreted as 'feminist'. In addition, beyond the discipline of art history, I have found the sophistication of analyses with respect to the shifting terrains of production (and reproduction) elaborated in feminist thought to be unparalleled elsewhere. Taken together, the attendance to the practice or methodology of realism on the one hand, and feminism as an emancipatory discourse and political praxis on the other, attest to my determination to avoid framing recent developments in art as a sudden and decisive break (as Boris Groys, among others, would have it).¹⁰ Rather the approach pursued in this thesis invites interpretation as a dynamic experimental trajectory – indeed, a *history* of the social document as a proposition for a history of contemporary art, where the breakthroughs of an experimental art

⁹ My usage of the term 'realism' is clarified later in this introduction and then unpacked more fully in Chapter 8.

¹⁰ Boris Groys, "Art in the Age of Biopolitics: From Artwork to Art Documentation," in *Art Power* (London: MIT Press, 2008): 53-65.

intertwined with social movements (feminism, for instance) is no longer particularised as 'a history of...' but spill into, and re-shape, the general field of 'art'.

It is with these thoughts in mind that I resist attending only to the artwork itself. Instead I take a broader perspective to consider this embedding in the 'field' of art; drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's conceptualisation I approach this as a zone of social activity within which a number of overlapping social institutions, relations and influences are in play.¹¹ In terms of my own position as an art historian, I characterise my work as socially informed. While I hold that cultural production and circulation cannot be separated from economic exchange, social shifts and the operations of power, the relationship between them is neither straightforward nor easily describable. Nevertheless, and as the following chapters will demonstrate, it remains vital to attend to the interrelationships that give rise to the social document at particular historical junctures. Though I attend to the period from 1968 to the 2010s as 'the contemporary', I locate the origins of the determined rise of the social document to the year 1989 – the moment when capitalism 'went global', as it were, following the fall of the Berlin Wall and the subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union.¹²

The intervening decades have now witnessed a number of seismic shifts, many of which are explored in detail over the course of the following pages: an apparently insatiable interest in the economy and the formation of 'economic subjects' on the part of artists; the ascendancy of the curator as contemporary art's creative figure *par excellence*; the sweeping proliferation of the establishment of a new global, speculative market in recently-produced art; 'biennial culture' and the concomitant rise of 'Contemporary' as a powerful brand, consolidating value anywhere from the art-fair marquee or auction house to the new public institutions or postgraduate programmes. The list goes on. Within this context, both material and ideological, I aim to demonstrate that the 'social document' provides a uniquely illuminating focus of study. To be clear, although I do introduce and analyse a corpus of artworks produced in a range of geographical areas, this thesis does not perform a survey in that it does not offer a comprehensive review of

¹¹ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, ed. Randal Johnson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993).

¹² See Chapter 3 for a discussion on globalisation. For now I note that there are differing views on globalisation and that an economist is credited with first popularising the term: Theodore Levitt used it in the title of an article in *Harvard Business Review*: "Globalization of Markets" (May–June 1983). However, it was in use before that date, particularly in the fields of sociology and political economy.

the production of social documents across the globe. Rather, I have selected my examples and case studies for their capacity to exemplify important themes, tendencies and, significantly, politically invested questions within this formation. A full list of artists, collectives and projects discussed can be found in Appendix E. This summary is important as it hopefully facilitates a reading of the selection I have performed as a researcher.

0.2 Selective literature overview

In this literature overview the intention is to offer a brief discussion of key texts in order to situate the thesis and to make plain my contribution to the scholarship in this area. This material will be further elaborated upon and used – together with other important, but not fundamental, texts – over the course of subsequent chapters. The aim is to present some core ideas from recent art history and theory that will then be supplemented later in this introduction with an ‘excursus’ that examines conceptualisations of the document and documentary modes more generally. Together, these two sections will lay some crucial foundations for the analysis presented in the chapters that follow.

As intimated above, Boris Groys asserted back in 2002 that art was undergoing nothing short of a radical transformation: recent developments were confronting ‘the question of the relationship between art and life in a completely new context, defined by the aspiration of today’s art to become life itself, not merely to depict life or to offer it art products.’¹³ For him, the *narrative* art document becomes an inevitable – and indispensable – symptom of what he calls the ‘biopolitical age’, *referring* to the reconfigured art/life form rather than becoming an artwork itself.¹⁴ Yet, Groys went on, the process of installation and presentation historically inscribes the document, enabling it to accrue an aura; in other words, a life and originality of its own.¹⁵ Groys’s text undoubtedly stands apart from the majority of theoretical and critical writing associated with the ever-increasing range of artistic practices which seek to intervene in, and shape,

¹³ Groys, “Art in the Age of Biopolitics,” 55.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Here Groys references Walter Benjamin’s influential essay from 1936: “The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility,” *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings. Volume 4, 1938-40*, eds. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, trans. Edmund Jephcott and Others (Cambridge MA; London: Harvard University Press, 1993): 251-283.

social realities. Yet while he does not deploy the term social document he too separates the artwork – which remains, in his words, ‘absent and hidden’ – from its documentation.¹⁶ By contrast, I will argue over the course of this study that the artwork’s reconfiguration has necessitated its *dispersal* across a number of different ‘sites’; while some of these sites or moments are indeed elsewhere or inaccessible to all but very few, they nevertheless incorporate the document as a crucial part of the work.

Acknowledging the outstanding salience of Groys’s observations on context of the document’s ascendancy in art and beyond, over the course of this thesis I extend and elaborate upon his remarks on biopolitics, arguing that, though – with very few exceptions – this term has *not* achieved traction amongst art historians, it is central to an understanding of the social document as well as the significance of its rise. I undertake a more detailed analysis of the histories and usages of the term ‘biopolitics’ in Chapter 4 but for now it is sufficient to note that it describes a politics that deals with life itself, which, in Thomas Lemke’s words, ‘is no longer confined to the singularity of concrete existence but has become an abstraction, an object of scientific knowledge, administrative concern, and technical improvement.’¹⁷ The few references to ‘biopolitical art’ that exist have therefore concerned examples wherein art has been displaced into the artist’s *life* (as opposed to body art, for example) as well as those that seek engagements beyond the conventional boundaries of art.¹⁸ Biopolitics is perhaps best known through the work of Michel Foucault; writing in the 1970s he conceptualised it as a process whereby a ‘whole political network became interwoven with the fabric of everyday life.’¹⁹ While tracing its roots further back in time, Foucault posited the nineteenth century as a crucial period in the consolidation of ‘biopower’.²⁰ Yet the term ‘biopolitics’ first appears in the 1920s, and I emphasise here that it is a concept of the modern and contemporary era.²¹ Its intimate connection to *technological* advances are of particular relevance to the present study, as are the indications that it is a concept of

¹⁶ Groys, “Art in the Age of Biopolitics,” 53.

¹⁷ Thomas Lemke, *Biopolitics: An Advanced Introduction*, trans. Eric Frederick Trump (New York and London: New York University Press, 2011), 117.

¹⁸ This topic will be examined in more detail in Chapter 4.

¹⁹ Michel Foucault, “Lives of Infamous Men,” in *Power: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984*, ed. James D. Faubion, trans. Robert Hurley et al., Vol. 3 (New York: New Press, 2000), 159.

²⁰ Michel Foucault, ““Society Must be Defended”: Lecture at the Collège de France, March 17, 1976,” in *Biopolitics: A Reader*, eds. Timothy Campbell and Adam Sitze, (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2013), 72.

²¹ The term was first used by Rudolf Kjellen who also coined the term ‘geopolitics’. Roberto Esposito, *Bios: Biopolitics and Philosophy* (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 16-17.

growing import from the latter stages of the twentieth century onwards.²² It is with this context in mind that I advance the term 'biopolitical globalisation' in my examination of the specific demands that are placed on art documentation in the twenty-first century.

Meanwhile, in the principal accounts of social practice, the production of associated documents – if mentioned at all – usually receives no more than a cursory acknowledgement.²³ Grant Kester's *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* published in 2004 is a case in point.²⁴ Examining alternative forms of collaborative cultural production based around inter-subjective exchange, he develops an analytical framework for 'dialogical aesthetics'. Documentary modes often constitute an integral part of his case studies' working processes but any consideration of their pervasive use is subordinated, no doubt as a consequence of Kester's desire to move away from art criticism's traditional focus on the perception of physical – or indeed visual – objects towards new criteria. As a result, though the book is amply illustrated with black and white images, little distinction is drawn between installation shots, group snaps of participants, posters, diagrams, video stills and modified photographs. Captions occasionally refer to the precise scale of an image, its medium or the collection within which it is held implying that these particular examples have entered the circuit as artworks in their own right rather than simply existing as incidental (and unacknowledged) documentary ephemera. In all cases, Kester's descriptions are orientated towards the specificities of the encounter and away from images. Moreover, the relationship between the two is not addressed.²⁵ While Dan Karlholm has highlighted the establishment of a 'secondary' audience through the presentation of materials and recordings related to social practice, such positions nevertheless remain, alongside Groys, in the minority.²⁶ Echoing the tendencies of post-war art criticism, it

²² Campbell frames this as 'the ever increasing concern of power with the life biology of its subjects.' Timothy Campbell, "Bios, Immunity, Life: The Thought of Roberto Esposito," in *Bios: Biopolitics and Philosophy*, Roberto Esposito (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), vii.

²³ This catch-all term is used here to denote a broad range of artistic production encompassing that otherwise known as socially-engaged, relational, dialogic, community-based. See Gregory Sholette, "After OWS: Social Practice Art, Abstraction, and the Limits of the Social," *e-flux journal* 31 (2012), accessed Apr 5, 2013, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/31/68204/after-ows-social-practice-art-abstraction-and-the-limits-of-the-social/>.

²⁴ Grant Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

²⁵ Bourriaud's influential essay *Relational Aesthetics* similarly avoided an engagement with documentary modes. He claimed that art is concerned with social exchange and generating relationships (rather than their representation). Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, trans. Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods (Dijon: Presses du Réel, 2002).

²⁶ Dan Karlholm, "Reality Art: The Case of Oda Projesi," *Leitmotiv* 5 (2005-06): 115-124. Karlholm's position will be addressed in more detail in Chapters 1 and 3.

seems that the document is almost always subordinate, unworthy of considered attention, a mere trace or echo of 'the real thing'. As Carl Andre succinctly put it in his scathing appraisal of photography: 'Art is a direct experience with something in the world, and photography is just a rumour, a kind of pornography of art.'²⁷

In stark contrast to such marginalisations of the document, the points of contact between contemporary art and the *documentary genre* (or mediatised culture, more generally) has been subjected to a more sustained interrogation. Within this articulation of the so-called 'documentary turn', it is frequently suggested that the boundaries between these fields are in the process of collapsing. The *Truth or Dare: Art and Documentary* symposium held in 2006 at the Whitechapel Gallery and Tate Modern is just one of many instances wherein attempts were made to frame recent developments in art as a *reinvention* – or at least a reinvigoration – of the *documentary genre* through the innovation of new forms or alternative platforms for display and dissemination (and, presumably, new markets).²⁸ In a similar vein, Maria Lind and Hito Steyerl go so far as to assert in their introduction to an anthology of texts on the subject, that: 'The art field has become a laboratory for the development of new documentary expressions.'²⁹ Their 2008 account places a clear focus on the development of the *documentary genre* since its inception in the late 1920s and examples taken from contemporary art since 1990.³⁰ Five years later T.J. Demos also discussed the 'reinvention' of *documentary practices* through art, this time situating developments in relation to the lived experience of what he calls 'crisis globalisation'.³¹ Others, including Alfredo Cramerotti, have argued that artists are adopting the tropes of mainstream journalism – investigative methodologies, interviews, voice-overs and editing techniques – in order to compensate for its 'blind spots'.³² In short, contemporary art's apparently new commitment to the production,

²⁷ Liza Bear and Willoughby Sharp, "Interviews: Carl Andre," *Avalanche* 1 (1970): 24.

²⁸ Gail Pearce and Cahal McLaughlin, eds., *Truth or Dare: Art & Documentary* (Bristol: Intellect, 2007). The editors of *The Need to Document* and Mark Nash are among the many to have identified a 'documentary turn'. Vit Havránek, Sabine Schaschl-Cooper & Bettina Steinbrügge, eds., *The Need to Document* (Zurich: JRP Ringier, 2005), 11; Mark Nash, *Experiments with Truth* (Philadelphia, Pa.: FWM, The Fabric Workshop and Museum, 2004).

²⁹ Maria Lind and Hito Steyerl, "Introduction: Reconsidering the Documentary and Contemporary Art," in *The Greenroom: Reconsidering the Documentary and Contemporary Art #1*, eds. Maria Lind and Hito Steyerl (Berlin: Sternberg Press & CCS Bard, 2008), 14.

³⁰ A similar focus on the *documentary genre* is found in Hila Peleg's *Berlin Documentary Forum* (2010 – 2014) hosted by The Haus der Kulturen der Welt.

³¹ T.J. Demos, *The Migrant Image: The Art and Politics of Documentary During Global Crisis* (London: Duke University Press, 2013), xii.

³² Stephan Jonsson, "Facts of Aesthetics and Fictions of Journalism: The Logic of the Media in the Age of Globalisation," *Nordicom Review* 1-2 (2004): 57-68. See also Alfredo Cramerotti, *Aesthetic Journalism: How to Inform without Informing* (Bristol; Chicago: Intellect, 2009).

distribution, and perhaps critique, of *information* has frequently been argued to involve a passing over into other fields, disciplines or practices.

In contrast to these approaches, I set out to link the current 'document trend' to the complex and heterogeneous histories of the document in the *art* of the 20th century. Here I must acknowledge the significant volume of literature that has emerged on the topic of documentation in relation to the field of performance art, prompted by Amelia Jones's 1997 essay "'Presence" in Absentia: Experiencing Performance as Documentation'.³³ In this text Jones challenged established understandings which positioned the (temporal) event in opposition to its (representational) recording – the latter positioned by Peggy Phelan as merely a 'spur to memory' – to argue instead for their mutually dependent relationship while also focusing on the specific value of materials hitherto frequently dismissed and rarely subjected to scrutiny.³⁴ What is particularly useful to a theorisation of the social document is that the rich debates that ensued variously attended to the *structure* of the artwork, the implications for the writing of art history and the formation of an audience – or audiences.³⁵ As I will show, however, significant differences, possibilities and histories attend documentation's position vis-à-vis interventions into social relations making an analysis of the social (rather than performance) document both urgent and necessary.

It is surely of relevance that the steady increase in the body of literature addressing the use of documentary modes in artistic practice in recent years is thanks in large part to the catalogues and anthologies that have accompanied exhibitions and curatorial projects registering the phenomenon.³⁶ This state of affairs serves to reinforce an

³³ Amelia Jones, "'Presence" in Absentia: Experiencing Performance as Documentation," *Art Journal* 56, no.4 (1997): 11-18. This was followed by a co-edited anthology of texts: Amelia Jones and Adrian Heathfield, eds., *Perform, Record, Repeat: Live Art in History* (Bristol: Intellect, 2012).

³⁴ Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked. The Politics of Performance* (London: Routledge, 1993), 146. There have also been curatorial efforts to recover and interrogate the place of the lens in performance art. See *Endurance: The Information* (1995) at Exit Art, New York and Gallery 400, Illinois curated by Papo Colo and Jeanette Ingberman; *Live Art on Camera* (2007) at the John Hansard Gallery curated by Alice Maude-Roxby. The latter also has a very useful catalogue: Alice Maude-Roxby, *Live Art on Camera: Performance and Photography* (Southampton: John Hansard Gallery, 2007).

³⁵ Three particular texts are worth highlighting as important: Philip Auslander, "The Performativity of Performance Documentation," *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 28, no. 3 (2006): 1-10; Frazer Ward, *No Innocent Bystanders: Performance Art and Audience* (Hanover, New Hampshire: Dartmouth College Press, 2012); Mechthild Widrich, *Performative Monuments: The Rematerialisation of Public Art* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014).

³⁶ Foremost among them are: Okwui Enwezor *Documenta 11: The Catalogue* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz; London: Art Books International, 2002); Havránek, Schaschl-Cooper and Steinbrügge, eds., *The Need to Document*; Lind and Steyerl, *The Greenroom: Reconsidering the Documentary and Contemporary Art #1*; Erika Balsom and Hila Peleg, eds., *Documentary Across Disciplines* (Cambridge, MA; London: Haus der

important contention of this thesis; namely, that curatorial outputs have played a significant role in *identifying, narrating, thematising, legitimising and, furthermore, arguably precipitating* the ascendancy of documentary modes in art. Given the importance of these contributions they deserve attention alongside conventional academic sources. As I will discuss in Chapter 5, rather than offering a theoretical or art historical underpinning to the displays, these texts are frequently framed by the curatorial conceit as working in tandem as part of an overarching 'project'.

My own research, then, starts out with the contention that there is a problem with how the document in art is currently 'being thought'. Two as yet unpublished doctoral theses have already begun to take discussions in an alternative direction: Amy Charlesworth's examination of the video essay and Nea Ehrlich's work on animated documentaries.³⁷ Though neither is concerned with the social document, their respective enquiries demonstrate that the question of the relationship between the social and technology preoccupies a new generation of art historians. Furthermore, their work resonates with my own identification of returns to ideas of realism, truth and the evidential capacities of the lens. Charlesworth offered an alternative understanding to established accounts that position the video essay as emerging through a post-structuralist framework, arguing instead that its proponents seek to deploy the visual to negotiate the 'vicissitudes of truth,' and relating it specifically to the documentary project as it has evolved through the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.³⁸ Meanwhile, Ehrlich challenged the presumed artificiality of animation, observing that developments in technology that have positioned the digital and the virtual as central to contemporary culture demand new post-photographic theorisations of the documentary. These, she argues, have contributed to the rise of 'truthiness' whereby the lens's claims for objectivity have been expanded to incorporate believability, highlighting the place of the viewer in the attribution of documentary status.³⁹ It cannot be claimed, however, that such alternative approaches are positioned securely within current debates.

Kulturen der Welt, Berlin / The MIT Press, 2016). The latter volume stemmed from Peleg's curatorial project, *The Berlin Documentary Forum* (2010 – 2014).

³⁷ Amy Charlesworth, *The 'Video-Essay' in Contemporary Art: Documenting Capital and Gender for the 21st Century* (Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, University of Leeds, 2013); Nea Ehrlich, *Animated Realities: From Animated Documentaries to Documentary Animation* (Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, University of Edinburgh, 2014).

³⁸ Charlesworth, *The 'Video-Essay' in Contemporary Art*, 4.

³⁹ Introduced in 2005, "truthiness" became Merriam-Webster dictionary's word of the year in 2006. It denotes 'the quality of seeming or felt to be true, even if not necessarily true.' "Press Release: 2006 Word of the Year," Merriam-Webster, accessed Jul 15, 2013, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/press-release/2006-word-of-the-year>.

In sum, by carving a different path through existing debates, literature and curatorial endeavours, I argue that their intersections and respective gaps point to the pressing need for a new and original conceptualisation of the ‘social document’ – one that is capable of overcoming the divisions and distances between existing lines of enquiry to knock discussions into new territories. To be clear, my intention is not to pursue a *defence* of the social document but rather to track its evolutions, purpose and import.

0.3 Research aims and questions

I began my research for this thesis in the wake of the 2008 global finance crisis, a moment that rendered apparent the acceleration of history and well as the conception of globalisation as a largely unknown territory or process. While what Alberto Toscano and Jeff Kinkle have described as the ‘full-blown *blockages*’ preventing adequate representation and orientation in and of the period of ‘late’ capitalism remained firmly in place, this was also a time when reality was being documented to an hitherto unimaginable extent, as camera phones, webcams, CCTV and social media proliferated.⁴⁰ The contrast between the impossibility of ‘imaging’ capitalism (in crisis or otherwise) and the sheer abundance of image documents of everyday life was striking. Furthermore, this context led me to reassess assumptions about documentary modes, to analyse their *evolving* characteristics, registering, among other factors, the implications of advances in technology. It also presented important questions about the *drivers* behind the document trend as a critical strategy in art as well as the distinguishing features of the artworks produced.

Over the course of this thesis I undertake a theorisation of the social document. I address it not as a *genre* of art but rather as *an effect that arises through a range of practices that cleave to social relations*. I argue that the social document holds a central position within the vanguard of contemporary art in the twenty-first century. Indeed, it traverses and connects many of the key strands that are now commonly taken to signal this position as numerous recent anthologies and textbooks testify. These include the *Truth Is Concrete* project that sought to map the territories of engaged art and artistic activism between 2012 and 2015. Among the topics addressed in the associated handbook, many pertain

⁴⁰ Alberto Toscano and Jeff Kinkle, *Cartographies of the Absolute* (Alresford: Zero Books, 2015), 11.

to the social document: assuming control of knowledge production, 'reality bending', reclaiming media spaces to create new visions of the commons, 'taking care', 'paying attention', and, of course, the preponderance of documentary modes.⁴¹ To these I would add the question of realism and 'the curatorial'.⁴²

As stated, I compile here a *selective* history of the social document. Key questions have guided my research and these will be addressed over the course of the following chapters and returned to again in the conclusion:

1. What is a social document and what questions does it raise vis-à-vis 'the artwork' as such, the infrastructures of the art field and the relationship between art and society?
2. Why has the demand for the social document increased in parallel with the shifting political, cultural and economic realities induced and accelerated by what has come to be termed 'globalisation'?
3. What new dimensions and insights can the social document's analysis bring to prevailing themes or tendencies within contemporary art practice and theory?
4. When it is *also* an art document, is the social document at heart a conservative and contingent device that returns the artwork to the institution, or does it maintain a tension by challenging the containment and self-awareness of art *as art*?
5. Does the social document represent a new approach to political realism in art?⁴³

0.4 Methodologies

My research methods consisted of a comprehensive survey of relevant literature, interviews with artists and curators as well as fieldwork including exhibitions and archive visits. Beyond these, a crucial aspect of my work in this area has been exhibition-

⁴¹ Steirischer Herbst and Florian Malzacher, eds., *Truth is Concrete: A Handbook for Artistic Strategies in Real Politics* (Berlin: Sternberg; Graz: Steirischer Herbst, 2014).

⁴² A term that has gained considerable traction in recent years, 'the curatorial' is linked to, but differs from, 'curating' in that it consciously refers to a broader mode of cultural praxis capable of producing a range of outcomes – not only exhibitions. Often described as a methodology, the focus tends to be orientated away from final products and towards processes, methods and tactics. For a brief introduction to the relevant debates see: Eszter Szakács, "Curatorial," Curatorial Dictionary, accessed Sep 27, 2016, <http://tranzit.org/curatorialdictionary/index.php/dictionary/curatorial/>.

⁴³ In my use of 'political realism' I mean to implicate both senses of the term – to draw in a history of practices or methodologies from the cultural field as well as the more colloquial understanding that implies pragmatism.

making: from the beginning I have set out to *investigate the potential of employing curating as a research methodology*. In the year prior to the commencement of my thesis research I undertook two exhibition projects as part of my curatorial role at Stills (Edinburgh) that raised questions that decisively influenced the direction my work in this area would subsequently take.⁴⁴ These were Nicky Bird's photographic examination of the personal impact of economic change and regeneration in communities across Scotland using participants' personal snapshots, and the *Martha Rosler Library* – a project by the artist Anton Vidokle which presented 7,700 of Rosler's books in the white-cube gallery space provoking complex questions around authorship and viewership.⁴⁵ Though Bird's and Vidokle's respective projects pursued very different strategies, both negotiated connections between the lens and practices predicated on the encounter.

Given my background in curating, exhibitions were an obvious 'output' for my doctoral research. Between 2009 and 2013 I presented a parallel curatorial programme entitled *Social Documents* for Stills and, in one case, for the Centre for Contemporary Arts in Glasgow.⁴⁶ However, my approach was not orientated towards presenting complete or closed bodies of research (a crowning gesture, as it were) but rather to more experimental engagements with the topic which *preceded* my writing. A case in point is the *Social Documents* programme's first episode: *The Ethics of Encounter* (2009/10). This curatorial project examined the persistent invocation of ethics in relation to practices and theorisations of contemporary art through a two-part exhibition as well as an events and screening programme, artist residency and an AHRC-funded research workshop.⁴⁷ The juxtaposition of works in the initial exploratory project was useful in that it foregrounded particular 'sub-tendencies' including a previously neglected gendered dimension: while transgressive works where participants, subjects or viewers were variously exploited, humiliated and tricked were perpetrated mainly by male artists, in the case of women artists the 'target' was usually the artist herself.⁴⁸ Another perspective revealed that the a-symmetrical power relationships underpinning works which have

⁴⁴ Stills is a centre for the production and display of photography and lens-based art funded by Creative Scotland. I held programming and curatorial positions with the organisation between 2005 and 2014. See www.stills.org.

⁴⁵ *Beneath the Surface Hidden Place*, Nicky Bird (2008); *Martha Rosler Library*, Anton Vidokle (2008).

⁴⁶ See Appendices A-C. Appendix D also includes details of a related subsequent exhibition I co-curated with Owen Logan entitled *The King's Peace: Realism and War* (2014).

⁴⁷ "The Ethics of Encounter Research Workshop" (Stills, 2011, accessed Nov 5, 2016, http://www.stills.org/ethics_workshop).

⁴⁸ Based on 'evidence' presented in this exhibition Angela Dimitrakaki later able to identify the emergence of a new set of 'Bad Boys' in art. See Dimitrakaki, *Gender, ArtWork and the Global Imperative*, 195.

provoked heated ethical debates often played out along the lines of *economic* relations, whether the artist was dealing with the 'Bonoification' of politics, NGOism in the Congo or queer lived subjectivities in deprived communities. *The Ethics of Encounter* thereby established fertile lines of enquiry which I subsequently developed through a series of conference papers, further curatorial projects, a book chapter and in the pages of this thesis.

Rather than undertake yet another survey of the documentary modes in contemporary art practice, *Social Documents* represented an attempt to reveal some of the formation's constitutive features. These are reflected in the selected case studies addressed over the following chapters and more accounts of the exhibition projects can be found in the appendices. Though some aspects were more collaborative than others (for example the final exhibition in the series, ECONOMY, was co-curated with Angela Dimitrakaki), each has involved a great deal of collective or joint-working and discursive exchange, all of which has been beneficial to the development of my research. Most important among these have been my experiences working with artists. The process of exhibition-making has afforded me opportunities to meet and discuss their practice in detail during studio visits, as well as to gain insights through conversations conducted over Skype and email. These 'durational interviews' have often spanned many years, as is the case with Martha Rosler, Dani Marti, WochenKlausur, Melanie Gilligan and Allan Sekula (who sadly passed away in 2013). Handling works and organising the display of archival documents – such as those relating to the *Tucuman Arde* (1968) intervention – also revealed a great deal about the significance of 'timeliness' to the social document.⁴⁹ Commissioning a new participatory work by the Austrian collective WochenKlausur, as part of the curatorial research, proved particularly illuminating, leading me to open up further avenues of research into the ethics and politics of care.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ See Chapter 1.

⁵⁰ See Chapter 6.

0.5 Excursus: Document(ary)

*The artwork is only incidentally a document.
No document is, as such, a work of art.*⁵¹

*[T]he photograph's status as evidence and record
(like its status as Art) had to be produced and
negotiated to be established.*⁵²

Before advancing a definition of the *social* document – the development of which is a central task of this thesis – it is first necessary to examine what is meant by ‘a document’ and ‘documentary modes’. To this end I borrow a device employed by Frances Stracey in the introductory chapter of her history of the Situationist International.⁵³ Here she included two ‘excurses’ dedicated to unpacking familiar concepts and notions, reinvigorating their meaning and complexity in order to lay the foundations for her subsequent argument. It is in this spirit that I use the following section to mark out the contours of relevant discussions that will be returned to and fleshed out over the course of this thesis.

What, then, is a document? What form can it take and how does it attain – and retain – this status? The relatively recent technological advances of the digital era which prompted a leap from the tangible hardcopy to the virtual world of code, has already confirmed that no singular definition or description is secure and that any account must be capable of evolution. In light of these developments, Michael Buckland revisited the work of two historical figures from the field of information science: Paul Otlet, the individual credited with anticipating the internet as networked model for holding and disseminating knowledge through documents, and the librarian Suzanne Briet.⁵⁴ While Otlet extended the definition of the document to incorporate any object that can be observed and used as an informative reference, Briet took this logic further, stating: ‘A document is evidence in support of a fact ... [It] is any physical or symbolic sign, preserved or recorded, intended to represent, or reconstruct, or to demonstrate a

⁵¹ Walter Benjamin, “Thirteen Theses against Snobs,” in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings. Volume 1, 1913-1926*, eds. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge MA; London: Harvard University Press, 2002), 459.

⁵² John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan Education Ltd, 1988), 6.

⁵³ Frances Stracey, *Constructed Situations: A New History of the Situationist International* (London: Pluto Press, 2014).

⁵⁴ Michael Buckland, “What is a “Document”?,” *Journal of the American Society for Information Science* 48, no. 9 (1997): 804–809.

physical or conceptual phenomenon.’⁵⁵ The primacy she afforded to function over form led her to take the document beyond even three dimensions and into the living world: contrasting an antelope running wild to another housed and displayed in a zoo, she argued that, in becoming physical evidence through being used by those who study it, the captured animal can be classed as a document.

Object	Document?
Star in sky	No
Photo of star	Yes
Stone in river	No
Stone in museum	Yes
Animal in wild	No
Animal in zoo	Yes

Figure 1: Susan Briet’s table from her manifesto on the nature of documentation published in 1951⁵⁶

As her table shows, intentionality and perception are paramount. By definition, then, the document is mediated, or, understood another way, *it is a form that mediation assumes* (teaching, for instance): either it can be a photographic or textual record of a material thing, or it can be the thing itself. In both cases it must be inserted into a system or institution that allows it to be represented, comprehended and *used* as a document. To this observation can be added the implicit authority – or authorial figure – behind the designative enunciation ‘this is a document’. Furthermore, this process certifies it as a repository, or source, of information, bringing with it an associated set of routines and practices. Michel de Certeau argued that this process of ‘setting aside’ changes both the ‘locus and status’ of the document, effectively producing it as such through a rules-based academic practice.⁵⁷ Always already separated from its original context, the ‘poached’, or

⁵⁵ Susan Briet (1951) *Qu’est-ce que la documentation* (Paris: EDIT, 1951), 7. Cited in Buckland, “What is a “Document”?”, 806.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ ‘In history everything begins with the gesture of *setting aside*, of putting together, of transforming certain classified objects into ‘documents.’ This new cultural distribution is the first task. In reality it consists in *producing* such documents by dint of copying, transcribing, or photographing these objects, simultaneously changing their locus and their status.’ Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, trans. Tom Conley (New York: Columbia, University Press, 1988), 72.

constructed, document's meaning is dependent on the manner in which it is used, narrated and interpreted.

These accounts are compatible with the etymological roots of the term 'document' which connotes information, evidence and learning/teaching, while subsequent usages have invited more explicit associations with truth and authority.⁵⁸ Together with the archive the document is frequently associated with Enlightenment values of power, authority and control as well as the development of capitalism. To be sure, the rationalisation of time and space were crucial to the construction of the latter: latitude, longitude, synchronised time, anthropology, archives and recording devices ensured dominance over the past and present together with control over the future. Moreover, such 'objective information' served – and indeed still serves – to justify this dominance, to *ground it in logic and inevitability*.

According to Briet, the one thing that the document *cannot* be is pure, unadulterated life (even, it can be assumed, in the digital information age); it is defined in relation to its context and does not possess a formal style per se. Yet this contention stands in danger of opening the term up to such an extent that it is emptied of all meaning. This thesis focuses on the production of *lens-based* narrative documents as materials which bring a particular set of questions, histories and theorisations. Of course, when considering photographic or filmic documents, issues of power and authority are no less relevant; indeed, they are further bolstered by what Roland Barthes memorably referred to as the 'evidential force' conferred by the lens.⁵⁹ As Steve Edwards succinctly puts it:

Documentary developed as a tool of the liberal state and reform movements at the end of the nineteenth century, when photographs began to be utilised by private and state institutions to gather intelligence on the working class, the poor and colonial subjects for the attention of various experts.⁶⁰

Yet, despite the camera's ability to produce an (apparently or not) objective record of what lies in front of it, this reference to specific usages illustrates well the lens-based document's implicit connection to particular formal approaches and aesthetic modes. The conventions and characteristics associated with 'documentary' have evolved in

⁵⁸ *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., Vol IV, s.v. "document."

⁵⁹ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Jonathan Cape, 1982), 89.

⁶⁰ Steve Edwards, *Martha Rosler: The Bowery in Two Inadequate Descriptive Systems* (London: Afterall, 2012), 77.

relation to its official and vernacular usages as well as the rich traditions of its eponymous genre in both photography and moving-image formats. While my intention here is *not* to argue that the social document in contemporary art is the latest in a long line of rebirths of the documentary genre – or indeed its wholesale import into art – the debates surrounding its development will nevertheless percolate through and inform the argument of the thesis. Sketching an outline of relevant strands of enquiry will therefore be of benefit.

Firstly, it is worth clarifying some of the distinctions that have been drawn between the document and the documentary. According to the film theorist Philip Rosen:

if shots as indexical traces of past realities must be treated as documents in the broad sense, documentary can be treated as a conversion from the document. This conversion involves a synthesising knowledge claim, by virtue of a sequence that sublates an undoubtable referential field of pastness into meaning.⁶¹

Rosen posits the documentary as something that has been consciously worked upon, calling to mind John Grierson's early description of such practices as 'the creative treatment of actuality.'⁶² Like the archive then, the documentary film can be described as a mediation framework for the document, organising and presenting material temporally (or spatially in the case of a photo-series) while classifying and contextualising to bestow additional authority and meaning. The process of producing the documentary film is an inherently contingent one of creative synthesis. This is the paradox that underpins the historic fluidity – even instability – at the heart of the documentary genre: despite being constituted through layers of mediation, it nevertheless retains strong associations with truth, transparency and objectivity. It both 'says' and 'shows', simultaneously offering narrative and proof, usually as part of a purposeful process of knowledge production.⁶³

The pervasive questions around the scope for objectivity in nonfiction film that began with the issues around creative selection gained new ground through the scepticism induced by post-structuralism and postmodern discourse. Working in this vein Michael

⁶¹ Philip Rosen, "Document and Documentary: On the Persistence of Historical Concepts," in *Theorizing Documentary*, ed. Michael Renov (New York; London: Routledge, 1993), 71.

⁶² John Grierson, "The Documentary Producer," *Cinema Quarterly* 2, no. 1 (1933): 8.

⁶³ Carl Plantinga, "What a Documentary Is, After All," in *Documentary*, ed. Julian Stallabrass (London: Whitechapel Gallery and MIT Press, 2013), 59.

Renov asserted documentary film's 'tropic character (their recourse to tropes or rhetorical figures)', to undermine the distinction between fiction and nonfiction.⁶⁴ Similarly, in her trenchant critique of the documentary tradition, Trinh T. Minh-ha catalogued some of the naturalised persuasive techniques, by which (in her terms) 'fact-makers' construct the real.⁶⁵ Such codes of veracity are variously said to include the long take, wide framing, minimal editing and informal, handheld camera movements or narrative devices such as personal testimony and subjective argumentation. While acknowledging that such stylistic conventions and correlations exist, Noel Carroll has argued that they do not preclude the possibilities of objectivity or indeed the documentary's knowledge claim: far from reliant upon formal devices, the viewer is primed in advance to encounter a film as a nonfiction through a process of 'indexing'. Expectations – *and, by extension, responses* – are mobilised through presentation and context as well as the way in which the film has been framed by the discursive community at large.⁶⁶ He goes on to defend the use of narrative in documentary film, countering Renov's contention that such devices equate the work with fiction by citing the use of similar methodologies in academic disciplines. The lens's privileged relationship with reality has similarly been challenged: the indexicality achieved through proximity and causal connection to the original scene has lost its assured associations with objectivity and evidentiary value as the functions of 'truth' and 'the real' have come under sustained scrutiny. In the words of the artist and theorist Martha Rosler: 'The credibility of the image as the explicit trace of the comprehensible in the living world has been whittled away for both "left" and "right" reasons.'⁶⁷ Yet the photograph or film nevertheless retains a strong link to the thing to which it refers, the cause that left the physical trace. As Linda Williams noted in 1993, a strong triple bind had emerged: a growing suspicion of the image (and its ability to convey lived experience) has been

⁶⁴ Michael Renov, "Introduction: The Truth About Non-Fiction," in *Theorizing Documentary*, ed. Michael Renov (New York; London: Routledge, 1993), 7.

⁶⁵ Trinh T. Minh-ha, "The Totalizing Quest of Meaning," in *Theorizing Documentary*, ed. Michael Renov (New York; London: Routledge, 1993), 94.

⁶⁶ Noel Carroll, "From Real to Reel: Entangled in Nonfiction Film," *Philosophic Exchange* 14, no. 1 (1983): 5-45; Noel Carroll, "Nonfiction Film, Postmodernist Skepticism," in *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies*, eds. David Bordwell and Noel Carroll (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996): 283-306. 'The distinction between nonfiction and fiction is a distinction between the commitments of the texts, not between the surface structures of the texts.' Ibid., 287.

⁶⁷ Martha Rosler, "In, around and Afterthoughts (on Documentary Photography)," in *Decoys and Disruptions: Selected Writings, 1975-2001* (New York; Cambridge MA: MIT Press in association with International Center of Photography, 2004), 188.

accompanied by a thirst for documentary footage together with a desire on the part of the viewer to have what remained of their trust exploited.⁶⁸

Underlying the fluidity of the concept of 'documentary', Oliver Lugon has identified three core concerns that have persisted throughout its evolution: 'the encyclopaedic/educational trend, the heritage/conservation line, and the social/political approach.'⁶⁹ Grierson and his followers enthusiastically promoted the documentary as a pedagogic tool while, more recently, Bill Nichols has suggested that the form has continued to 'stimulate epistophilia' (a desire to know) amongst its audience.⁷⁰ Keen to differentiate the documentary from its other non-fiction counterparts, Grierson elevated the intimate knowledge produced through the former's thorough, long-term engagement with a subject against 'lower' materials designed for the immediate and rapid consumption of (entertaining) information.⁷¹ While Carroll has emphasised the protocols that documentary shares with academic disciplines (research, evidence and interpretation), this claim to knowledge – again, historically imbued with the spirit of Enlightenment – has been frequently challenged by an expanding set of questions concerning the kind of knowledge produced: its social, political contexts and the ethical implications of its production. A powerful example remains Rosler's excoriating analysis of the social documentary (again, *not* 'social document') genre, which specifically addressed the ideological basis of image production and reception: 'Documentary, as we know it, carries (old) information about a group of powerless people to another group addressed as socially powerful.'⁷² For her, guided by a conservative reformist – rather than revolutionary – moralism, such images deploy the camera's indexicality to *naturalise* circumstances rather than to reveal truths that are otherwise invisible.

Here we loop back to developments in photographic theory from the 1970s, the flavour of which John Tagg captured with the phrase: 'Like the state, the camera is never

⁶⁸ Linda Williams, "Mirrors Without Memories: Truth, History and the New Documentary," *Film Quarterly* 46, no. 3 (1993): 12.

⁶⁹ Oliver Lugon, "'Documentary': Authority and Ambiguities," in *The Greenroom: Reconsidering the Documentary and Contemporary Art #1*, (Berlin, Sternberg Press & CCS Bard): 28-37.

⁷⁰ Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary* Second Edition (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2010), 40.

⁷¹ John Grierson, "First Principles of Documentary," in *Grierson on Documentary*, ed. Forsyth Hardy, (London: Collins, 1946), 78.

⁷² Rosler, "In, around and Afterthoughts," 179.

neutral.⁷³ Tagg focused on the 'discursive systems' within which the photographic image operates. Informed by Michel Foucault, Louis Althusser as well as semiotics, he proposed that Foucault's use of the Panopticon as the metaphor of the new social order could have been the photograph:

by the end of the nineteenth century, it could be argued, the new will to power, founded on a fateful threefold unity of knowledge, control and utility, could find a new metaphor in the unobtrusive cells of the photographic frame; in its ever more minute division of time and motion; in its ever finer scrutiny of bodies in stringent laboratory conditions.⁷⁴

If, nearly three decades later, Gerard Raunig could once again remark on the oppressive dimension of photographic document, given its 'affirmation of power, property and discipline', it is important to note that Tagg also insisted on power's generative capacities: 'It produces reality', he claimed.⁷⁵

The critiques waged against the positivist belief in authentic knowledge, derived purely through actual sense experience (or the physical trace of it), relate closely to some of the trenchant debates around realism. While frequently echoing the positions outlined above, realism offers an expanded theoretical and philosophical toolkit together with a more advanced basis in the discipline of art history – though both John Grierson and Robert Flaherty anchored documentary to a realist tradition.⁷⁶ That said, as Raymond Williams put it back in 1976, 'realism' is 'a difficult word'. He goes on: 'Reality is here seen not as static *appearance* but as the movement of psychological or social or physical forces; realism is then a conscious commitment to understanding and describing these.'⁷⁷ Seeking to acknowledge its relevance across cultural forms, as well as its imbrication with philosophical debates and politics, Matthew Beaumont defines realism as: 'the assumption that it is possible, through the act of representation, in one semiotic code or another, to provide cognitive as well as imaginative access to a material, historical reality that, though irreducibly mediated by human consciousness, and of course by language,

⁷³ Tagg, *The Burden of Representation*, 63.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 87.

⁷⁵ Gerald Raunig, "The Document as Present Becoming," in *The Need to Document*, eds. Vit Havránek, Sabine Schaschl-Cooper and Bettina Steinbrügge (Zurich: JRP Ringier, 2005), 89; Tagg, *The Burden of Representation*, 87.

⁷⁶ John Grierson, "The Course of Realism," in *Grierson on Documentary*, ed. Forsyth Hardy (London: Collins, 1946): 132-144.

⁷⁷ Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 257; 261 Williams' volume set out to excavate specific terms in general usage within everyday and academic debates around culture and society.

is nonetheless independent of it.’⁷⁸ These are complex terrains and a core task of this thesis is to unpack this term. Suffice to say for now that I do not ally myself with those positions that hold it to be concerned merely with the mimesis of surface appearances, but rather those that hold it to be a critical commitment.

I will close this excursion with some brief comments on the relationship between the document, documentary and the histories and sites of ‘art’. Walter Benjamin’s *Thirteen Theses against Snobs* from 1928, cited in the epigraph above, articulates the gulf between the conceptual framings of art, the document and their respective modes of consumption. John Grierson’s coinage of the term ‘documentary’ in 1926 roughly coincided with Alfred Barr Jr.’s development a new, sparse display model at MoMA in 1929: just as the nascent white cube began the process of banishing the exterior world (regulating everything from lighting to climate controls and ever more sophisticated security), the documentary genre was defining itself through a desire to open up and engage directly with social realities. More recently, during an interview conducted in 1998, the artist Allan Sekula rather humorously remarked that ‘in this sort of intellectual environment, simply to insist that social or economic life can or should be represented now seems like an ethical reproach, as welcome as dragging in a dead cat.’⁷⁹ And yet, despite this apparent antipathy, viewed from another perspective the need to document can be described as a pervasive and recurring feature in the history of twentieth-century art. Indeed, as I will argue, lens-based documentation has played a decisive role in the multifarious intersections between art and life.

0.6 Thesis outline

This thesis is divided into two parts. **Part I** sets out to plot and tease out the complex trajectory of the social document and to develop a definition of the term. Notably, my efforts to anchor documentary modes more securely within art history *runs against established genealogies*, which frequently privilege other features and accounts – for example the ascendancy of cinematographic lens-based artworks.⁸⁰ I emphasise that

⁷⁸ Matthew Beaumont, “Introduction: Reclaiming Realism,” in *Adventures in Realism* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2007), 2.

⁷⁹ Debra Risberg, “Interview with Allan Sekula,” in *Dismal Science: Photo Works, 1972-1996*, Allan Sekula (Normal: University Galleries, Illinois State University, 1999), 237.

⁸⁰ Dominic Costello and Margaret Iversen, eds., *Photography after Conceptual Art* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010).

though I am presenting here a linear narrative that demonstrates the objective grounds on which such a history of the document can be put together, *this is not necessarily a teleological or progressivist one.*

Chapter 1 assesses the demand for the lens-based document after 1968 across a range of socio-economic contexts, paying particular attention to interpolations with social struggle. Here I take up my contention above to propose a reconsideration of the history of twentieth-century art which positions the document as a structural force. My analysis of specific debates and case studies pays particular attention to those associated with conceptual art, including Mary Kelly's groundbreaking *Post-Partum Document* (London, 1973-75/79), Grupo de Artistas de Vanguardia's *Tucumán Arde* (*Tucumán Is Burning*) intervention staged under Argentina's Onganía dictatorship in 1968 and an example from a state-socialist context: Sanja Iveković's *Triangle* (Yugoslavia, 1979). I argue that these experimental realist works open up new possibilities for the document in art and highlight particular capabilities, tendencies and facets that will be returned to over the course of the thesis. My account begins, then, with a decisive move away from understandings of documents (art or otherwise) that variously dismiss them as dry, static and 'cold'.

Chapter 2 then moves forward in time to address the apparent *proscription* of documentary modes under postmodernism, analysing, and indeed challenging, what I call the 'lineage of disappearance'. Returning to the theoretical and philosophical contributions of Fredric Jameson and Jean-François Lyotard among others, I note the salience of contemporaneous positions on the concept of 'totality' to this lineage, as well, as the abandonment of truth and the destabilisation of representation (inspired by critiques that emerged principally through post-structuralism). Yet at the same time, I call attention to a rejuvenated demand for (frequently self-) documentation that can be connected to the emergence of new political subjectivities.

Chapters 3 and 4 together present an overview of the unparalleled rise in art since 1989 of documentary modes in general and social documents in particular, as well the shifting political and economic circumstances under which this profusion has occurred. **Chapter 3** elaborates on artistic production, plotting the sheer diversity of uses and appearances of the document and documentary modes over this period while noting that the attendant critical reception tends to be animated by either iconophobic or iconophilic

tendencies. I problematise this dichotomy and, through an analysis of works by Ala Plástica, Rick Lowe and Harun Farocki among others, re-examine the place of the visual. Against the critical focus on artistic strategies that ‘fictionalise’ or otherwise ‘corrupt’ documentary modes, I argue that a strong current in artistic production makes a renewed claim on social realities and relations that prioritises the evidential capacities of the lens.

Chapter 4 constitutes the core of the thesis: here I advance a definition of the social document and contextualise its ascendance. It begins with a consideration of the implications of the transition from ‘postmodernism’ to ‘globalisation’ as descriptors of the contemporary.⁸¹ I then move on to an analysis of biopolitics as a theoretical framework, arguing that the role and characteristics of documentary modes across a range of sites and contexts demand further consideration of the era of ‘biopolitical globalisation’ – a term through which I seek to facilitate an expansion beyond globalisation’s geographical focus to attend to ‘life’ and subjectivity. I argue that the social document’s marked predilection for *economic* (rather than *cultural*) subjects reflects a much broader shift, one that reveals the economy to be concerned not just with production but capitalism’s new frontier: ourselves. In this chapter, then, I test the hypothesis that the social document constitutes *the* exemplary artistic output in the times of biopolitical globalisation.

Part II adopts a case study model in order to facilitate more in-depth analyses centred on four thematics. My aim has been to further develop an understanding of the term in its theoretical specificity through these shorter, more focused chapters. Though a number of strands of enquiry could have been taken up, those developed here have not been informed by a subjective preference, but rather capture topics that have become, or are in the process of becoming, preponderant at this time. Broadly, these are: the curatorial, social reproduction, ethics, and realism.

Following my proposition above – that curatorial endeavours have played a large part in not only narrativising and theorising but *precipitating* the deployment of documentary

⁸¹ I acknowledge here that I have taken certain liberties in presenting these to terms as antithetical. This has been done for analytical reasons, to facilitate my analysis of the artwork and the art field. The relationship between them remains to be properly clarified but such a task lies beyond the scope of this thesis.

modes in contemporary art – **Chapter 5** offers an analysis of the coincident rise of the social document and the curator as an exemplary figure in contemporary art production. From global ‘blockbuster’ exhibitions, right through to relatively small-scale research networks, I examine how the social document traverses and negotiates a core tension between display and discursive or pedagogic endeavours, thereby offering a fresh perspective on ‘the curatorial’. My primary case study is *A Crime against Art* (2008), an (admittedly peculiar) social document that exemplifies the reconfigurations that the artwork has undergone. In doing so it adds further dimensions to the question on the extent to which the social document can be described as a curatorial product.

Chapter 6 takes up the same issue, this time by way of an examination of Rosler’s *If You Lived Here....* (1989) – a social document that only arises as such through the artist’s curatorial gesture. Through what can be described as a process of militant curiosity Rosler tackled urgent themes of housing, gentrification and homelessness, asserting once again the centrality of urban questions to social struggle.⁸² I use feminist elaborations on the concept of ‘social reproduction’ to unpack this prescient work and advance Fredric Jameson’s sketched outline of ‘cognitive mapping’ as a realist strategy – one capable of connecting the abstract to the lived, and, furthermore, one that in this case necessitates the production of the social document.

Chapter 7 attempts to grasp the shifts that differentiate Rosler’s social document from more recent instances from the 2010s that nevertheless continue to grapple with the politics and ethics of care. I connect the latter’s *prioritisation* of ethics to its supposed ‘triumph’ over politics in the era of biopolitical globalisation. Examining the social documents that arise through two practices featured within my associated exhibition programme – the collective WochenKlausur and the artist Dani Marti – I offer an alternative perspective to those current debates on the intersections between ethics and aesthetics that leave us with a binary shock-versus-salve stalemate. Arguing instead for the relevance of ‘care ethics’ to recent incarnations of the social document (and the artworks of which it forms a part), I further stress that analyses must integrate a consideration of *economic* dimensions and relations.

⁸² Jorge Ribalta has argued that the theoretical output of Henri Lefebvre, Manuel Castells, and David Harvey in the 1970s ‘laid the foundations for a contemporary understanding of the city as a historical phenomenon within the history of capitalism and the new role of social movements as a political vanguard.’ Jorge Ribalta ed., *Not Yet: On the Reinvention of Documentary and the Critique of Modernism: Essays and Documents, 1972-1991* (Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, 2015), 24.

Chapter 8 concludes the thesis by testing a final hypothesis: that the social document contributes to the tradition of realism as a critical commitment. Pressing into view realism's long and established connections with revolutionary politics, I counter the shallow invocations of the term evident in the vast majority of recent literature on documentary modes in art to directly engage with the challenges and contradictions signaled by Williams. A social document produced by Pilvi Takala constitutes my central case study and I 'turn' this work through the debates in order to assess their relevance. More specifically, I make recourse to the defence of realism advanced by Georg Lukács, particularly in the 1920s and 1930s in order to address more precisely the returns and reorientations witnessed in biopolitical globalisation to evidence, totality and truth – vexed yet tenacious conceptions that strike at the heart of the social document as I conceive it.

0.7 Final introductory remarks

Over the course of the production of this thesis I benefited from testing my material and arguments through participating in panel discussions as well as numerous conferences. I have also co-organised research workshops, symposia and reading groups that have further grounded and expanded my thinking on this topic, details of which are summarised in Appendix F.⁸³ In accordance with the assessment regulations I acknowledge that a proportion of the material included in this thesis has been published during the course of my doctoral research. Chapter 5 includes elements of my article 'Endgame? Reconfiguring the Artwork', which appeared in the journal *Third Text* in 2012.⁸⁴ Chapter 4 draws from the ideas presented in the introductory chapter of the edited volume *ECONOMY: Art Production & the Subject in the 21st Century* co-written with Angela Dimitrakaki, and Chapter 6 of this thesis expands on my single-authored chapter from the same volume entitled 'Being with, across, over and through: Caring Subjects, Ethics Debates and the Encounter in Contemporary Art'.⁸⁵ Finally, a version of Chapter 7

⁸³ See Appendix F for details.

⁸⁴ Kirsten Lloyd, "Endgame? Reconfiguring the Artwork," *Third Text* 26, no. 5 (2012): 529-542.

⁸⁵ Dimitrakaki and Lloyd, "The Last Instance: The Apparentness of Economy, Social Struggles and Art in Global Capitalism," in *ECONOMY: Art, Production & The Subject in the 21st Century*, eds. Angela Dimitrakaki and Kirsten Lloyd (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015): 1-32; Kirsten Lloyd, "Being with, across, over and through: Caring Subjects, Ethics Debates and the Encounter in Contemporary Art," in *ECONOMY: Art, Production & The Subject in the 21st Century*, eds. Angela Dimitrakaki and Kirsten Lloyd (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015): 140-157.

will appear in the edited volume *Feminism and Art History Now* entitled '*If You Lived Here... : A Case Study on Social Reproduction in Feminist Art History*'.⁸⁶

Through the analysis undertaken in this thesis I aim to grasp what drives the production of the social document as well as what its remarkable proliferation reveals about the relationship between art and society. Does it simply offer an explanatory tool of record or does it participate in imagining society differently? To paraphrase Thomas Lemke: what does the rise of the social document reveal about the meaning of art and politics in biopolitical times?⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Kirsten Lloyd, "*If You Lived Here... : A Case Study on Social Reproduction in Feminist Art History*," in *Feminism and Art History Now!*, eds. Victoria Horne and Lara Perry (London: I.B. Tauris, *forthcoming in 2017*).

⁸⁷ Lemke, *Biopolitics*, xiii.

PART I

TOWARDS A HISTORY OF THE SOCIAL DOCUMENT 1968-2015

CHAPTER 1

The Demand for the Document and Social Struggles

1.1 *New, emergent subjectivities*

In this chapter I begin the task of locating the emergence of social document within the narratives of art history, focusing on the period between 1968 and 1979, a time when the labour movement was at its peak, and when, for a number of commentators, ‘post-war’ gave way to the ‘contemporary’ following the transnational student and worker uprisings of May 1968.¹ It is also a time associated with the initial stirrings of neoliberalism, political economic practices marked, in David Harvey’s words, by ‘deregulation, privatization, and withdrawal of the state from many areas of social provision,’ as well as post-Fordism – the name given to a capitalist economy liberated from the old, redundant order of the strict assembly line.²

Remarkably little work has been done to date in terms of looking back to examine the interrelations of lens and social struggle during this decade – particularly as regards feminism. Important recent work in this area has included Antigoni Memou’s examination of the place and contribution of photography in just a few of the great variety of social movements that emerged through ‘68 and beyond as well as Siona Wilson’s excavation of the connections between UK feminist artistic production and labour politics. Yet the latter’s focus on feminism contrasted sharply with the inexplicable absence of this perspective in Jorge Ribalta’s curatorial account of the reinvention of the ‘documentary idea’ presented at the Museo Reina Sofía, Madrid in 2015.³ In his foreword to the associated exhibition book Ribalta foregrounds the

¹ Göran Therborn, “Class in the 21st Century,” *New Left Review* 77 (2012): 78; Editors, “The Legacy of May ‘68,” *New Left Review* 115 (1979): 1. For an account of ‘68 as a watershed moment and global phenomenon see Carole Fink, Philipp Gassert and Detlef Junker, eds., *1968: The World Transformed* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). As Therborn outlines, the waning of workers’ power came hot on the heels of this peak.

² David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 3.

³ Antigoni Memou, *Photography and Social Movements: From the Globalisation of the Movement (1968) to the Movement against Globalisation (2001)* (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 2013); Siona Wilson, *Art Labour, Sex Politics: Feminist Effects in 1970s British Art and Performance* (Minneapolis;

historical parallels between the 1930s and the 1970s, observing that both endured major *economic* crises.⁴ Moreover, he highlighted that present-day interpretations of the former are read through the ‘filter’ of the 1970s.⁵ In the light of this point it must be acknowledged that this thesis now also looks back, this time from a perspective grounded in the aftermath of yet another crisis – the global financial crash of 2008 – that has, once again, coincided with a time when documentary modes have undergone a resurgence in the art field. It is the specificities of this context that have prompted these reassessments of the 1970s – a decade when photography was consciously deployed as a social practice. To underline this point it is worth noting that as recently as 2002 John Walker could still describe the decade as ‘neglected’ and underappreciated in his survey of the radical art produced during that time.⁶ From an art historical standpoint, then, my own reappraisal can be described as close in spirit to Hal Foster’s exploration of the *return* as a foundational to the discipline.⁷ In place of a structure premised on repetitions and regressions, he proposes a web or matrix viewpoint: ‘our framings of the past depend on our positions in the present and that these positions are defined through such framings.’⁸

In the view of the historian Bo Stråth ‘1968’ is best understood not as a moment bracketed as a calendar month or year but as ‘the symbolic representation of a broad spectrum of social, political and cultural movements and protests during the last half of the 1960s and the first half of the 1970s.’⁹ It is in relation to this tumultuous context that Ribalta could frame the material he presented as a response to two urgent needs: ‘to make visible new, “revolutionary” subjectivities’ and ‘the realist demand for a class-based self-image.’¹⁰ Memou and Ribalta take a broad look at documentary production as part of the visual cultures of the time, a move which in the latter’s case enables the

London: University of Minnesota Press, 2015); The exhibition *Not Yet: On the Reinvention of Documentary and the Critique of Modernism* (2015).

⁴ Jorge Ribalta, “Foreword” in *Not Yet: On the Reinvention of Documentary and the Critique of Modernism: Essays and Documents, 1972-1991*, ed. Jorge Ribalta (Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, 2015), 8.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁶ John Walker, *Left Shift: Radical Art in 1970s Britain* (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2002).

⁷ Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century* (Cambridge MA; London: MIT Press, 1996), 3.

⁸ *Ibid.*, xii.

⁹ Bo Stråth, “1968: From Co-determination to Co-worker. The Power of Language,” *Thesis Eleven* 68 (2002): 79

¹⁰ Jorge Ribalta, “Introduction: Outline for a Map of the Debates around Documentary in the “Long 1970s”,” in *Not Yet: On the Reinvention of Documentary and the Critique of Modernism: Essays and Documents, 1972-1991*, ed. Jorge Ribalta (Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, 2015), 43.

presentation of work by unknown photographers, documentarists, figures who saw themselves as somewhat ‘amphibious’ such as Jo Spence and Terry Dennett as well as (now) major international artists like Martha Rosler.¹¹ Without seeking to underplay the value of this approach my concern in this chapter reorientates attention to elaborate an understanding of the place of documentary modes in *art history*. Following a brief introduction to established lines of enquiry, including a consideration of the relevance of theorisations of art documentation from the field of live art and performance studies, I focus primarily on conceptual art. An in-depth analysis of three case studies is then used to unpack what early instantiations of the social document in art have been called upon to do in the context of social struggles across the globe.

1.2 *The document and art history*

While a comprehensive account of appearances of documentary modes in twentieth century art remains to be written there is much to suggest that, from the Surrealists onwards, the document can be described as a pervasive and enduring presence.¹² Yet a glance through the surveys demonstrates that its lineage has been neglected in dominant accounts. Part of the reason for this may be that, despite the proliferation of material which deals with the development of lens-based practices in art history, analyses tend to be limited by their reference to specific mediums (namely photography, film and video). By contrast, the term ‘document’ evades any narrow take on medium specificity – just as ‘pictures’ did for Michael Fried and Douglas Crimp before him.¹³ A focus on this cross-cutting category provides an opportunity to create an alternative set of art historical narratives. This effort to register the trajectory of a tendency not reducible to a particular medium or style is, of course, hardly new. In two articles published in 1977, Rosalind Krauss refuted the then-prevalent critical recourse to ‘pluralism’, proposing an

¹¹ It is revealing that the easiest way for Ribalta to secure some works for display was to purchase them for his personal collection and loan them to the museum anonymously – an act unthinkable if the material in question was securely held within the narratives of art history and therefore almost certainly unaffordable. Jorge Ribalta, conversation with the author, May 11, 2015.

¹² Consider the Surrealist’s commitment to the documentation of the unexpected and contradictory aspects of everyday social realities or Georges Bataille’s short-lived yet prolific journal *Documents* (*Archéologie, Beaux Arts, Ethnographie, Variétés*) – 17 issues were published between 1929 and 1930. In the latter the radical conjunction of ethnography and art was used to deploy subversive cultural criticism.

¹³ See Michael Fried, *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008); Douglas Crimp, “Pictures,” *October* 8 (1979): 75–88; Douglas Crimp, “The Photographic Activity of Postmodernism,” *October* 15 (1980): 91–101. Chapter 2 of this thesis undertakes a more detailed examination of Crimp’s texts.

alternative common ground for the art of the 1970s.¹⁴ Citing dance, painting, sculpture, video and site-specific interventions, she argued that indexicality had emerged as the dominant sensibility. I will return to her argument later, which, though related to documentary modes, foregrounds notions of trace and imprint. Nevertheless, the focus of the vast majority of literature to date means that it will be necessary to ground my own arguments in relation to key critical texts which are medium specific. At the same time, I am keen to stress that though I set out to discuss lens-based documentary modes, it will be necessary to draw in and situate these formations in relation to other forms of documentation and indeed artistic practice.



Figure 2 (left): Luis Buñuel, *Las Hurdes* (film still) 1932

Figure 3 (right): Renzo Marten, *Episode III – Enjoy Poverty* (film still) 2009

Rather than navigate the multiple threads of artists engagements with documentary modes throughout the twentieth century, it will be sufficient to begin by identifying two significant concerns that continue to hold relevance today: the commitment to enacting a 'meta-critique' of the category of documentary and the debates around the dependency on performance practices and body art on the document. Consider, first, the similar impulses underpinning two moving image works separated by nearly eight decades: Luis Buñuel's *Las Hurdes* (1932) and Renzo Marten's *Episode III – Enjoy Poverty* (2009). Employing cruel parody, fictive modes and shocking distortions they each depict destitute rural communities (in the Basque region and the Democratic Republic of the Congo respectively) explicitly for consumption by wealthy urban audiences in the centres of the 'developed' world. This fascination with what I would call the underbelly of the Enlightenment project can be described as a defining feature of one strand of artistic uses of documentary modes throughout the intervening period. The critique of

¹⁴ Rosalind Krauss, "Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America," *October* 3 (1977): 61-81; Rosalind Krauss, "Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America. Part 2," *October* 3 (1977): 58 -67.

their implicit authority and evidentiary value has taken on a variety of approaches beyond satire: Vera Frenkel's *The Secret Life of Cornelia Lumsden: A Remarkable Story* (1979-86), for example, mobilised documentary modes in a fictional way that has since become widespread. This cycle of work fabricated the life of a female Canadian author using text, installation and video. In *Part I: Her Room in Paris* (1979) a Canadian Broadcasting Corporation commentator discusses Lumsden with five characters named as the Friend, the Lover, the Rival, the Expert, and the Confidant, most of whom are played by Frenkel herself. The material was so convincing that the author 'passed for real' when presented at Expo 86, a World's Fair held in Vancouver.¹⁵ In *The Secret Life* Frenkel not only anticipated artists' fictive disruptions of documents and archives (now perhaps best known through examples including The Atlas Group Archive) but also marks an early interrogation of the place of documentation in the creation of social life. I will return to address the salience of this theme later in Part I.

The deployment of documentary modes to capture transient and ephemeral practices appears to offer a counter to such critical or even subversive approaches. From land art and site-specific installations to live art and performance, the reconfigured artworks of the 1960s and 1970s relied upon the camera as a pragmatic means of documentation and dissemination. Recovering temporally or geographically remote events and interventions for gallery walls, magazine pages, collections and, ultimately, art historical surveys, the lens was a crucial tool that often sat in complex relation vis-à-vis the 'artwork' itself. It is in the fields of performance and body art that these relations have been cogently elaborated.

In 1993 Peggy Phelan asserted that the condition of *disappearance* effectively defined performance, a claim that positioned documentation as not only fundamentally separate, but even as betrayal:

The pressures brought to bear on performance to succumb to the laws of the reproductive economy are enormous. For only rarely in this culture is the 'now' to which performance addresses its deepest questions valued. (This is why the now is supplemented and buttressed by the documenting camera, the video archive.) Performance occurs over a time, which will not be repeated. It can be performed again, but this repetition itself marks it as

¹⁵ Jayne Wark, *Radical Gestures: Feminism and Performance Art in North America* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2006), 137. See also Amy Louise Furness, *Towards a Definition of Visual Artists' Archives: Vera Frenkel's Archives as a Case Study* (Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, University of Toronto, 2012).

'different.' The document of a performance then is only a spur to memory, an encouragement of memory to become present.¹⁶

In 1997 – a time when attention to documentary modes was markedly on the rise across the field of contemporary art – Amelia Jones published an influential essay that challenged the primacy afforded to the originary event of performance art. She submitted that the document does not simply provide a utilitarian entry point but rather exists in reciprocal interrelation: "The body art event needs the photograph to confirm its having happened; the photograph needs the body art event as an ontological "anchor" of its indexicality."¹⁷ Nearly a decade later in 2006, Philip Auslander argued for the performativity of documentation itself, rejecting what he sees as the false divide between 'straight' documentation and the 'theatrical' enterprise of performed photography, which can be based entirely on artifice (he references Yves Klein's famously constructed *Leap into the Void* of 1960) or produced through a meticulously choreographed event staged solely in order to be documented. He maintains that in all cases, the driving motivation is not to capture the performance, as in ethnography, but rather to make the *artist's work* available to a larger audience.¹⁸

Though it is not expressed as such by either writer, the framing of the performance and the recording as at least an equal component within a 'sequence of supplements' (Jones after Jacques Derrida) provokes the conclusion that the moment of 'art' is in fact a highly complex affair involving not only the event and its material document but memory and perhaps even rumour and critical discourse. While determined not to privilege one of these experiential sites, Jones acknowledges the different 'specificities of knowledges' that coalesce around each. Though the emphasis she places on the viewer <—> document relationship is, at least in part, undoubtedly an effort to re-dress an imbalance within the available literature which focuses so explicitly on the face-to-face encounter, Auslander takes a more provocative stance, going so far as to claim that the artist's interactions with the immediate audience is merely incidental. It is the document, as the final product, that effectively produces the artwork *as such*: 'our sense of the presence, power, and authenticity of these pieces derives ... from perceiving the document itself *as*

¹⁶ Phelan, *Unmarked*, 146.

¹⁷ Jones, "'Presence" in Absentia," 16.

¹⁸ Auslander, "The Performativity of Performance Documentation," 1-10.

a *performance* that directly reflects an artist's aesthetic project or sensibility and for which we are the present audience [emphasis in the original].'¹⁹

1.3 Conceptual art documents

While the frequent use of tropes from the documentary tradition and the demand for documentation of live or ephemeral practices are both germane to the positioning of the social document in relation to the history of art, my concern here is with a narrower subset of practices which can be seen as antecedents to current formations. Rather than capturing any and all appearances of documentary modes, I maintain that the 'social document' arises from particular types of conjunction between the lens and social relations or social realities (i.e. not just an event or bodily action). Following a recognition that conscious engagement with 'the social' is by no means integral to the art document (lens-based or otherwise), it is necessary to examine specific instances which can help to differentiate and tease out some 'origins' of the social document's entanglements with narratives of lived experience, social bonds and opposition. I will therefore begin to sketch out the problematic of the social document through a series of historical case studies which begin to draw out particular traits or point to developments which, in hindsight, can be shown to have considerable import in terms of more recent approaches. That they all fit loosely within the purview of conceptual art is no coincidence, for it is here that usage of the document can be said to have become *paradigmatic*.

Conceptual art also underwent something of a critical recovery in the 1990s, a process signalled by a notable rise in the number of exhibitions mounted and anthologies, monographs and articles published.²⁰ Dan Karlholm's recent analysis of art historical surveys follows this recuperation through the teaching textbooks, noting that, as the years pass, conceptual art is afforded both more copy inches and more sympathetic appraisals.²¹ This marked escalation has resulted in a burgeoning number of disparate

¹⁹ Ibid., 9.

²⁰ Among others an inventory would include Los Angeles' Museum of Contemporary Art's exhibition *Reconsidering the Object of Art: 1965-1975* (1995) as well as Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson's reader *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology* (Cambridge MA; London: MIT Press, 1999). Other exhibitions include: *Open Systems: Rethinking Art c.1970* (2005) TATE Modern, curated by Donna DeSalvo; *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin 1950s-1980s* (1999) Queens Museum of Art, curated by Luis Camnitzer, Jane Farver and Rachel Weiss.

²¹ Dan Karlholm, "Surveying Contemporary Art: Post-war, Postmodern, and then What?," *Art History* 32, no. 4 (2009): 712-733.

accounts that focus on its legacies and attempt to identify precisely how conceptual practices remain relevant to those at the turn of the millennium. Though its temporal brackets are usually taken to be the mid 1960s to the mid 1970s, recent scholarship has often adopted an expansionist approach in terms of time, geographic spread and gender representation. Indeed, one facet of its framing as a pivotal art historical period has been the tendency to focus on its politicised variants, a move often seen as yet another attempt to recover something of art's lost radical edge.

In his introduction to the anthology *Art after Conceptual Art*, Alexander Alberro counters Krauss's claim in her 1973 article 'Sense and Sensibility' that conceptual art was merely a period style. Contending that its continuing significance lies in a 'greater aesthetic open-endedness that allowed art to intersect with an expanded range of social life', his volume is indicative of this broader shift away from the doyens of conceptual art and towards what were more peripheral practices at the time.²² Two years earlier, in 2004, Peter Osborne articulated the generative impact of conceptual art thus:

The critical legacy of conceptual art consists in the combination of four main insights, which collectively make up the condition of possibility of a post-conceptual art. These are: 1) the ineliminability but radical insufficiency of the aesthetic dimension of the art work; 2) the necessary conceptuality of the art work; 3) the critical requirement of the anti-aesthetic use of aesthetic materials; 4) the radically redistributive character of the unity of the artwork across the totality of its material instantiations (and the instability of the empirical borders of this totality).²³

Osborne's checklist can be said to lay out the conditions under which the *document* rose to prominence in both conceptual art *and* the art of time in which he was writing (2004). This extraordinary prevalence of documentary modes in the former can be easily detected even as conceptualist approaches evolved within starkly different contexts across the globe, from Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia to Brazil and Argentina, to North America and England.

Lucy Lippard's early optimistic prediction that the arc of conceptual art's development would ultimately result in the obsolescence of the art object was refined by the writer herself less than five years later when she acknowledged that, no matter how cheaply

²² Alexander Alberro, "Introduction: The Way Out is the Way In," in *Art After Conceptual Art*, eds. Alexander Alberro and Sabeth Buchmann (London: The MIT Press, 2006): 13-26.

²³ Peter Osborne, "Art Beyond Aesthetics," *Art History* 27, no. 4 (2004): 663.

produced, reproducible or unpretentious the material support, ideas-based art could not evade the appetites of the market and the label of the luxury commodity.²⁴ Yet, as she went on to claim; ‘An informational, documentary idiom has provided a vehicle for art ideas that were encumbered and obscured by formal consideration.’²⁵ If not a negation, then, conceptual art’s documents were seen to offer a critique of materiality and viscosity. Chiming with the open-ended propositions of instructional or systems-based work, the document could (potentially at least) resist the status of a finished product to instead be presented as one *possible* outcome (or specific realisation) from a larger endeavour. However, it was more than just a pragmatic after-effect of the opening up of the artwork to new sites and durations. Utilised alongside instructions, diagrams and charts, the document was also privileged for its apposite connections to information systems, an ethics of amateurism, and for its connections to the research methodologies (and indeed visual aesthetics) of other social disciplines. As a number of artists focused their attentions on the communication of empirical experiences, its association with notions of neutral facticity were emphasised, occasionally to the point of parody.²⁶

Osborne’s reference to the ‘anti-aesthetic use of aesthetic materials’ holds a particular relevance for the understanding of lens-based outputs in conceptual art. In his polemic ‘Art and Philosophy’ arch-analytic conceptualist Joseph Kosuth maintained that the artwork was not to be found in the medium of its presentation. Material objects could be employed so long as they did not deflect attention away from the proposition itself: the Photostats used for tautological works like *One and Three Chairs* (1965?) could, he later declared, simply be thrown away.²⁷ Given this scepticism that surrounded viscosity it is worth unpacking some of the debates around the use of photography in the production of conceptual documents. Two particularly influential essays, both written in the mid-1990s to accompany exhibitions, put forward markedly different arguments: Jeff Wall’s “‘Marks of Indifference”: Aspects of Photography in, or as, Conceptual Art’ for MOCA’s *Reconsidering the Object of Art 1965-1975* in 1995 and John Roberts’ ‘Photography, Iconophobia and the Ruins of Conceptual Art’ for *The Impossible Document: Photography*

²⁴ Lucy Lippard and John Chandler, “The Dematerialisation of Art,” in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, eds. Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge MA; London: MIT Press, 1999): 46-51; Lucy Lippard, “Postface,” in *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001): 263-264.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 263.

²⁶ For instance Douglas Heubler and Mel Bochner’s respective efforts to undermine the authoritative connections of documentary modes through strategies of jokes and play.

²⁷ The date of this work is contested. Rather than being thrown away it was acquired by MoMA and is held in the collections of their Painting and Sculpture Department.

and *Conceptual Art in Britain 1966-1976* in 1997, an exhibition he curated during his tenure at Camerawork in London.²⁸ Both essays make strong arguments for the considerable importance of the lens-based outputs of conceptual art to subsequent developments in contemporary art, yet neither anticipates the increasingly central place that artists' use of lens-based documentary modes would occupy in the art of the 1990s and beyond. While their respective interrogations are useful, the case studies that follow will suggest that vital perspectives were in fact missed. This is at least in part due to the fact that the outputs of Anglo-American males dominate the field of reference for both essays – an issue that I will make an effort to redress here.

The relationship between photography and conceptual art has been afforded increasing attention since the mid 1990s. In 2011-12 the Art Institute of Chicago presented the exhibition *Light Years: Conceptual Art and the Photograph 1964-1977* while, also in 2012, the photography magazine *Source* published a special issue on the topic.²⁹ Yet in these examples and others 'Photoconceptualism' is often partitioned off and treated as a distinct field enquiry by commentators and curators.³⁰ Wall takes this logic further to argue that the medium played a defining role: 'Conceptual art's essential achievements are' he claims, 'either created in the form of photographs or are otherwise mediated by them.'³¹ His account skirted around the conspicuous prevalence of documentary modes, talking instead in terms of 'reportage'.³² Not yet fully assimilated into (or exploited by) the art market, the photograph still retained at least the potential to elude 'the commercial-bureaucratic-discursive order', a potential apparently bolstered by conceptual art's experiments with 'anaesthetic' strategies.³³ According to Wall, then, one of the major developments in 1960s and 70s art-photography was the refunctioning of reportage (where the immediate moment is prioritised over the careful compositions of

²⁸ Both were published in books that accompanied exhibitions. Jeff Wall, "'Marks of Indifference': Aspects of Photography in, or as, Conceptual Art," in *Reconsidering the Object of Art: 1965-1975*, eds. Ann Goldstein and Anne Rorimer (Cambridge MA; London: MIT Press, 1995): 247-67; John Roberts, "Photography, Iconophobia and the Ruins of Conceptual Art," in *The Impossible Document: Photography and Conceptual Art in Britain 1966-1976* (London: Camerawork, 1997): 7-43.

²⁹ *Source* 71 (2012).

³⁰ See Costello and Iversen, eds., *Photography after Conceptual Art*.

³¹ Wall, "Marks of Indifference," 253.

³² Defined as: "The describing of events (usu. by an observer); *spec.* the reporting of events for the press or for broadcasting, esp. with reference to its style; an instance of this, a piece of journalistic or factual writing." *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., Vol XIII, s.v. "reportage."

³³ The connection between art and journalism reaches considerably further back. Consider, for example, the worker photographer movements in the early 20th century. Franz Hollering called for the report and the artist to join forces in *Der Arbeiter-Fotograf* 5 (1928). See Jorge Ribalta ed., *The Worker Photography Movement (1926-1939) Essays and Documents* (Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, 2011), 104-106.

the pictorialist enterprise). Yet at the same time strategies of mimicry, parody and subjectivisation set it in distantiated and introverted relation to photojournalism. Such *imitations* of the conditions of heteronomy means that conceptual photography as an 'anti-object' fails, always to be recalled as a thoroughly autonomous work of art. Furthermore, Wall claims that: 'The gesture of reportage is withdrawn from the social field and attached to a putative theatrical event.'³⁴

There is a lot to sift through here. Sticking with the reference points Wall marshals for the moment (Douglas Heubler, Dan Graham and Ed Ruscha et al.), his focus on conceptual photography's relationship to photojournalism obscures the more obvious connection to the operations and visual languages of research in the social field such as anthropology or sociology. Even when discussing Dan Graham's magazine spreads *Homes for America* (1966-67), he argues that the usual journalistic content – the references to the larger social world – have been removed to instead offer 'models of the social, not depictions of it.'³⁵ Douglas Heubler's endeavours, on the other hand, attempt to parody the journalist's project assignment itself, excising in the process 'compelling social subject matter' in order to render the structure of the work visible.³⁶ The anthropologist's drier and more durational enterprise is not, apparently, relevant here: there is 'nothing of significance to depict'.³⁷ Engagement with 'the social', we can infer, is only possible through the capture of events. Though Wall's recognition of parody and mimicry in conceptual photodocumentation is indeed useful, the blanket claims he makes for their constitutive role are problematic. Moreover, his determination to site them in relation to the project of modernism reduces it to something of a one-liner: to render visible the essential conditions of the photographic medium. Any complexity that might be associated with the use of parody, playfulness or humour is flattened out into a single, simple operation. Does the introduction of what might be termed 'performative' strategies so fully disrupt a work's relationship with, and relevance to, material social realities? Wall's scepticism regarding the conceptual document's ability to engage with social relations is made more explicit in another of his essays: 'In presenting its forgotten card-files and print outs, its "caskets" of information, conceptual art recapitulates a kind of Mallarméanism: social

³⁴ Wall "Marks of Indifference," 253.

³⁵ Ibid., 257.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid., 258.

subjects are presented as enigmatic hieroglyphs and given the authority of the crypt.’³⁸ Social life is apparently either emptied out or killed off by the detached conceptual document. Communication, research or knowledge production are not viable enterprises.

For Wall, the real achievement of ‘photoconceptualism’ was to realise photography’s complete acceptance as art, an acceptance that could only be gained through its very *failure* to achieve the avant-gardist negation of the idea of ‘autonomous, bourgeois, collectable art.’ The passage through conceptual art, with its apparent resistance to formal concerns (or as he puts it ‘artification’), impelled photography along the reflexive path of auto-critique, a path that inevitably revealed its intrinsic commitment to depiction and led to a reinvigorated exploration of the pictorial. His argument that the legacies of conceptual art had to be rejected in order to stage a recuperation of social content through *the pictorial* acts as a prelude to his own museum scale, elaborately constructed tableaux which seek to engage critically with quotidian life. Subsequent art-photography apparently had to leave behind reportage (refunctioned or otherwise) to instead put into play the necessary condition of being ‘a depiction-which-constitutes-an-object.’ That content is indeed subordinated to structures and symptoms in accounts of conceptual art is affirmed by David Company’s dry observation that ‘art history has little to say on the content of *Homes for America* beyond pointing out that it has one.’³⁹

Two years later Roberts offered an altogether different perspective, proposing that the resonance of these past practices (mainly their aporias and neuroses) underpins the ‘shared cognitive ground of advanced art today.’⁴⁰ His long essay registers the dominance and specificities of lens-based outputs yet resists an artificially singular focus to situate them within the broader project of conceptual art. In contrast to Wall’s contention that conceptual artists were occupied with the radicalisation of the medium of photography, he maintained that the medium itself remained of little interest to many practitioners who saw themselves as avant-garde *artists*, not avant-garde *photographers*. According to Roberts, an ‘iconophobic-iconophiliac dialectic’ underwrites the work of this period,

³⁸ Jeff Wall, “Dan Graham’s Kammerspiel,” in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, eds. Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge MA; London: MIT Press, 1999), 511.

³⁹ Company has noted that ‘art history has little to say on the content of *Homes for America* beyond pointing out that it has one.’ David Company, “Conceptual Art History or, A Home for Homes for America,” in *Rewriting Conceptual Art*, eds. Michael Newman and Jon Bird (London: Reaktion Books, 1999), 139.

⁴⁰ Roberts, “Photography, Iconophobia and the Ruins of Conceptual Art,” 7.

prompted by a sustained consideration of the conditions and processes of reception. On one hand, the challenges mounted against the visual through analytic conceptual art make plain a fundamental distrust of images. Yet Roberts also finds this tendency at work in the de-skilled or amateur aesthetics of the functional snapshot employed: what he calls the 'primitivistic' use of the photographic document. Even in Victor Burgin's and John Stezaker's iconophiliac urge to appropriate images from mass culture he identifies the same demand to test possible exit points from the sensuous absorption and taste-making practices of high modernism. This iconophobia was at least in part a reaction to the spectacles of extreme violence unleashed by the Vietnam war.⁴¹ Despite this, in the early days of conceptual art: 'There is no interest in turning the camera on social subjects in order to say something about social power etc. At no point did the early conceptualists want to return to, or want to be confused with, the social documentarists.'⁴²

Robert's incisive reflections on the evolution of conceptual art's relationship with photography are perhaps most useful when they come to the destabilisation of dominant notions of viewership as artists sought to create alternative forms of attention. Roberts writes: 'The identification of art's spectatorship with reading, the incorporation into the cognitive space of art, the expanded time of serial photography, and as such the self-conscious expansion of art into interactivity-through-time, are evidence of a radical new temporality.'⁴³ Photography was used to tap into a demotic idiom which resisted the ease of seductive spectacularisation through either attempting to disrupt the existing codes of mass culture (Victor Burgin) or engaging with repetitious and emphatically dull subject matter – from petrol stations (Ed Ruscha), suburban semis (Dan Graham), bridges (Robert Smithson) and 'random' passers-by (Douglas Heubler). It distinguished itself from analytic conceptual art's end-game tautologies by pointing to things that were in the world. What Roberts finds in this entanglement with the ordinary is an attempt at a new form of spectatorship which did not rely upon either transcendent experience or the problematic position of the objective witness but which instead tried to engage with the complexities of communication and knowledge production. In his account, narrative, story-telling, and allegory, all regain a place through the photographic document. There

⁴¹ This can be linked to Lucy Lippard's claim that 'social change, radical politics ... Lack of faith in existing cultural institutions and economic systems, have all affected the emergence of dematerialized art.' From the preface to her exhibition catalogue for 2.972.543 at the CAYC gallery. Cited in Luis Camnitzer, *Conceptualism in Latin American Art: Didactics of Liberation* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007), 249.

⁴² Roberts, "Photography, Iconophobia and the Ruins of Conceptual Art," 26.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 21.

is, he claims, an 'obliteration of the distinction between looking and 'reading', knowing and feeling.'⁴⁴ The primitive document is capable of much it would seem.⁴⁵

1.4 *The nervous surfaces of social life*

Returning now to the 'indexical trace' that Krauss posits as the red-thread running through the artistic practices of the 1970s, I argue that it remains insufficient as a conceptual tool through which to analyse works that constitute part of a complex history of the social document.⁴⁶ As 'styleless', 'mute' and 'uncoded,' it apparently comes before the document, and, as Krauss's discussion reveals, can evade any reference to information, evidence, or knowledge production. Benjamin Buchloh's much later account of the proto-conceptual practices of the 1960s which established an 'aesthetic of administration' is also inadequate.⁴⁷ Though Buchloh (very) briefly contextualises this transformation of artistic production and aesthetic experience in relation to broader societal and economic shifts, these connections were more rigorously theorised by Jack Burnham in an article first published in the magazine *Artforum* in 1968.⁴⁸ Recognising a shift which saw power reside not in the traditional symbols of wealth but in the control of information, he proposed a systems approach to culture which addressed the shift from art object to 'environments or artefacts'. His argument draws out crucial developments which hold much relevance for – and indeed anticipate – tendencies usually associated with contemporary artistic practices of the past twenty years: 'art does not reside in material entities,' he stated, 'but in *relations* between people and between people and the components of their environment [emphasis added].'⁴⁹ Add to Burnham's systems aesthetics Ian Burn's assertion of the social dimension of conceptual

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ 'The photographic document is not so much an inert nomination of things in the world, but a source of inferential complexity.' Ibid., 29.

⁴⁶ While both are underpinned by referral, it can be inferred from her account that indexicality comes *before* the document to be embedded within it: 'This quality of transfer or trace gives to the photograph its documentary status, its undeniable veracity'. Krauss, "Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America. Part 2," 59.

⁴⁷ Benjamin Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962-1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions," *October* 55 (1990): 105-43.

⁴⁸ Buchloh states: 'For this aesthetic identity is structured much the way this class's social identity is, namely, as one of merely administering labour and production (rather than producing) and of the distribution of commodities'. Ibid., 128. Jack Burnham, "Systems Esthetics," *Artforum*, September 1968: 30-35.

⁴⁹ Ibid. For recent work on Burnham's theoretical legacy see Luke Skrebowski, "All Systems Go: Recovering Jack Burnham's 'Systems Aesthetics,'" *Tate Papers* 5 (2006), accessed Dec 12, 2012, <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/05/all-systems-go-recovering-jack-burnhams-systems-aesthetics>.

art in his essay 'Memoirs of an Ex-Conceptual Artist' (1981). Here, Burn delineated five general tendencies: an attempt to evade the market; a preference for the more 'democratic' forms of mass communication and the media; a concern with social relationships; collaborative working methodologies and, finally, a desire to critically consider art's position and role within a broader social context.⁵⁰ It is the two latter perspectives, alongside Roberts', that I wish to use as a grounding for the following analysis of the heterogeneous prefigurations of the social document in conceptual art.

I will now proceed to draw out particular features that can be said to inform the possibilities of and for the social document in art through a selection of specific case studies. By organising them under a set of three overarching themes, my aim is to further examine the ways in which the legacies of these practices and the questions they raise remain relevant today. I begin by looking at the deployment of documents as part of what I call a 'worktable' production methodology suited to collective action, in this case mobilised against the onset of neoliberal reforms in Argentina. This is followed by a reappraisal of Mary Kelly's groundbreaking *Post-Partum Document*, a work produced in the orbit of the feminist movement in Britain. My attempt to begin to trace just a few of the many unresolved appearances on the social document in this period then moves to consider its parallel emergence in the non-capitalist context of (the former) Yugoslavia. These constitute three instances where the art document is bound in with political projects for social change. They reveal how documentary modes were uniquely suited to the demand for systematic, research-orientated methodologies, offering an alternative means to engage with social *life*. These are works which avoid the abstraction of content usually associated with conceptual art. Instead, the emphasis is squarely placed on human desires and social relations, affect and communication.

⁵⁰ Ian Burn, "The 'Sixties: Crisis and Aftermath (Or the Memoirs of an Ex-Conceptual Artist)," in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, eds., Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 1999): 402-404.

WORKTABLE

*If you take the questioning of the traditional criteria for the work of art to its ultimate consequences, wouldn't it be legitimate to say that the best work that can be created today is a riot?*⁵¹

Surveys of conceptual art often note – if only in passing – that the repressive political and social circumstances in many Latin American countries during the 1960s and '70s led to the development of an alternative strain of conceptual art which exhibited more overt political intentions in their critical engagements with the idea of 'art'.⁵² Yet such brief comments fail to capture the transformative impact of urgent situations on artistic output. In Argentina, the increasingly authoritarian context of General Onganía's military dictatorship (1966–70) prompted a range of staged interventions and occasionally violent disruptive actions including those realised through the now-notorious *Experiences 68* group exhibition at the Instituto Di Tella, Buenos Aires, and the *Experimental Art Series* staged in the same year across multiple gallery spaces in the city of Rosario. As part of the latter, the artist Graciela Carnevale locked an opening night audience inside an empty glass-fronted gallery violently obliging (as she put it) the spectators to participate. This *Lock-up Action* (or *El encierro*, *The Confinement*) concluded when the window was smashed from the outside.

For his contribution to *Experiences 68*, Oscar Bony paid a family to present themselves on a large stepped plinth in the exhibition space accompanied by documentary sound recordings of their daily home lives in *La Familia Obrera* (*The Working Class Family*). Recalling Suzanne Briet's caged antelope, Bony's astonishingly prescient move presented life itself as documentary material as part of a broader attempt by Argentinean artists to engage with issues of class and socioeconomic inequality. Meanwhile, Roberto Jacoby's telex machine transmitted live coverage from the insurrection in France into the gallery while the artist distributed his flyer 'Message in the Di Tella'. Proclaiming the end of aesthetic contemplation the text declared: 'The work of art has also ended because life and the planet itself are becoming art.' When sections of the exhibition were censored, the artists withdrew and destroyed their work in the streets outside the gallery, issuing

⁵¹ Horacio Verbitsky, "Arte y Política," *Confirmado*, Aug 1, 1968.

⁵² Lucy Lippard, "Escape Attempts," *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001): vii-xxii; Paul Wood, *Conceptual Art* (New York: Delano Greenidge, 2002).

a statement that denounced political repression. Under such circumstances, the dematerialisation of the art object was understood to be its dissolution into social life. The desire to produce a new field, function, and language for art was explicitly orientated towards realising art's capacity to forge new realities. As another *Experiences 68* artist Pablo Suárez put it: 'Nobody can give you a manufactured and canned version of what is happening at this moment. What is happening is Man, the work: *the design of life forms* [emphasis added].'⁵³



Figure 4: Oscar Bony, *Familia Obrera* (*The Working Class Family*) (gelatin silver print) 1968

In the same tumultuous year, a collective project realised under the name Grupo de Artistas de Vanguardia (Group of Avant-Garde Artists) aimed to go beyond the institution of culture to produce transformative artworks which operated as effective political events.⁵⁴ *Tucumán Arde* (*Tucumán is Burning*) brought together artists, union members, sociologists, economists, students, filmmakers and photographers to document and publicise the deplorable social conditions in Tucumán, an impoverished province located in the North of the country. In this region the government were pursuing a destructive economic experiment ostensibly aimed at agricultural and

⁵³ Pablo Suárez, "Letter of Resignation to Jorge Romero Brest," *Listen, Here, Now!: Argentine Art of the 1960s: Writings of the Avant-Garde*, ed. Inés Katzenstein (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2004), 291. This is one example of multiple instances where artists referred to life as art.

⁵⁴ Maria Teresa Gramuglio, Nicolas Rosa and others, "Tucuman Is Burning: Statement of the Exhibition in Rosario," *Listen, Here, Now!: Argentine Art of the 1960s: Writings of the Avant-Garde*, ed., Inés Katzenstein (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2004): 319-323.

industrial diversification. During this first wave of neoliberalisation, the majority of the area's sugar refineries were closed down, ushering in an era of instability, exacerbating poverty, precipitating migration and significantly weakening the unions.

Documentary modes were at the heart of the project. Participants sought to establish an 'information super-circuit' – akin to what would now be termed 'tactical media' (the production of alternative news and information systems) – to counter the misinformation propagated by the state-sanctioned press designed to conceal the harsh realities of the catastrophic situation.⁵⁵ Explicitly rejecting the traditional sites of culture as 'useless' the group planned their activities in stages, firstly undertaking research expeditions to the region, amassing evidence using photography, film and recorded interviews with community leaders, union representatives, teachers, doctors, labourers and unemployed families. They then produced reports before publically denouncing the situation at a press conference. Two major 'exhibition-condemnations' of the photographic, filmic and audio documentary material produced followed in the General Confederation of Labour of the Argentines' (CGT) buildings in the cities of Rosario and Buenos Aires – a combative trade union that openly (and practically) supported the groups' operations.⁵⁶

Advertised by fly-posters, cinema slides and street graffiti, the exhibitions eschewed the usual conventions of the white cube gallery space, taking over the respective buildings to create a powerfully immersive information experience produced by over forty people. Large-scale 'mural' photographs, newspaper clippings, posters along with graphs and statistics calling attention to the clear connections between exponents of financial and political power were pasted across the walls. Documentaries and interview recordings were presented and audio information regularly blared from speakers. All this was set against the information issued by the government and the media on the impact of the economic strategies. Every few minutes the lights were dimmed to represent the frequency of deaths of children from malnutrition. Materials were available for visitors to take away including artist statements, copies of documents and sociologists reports.

⁵⁵ Ibid.; Avant-Garde Artists of the Committee for Artistic Action, "Buenos Aires Statement," *Listen, Here, Now!: Argentine Art of the 1960s: Writings of the Avant-Garde*, ed., Inés Katzenstein (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2004): 323-326.

⁵⁶ Two further presentations were planned in Santa Fe and Cordoba but did not happen. For a cogent account of their early adoption of the now-familiar 'artist as curator' model see Ana Longoni, "Avant-Garde Argentinean Visual Artists Group, *Tucumán Burns*, 1968," *The Artist as Curator 2*, *Mousse* 43 (2014): 3-18.

Though the Rosiaro exhibition (entitled the *First Avant-Garde Art Biennial*) lasted two weeks, its counterpart in the capital city was quickly shut down by the authorities and the group disbanded before the completion of their final project report.



Figure 5: Grupo de Artistas de Vanguardia, *Tucumán Arde* (*Tucumán is Burning*) (exhibition view) 1968

What can be said about the use of documentary modes in the *Tucumán Arde* interventions? Bound to an overarching sociological / economic research project, the 'reportage' function clearly remained grounded in concrete material realities. Yet the conventional positions of authorship and viewership usually associated with compassionate social documentary were radically altered. Through an *open, horizontal 'worktable' production methodology*, the documents became live receptacles or provocations, orientated not only towards awareness raising but to facilitate organic, cross-disciplinary working and, ultimately, to providing the context and tools for corrective action. In this sense, temporality is critical: made for a very specific time and audience, their role and efficacy is entirely determined by the duration and strength of the collaboration between participants and audiences (considered as 'co-producers').

As Alexander Alberro has noted, what marked *Tucumán Arde* apart from its peers was the group's recognition of the power of the media but also their desire to disrupt and

even colonise its flows of information.⁵⁷ Indeed, many of the forms and procedures appropriated by the group were those adopted by the emerging armed leftist organisations in a process labeled *foquismo* (the “armed struggle”) in art.⁵⁸ To these ends, the ‘new aesthetics’ advanced by the group demanded the selection of materials based on ‘their efficient transmission, their persuasive power, their clarity, their unavoidability, their power to force the media to publicise a condemnation.’⁵⁹ Low cost, accessible, and orientated towards purposeful communication rather than beauty or originality, documentary modes – and, notably, their curation – were clearly seen as the most expedient vehicle for fulfilling such a task. Rather than dedicated to recording and re-presenting a past, then, the documents and their dissemination were orientated towards engaging with the present in order to influence the future; in other words, the production of the social document was intended to assist in the process of creatively molding and transforming concrete social realities (life).

Reprising traditional realist subject matter such as labour and economic relations, *Tucumán Arde* can also be said to have reformulated realist strategies. Furthermore, it anticipated many of the developments in later conceptual practices in North America and Britain. A similar prioritisation of documentary modes and sociological tactics in the context of workplace struggles can be found in other artworks including Fred Lonidier’s series *The Health and Safety Game* (1976). Intended for display in union halls across the U.S., Lonidier used ‘evidential’ photography, text and video to expose case studies of workplace injuries. Only a few years earlier, Kay Hunt, Margaret Harrison and Mary Kelly’s exhibition project *Women and Work: A Document on the Division of Labour in Industry* (1973-75) undertook a sociological analysis of a metal box factory in Berdmondsey, London. Archival research, interviews and on-site observations during the time of the implementation of the U.K.’s Equal Pay Act centred on the division of labour within the factory as well as the double burden placed on women by their work within the home.⁶⁰ The resulting display at the South London Art Gallery (near the factory itself) brought together the material results of this research process, comprising punch cards and charts comparing male and female rates of pay; excerpts from

⁵⁷ Alexander Alberro, “Reconsidering Conceptual Art, 1966-1977,” in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, eds., Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 1999), xxvii.

⁵⁸ Sao Paulo Biennial presentation of the *Tucumán Arde* archive (2010).

⁵⁹ León Ferrari, “The Art of Meanings,” *Listen, Here, Now!: Argentine Art of the 1960s: Writings of the Avant-Garde*, ed., Inés Katzenstein (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2004), 320.

⁶⁰ Margaret Harrison, “Notes on Feminist Art in Britain 1970-77,” *Studio International* 193, no. 987 (1977), 217.

parliamentary acts; small photographic portraits of female employees; typed summaries of their daily schedules; audiotapes and film recordings of factory life. As Mari Carmen Ramirez said of Latin American conceptual art, both *The Health and Safety Game* and *Women and Work* rested on an 'equation of art with knowledge that transcends the aesthetic realm, which enabled them to explore problems and issues linked to concrete social and political situations.'⁶¹ In all three cases *curatorial strategies* were central: the documents' evidentiary value, set in motion and narrativised through exhibition making. Ease of transportation and the choice of display site was also crucial to each – as Harrison pointed out, the distilled format of the materials used in *Women and Work* made them particularly easy to handle. She goes on to note that the display became one of the touring exhibitions of the Labour History Museum in Limehouse, London.⁶² It was again exhibited in 1975 by Hackney and then Brighton Trades Council.⁶³

The Grupo de Artistas de Vanguardia disbanded after the forced closure of the Buenos Aires exhibition and many of its participants renounced art. The archive of related materials is now held in the collection of MACBA (Barcelona) and has been exhibited (more than three decades after their production) in both *Documenta 12* (2007) and the *Sao Paulo Biennial* (2010). In such an afterlife is the 'authority of the crypt' discussed by Wall duly realised? Does it condemn the material to just the sort of existence that its creators sought to evade, namely, its neutralisation by the institutions of art? In my discussions with Carnevale (the only remaining member of the original collective to retain an interest in the archive), she noted her dissatisfaction with these displays of what she called 'dead objects' and asserted the importance of using curatorial strategies to 'reactivate' the archive's relevance for a contemporary moment.⁶⁴ In the case of the curatorial project *The King's Peace: Realism and War* (2014) – an exhibition that examined the importance of mediation and montage to realism – she agreed to present photocopies of the materials together with narrative panels on a structure based on original designs by the Latvian Constructivist and pioneer of political photomontage

⁶¹ Mari Carmen Ramirez, "Blueprint Circuits: Conceptual Art and Politics in Latin America," in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, eds. Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge MA; London: MIT Press, 1999), 553.

⁶² Harrison, "Notes on Feminist Art in Britain 1970-77," 217.

⁶³ Judith Mastai, "Introduction," in *Social Process/Collaborative Action*, ed. Judith Mastai (Vancouver, B.C.: Charles H. Scott Gallery, Emily Carr Inst. of Art and Design, 1997), 11. The subsequent fate of the material is difficult to establish. While contemporaneous reviews suggested that it would be acquired into the collection of Manchester's Museum of Labour History, the curator Judith Mastai noted in 1996 that she had discovered it to be residing in Kay Hunt's attic. In 2001 it was acquired by TATE.

⁶⁴ Graciela Carnevale, e-mail correspondence with author, Apr 7, 2014.

Gustav Klucis.⁶⁵ These semi-portable multimedia agitprop kiosks were intended to disperse information on the streets of Moscow in celebration of the fifth anniversary of the Russian Revolution and integrated various combinations of loudspeakers, film screens and display units. The reconstruction of the structure thereby connected two very different historical and political contexts in which mass communication and political participation were central to the activities of artists.

INTIMATE RELATIONS

*You should have a practice in art that actually looks forward to a moment that will be different. I think that's the point that we haven't actually grasped. Critics look at a work and they say, 'That's only a negative deconstructive understanding of personal experience', without seeing what the work as a whole represents in terms of a positive view of social change and what art could be in the future.*⁶⁶

While the debates on the relationship between live art and its documentation have been examined above, I want to turn now to another type of practice which deals with alternative conceptions of duration and performativity: practices which engage with the documentation of not an event, situation or action but of *durational social relations*. Many of the same issues persist, including the challenge that Jones articulated as 'the impossibility of knowing, keeping, or anchoring the present (present experience) without it slipping away.'⁶⁷ Yet though such works are marked by a belatedness in that they are, in the main, specifically engineered as attempts to chronicle lived experience for future (otherwise undefined) arts audiences, the documents possess additional challenges and complexities.

The production of Mary Kelly's *Post-Partum Document* (1973-75/79) spanned a six-year period, during which she charted her developing relationship with her infant son.⁶⁸ 135

⁶⁵ See Appendix D for an account of this exhibition. The *Tucumán Arde* structure was constructed for TATE Liverpool's exhibition *Art Turning Left* (2013-14) by local art students in cooperation with Graciele Carnevale.

⁶⁶ Mary Kelly interviewed by Monika Gagnon initially published in *C Magazine* 10 (1986): 24. Cited in Griselda Pollock, "Screening the Seventies: Sexuality and Representation in Feminist Practice – A Brechtian Perspective," in *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art* (London; New York: Routledge, 1993), 155.

⁶⁷ Amelia Jones, "Introduction," *Art Journal* 70, no. 3 (2011), 43.

⁶⁸ Presented at the ICA in 1976. Henceforth *PPD*.

units of material split into six sequences presented first-person accounts and primary evidence ranging from stained nappy liners to early attempts writing, alongside analyses in the form of charts, diagrams and observations typed on index cards. The resulting *Document* has been exhibited in white cube gallery spaces and reproduced as a book. Discussing the work, Peter Wollen briefly acknowledged that ‘it was logical to move from the documentation of an art performance to documentation of an artist’s *life* [emphasis added],’ and yet the ramifications of this extraordinary shift are yet to be examined in any depth.⁶⁹ For one thing, Kelly’s work posed a substantive challenge to the polarisation of what constituted social and non-social content in art: ‘intersubjective relationships are fundamentally social,’ she asserted.⁷⁰

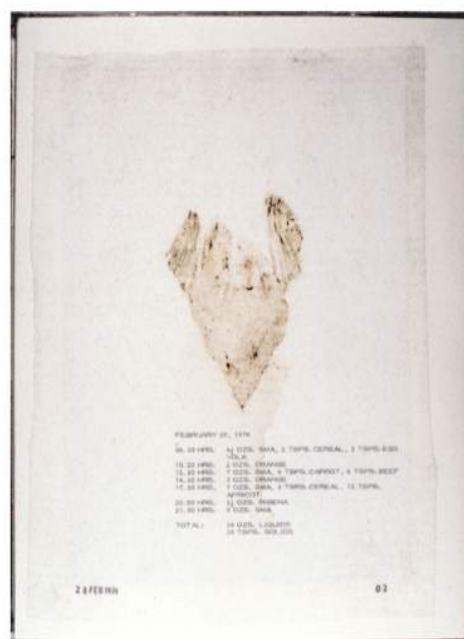


Figure 6: Mary Kelly, *Post-Partum Document: Documentation I* *Analysed Fecal Stains and Feeding Charts* (detail; Perspex units, white card, diaper linings, plastic sheeting, paper, ink) 1974

Life, as a complex, social, psychic and durational experience, was broached in this instance not through the lens but through traces, narratives and interpretative reflections or analysis. The inclusion of only one photograph in the whole series appears to align the work with the iconophobic current identified by Roberts. Though Kelly

⁶⁹ Peter Wollen, “Thirteen Paragraphs,” in *Social Processes / Collaborative Action: Mary Kelly 1970-1975*, ed. Judith Mastai, (Vancouver, B.C.: Charles H. Scott Gallery, Emily Carr Inst. of Art and Design, 1997), 30.

⁷⁰ Mary Kelly, “Notes on Reading the Post-Partum Document,” in *Imaging Desire* (Cambridge MA; London: MIT Press, 1996), 22.

admits that she once considered the lens to be 'somehow inherently more progressive' and 'more suited to representing social issues', her explicit rejection of photography and film in *PPD* constitutes a significant and formative chapter in the history of the social document. In her 'footnote' to the series she makes her intentions plain:

to avoid the literal figuration of mother and child, to avoid any means of representation which risked recuperation as "a slice of life". To use the body of the woman, her image or person is not impossible but problematic for feminism. In my work I have tried to cut across the predominant representation of woman as the object of the look in order to question the notion of femininity as a pre-given entity and to foreground instead its social construction as a representation of sexual difference within specific discourses. For me, this is not a new form of iconoclasm but a shared aspiration (truly post-modernist?) to "picture" the woman as subject of her own desire.⁷¹

On the debates around the politics of representation in Kelly's work, Griselda Pollock succinctly argued that in any 'cultural form that wishes to challenge the existing social knowledges ... The lure of the purely visual had to be refused, refuted or negotiated very critically.'⁷² Yet, rather than simply a negation of problematised visual codes, Kelly effectively combined relatively *weak* images (in the form of bodily traces and echoes), texts and diagrams *as documents*. She notes in her 'Preface' that her intention was 'to pull the visible more firmly into the space of the readable ... I wanted to avoid setting up an opposition between image and text. Ideally, each should hold the possibility of becoming the other, or perhaps the same, that is, "writing".'⁷³ Again, the deployment of the document is seen as encouraging a particular type of viewership by leaving a gap, or critical space, for interpretation. In Judith Mastai's words: 'this was a period in which mental operations were privileged and modes of production and form were chosen which had the same *provisional* existence as the intellectual skills and cognitive strategies they represented [emphasis added].'⁷⁴

⁷¹ Mary Kelly, "Preface to *Post-Partum Document*," in *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists' Writings*, eds. Kristine Stiles, Peter Selz (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 2012), 1011. Despite Kelly's attempt (in 1983) to connect this work to the then more fashionable reference of 'pictures,' the title and the content of the work clearly prioritise documentation. The privileging of 'pictures' in postmodernism will be taken up in Chapter 2.

⁷² Griselda Pollock, "Histories," in *Social Processes / Collaborative Action: Mary Kelly 1970-1975*, ed. Judith Mastai, (Vancouver: Charles H. Scott Gallery, 1997), 43.

⁷³ Mary Kelly, "Preface," in *Post-Partum Document* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), xxi.

⁷⁴ Judith Mastai, "Portrait of an Artist after Choice: Mary Kelly and the Historicization of Conceptual Art," in *Social Process / Collaborative Action: Mary Kelly 1970 - 75*, (Vancouver, B.C.: Charles H. Scott Gallery, Emily Carr Inst. of Art and Design, 1997), 19.

Similar ideas underpinned the exhibition project *Women and Work: A Document on the Division of Labour in Industry* (1973-75), and another of Kelly's collaborative works (also produced in parallel with *PPD*), the film *Nightcleaners*.⁷⁵ Referring to the former, Kelly acknowledged its formal similarities to Hans Haacke's *Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings: A Real-Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971* (1971), particularly 'in the display of the documents, the time that we took to investigate the conditions in the factory, and the way that we used all the forms of visual display that would give the viewer a way of weaving through and understanding the problem of that factory and its means of implementing equal pay.'⁷⁶ As Laura Mulvey proposes, such radical art practices transform the exhibition site from a place of absorption, reflection or escape, into a space of argumentation.⁷⁷ Put another way, documents are put to work and, in turn, put the spectator to work. Yet this focus on information, knowledge and research misses crucial dimensions of each of these examples: *affect*. While the clatter of machinery on the factory floor rang out from the film projections presented in the *Women and Work* exhibition, and *Nightcleaners* spliced long black passages into footage, disrupting the flow of the film, *PPD* figures a level of intimacy that marks it apart from Kelly's collaborative ventures.

In 1999, a new reading of *PPD* was offered by Helen Molesworth that provocatively reconsidered the work as a critique of the relations between the public and private spheres.⁷⁸ The time of this reading's emergence is again indicative of a broader shift in theoretical emphasis – a shift that this thesis is attempting to plot. In sharp contrast to familiar accounts which either focus on the relationship between *PPD* and psychoanalysis, or use it as a convenient exemplar for binary debates within feminist art

⁷⁵ Produced by a group of film-makers, including Kelly, under the name of the Berwick Street Film Collective, the 90 minute film *Nightcleaners* began as a cinéma vérité' documentation of a campaign to unionise female cleaners employed work during the night in office buildings but evolved into a more complex, self reflexive, engagement with the labour struggle. For incisive accounts see Sheila Rowbotham, "Jolting Memory: *Nightcleaners* Recalled," in *Plan Rosebud: On Images, Sites and Politics of Memory*, eds. Mari Paz Balibrea and Maria Ruido (Santiago de Compostela: Xunta de Galicia, 2009); Claire Johnston and Paul Willemen, "Brecht in Britain: The Independent Political Film (on *The Nightcleaners*)," *Screen* 16, no. 4 (1975/76): 101-118.

⁷⁶ Douglas Crimp, "Douglas Crimp in Conversation with Mary Kelly," in *Mary Kelly*, eds. Margaret Iverson, Douglas Crimp and Homi K. Bhabha (London: Phaidon, 1997), 15. To be clear, the information presented not only dealt with the factory as a site of production but also the home as a site of reproduction.

⁷⁷ Though she also made naïve claims for this move, arguing that it 'deprives the object of any market value'. Laura Mulvey, "Post-Partum Document Review," in *Post-Partum Document* (Berkeley: University of California Press), 201.

⁷⁸ Helen Molesworth, "Cleaning up in the 1970s: The Work of Judy Chicago, Mary Kelly and Mierle Laderman Ukeles," in *Rewriting Conceptual Art*, Michael Newman and Jon Bird (London: Reaktion Books, 1999): 107-122. Molesworth elaborated on this argument further in: Helen Molesworth, "House Work and Art Work," *October* 92 (2000): 71-97.

history, Molesworth reframed the series in terms of '*political* economy as opposed to a bodily or psychic one.'⁷⁹ She argued that *labour* became the work's central and most enduring theme. This insight fits well with the concerns of Kelly's parallel collaborative projects which also dealt with the 'social/sexual division of labour' and her commitment to feminism (she was a founder of the National Women's Liberation Movement in Britain).⁸⁰ Molesworth further notes that the structural relationship between the categories of public and private came under the scrutiny of other artists, including Martha Rosler (in her video works *Semiotics of the Kitchen* of 1975 and *Domination of the Everyday* of 1978) and Mierle Laderman Ukeles in her *Maintenance Art Performances* (1973-74).⁸¹ Attempting to negotiate the entrenched divide between essentialist and theory-based practice through this focus on labour, Molesworth's analysis also takes in Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party* (1979), a move that prevents her from acknowledging and interrogating the pivotal role that *documentary modes* played in each of the others' disruptive incursions into the hitherto closed realms of 'private' life. Furthermore, in addition to their paired back aesthetics which combined texts with 'low' visual materials, Rosler, Kelly and Ukeles considered in detail the production (and indeed reproduction) of subjectivity.

It is not just Kelly's engagement with 'private' lived experience that takes her work into new territories, it is the use of the document as a means to chart, represent and explicate a *very particular social relation* as it evolves over time. In order to adequately capture this relation, *PPD* incorporates a range of formats, layering registers and discourses while shifting between different modes of address. The document proves to be flexible enough to introduce these multiple perspectives: 'primary' materials including personal fetishes such as casts of the child's tiny fist, 'straight' data records and Kelly's own diaristic accounts are locked together with scientific analyses and psychoanalytic interpretations. Using her own maternal experience in the manner of a case study, she collapses systematic 'pseudoscientific' (in her words) language with an emphatic – occasionally abject – sequence of material subjective moments. Once again, the spectre of Wall's 'parody' emerges. Yet, even if her task of self-analysis is an impossible one, Kelly's investigations cannot be dismissed as mere mimicry; rather, they are *tactical*.⁸²

⁷⁹ Molesworth, "Cleaning up in the 1970s," 114.

⁸⁰ Mary Kelly, "Introduction: Remembering, Repeating, and Working-Through," in *Imaging Desire*, (Cambridge MA; London: MIT Press, 1996), xviii.

⁸¹ Molesworth, "House Work and Art Work".

⁸² *PPD* also highlighted oversights in Lacanian theory.

On the one hand, she specifically aimed to counter naturalised understandings of motherhood, while on the other, a singular format, discipline or approach was found to be insufficient:

At first I looked at it very sociologically but it became more and more obvious that you couldn't get rid of the irrationality of this event, the question of desire and questions of social and psychic constructions of maternal femininity.⁸³

It seems that knowledge was intended to be arrived at obliquely, produced through active engagement with primary documents and their juxtapositions or interpretations.

One aspect revealed through this intimate portrait of a caring relation is the need of Kelly as a mother to record, *understand* and thereby try to exert some control over an experience which has so deeply shifted her physical, psychic and social subjectivity. In her introduction to the work, Juli Carson notes that in *PPD* Kelly *performatively* works through a very intense personal experience.⁸⁴ Though she does not expand further on the implications of this strategy, performativity (certainly more than parody) does indeed capture something of the combination of the work's complicated relationship to established disciplines and its therapeutic edge. There is an intensity – a life – that cannot be contained by the documents but that is rather evoked and gestured towards.⁸⁵

In her 2013 volume on conceptual art titled *Systems We Have Loved*, Eve Meltzer has charted artists' attempts to restore affectivity to the disaffected, antihumanist subject of a period dominated by structuralism and post-structuralism.⁸⁶ Using *PPD* as one of her key examples, she sought to reveal the phenomenal excess, or – as Brian Massumi vividly put it – 'the gaps between positions on the grid'.⁸⁷ This focus on the body and feelings, on recognising and recovering the affective import of conceptualist artworks, counters Buchloh's dominant reading of conceptual art's 'aesthetics of administration'.⁸⁸ Though

⁸³ Crimp, "Douglas Crimp in Conversation with Mary Kelly," 15.

⁸⁴ Juli Carson, "Post-Partum Document: An Introduction," in *Mary Kelly: Projects 1973-2010*, ed. Dominique Heyes-Moore (Manchester: The Whitworth Art Gallery, The University of Manchester, 2011), 76.

⁸⁵ This notion of intensity can be linked to Antonio Negri's discussion of the work of art's crucial 'excess' that he claims can be orientated towards either the support of, or in contest to, the capitalist mode of production. Antonio Negri, *Art and Multitude*, trans. Ed Emery (Cambridge: Polity, 2011).

⁸⁶ Eve Meltzer, *Systems We Have Loved: Conceptual Art, Affect, and the Antihumanist Turn* (Chicago; Illinois; London: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

⁸⁷ Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 4.

⁸⁸ Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962-1969."

reminiscent of Margaret Iversen's likening of the shit-stained nappy liners to 'precious prints on some rare, handmade paper' (a connection that surely verges on the comical), Meltzer's formal emphasis on 'the particular affective charge of a wrinkle' in one of the displayed child's vests is, however, not simply an(other) attempt to buttress the transformation of a deliberately 'low' document into a fetishised art object.⁸⁹ Rather, Meltzer highlights the work's oscillation between 'the alienation of information' and 'the longing of a document' while also going on to note that 'complexity itself, scientism itself, and hyperbolic cerebralism are themselves generative of affect.'⁹⁰ Kelly, she argues, displays an amorous affection for information systems, aesthetics and rhetoric. Her claims chime with the interpretation of Ana Mendieta's performance documentation offered nearly two decades earlier by Miwon Kwon in which she also foregrounded the affective dimension of the material – this time the photographic image. She observed that they foreground 'a distinction between the photograph as documentation and the photograph as souvenir. While a document is predicated on the authentic belief of an authentic moment of origin, the souvenir is based on a recognition of its loss. Mendieta's photographs function like souvenirs.'⁹¹ Though I do not agree with the hard division Kwon institutes between the document and the souvenir, her discussion on the centrality of narrative, intimacy and biography to the latter is compelling. As I will argue, these dimensions are in fact of crucial relevance to a reconsideration of documentary modes in contemporary art.

If affectivity is easily associated with the belatedness of these mementos (or primary documents), the performative aspect of *PPD* gives rise to another temporality of the social document (one which Meltzer does *not* engage with). This performative impulse can be seen not only through staging, or its association with conceptual art's procedural enactments but through their function and appearance as *therapeutic tools*, used in real time to process and analyse feelings and scenarios. The combination of Kelly's diaristic narratives and the apparently compulsive desire to systematically collect, order and

⁸⁹ Margaret Iversen, "Visualizing the Unconscious: Mary Kelly's Installations," in *Mary Kelly*, eds. Margaret Iversen, Douglas Crimp and Homi K. Bhabha (London: Phaidon, 1997), 34; Meltzer, *Systems We Have Loved*, 173. Iversen's reading appears to speak directly to Kelly's observation, cited by Owen Logan: 'As Mary Kelly has argued, the more modern art dissipated its forms, the more the merest traces of formal substance or creative selection have become fetishised as the marks of the creative subject. Ultimately, the subject becomes the commodity of art.' Duncan Forbes, "Situating Realism: An Interview with Owen Logan," *Third Text* 18, no. 4 (2004): 261–277.

⁹⁰ Melzer, *Systems We Have Loved*, 173; 175.

⁹¹ Miwon Kwon, "Bloody Valentines: Afterimages by Ana Mendieta," in *Inside the Visible: An Elliptical Traverse of 20th Century Art in, of, and from the Feminine*, ed. M Catherine de Zegher (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 170.

interpret means that the series is suffused with an extraordinary mix of emotions and affects, from anxiety and grief through to pleasure. It is the document that is able to capture these gaps between the positions in the grid: not just a container of information it can also act as a receptacle for feeling and investment.

PPD expands the concepts of the social into the 'private' territories of social reproduction – this is the 'hidden labour' to which Molesworth alludes.⁹² At the same time it expands understandings of what the social document itself is capable of: traversing public and private realms, operating as a therapeutic aid, communicating scientific, symbolic and affective knowledges. As a performative document of a caring relation it is necessarily durational in scope. Yet though it moves beyond the relatively brief moment of the event to deal with a new temporality, it is important to note that the 'artwork' itself has not been displaced into the terrains of actual life. From this perspective, then, *PPD* is perhaps best regarded as representative of a particular regime of the 'biopolitical artwork' – one that lays the ground work for – but must be differentiated from – future developments.

ECONOMIC SYMPTOMS

The early examples of the social document cited thus far have each emanated from capitalism, yet its history must be acknowledged as a more global affair. In her analysis of 'Moscow Conceptualism', Ketī Chukhrov has argued that distinctions from its Western counterparts must be understood in relation to historical and biopolitical conditions of development produced through the particular features of the local socialist economy.⁹³ For the purposes of this chapter a now canonical example produced in Zagreb will serve to at least begin an examination of this history as it developed within socialist contexts. Needless to say, my contention is not that one work can in any way be representative. Under President Tito the former Yugoslavia occupied a distinctive position as a 'grey zone' between East and West, developing its own model of socialist economy while also producing a less polarised opposition between official and unofficial art systems than elsewhere. International communication and exchange within the art field was also

⁹² A term that emerged in feminist thinking in the 1970s, 'social reproduction' refers to the 'labour of love' traditionally performed for free by women in the home. For a more expansive and detailed definition see Chapter 6 of this thesis.

⁹³ Ketī Chukhrov, "Soviet Material Culture and Socialist Ethics in Moscow Conceptualism," *e-flux journal* 29 (2011), accessed Jan 4, 2012, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/29/68089/soviet-material-culture-and-socialist-ethics-in-moscow-conceptualism/>.

relatively intense here.⁹⁴ Nevertheless, in considering Sanja Iveković's *Triangle* (1979), the aim is to enable a more complex analysis of the relationship between social matrix, the increasingly relevant paradigm of a global history and appearance of the document.

Triangle claims to document across four photographs an action which took place on the 10th of May 1979 over the course of 18 minutes. All shot from a concrete balcony, three images are arranged in a column depicting (in descending order) a figure on top of the roof of a large building, President Tito's cavalcade as it progresses up a central street and a crowd patrolled by policemen on the pavement directly below. To the right of the central photograph is another of equal dimensions, this time showing the artist on the balcony, sitting reading a book with one of her hands between her legs. The accompanying short text states that she is performing masturbation and that the surveillance figure on the rooftop is her intended 'viewer'. When a policeman comes to the door of the apartment and orders that 'the persons and objects are to be removed from the balcony,' the action comes to an end. In this text, the artist makes clear that *Triangle* – as the title already indicates – develops as a communication circuit between herself, the distant figure on the roof and the policeman below. In a fascinating twist, Iveković effectively choreographs an external event with her unwitting participants, thereby manipulating and shaping social reality. While neither the presence of the photographer nor subsequent viewers of the documentation are acknowledged, this work is clearly exemplary of Auslander's 'performative' mode of production described above, where the document does not just 'open up' the circuit of viewership but effectively *produces the artwork* – in this case by distilling the concise narrative.

⁹⁴ For a discussion see Ana Janevski ed., *As Soon as I Open My Eyes I See a Film: Experiment in the Art of Yugoslavia in the 1960s and 1970s* (Warsaw: Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, 2010).



Figure 7: Sanja Iveković, *Triangle* (four gelatin silver prints with printed text) 1979

In her extensive analysis of *Triangle* Ruth Noack rigorously considered the complexities of the *Triangle* documents, suggesting that this perspective brings to bear a very different set of histories and discourses to those gleaned through its analysis solely as a performance. Though she (correctly) asserts the primacy of the gallery audience as the site where the work coheres as such, her discussion attempts to steer attention away from a focus on evidential value, suggesting that whether the action *actually* unfolded as described (or even whether the photographs were taken on the same day) is moot. For her, doubts over the documents' veracity cannot 'undo' the work.⁹⁵ She identified a 'chasm' within feminist art of the 1970s 'between those artists and movements for which a discussion of art's status was bound up with or even secondary to their socially orientated politics (e.g. Chilean artist Lotty Rosenfeld or the Californian women's art movement) and those who focussed their politics solely on the art field (e.g. Marina Abramović).'⁹⁶ This assertion brings significant implications for an understanding of what I am calling the social document.

In *Triangle* Iveković presents an act of civil disruption, playing out and rendering visible through her performance and its carefully considered re-presentation the processes

⁹⁵ 'It is not their documentary character per se that is decisive here, but the fact that the work claims their documentary character.' Ruth Noack, *Sanja Iveković: Triangle* (London: Afterall Books, 2013), 40.

⁹⁶ Noack, *Sanja Iveković*, 89.

behind the maintenance of the civil peace. In his overarching examination of the formation of the modern state, first published in 1939, the German sociologist Norbert Elias argued that the 'civilising process' played an indispensable role. His assertion that 'a continuous uniform pressure is exerted on individual life by the physical violence stored behind the scenes of everyday life, a pressure totally familiar and hardly perceived' is one that seems to speak directly to Iveković's project.⁹⁷ The peculiar security that this containment of violence brings demands self-restraint, reaching down into the norms of 'civilised' behaviour and the development of a polite culture. At the same time, within modern societies' dense webs of interdependence, the social existence of the individual who 'gives way to spontaneous impulses and emotions' is threatened. When the extremes of both violence and pleasure are suppressed, the simple act of performing masturbation on a balcony during a parade presents a stark challenge.

While Bojana Pejić has usefully discussed Iveković's forced articulation of a visual order, particularly the underpinning gendered logic of public 'menspace' and its ability to control the private sphere, Noack has further remarked that the socialist state's incursions into the processes of social reproduction were (to a degree at least) emancipatory.⁹⁸ However, she notes that while it was recognised that more progress against sexism was required, the (renumerated) workplace remained the conventional stage for any social change: 'Domestic violence, unpaid reproductive labour and the sexism that came with increasing consumerism and its correlate, the advertisement industry, were relegated to a private sphere that was neither to be looked at nor spoken about.'⁹⁹ The photographs enable Iveković to at once hone on the threat of the distant surveillance figure and the spectacular rhetoric of the motorcade, contrasting yet *connecting* them with the intimacy of her sun-drenched balcony, full of the sensory delights of smoking, whisky, intellectual pursuit and erotic pleasure. The careful juxtaposition of photographic registers underscores the effect, moving from personal snapshots, media-like imagery and evidential material. It is the use of the pared down text/image document that succinctly narrates the connection in ways that the single image or performance (or its simple mirroring) cannot achieve. Added to this, Silvia

⁹⁷ Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2000), 372.

⁹⁸ Noack, *Sanja Iveković*, 83.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 13. Elsewhere Iveković confirms: 'Communism didn't deal with equal rights – the discourse of equal rights was just a thin layer covering the very stable patriarchy.' Katarzyna Pabijanek, "Women's House: Sanja Iveković Discusses Recent Projects," *Artmargins Online*, 2009, accessed 5 Sep 2011, <http://www.artmargins.com/index.php/5-interviews/541-qwomens-houseq-sanja-ivekovic-discusses-recent-projects-interview>.

Eiblmayr has referred to the 'public cuts' by which Iveković 'pierces the desired "calm surface" of the public space, pointing to its true, conflictual character.'¹⁰⁰ *Triangle*, then, once again allies with certain positions on realism that connect it to the excavation and exposure of contradictory realities.

In terms of the artistic context of her production, Iveković belongs to a generation of critical and experimental Yugoslavian artists and filmmakers often cited under the umbrella term 'New Artistic Practice' who, in the wake of 1968, explored alternative means of production, presentation and distribution.¹⁰¹ In her words: 'The paradox is that we as artists had serious intentions of "democratising art" but the artistic language that we were using was so radically new that our audience was really limited.'¹⁰² Added to this, with no market to speak of the artworks produced were not subject to the same inexorable commodification process as their Western counterparts. However, the production of documents certainly facilitated artistic contact, particularly amongst socialist countries but also, in those states where the Iron Curtain was more porous, beyond. In his account of the pragmatic exchanges between the Yugoslav and Polish avant-gardes in the 1970s, Lukasz Ronduda builds a picture of the role that the art document played in these contacts to describe a context of mutual influence.¹⁰³ Among other anecdotes he notes that all of the documentation intended for the *Modern Yugoslav Art* exhibition at the Contemporary Gallery, Warsaw in 1974, was transported to Poland 'under the arm' of one of the artists, Rasa Todosijević.

When the Yugoslavian artist Tomislav Gotovac visited Poland in 1978 to participate in exhibitions, he stayed with the artistic duo Zofia Kulik and Premyslaw Kwiek (KwieKulik), leaving behind extensive documentation of his work at their 'Laboratory of Action, Documentation, and Promotion' in Warsaw.¹⁰⁴ As the title of their self-directed initiative suggests KwieKulik also employed documentary strategies as part of their 'performing life' and living art works. In parallel with Mary Kelly, they produced

¹⁰⁰ Silvia Eiblmayr cited in *Promises of the Past: A Discontinuous History of Art in Former Eastern Europe*, eds. Vít Havránek, Christine Macel, Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez (Zurich: JRP/Ringier; Paris: Centre Pompidou, 2010), 99.

¹⁰¹ Ana Janevski, "As Soon as I Open My Eyes I See a Film: Experiment in the Art of Yugoslavia in the 1960s and 1970s," in *As Soon as I Open My Eyes I See a Film: Experiment in the Art of Yugoslavia in the 1960s and 1970s*, ed. Ana Janevski (Warsaw: Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, 2010), 29.

¹⁰² Antonia Majaca, "Feminism, Activism and Historicisation: Sanja Ivekovic talks to Antonia Majaca," *n.paradoxa* 23 (2009): 6.

¹⁰³ Lukasz Ronduda, "Pragmatism of the Margins: On Contacts between Yugoslav and Polish Avant-Gardes in the 1970s," in *Whenever I Open my Eyes I See a Film*, 62.

¹⁰⁴ Ronduda, "Pragmatism of the Margins," 62.

Activities with Dobromierz (1972-74), documenting family life via hundreds of photographic images, in this case intending to examine the cultural and political subordination of the self under the control apparatus of the communist regime. As Katarzyna Michalak has noted, KwieKulik did not differentiate between the performance and its documentation, believing that they are ‘accomplished together’. At the same time she emphasises that the latter was additionally important to them as it could represent them abroad.¹⁰⁵ Finally, Ronduda recounts that for the exhibition *Polskija Avangarda* organised by the Zagreb Student Centre (1975), Polish artists were asked to send documentation of their works. The exhibition was conceived as an ‘attempt at communication between communities with similar problems in their cultural artistic production.’¹⁰⁶ Documentation, then, was favoured as a *pragmatic* form suited to facilitating the mediation and development of artistic practice.



Figure 8: KwieKulik, *Activities with Dobromierz* (detail; slideshow still) 1972-74

The formal decisions underpinning *Triangle* must be considered against this wider context of production and dissemination. Noack’s useful account of the ‘life’ of the *Triangle* documentation reveals a great deal about their ontological status vis-à-vis the

¹⁰⁵ Katarzyna Michalak, “Performing Life, Living Art/ Abramovic/Ulay and KwieKulik,” *Afterimage* 27, no. 3 (1999): 15.

¹⁰⁶ *Novina Nova*, Galerija Studentskog Centra, Zagreb, May 1975. Cited in Ronduda, “Pragmatism of the Margins,” 63.

artwork, focusing in particular on the process of canonisation that the piece has undergone in more recent years. She is particularly concerned with the discrepancies between the numerous presentations of the documentation both in terms of their actual content (different versions of the images and texts were often used) and their positioning, which has only recently settled into a precisely set order. In this progression, Noack tried to identify the approximate moment that the material shifted from purely documentary to becoming 'a work' – a shift that she locates somewhere around the late 1990s. This, I would add, is in line with the rise to prominence of conceptual art, performance art documentation and art's 'documentary turn'. However, her apparent return to the idea that the documents *can* be separated from the artwork to become mere referents is, in my view, not persuasive. Far more insightful is her proposal that the documents were deliberately kept open: 'Against a rhetoric of the finished work, these small changes keep the artist involved, as if *Triangle* needed some slight instability in order to stay alive.'¹⁰⁷ Following this logic, it could be argued that the document is deployed because it retains these opportunities for reworking in different contexts of reception. If documents are, then, *predisposed to the curatorial*, as with the example of the *Tucumán Arde* example, the question is whether subsequent curatorial interventions can endow them with a refreshed political relevance or potency beyond the initial moment of their creation, or if they are necessarily compromised.¹⁰⁸

1.5 Conclusion

Though each of the examples cited here have all, at some point, been associated with conceptual art (taken here to roughly span the period between 1968 and 1979), their relationship with it is far from straightforward. Mary Kelly's and Sanja Iveković's work is perhaps more illuminatingly framed as feminist, first and foremost, while the activist strategies of the Grupo de Artistas de Vanguardia led some of their number to explicitly reject any association with conceptual art:

the language invented for and from the elite was useless for communicating with the new public that was sought. *Tucumán Arde* used art to make politics. The greatest part of conceptual art and some expressions of contemporary political art use politics as a subject matter to make art.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ Noack, *Sanja Iveković*, 39.

¹⁰⁸ In both cases artists appropriated the curatorial function.

¹⁰⁹ Leon Ferrari cited in Camnitzer, *Conceptualism in Latin American Art*, 70.

As case studies, what they undoubtedly demonstrate is the heterogeneous character of the social document, as it emerges in response to different geographical locations, socio-economic contexts and struggles. Despite these differences, the fact remains that, in their respective searches for critical formal strategies capable of challenging existing social knowledges, artists working in a variety of contexts across the globe turned to the document. The reasons for this are multiple but a few overarching observations are worth noting. *Firstly*, as a format it could engage with the new open-ended, performative temporality of art to become the physical dimension of wider, durational, and occasionally multi-authored, *projects*. Notably, projects emerged as the pre-eminent way to organise work under post-Fordism, including within the art field. As a structure it finds definition through its temporal delimitation; of having a beginning and an end point.¹¹⁰ *Secondly*, in the shift from contemplation to cognition (or from absorption to use), the document was privileged not as a medium in the modernist sense but for its *mediatory* capacities (to refer, to store, to communicate). *Thirdly*, as artists increasingly became concerned with the sites of both production and mediation, their role often took on a curatorial dimension. In many of the cases cited here, the exhibition became a site for building narratives and arguments through the organisation of documents. *Fourthly*, and perhaps most significantly, they articulate the need for a different kind of object altogether – and frequently one that could accommodate *text* alongside images – as artists sought to engage with hidden social realities, invisible economic forces and precarious social struggles. From research and the establishment of new communication circuits to intimate engagements with lived experience, art, life and the document intersected in a multitude of ways.

¹¹⁰ See Chapters 3, 4 and 5 for a further discussion, as well as Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 2007).

CHAPTER 2

The Repudiation of the Document and the Postmodern Current

2.1 *The lineage of disappearance*

[T]he a- or non-aesthetic uses of photography associated with various conceptual, proto-conceptual or post-conceptual practices of the 1960s and 1970s, and their documentation, gave way in the 1980s to the self-consciously 'anti-aesthetic' practices of postmodern appropriation, only to be overtaken by the large-scale and frequently digital, colour photography that has dominated photographic art since the 1990s.¹

So begins Diarmuid Costello and Margaret Iversen's edited volume of essays *Photography after Conceptual Art* published in 2010. Though their trajectory reasserts the privileged position the lens has occupied in post-war artistic practice, it leaves the ground quite unprepared for the undeniable prominence of documentary modes in art at the turn of the century. The previous chapter demonstrated some of the ways in which conceptual art subjected modernism to sustained examination and challenge, yet considering whether it captured the initial energies of a new postmodern era (Foster) or constituted the last gasp of its antecedent (Wall), is less useful in the context of the project of this thesis.² As Victor Burgin has noted:

It seems likely that 'conceptualism' is destined... to be represented as that 'movement' which, by undermining 'modernism,' paved the way for 'post-modernism.' None of the 'isms' here, however, were, or are, unitary phenomena nor do such cultural phenomena simply give way to one another like television programmes in an evening's viewing.³

Nevertheless, if the question 'what comes after conceptual art?' has indeed been pervasive, what is of crucial import here is that to all intents and purposes the document

¹ Costello and Iversen, eds., *Photography after Conceptual Art*, 1.

² Hal Foster, "Subversive Signs," in *Recodings: Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics* (Seattle: Bay Pres, 1985), 100; Wall, "Marks of Indifference."

³ Victor Burgin, "The Absence of Presence: Conceptualism and Postmodernisms," in *The End of Art Theory: Criticisms and Postmodernity* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986), 48.

frequently disappears from view. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the literature associated with postmodernism. My aim in this chapter is to challenge, or at least complicate, this lineage of disappearance.

The terms 'postmodernity' and 'postmodernism' are used here on the understanding that the former refers to the historical conditions through which the latter arises. Among the few who continue to name the early twenty-first century 'postmodern' are the American literary theorist Michael Hardt and the autonomist Marxist political philosopher Antonio Negri in their trilogy of books beginning with *Empire*.⁴ Their persistence stands in stark contrast to the apparent aversion to the term in art historical literature where it has become deeply unfashionable. Implicitly referring to a *past* set of circumstances it thereby raises the issue of periodisation – despite the fact that much of the work of the time was explicit in its effort not simply to produce another temporally defined 'movement'.⁵ It now appears that postmodernism is taken to reference a specific period – broadly taken as bracketed between the end of the 1960s to the latter stages of the twentieth century, reaching its zenith in the mid 1980s – during which time much creative and intellectual labour was expended on delineating new emerging societal contours.

My intention here is not to dismiss postmodernism or to reduce it to mere stylistic tropes. Rather, I will firstly examine some of the reasons behind the apparent antipathy towards documentary modes before going on to analyse the conditions of their persistence in works that engage with narratives of lived experience and what I tentatively refer to as a realist lineage. I have attended to developments in photographic practice in order to focus on the *document* trend, following on from the analysis undertaken in Chapter 1. Though there is no scope to attend to the topic in any detail, it must be acknowledged that the trajectory of video art was similarly rich over this period, marked by struggles between 'aestheticism' and 'information' while posing challenges to conceptualisations and practices of documentary realism; in Martha Gever's words frequently 'unsettl[ing] perceptions of reality rather than confirm[ing] its inevitability.'⁶

⁴ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).

⁵ As Laura Kipnis points out, postmodernism's obituary was already declared in a *New York Times* article as far back as 1990. Laura Kipnis, "Repossessing Popular Culture," in *Theory in Contemporary Art Since 1985*, eds. Zoya Kacur and Simon Leung (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 372.

⁶ Martha Gever, "The Feminism Factor: Video in Relation to Feminism," in *Illuminating Video: An Essential Guide to Video Art*, eds., Doug Hall and Sally Jo Fifer (New York: Aperture/BAVC, 1990), 230; Martha Rosler,

2.2 From the conceptual-art-text to the postmodernist textualisation of the image

In 1978, the influential U.S. journal *October* launched a special issue on photography in which the editors articulated an urgent need for a 'radical sociology' of the medium.⁷ Playing a leading role in articulating the shift towards postmodernism, many of its contributors went on to frame this complex yet fundamental 'breach' precisely in terms of artists' recourse to the previously spurned medium of photography.⁸ The shift (which excises references to 'photo-conceptualism') is usually articulated as follows: against MoMA curator John Szarkowski's modernist attempts at the assimilation of photography into the hallowed space of the Fine Arts based around formalist themes (of time, the frame, the detail and 'the thing itself'), this new generation of artists, curators and critics employed photography precisely for its capacity to speak to the era's fascination with copies, fragments, plurality, inauthenticity, allegory and questions of representation. As a result, for all – or, paradoxically, perhaps because of – the rejection of the tyranny of medium specificity, photography was frequently held up as the preeminent mode of postmodernity. Similar claims were also made on behalf of video, indicating that it was the peculiar attributes of *the lens* and its products that carried such a degree of contemporary relevance and thereby critical weight.⁹

The term 'document(ary)' is all but dropped from the critical lexicon during this period. As will become clear, this proscription is *not* due to the absence of documentary modes. Indeed, it would be possible to write an alternative history of postmodern art from this perspective. Apparently, then, other explanations must be sought. Douglas Crimp's choice of title *Pictures* for his exhibition and influential text in which he used the term 'postmodern' (originally published in 1977 as an exhibition catalogue essay) appears at first to offer a neat answer. It seems to revert to the common art historical trope which

"Video: Shedding the Utopian Moment," in *Decoys and Disruptions: Selected Writings, 1975-2001* (New York; Cambridge MA: MIT Press in association with International Center of Photography, 2004), 43.

⁷ The Editors, "Photography: A Special Issue," *October* 5 (1978): 4.

⁸ Crimp, "Pictures"; Craig Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Towards a Theory of Postmodernism," *October* 12 (1980): 67-86; Crimp, "The Photographic Activity of Postmodernism." In another essay Crimp asserted that: 'It is photography's re-evaluation as a modernist medium that signals the end of modernism. Postmodernism begins when photography comes to pervert modernism.' Douglas Crimp "The Museum's Old, the Library's New Subject," in *On the Museum's Ruins* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), 77.

⁹ In his preface to the anthology *Illuminating Video* David A. Ross states that video is the seminal postmodern form. David A. Ross, "Preface," *Illuminating Video: An Essential Guide to Video Art*, eds., Doug Hall and Sally Jo Fifer (New York: Aperture/BAVC, 1990), 10. Postmodernism is also associated with a return to painting.

has maintained a separation between the realm of 'pictures' and those of 'documents' setting the latter's presumed styleless lack of subjective intention in antithetical relation to the unwavering commitment to expression and aesthetic effect.¹⁰ Yet Abigail Solomon Godeau distinguished postmodern practices from their modernist 'art photography' counterparts, precisely on the basis of the latter's privileging of the 'pictorial' (à la Szarkowski).¹¹ A more useful distinction to draw between conceptual art and what must now be regarded as the dominant mode of 'critical' postmodern practice might instead articulate a shift in emphasis away from documentation and towards issues of representation. Crimp's essay attempted to articulate the connection between the theatricality – or presence – of the performative practices of the 1970s and their afterlife. In doing so, his refusal of the term 'documentation' is notable. Instead, he writes of a reinvestment in the pictorial image through the process of 'staging', citing works by artists including Cindy Sherman. He writes: 'the presentation of an event in such a manner and at such a distance that it is apprehended as representation – representation not, however, conceived as the *re*-presentation of that which is prior, but as the unavoidable condition of the intelligibility of even that which is present.'¹² In other words, the deployment of an event to produce an image intended to interrogate the processes and politics of representation. The rich complexity of the performative document and the adaptability of the conceptual art document have all but disappeared from view.

Postmodernism's obsession with representation stemmed from the recognition that it constituted a prime site of ideological activity. Whether artists aimed for a deliberate expansion of the repertoire of representational modes and tropes available or engaged in critique using deconstructive methodologies, a discontent with the then current formations ran across the board. Alternative approaches to narrative together with the tendency towards performative staging Crimp identified were two strategies that began to feature heavily in this period. As the image was reframed as 'text', documentary modes were considered through alternative critical prisms. A now (somewhat ironically) canonical work, Sherrie Levine's *After Walker Evans* (1981), offers an example. Re-photographing Evans' Farm Security Administration social documentary photographs

¹⁰ For a discussion see Steve Edwards, *Photography: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

¹¹ Abigail Solomon-Godeau, "Photography after Art Photography," in *Art after Modernism: Rethinking Representation* (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984): 75-85.

¹² Crimp, "Pictures," 77.

and copyrighting the results as her own, she both dealt in documents and produced yet more of the same. Yet the work, and the critical attention it garnered, reorientated attention away from the ostensible subject matter (poverty-stricken families during the Great Depression of the 1930s) and instead focused upon how her deceptively simple move draws together many of the era's pivotal ideas on authorship, originality, authenticity and appropriation. Her provocation simultaneously seemed to call into question the process of canonisation, the master (read male) creator, the commodity position of photography as an inherently reproducible medium, and – perhaps only as an afterthought – the ethnographic enterprise itself. The documentary value of the image *per se* was no longer of interest other than for documenting the pre-existing image and as a potential target for deconstructive impulses.



Figure 9: Sherrie Levine, *After Walker Evans* (silver gelatin print) 1981

Sherman, Levine et al. are examples of what Hal Foster classified as 'good' or critical postmodernism. He writes:

In cultural politics today a basic opposition exists between a postmodernism which seeks to deconstruct modernism and resist the status quo and a

postmodernism which repudiates the former to celebrate the latter: a postmodernism of resistance and a postmodernism of reaction... a resistant postmodernism is concerned with a critical deconstruction of tradition, not an instrumental pastiche of pop- or pseudo- historical forms, with a critique of origins, not a return to them. In short, it seeks to question rather than exploit cultural codes, to explore rather than conceal social and political affiliations.¹³

Concern with the social is not abandoned in such practices, then, but is rather reflected and refracted into a particular concern with the social relationships produced and maintained by the lens. Indeed, interrogations of mass media representations – *as part of reality* rather than external to it – became paradigmatic during this period as the artist became ‘a manipulator of signs more than a producer of art objects.’¹⁴ Technologies were frequently viewed as determinant, as demonstrated by the readings of Sherman’s carefully rendered tableaux in her *Untitled Film Stills* (1977-80) which deftly captured a narrow range of stereotypical characters, or even Martha Rosler’s acid-laced performative critique of the construction of femininity in the video work *Reading Vogue* (1982). Venturing beyond the white cube, Barbara Kruger and Victor Burgin’s respective appropriations of the language of advertising in photo-text montages like *Untitled (Your Body Is a Battleground)* (1989) or *Possession* (1976) were intended to disrupt what they saw as the maintenance and reproduction of the dominant ideology. ‘What interested me’ Burgin later said in an interview with John Roberts, ‘was how ‘art’ might be able to create an alternative space of reflection on the mainstream media practices given the cultural dominance of TV, cinema and advertising.’¹⁵ In working through, with and against mass media channels or tropes, these artists and many more like them were establishing a foothold in order to engage with the politics of representation.

What Roland Barthes referred to as photography’s ‘evidential force’ was problematised in this type of ‘critical’ postmodernist practice. The sporadic challenges mounted in previous decades against the photographic document’s claim to offer a straight and objective record of reality intensified into a sustained interrogation. The *impossibility* of truth and the inherent contingency of evidence became the subject of many works, while

¹³ Hal Foster, *Postmodern Culture* (London; Sydney: Pluto Press, 1983), xi –xii.

¹⁴ Affirming the centrality of the lens Foster listed the forms of production and modes of address that such artists employ as ‘photo-text collage, constructed or projected photographs, videotapes, critical texts, appropriated, arranged or surrogate artworks, etc.’ Hal Foster, from “Subversive Signs,” in *Art in Theory 1900-1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, eds. Paul Wood and Charles Harrison (Oxford; Cambridge MA: Blackwell), 1066.

¹⁵ John Roberts, “Interview with Victor Burgin,” *The Impossible Document: Photography and Conceptual Art in Britain, 1966-1976* (London: Camerawork, 1977): 80-103.

the idea that the artist stands apart from what he or she seeks to criticise was comprehensively rejected. On one level, then, working with image-producing technologies like photography and video was an entirely appropriate strategy for practitioners consigned to 'work-within' an inescapable system where, in Althusserian terms, ideology pervaded all social institutions and relationships: the lens-based image was both a tool and a target. Artists often sought to deconstruct constituting web of complex relationships, assumptions and ideological formations underpinning 'neutral' or 'objective' representations in order to expose the ways by which they construct and reproduce understandings of the world. Informed by the heady mixture of feminist theory, post-structuralism and post-colonial critique, this focus on the politics of representation simultaneously acknowledged the power of the image and demanded new explorations of its potential to effect socio-political change.

Postmodernism was of course closely allied (particularly in the *October* circle) with the loose configuration of deconstructive and poststructuralist theory. Yet, even as the artwork's status as a relational text intended to be read rather than transcendently experienced was repeatedly emphasised, the position of authorship apparently problematised (along with the fetishisation of 'unique subjectivity'), and the fragment privileged in the 'war on totality', any reference to documentary modes were cast far from view under what Foster termed the new 'anti-aesthetic' tendencies of artistic practice.¹⁶ Despite this emphatic turn towards the lens, such modes' identification with information, objective utilitarianism and – perhaps worst of all – *realism* rendered them, for the most part, deeply unpopular as many artists withdrew from documenting material social realities.

This repudiation can be connected to post-structuralism's destabilisation of the relationship between representation and reality. In Baudrillard's account of postmodernity this relationship is severed (or at least fundamentally transformed). Citing photography's role in this process he has traced the successive phases of the image as moving from a reflection of a basic reality, through the perversion of that reality and then on to the masking of the absence of a basic reality. The final scenario of 'simulation' for which Baudrillard's writing is well known is the moment where the image 'bears no

¹⁶ Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977); Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984); Hal Foster, *Postmodern Culture*.

relation to any reality whatever: it is its own pure simulacrum.’¹⁷ Such a theorisation obviously holds considerable implications for the photographic or filmic document; not only does it refuse the possibility of its referential base, it performs an inversion whereby images precede the real in order to *produce* reality. From such a perspective, when the focus of concern is placed squarely upon the circulation of the *image* within this groundless network of communication, it seems that the (constructed) picture must inevitably be privileged over the document after all. ‘By the eighties,’ the artist and theorist Allan Sekula observed, ‘documentary had become a more or less “decadent” genre.’¹⁸ And sure enough it at first appears that the document could only enter the field of art undercover, dosed up with heavy irony to facilitate its own critique, or, at the very least, imbued with a recognition that any claim upon truth or a privileged access to reality was fundamentally problematic, if not dangerous.

2.3 The (cultural) politics of postmodernism

So much for the document, what about ‘the social’? If the endeavour to establish new paradigms of social criticism is often presented as a central feature of the this era, more needs to be said on both this approach and the possibilities of its politics. At this complex – not to say contradictory – juncture, the political was often presented as practices of power that played out upon, or diffused through, bodies and the everyday operations of life. As the demand rang out for a new postmodern politics which could ‘complete the Gramscian move to extend the political into all spheres, domains and practices of our culture,’ understandings of politics moved beyond the traditional regulated spheres and institutions to become imbricated with the arena of culture.¹⁹ In terms of art, for Foster, the opening up that occurred through the resistant or ‘counter-practices’ of oppositional postmodernism saw artists seek to connect the cultural to the social, ‘to explore rather than conceal social and political affiliations.’²⁰ Not about unveiling underlying political ‘truths’ or progressively working towards a fixed ethical horizon, the rejection of such

¹⁷ Jean Baudrillard, “The Precession of Simulacra,” in *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, ed. Brian Wallis (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984): 256. In another text he states: ‘Reality itself founders in hyperrealism, the meticulous reduplication of the real through another, reproductive medium, such as photography.’ Jean Baudrillard, “The Hyper-realism of Simulation,” in *Art in Theory 1900-1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, eds. Paul Wood and Charles Harrison (Oxford; Cambridge MA: Blackwell): 1049-1051.

¹⁸ Benjamin Buchloh, “Conversation between Allan Sekula and Benjamin Buchloh,” in *Performance Under Working Conditions*, ed. Sabine Breitwieser (Vienna: Generali Foundation, 2003), 39.

¹⁹ Andrew Ross, “Introduction,” in *Universal Abandon?: The Politics of Postmodernism*, ed. Andrew Ross (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), xv.

²⁰ Foster, *Postmodern Culture*, x.

totalising grand or meta-narratives brought about a focus on a politics of difference. On one level then, this 'cultural turn' sought to take account of the emergence of the new social movements and new political subjectivities. In order to consider more deeply the implications of this move in relation to attitudes towards and uses of the document, it is useful to first lay some groundwork by looking at the work of two of postmodernism's key theorists Fredric Jameson and Jean-François Lyotard.

Jameson's totalising account of postmodernism charts the transformation of the cultural sphere in contemporary society, setting it in relation to the infrastructures of the economic system of late capitalism.²¹ For him too, the inception of the postmodern era is characterised by the demise of notions of the unique and the personal associated with modernist subjectivity as well as the rise of the lens: the individual brushstroke is replaced by 'the emergent primacy of mechanical reproduction', while elsewhere he refers to the 'current intensification of an addiction to the photographic image.'²² Yet, rather than simply identifying a stylistic departure, Jameson's influential periodisation project delved into various spheres of social production to argue that it is in fact 'culture' that binds and connects them all to play a crucial role in the functioning and reproduction of capitalism. He therefore argued for a more open approach to Marx's base (relations and forces of production) – superstructure (the related cultural, social, political and ideological forms) model:

[...] 'base and superstructure' is not really a model, but a starting point and a problem, something as undogmatic as an imperative simultaneously to grasp culture in and for itself, but also in relationship to its outside, its content, its context, and its space of intervention and of effectivity. How one does that, however, is never given in advance.²³

Jameson acknowledges that the title of his influential article (and then book) 'Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism' effectively conflates the economic with the cultural, eclipsing the distinction between the base and superstructure so that: 'the base, in the third stage of capitalism, generates its superstructures with a new kind of dynamic.'²⁴ Under these circumstances, the new

²¹ Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *New Left Review* 146 (1984): 53-92.

²² Ibid., 66. He acknowledges his debt to Baudrillard. Fredric Jameson, "Marxism and Postmodernism," *New Left Review* 176 (1989): 32.

²³ Jameson, "Marxism and Postmodernism," 41-42.

²⁴ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), xxi.

condition of the reified image Jameson describes again sees the referent slip from view; depthlessness emerge as a constitutive feature, as well as a refusal to engage the present or to think historically. Such a cultural logic problematises both documentary modes and curtails the possibility of politics. In what forms and under what caveats, then, do they persist? In the bewilderment and social confusion that emerges under western capitalism's consumer society, orienting or positioning oneself politically becomes very difficult while the subject's agency is neutralised. The inability to adequately represent the space of multinational capital is in part blamed for this situation. In another essay he clarified his position:

I am far from suggesting that no politics at all is possible in this new post-Marxian Nietzschean world of micropolitics – that is observably untrue. But I do want to argue that *without a conception of the social totality* (and the possibility of transforming a whole social system), no properly socialist politics is possible [emphasis added].²⁵

Though he does not explicitly state as much, his argument can perhaps be expanded to note that all the then current artistic forms and strategies were able to capture were the *symptoms* of postmodernism's cultural turn.

Jean-François Lyotard, another exemplary theorist of postmodernism, accounts for these cultural transformations through what he terms the crisis of narratives. Taking science as his object of analysis, the weight of his text *The Postmodern Condition* (1979) arguably made a more substantive impact within the humanities. In an attempt to lay the basis for a post-Marxist social theory, his work contended that the very status and grounds of knowledge had been fundamentally altered by the abandonment of a universalist philosophy to instead be characterised by fragmentation, splintering and a move beyond the possibility of consensus. In place of blind faith in the 'grand narratives of legitimation' which inevitably exclude and silence minority voices, he argued for a 'justice of multiplicities'.²⁶

Exactly what possibilities for politics Lyotard's 'war on totality' retains has been the subject of much debate and indeed open derision, from David Harvey's charge of

²⁵ Fredric Jameson, "Cognitive Mapping," in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1988), 355.

²⁶ He summarises: 'Simplifying to the extreme, I define *postmodern* as incredulity toward metanarratives'. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, xxiv.

relativism to Seyla Benhabib's accusation that all he ends up with is 'neoliberal interest group pluralism.'²⁷ Among the most useful arguments in this context are those which set his contentions in relation to feminist discourse. Nancy Fraser and Linda Nicholson do just this in their essay 'Social Criticism without Philosophy' where they contrast his pragmatic, local and ameliorative approach – which they find to be rather vague, if not naïve – with feminism's political commitment.²⁸ While maintaining that generative intersections can take place, they argue that such theories of postmodernism preclude:

one familiar, and arguably essential, genre of political theory: identification and critique of macrostructures of inequality and injustice that cut across the boundaries separating relatively discrete practices and institutions. There is no place ... for critique of broad-based relations of dominance and subordination along lines like gender, race and class.²⁹

Given that the enduring critical significance of postmodernism is often located precisely in its acknowledgement of 'the multiple forms of otherness as they emerge from differences in subjectivity, gender and sexuality, race and class, temporal (configurations of sensibility) and spatial geographic locations and dislocations', it is worth (albeit briefly) further unpacking this focus on 'otherness' through the distinct positions of Lyotard's politics of difference, as well as feminist theories and practices.³⁰

'A *self* does not amount to much,' Lyotard writes, 'but no self is an island; each exists in a fabric of relations that is now much more complex and mobile than ever before.'³¹ Insisting on the heterogeneity of social identities, he frames individuals as 'nodal points' through which various communication circuits and social bonds fluidly pass. Contextually and historically bound 'little narratives' leap to prominence under such circumstances, offering an alternative to the oppressive hegemonic perspectives which, in his view, have lost credibility. Describing his contemporary situation as 'godless' Lyotard argued for a pragmatic approach which, rather than ascribe to singular,

²⁷ David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 52; Seyla Benhabib, "Epistemologies of Postmodernism," in *Feminism/Postmodernism*, ed. Linda Nicholson (London: Routledge, 1990), 123.

²⁸ Nancy Fraser and Linda Nicholson, "Social Criticism without Philosophy: An Encounter between Feminism and Postmodernism," in *Universal Abandon?: The Politics of Postmodernism*, ed. Andrew Ross (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988): 83-104.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 88.

³⁰ Andreas Huyssens, "Mapping the Post-modern," *New German Critique* 33 (1984): 50.

³¹ Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 15.

authoritative ethical schemas, focused on the creative – and, most importantly, *political* – power of individuals to tell stories. He writes:

The only way that networks of uncertain and ephemeral stories can gnaw away at the great institutionalised narrative apparatuses is by increasing the number of skirmishes that take place on the sidelines. That's what women who have had abortions, prisoners, conscripts, prostitutes, students, and peasants have been doing in your country over the last decade or so. You make up little stories, or even little segments of little stories, listen to them, transmit them and act them out when the time is right.³²

In short, *Lyotard advocates an entrepreneurial approach to politics.*

That the self (now the 'subject') is fundamentally social and is culturally constructed has been a mainstay of a miscellany of postmodern theoretical propositions.³³ If Lyotard's narrative explosion rejected consensus-driven politics to instead celebrate fragmentation, multiplicity and individual freedom of expression, for Fraser and Nicholson his attack on the assumption of a stable self offered a potential route out of the problems of feminism's 'disabling vestiges of essentialism'. Yet, they remained highly sceptical of his 'politics of difference' which they saw as incapable of harnessing feminism's social-critical power. Instead, they envisaged the richer, more complex, hybrid terrains of 'postmodernist feminisms', a patchwork of alliances based around commonalities which are nevertheless interlaced with differences.³⁴

For critics like Craig Owens postmodernism's radicality lay in this very commitment to difference.³⁵ As observed above, many artists, concerned with the violence of the signifier, deliberately destabilised conventional structures of representation and looking (the gaze). Owens put it thus:

It is precisely at the legislative frontier between what can be represented and what cannot that the postmodernist operation is being staged – not in order to transform representation, but in order to expose that system of power that authorizes certain representations while blocking, prohibiting or

³² Jean-François Lyotard, "Lessons in Paganism," in *The Lyotard Reader*, ed. Andrew Benjamin, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1989), 132.

³³ This notion was not new, see, for example, Freud's work on the subject.

³⁴ Fraser and Nicholson, "Social Criticism without Philosophy". I would argue that this plural notion of feminism which holds that distinct 'varieties' can coexist can now be seen as politically counterproductive.

³⁵ Craig Owens, "The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism," in *Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (London; Sydney: Pluto Press, 1983), 59.

invalidating others.³⁶

Disrupting or revealing structures then, rather than engaging directly with content, was the primary task of postmodernism's exemplary artists – cited time and again by Owens and his contemporaries – Cindy Sherman, Barbara Kruger, Sherrie Levine and Dara Birnbaum.³⁷ Yet subjectivity and representation remained highly contested ground at a time when issues of identity were at the heart of political life. A maelstrom of perspectives around such issues emerged through emphatic debates around gender, ethnicity and sexuality, debates which tended to displace class-based concerns. At the same time, other artists and cultural practitioners, in variance to Sherman et al.'s deconstructive thrust, employed lens-based media to *vie for visibility within the arenas of representation*, while much feminist discourse explicitly challenged the poststructuralist denial of the subject and postmodernism's rejection of representation.³⁸ Such alternative approaches are particularly relevant in this context not least because – as will be shown below – the diverse attempts at recuperation required the persistence of documentary modes.³⁹

2.4 Lived subjectivities, self-documentation

To summarise, a central pillar of postmodernism is held to be the dismantling of the modernist concept of representation – a shift in emphasis that appears to have radically undermined (if not entirely displaced) both documentary modes and concerns with material social realities. That this account does not tell the full story is plainly articulated by Martha Rosler (herself a purveyor of polemical critiques against traditional social documentary photography) in her essay 'Notes on Quotes,' first published in 1982, in which she lambasts Sherrie Levine:

³⁶ Ibid., 59.

³⁷ Notably, in contrast to Wall and Roberts' respective focus on white male conceptual artists, this 'core list' is comprised of white women.

³⁸ In the words of Seyla Benhabib: 'Lyotard wants to convince that the destruction of the episteme of representation allows only one option, namely, a recognition of the irreconcilability and incommensurability of language games and the acceptance that only local and context specific criteria of validity can be formulated.' Benhabib, "Epistemologies of Postmodernism," 112.

³⁹ Connecting the *Pictures* generation with the critiques of Guy Debord, Bowen suggests that Sherman, Levine et al. 'appropriate[d] photographic imagery from commercial culture in order to undercut photography's truth claims, and thereby expose its ideological basis; it involve[d] critique that, as Debord suggests in his decription of *detournement* reveals the absence at the heart of the spectacle's seeming presence.' Dore Bowen, "Imagine There's No Image (It's Easy If You Try): Appropriation in the Age of Digital Reproduction," in *A Companion to Contemporary Art since 1945*, ed. Amelia Jones (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 538.

What alternative vision is suggested by such work? We are not provided the space within the work to understand how things might be different. We can imagine only a respite outside social life – the alternative is merely Edenic or Utopian. There *is* no social life, no personal relations, no groups, classes, nationalities; there is no production other than the production of images. Yet a critique of ideology necessitates some materialistic grounding if it is to rise above the theological.⁴⁰

Rosler and the rest of the San Diego group's respective practices stand testament to a continued dedication to engaging with social, political and economic relations and realities during this period.⁴¹ While their (and others') commitment to documentary modes and even critical realism endured, it did so in the light of a fundamentally transformed perception of the image. Rosalyn Deutsche suggested that this generation of American artists '*treated the image itself as a social relationship* and the viewer as a subject constructed by the very object from which it formerly claimed detachment.'⁴² In what follows I set out to unpack these ideas through reference to particular artistic strategies that engage with *positional* truths, produced within and beyond the U.S. context.

Selecting feminism as the prism through which to engage with these questions can, in part, be put down to the critical role that sexual politics played in foregrounding performance, the lens and, latterly, community or participatory strategies as pre-eminent contemporary art forms – all of which also hold considerable import in terms of the histories of the social document. Though artists engaged in other politicised frameworks, such as post-colonial critique, also offer extremely useful and distinctive perspectives, an analysis of some debates, theories and practices brought forth through feminism facilitates a consideration of the rich diversity of approaches to the document and documentary modes.

⁴⁰ Martha Rosler, "Notes on Quotes," in *Decoys and Disruptions: Selected Writings, 1975-2001* (New York: Cambridge, Mass; MIT Press in association with International Center of Photography, 2004), 142.

⁴¹ The San Diego Group also included Allan Sekula, Fred Lonidier and Philip Steinmetz.

⁴² Rosalyn Deutsche, *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics* (Cambridge, MA; London: MIT Press, 1996), 33.

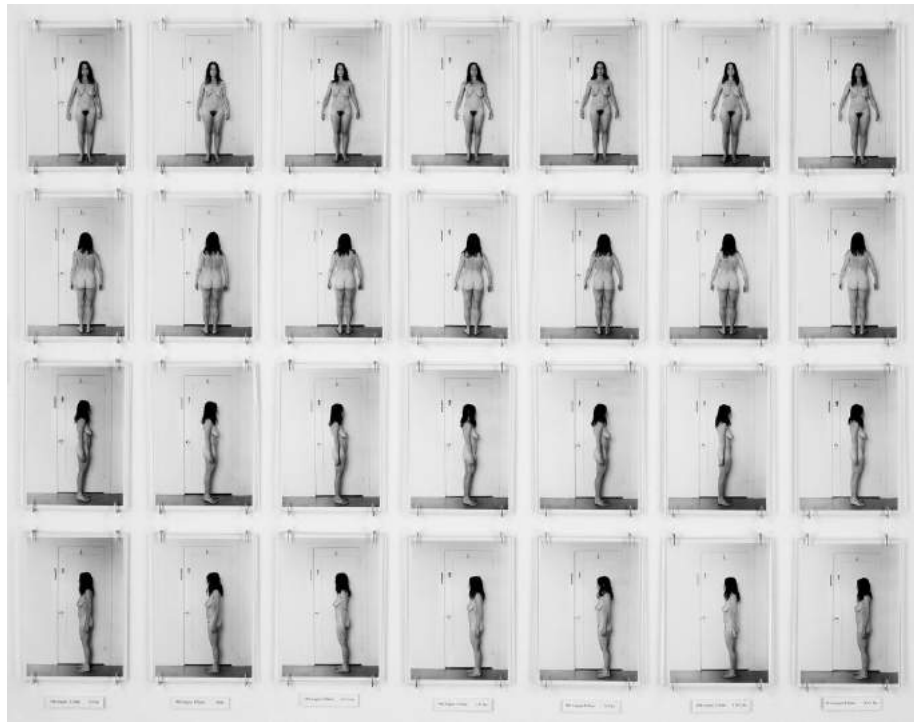


Figure 10: Elenor Antin *Carving: A Traditional Sculpture* (detail; silver gelatin prints) 1972

Elenor Antin's *Carving: A Traditional Sculpture* (1972) in which she documents the visible impact of her diet regime over the course of 37 days is a case in point. Her repetitive series of black and white images deliberately call to mind photographic enterprises associated with the disciplinary exercise of power including anthropological classification or criminal mugshots, while her title refers to the ideological grounding of aesthetics and creative production more generally. As Walter Benjamin famously insisted: 'There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism.'⁴³ Solomon-Godeau observes that artists like Antin were quick to recognise the oppressive role played by the lens-based image and did not confine their interrogations to the outputs of the mass media:

This recognition of photography's instrumentality in the production of woman-as-image in turn fostered a heightened criticality vis-à-vis the technologies of representation themselves: what they enabled, what they enacted, what they authorized, and what they censored ... it seems apparent

⁴³ Walter Benjamin, "On the Concept of History," in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings. Volume 4, 1938-40*, trans. Edmund Jephcott and Others, eds. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge MA; London: Harvard University Press, 2006), 392.

that feminist artists intuitively grasped the difficulty of extricating the woman who speaks from the discourses that speak her.⁴⁴

That the document or documentary modes were not necessarily considered to be antithetical to a critical engagement with issues around representation is further borne out by Mary Kelly's and Sanja Iveković's respective practices discussed earlier. In an era when the personal was declared political, the document revealed itself to be ideally positioned to engage with the hitherto closed realms of 'subjective' experience. It is with these thoughts in mind that a more in-depth analysis of the intersections between postmodern identity politics and the representation of 'lived subjectivities' (usually through strategies of self-documentation and storytelling) will be undertaken.

Commentary on the subject of narrative in postmodern art practices tends to make regular recourse to the collapse of metanarratives and the consequent prioritisation of the fragment as a defining feature.⁴⁵ However, as Lyotard suggests, if it broke down, it was only to re-emerge on an altered scale and with splintered focus. In the course of the essay 'Lessons in Paganism', Lyotard makes his point more explicit, posing himself the question: 'Could you explain why our intellectuals are now more likely to believe the stories of prisoners or rebels than the stories of commissars, whereas the reverse was true for such a long time?'⁴⁶ This marked appetite for such accounts of direct lived experience, such 'little narratives', appears to reach new heights when *the artist's own life* is implicated.⁴⁷ Such strategies proliferate across the art of the 1980s and 1990s in which performative tactics and storytelling are deployed to produce autobiographical,

⁴⁴ Abigail Solomon-Godeau, "The Woman Who Never Was: Self-Representation, Photography and First-Wave Feminist Art," in *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution*, ed. Lisa Gabrielle Mark (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2007), 339.

⁴⁵ This is not to argue that the attention afforded to the fragment was a new development – it was also central to Surrealism.

⁴⁶ Lyotard, "Lessons in Paganism," 128.

⁴⁷ Beyond personal experience it's also a point which appears to speak directly to (what I would term) late-postmodern photographic practices which focused so relentlessly on the necessity of 'bearing witness'. Though at first such works appeared to belie the poststructuralist abandonment of notions of truth, here they can be seen as yet another aspect/facet of the era whereby life stories and personal testimonies became privileged sources of information. Found images and reworked documents often played a central part in such practices which appeared with particular regularity in the early 1990s. This tendency is particularly pronounced in works which deal with traumatic historical events. Examples might include the output of The Photo Archive Group founded in 1994 by two North American photojournalists named Chris Riley and Doug Niven as a response to the collection of identification photographs they encountered in Cambodia's Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocide. Or Marcelo Brodsky's highly personal, *Buena Memoria (Good Memory)* of 1996 which dealt with the aftermath of Argentina's dirty war during which the state systematically 'disappeared', tortured and executed and thousands of its own citizens. In this type of practice, the individual is frequently cast as the embodiment of history.

confessional accounts or intimate portraits. Often used as a mediation device, the document is never far from view.

Nan Goldin's diaristic chronicles of her 'community of lovers', *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* (1979-2004), exists both in the form of a photo-book and a slide installation in which images are 'played' sequentially in a black-box environment accompanied by a pop music soundtrack. A subculture of drag queens, drunk friends, abused women, homosexual couples and terminally ill AIDS victims are captured by her lens, often in highly intimate situations. Through the camera, Goldin's emphatically immanent gaze attempts to record her own lived experience and thereby construct (even legitimate) the stories of her particular community – or, to borrow another of her titles – 'the other side'. It is an approach that could not be more different to that of Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills* (1977-80) project – the conclusion of which overlapped with the beginning of *The Ballad*: while the latter deployed the fragment as an instrument of deconstruction, Goldin documents in an attempt to *expand* – or, more accurately, *queer* – the field of representation.



Figure 11: Nan Goldin, *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* (detail; slide installation) 1979-2004

Discussing *The Ballad*'s accumulation of images she stated: 'These pictures come out of relationships, not observation.'⁴⁸ Louis Kaplan has provided a useful consideration of

⁴⁸ Nan Goldin, *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1989), 6.

this work in which he registers a move from reportage to autobiographical confession. He also foregrounds the limitations of Krauss' comments on indexicality:

The photograph as index offers a very different understanding of the purpose and function of the snapshot in comparison with a community-exposed photography. In the theory of the index, the snapshot is a sign of absence, an effect of framing, a deposit of the photographic trace. In Goldin's community exposed photography, the snapshot is a sign of immediacy and intimacy, a performative "I love you," the touch and the caress of the haptic.⁴⁹

On one level, then, this is an artwork that, once again, extends the repertoire of the document. Infused with a subjective and autobiographical force Goldin's durational project connects with a range of practices in which the 'radicalised' document assumes a central role in *artists' various engagements with social realities and relations*. Yet on another, it rests upon the assumption that, as an active participant rather than an interloper, she enjoys a privileged access to her apparently authentic subject matter.

This early adoption of the participant observer role (which was later thrust to the fore in Foster's critique of art's 'ethnographic turn') perhaps does little to mitigate the risks associated with serving subcultures, with their frisson of bohemian danger and excess, up to privileged art world audiences keen for a salacious thrill. Effectively preparing others' lives for visual consumption, such narrative-driven documentary material can easily be framed as inherently conservative. These are indeed highly charged, passionate images which, though less shocking than perhaps they once were, continue to fascinate – an effect bolstered by the seductive film-like viewing context and (now rather nostalgic) soundtrack. Is the fate of 'sideline skirmishes' advocated by Lyotard ultimately to be accommodated, absorbed and capitalised? As Peggy Phelan dryly remarked: 'if representational visibility equals power, then almost-naked young white women should be running Western culture.'⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Louis Kaplan, "Photography and the Exposure of Community: Sharing Nan Goldin and Jean-Luc Nancy," *Angelaki* 6, no. 3 (2001): 11.

⁵⁰ Phelan, *Unmarked*, 10.



Figure 12: Jo Spence, *Beyond the Family Album* (detail; photographs on panels with texts) 1978-79

Similarly staging disruptive incursions into the hitherto closed realms of private 'life' the output of the British photographer Jo Spence offers a useful counterpoint to Goldin. In the same year as the latter embarked on her *Ballad* Spence displayed *Beyond the Family Album, Private Images, Public Conventions* (1978-1979) as part of a group exhibition at London's Hayward Gallery.⁵¹ While also engaging with the quotidian snapshot Spence took an alternative approach, stressing the insights that a critical analysis of the ubiquitous and apparently benign family album can bring to an understanding of the place of politics in the domestic.⁵² Spence constructed a sequence of laminated panels that interspersed texts with images of herself from babyhood onwards and press cuttings that exposed these familiar products of everyday amateur photography as complex sites of ideological negotiation. Observing that the materials that were meant to chronicle her own personal history actually related a 'complete mythology' she focused on their adherence to pre-set formulas that *regulated life* – a process that left much of lived experience undocumented, from the labour of childcare through to the deaths of

⁵¹ The exhibition was called *Three Perspectives on Photography*.

⁵² While the work does touch upon media imagery around the same time Spence also produced another (this time collaborative) piece addressing the family as ideologically produced, this time taking specific aim at media representations of the household. See the Polysnappers (Jo Spence with Mary Kennedy, Jane Munro and Charlotte Pembrey), *Family, Fantasy and Photography* (1981).

her parents.⁵³ The *autobiographical* focus of this (and subsequent) work is particularly striking, as is Spence's effort to examine and challenge the formation of her own subjectivity through 'fragmentary narratives' that included analyses of the impact not only of media representations on her own specific experience but of *class*.⁵⁴

While I agree with Roberts that this work is exemplary of a postmodern commitment to the 'second-order analysis' of the symbolic productions of capitalism, his contention that it also indicative of a break with what he calls the 'reportorial moment' requires further nuance.⁵⁵ Taking the form of newspaper or magazine spreads, Spence's panels construct an account of the artist's life while the images themselves are deployed and scrutinised as both evidence and *useful* 'cognisable objects' introducing a crucial pedagogic dimension.⁵⁶ As *documentary archives held, managed and often produced by women* Spence saw family albums as a site ripe for intervention. Roberts notes that her approach – particularly use of her own life and body – led to 'considerable success with women's groups and photography classes.'⁵⁷ Together with her long-time collaborator, Terry Dennett, Spence was heavily influenced by the histories of the worker photography movement's use of documentary modes as a tool in political struggle during the early twentieth century.⁵⁸ In other words, and as Siona Wilson also notes, their work in the UK emerges from markedly different political and intellectual traditions to that of what is referred to as 'critical postmodernism' in the U.S..⁵⁹

Spence's commitment to activist pedagogy can also be seen in her earlier involvement with collective endeavours including the Photography Workshop and The Hackney

⁵³ Jo Spence, "Some Questions and Answers," in *Putting Myself in the Picture: A Political, Personal, and Photographic Autobiography* (London: Camden Press, 1986), 208.

⁵⁴ Jo Spence, "Reworking the Family Album," in *Cultural Sniping: The Art of Transgression* (London: Routledge, 1995), 191. On one panel the text reads 'We must learn to see beyond ourselves and the stereotypes offered, to understand the invisible class and power relationships into which we are structured from birth.' Jo Spence, "Visual Autobiography: Beyond the Family Album," *Putting Myself in the Picture: A Political, Personal, and Photographic Autobiography* (London: Camden Press, 1986), 92.

⁵⁵ John Roberts, *Postmodernism, Politics and Art* (Manchester; New York; Manchester University Press, 1990), 92.

⁵⁶ Her approach resembles that advocated by the educator and theorist Freire. Paulo Freire, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (London: Penguin Books, 1996). Spence and Dennett's work was inspired by Freire's theories: Jo Spence and Terry Dennett, "Photography, Ideology, Education," *Screen Education* 21 (1976-77): 106-33. See Chapter 5 for a more detailed account of Freire's use of 'visual aids'.

⁵⁷ Roberts, *Postmodernism, Politics and Art*, 99.

⁵⁸ Ribalta notes that it the first contribution to the history of the movement published in English appeared in the anthology *Photography/Politics: One* (1979) edited by Spence and Dennett together with Sylvia Gohl and David Evans. Ribalta, "Introduction: Outline for a Map of the Debates around Documentary in the 'Long 1970s,'" 30.

⁵⁹ Wilson, *Art Labour, Sex Politics*, 176.

Flashers (an all-female agitprop collective). The latter's *Women and Work* (1975) exhibition – staged in London in the same year as Harrison, Kelly and Hunt's presentation of the same name – adopted what Wilson has called a practice of 'proletarian amateurism'.⁶⁰ Documentary photographs of women labouring both inside and outside the home were pinned alongside small pieces of paper with handwritten statistics on pay and unemployment as well as short texts.⁶¹ In her account of this work one member of the collective, Liz Heron, noted that their aim was to capture invisible yet economically vital domestic labour in order to expand representation and thereby 'validate women's experience'.⁶² Finding the naturalism of 'straight' documentary to be, at best, limited, the group's later education dossier *Domestic Labour and Visual Representation* (1980) posted to schools and community centres included a series of slides together with an instruction book that explicitly treated the connection between the oppression of women through their labour (paid and unpaid) and their public visual representation in as inseparable. As well as inviting analysis of tabloid spreads and advertisements the first slide reprised an image of workers in a garment factory from *Women and Work*. Here, then, was an instance of activist community interventions specifically engaging with the politics of representation. The associated text asked:

What does this photograph tell you? What does the photograph say about women and work? What does it *not* say? It is a specific image of *one* garment factory – does it say anything about factories in general?

Students could find other images of people 'at work' and consider how much they say about the work – the processes of production, earnings, hours, conditions, profits etc.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 140. Here she consciously draws on Jeff Wall's use of the term in his essay "Marks of Indifference," 250.

⁶¹ Embracing the amateur and provisional, Spence later noted that she agreed with the view of an unnamed colleague that: 'you should be able to put an exhibition in the post if you really want to circulate it.' Spence, "Some Questions and Answers," 205.

⁶² Liz Heron, "Hackney Flashers Collective: Who's Still Holding the Camera," in *Putting Myself in the Picture: A Political, Personal, and Photographic Autobiography*, Jo Spence (London: Camden Press, 1986): 66-74.

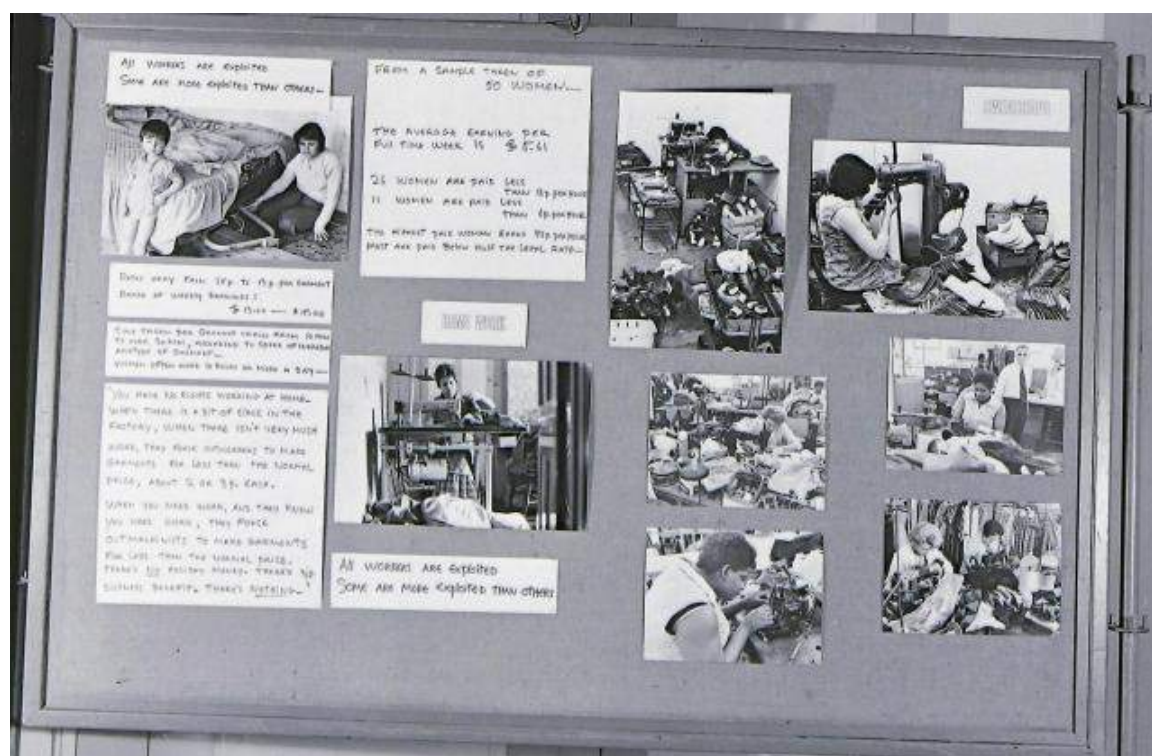


Figure 13: The Hackney Flashers, *Women and Work* (detail; photographs on panels with text) 1975

I return to this earlier 'community photography' work as it helps to plot the parameters of broader shifts photographic and artistic practice. In Spence's case the trajectory is usually articulated as a transition from documentary to photo-theatre to phototherapy; another instance, then, of the lineage of disappearance, this time moving from public to private, *individual* subjectivity (specifically connected with themes of care and health). The material for which Spence is perhaps best known is that produced in response to her own illness and specifically breast cancer diagnosis in 1982 – she died as a result of leukaemia in 1992. Spence's shift of attention away from labour (whether productive or reproductive) is indicative of a general tendency over the 1970s whereby in Angela Dimitrakaki's words feminist art theory 'forgot labour' – despite women's growing presence in the workforce.⁶³ To this observation I add that this memory lapse (overcome, as I will show, in the 1990s and 2000s) was paralleled by *experimentations* with documentary modes.

⁶³ Angela Dimitrakaki, "Feminism, Art, Capitalism," (paper, Agency and Crisis conference, Wolverhampton University, Oct 19, 2016).

Spence's series *The Picture of Health*, engaged with what she called 'the politics of cancer' and the 'crisis of representation,' self-documenting her lived experience of the healthcare establishment as well as her practices of self-care.⁶⁴ One image in particular recalls – once again – Briet's caged antelope, where Spence has marked the phrase 'Property of Jo Spence?' on her left breast in an attempt to challenge the reductive inscription of her body itself to a mere document following its insertion into the medical system. Of these carefully staged photographs, Roberts has argued that they constitute one of many instances of '*the postmodernisation of the documentary/interventionist tradition* [my emphasis].'⁶⁵ Pressing the implications of this point further, I contend that, though highly theatrical as 'pictures', the documentary-value and connections of the image remains crucial.



Figure 14: Jo Spence in collaboration with Terry Dennett, *Crisis Project / Picture of Health? (Property of Jo Spence?)* (gelatin silver print) 1982

Yet more significantly, Spence herself locates her work within a *realist* lineage, noting her move from social realism to 'psychic realism'.⁶⁶ Writing in 1988, on what she argues is *feminism's epistemological commitment to realism*, Griselda Pollock drew a distinction

⁶⁴ Jo Spence, "The Picture of Health?," in *Putting Myself in the Picture: A Political, Personal, and Photographic Autobiography*, Jo Spence (London: Camden Press, 1986), 151.

⁶⁵ Roberts, *Postmodernism, Politics and Art*, 103.

⁶⁶ Spence's teacher Victor Burgin also used this term.

between approaches that document, discuss and thereby construct women's lives and histories as part of a consciousness-raising project and those that displace and analyse reality in pursuit of the production of knowledge.⁶⁷ Spence's work can be argued to straddle these approaches. In an unpublished interview, she states:

I want to construct images that cause a rift in how people perceive 'the real', but I don't want to leave the real behind. Thus when I say I am dealing with fantasy I am simply dealing with that which is suppressed in visual representation, that which is not normally shown.⁶⁸

Produced in collaboration with Terry Dennett one of Spence's final endeavours *The Crisis Project* drew from their archives to explicitly connect works dealing with so-called personal and public issues that present challenges precisely in terms of their representability – namely ill health and capitalism. In an associated text they asserted: 'it is our belief that global economic crises cannot be separated from so-called personal crises. They need to be debated in tandem.'⁶⁹ Such a task, moreover, demanded 'lateral imaging' and a dual approach encompassing both staged photography and legal record photography – indicatively one strand of work was entitled *Scenes of A Crime*, another *Real Stories*.⁷⁰ The unambiguous prioritisation of *the economy* as a theme in a text written at the beginning of the 1990s is important to note here, as is the writers' emphasis on attending to the positional truths of 'crisis management'.⁷¹ (In other words, fragments are not simply conceived as isolated but rather as connected). A focus on lived experience, they argued, was central to the evolution of documentary photography – as I will show this proved to be a prophetic claim that bears considerable relevance to the trajectory of the social document. Finally, and again anticipating subsequent arguments in this thesis, I want to highlight the *biopolitical* dimension of Spence's output. Not only does she incorporate the vicissitudes of her own life – *and indeed her death* – into the

⁶⁷ Pollock, "Screening the Seventies."

⁶⁸ Jo Spence, unpublished interview with John Roberts from 1985. Roberts, *Postmodernism, Politics and Art*, 101.

⁶⁹ Jo Spence and Terry Dennett, "The Crisis Project: Scenes of the Crime," in *Cultural Sniping: The Art of Transgression* (London; New York: Routledge, 1995), 219. As I will elaborate in Chapter 8, their comments contribute to a long-standing critical connection between crisis and realist strategies.

⁷⁰ Jo Spence and Terry Dennett, "The Crisis Project," 221.

⁷¹ In one of her final notes Spence discussed a potential posthumous retrospective: 'Don't end up with Phototherapy but with the crisis (Public/Private) work. I would hate to be known as only having worked on Subjectivity and not given a fuck about anyone else. I did care about the world but felt totally impotent as I got iller and older.' Jo Spence, "Thoughts on Dying (being Constructive)," in *Jo Spence: The Final Project* (London: Riding House, 2013), 18.

structure of her artworks, she explicitly interrogates its *regulation and control* through the media, technology and healthcare.

2.5 Conclusion

As Jonathan Harris has argued, the demise of postmodernism ‘allows a rediscovery and redeployment of critical art historical texts, arguments, artworks, and values left in the historical margins.’⁷² The increased levels of both curatorial and critical attention to which Spence’s contributions have recently been subject is again due, at least in part, to its relevance to subsequent practices and theorisations of contemporary art.⁷³ Spanning and complicating established periodisations, her output offers important and illuminating lines of connection between the demand for the document associated with the art of the 1970s and its apparent repudiation in the 1980s.

I have argued that it is necessary to prise open a more nuanced understanding of the associated practices, theories and contexts associated with postmodernism if subsequent developments concerning documentary modes in art are to be understood. At the beginning of this chapter I noted the current critical aversion to the term. In the rare instances that it does appear it is usually to assert its exhaustion.⁷⁴ It is worth reflecting, then, on the terms under which it *is* being discussed. In 2011 the Victoria and Albert Museum broached the topic through the historicising exhibition *Postmodernism: Style and Subversion 1970-1990*. An excerpt from the interpretation materials read: ‘Vivid colour, theatricality and exaggeration: everything was a style statement. Whether surfaces were glossy, faked, or deliberately distressed, they reflected the desire to

⁷² Jonathan Harris, *Value, Art, Politics: Criticism, Meaning and Interpretation after Postmodernism* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007), 4.

⁷³ Siona Wilson dedicates a chapter to her output in *Art Labour, Sex Politics*. Other recent texts include Victoria Horne, “The Art of Social Reproduction,” *Journal of Visual Culture* 15, no. 2 (2016): 179-202; Anne Boyer, “The Kind of Pictures She Would Have Taken: Jo Spence,” *Afterall* 42 (2016): 4-11. Recent exhibitions include *Jo Spence, Beyond the Perfect Image* (2006), curated by Jorge Ribalta and Terry Dennett, Museu d’Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA); *Beyond the Family Album and Other Projects* (2005) Belfast Exposed, Belfast; *Jo Spence: Work (Part I)* (2012), SPACE, London; *Jo Spence: Work (Part II)* (2012) Studio Voltaire, London; *Jo Spence: Work (Part III) ‘The History Lesson’* (2013) White Columns, New York. The Hackney Flashers’ *Who’s Holding the Baby?* was included in *History is Now: 7 Artists Take on Britain*, Hayward Gallery (2015). Photography Workshop panels were acquired by Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia in 2010.

⁷⁴ See Hal Foster, “Questionnaire on “The Contemporary”,” *October* 130 (2009), 3; Nicolas Bourriaud, “Altermodern Manifesto,” e-flux, accessed 7 Nov 2016, <http://www.e-flux.com/announcements/38261/altermodern-manifesto/>.

combine subversive statements with commercial appeal.’⁷⁵ Taking issue with its conservative and reductive curatorial approach, Gail Day reflected on the distinct lack of attention to ‘subversion’ as well as the exhibition’s failure to capture the underpinning political contestations and contexts. She notes:

One would be hard pressed to know from Postmodernism [the show] that the period under scrutiny saw a massive assault on working class communities and labour organisations; significant battles over racist and sexist discrimination, gay rights, abortion rights and anti-Nazi activism; the deregulation of the financial markets; the beginnings (in the UK) of the attacks on free university education and the dismantling of the postwar welfarist settlement.⁷⁶

However, Day’s own reading of the debates and practices associated with ‘critical’ postmodernism as so many responses to the imposition of neoliberalism brings with it a specifically *economic* inflection that can also be detected elsewhere. In response to the V&A’s blockbuster, *The Guardian* newspaper ran a piece on the ‘10 Key Moments’ of the ‘movement’ [sic] of postmodernism.⁷⁷ Relying heavily on Jameson’s account, postmodernism is unambiguously connected to economic transformations and the onset of post-Fordism: oil prices trump the cultural subjects of so-called ‘identity politics’. A similar prioritisation can be found in Ben Davis’s 2012 article in which he sets out to unpack the reasons behind the concept’s abandonment. Conflating postmodernism with postmodernity, he recovers David Harvey’s well-known account of the latter to devote a large proportion of his text to a discussion of the economic dimensions.⁷⁸ My point is that if (surface-skimming blockbusters aside) this is the aspect that retains traction in accounts of postmodernism produced in the early twenty-first century, this reveals something more significant about the priorities of the latter time; namely, that ‘economy’ became the legitimising discourse after postmodernism. I will return to elaborate upon this argument in Chapter 4.

⁷⁵ “Postmodernism,” Victoria and Albert Museum, accessed Sep 6, 2016, <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/p/postmodernism/>.

⁷⁶ Gail Day, “Style without Subversion,” *Mute* 3, no. 2 (2011), accessed Oct 6, 2012, <http://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/style-without-subversion>

⁷⁷ Stuart Jeffries, “Postmodernism: The 10 Key Moments in the Birth of a Movement,” *Guardian*, 20 Sept 2011, accessed Oct 6, 2012, <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2011/sep/20/postmodernism-10-key-moments>.

⁷⁸ Ben Davis, “The Age of Semi- Post-Postmodernism,” *Artnet* (2010), accessed 7 Nov 2016, <http://www.artnet.com/magazineus/reviews/davis/semi-post-postmodernism5-15-10.asp>. David Harvey explicitly connected the onset of postmodernity with changes in the capitalist mode of production and the rise of ‘flexible accumulation’ as well as further ‘time-space compression’. Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*.

CHAPTER 3

The Rift? Iconophobia and Iconophilia

3.1 *The rise of the document after 1989*

Since the turn of the century, curators and theorists have highlighted art's new commitment to the production and distribution of *information*, whether compensating for the 'blind spots' of mainstream journalism or simply adopting its tropes.¹ An alternative regime of knowledge production is seen to be in play that crosses from art and curating to activism and theory. Yet documentary modes are deployed not only to map and analyse social realities, as Boris Groys observed they are also part and parcel of projects which broker engagements between art and life.²



Figure 15 (left): Ursula Biemann, *Deep Weather* (video still) 2012

Figure 16 (right): Ala Plástica *Magdalena Shell Oil Spill* (photograph) 1999 – 2003

Here, then, are two initial perspectives on contemporary art's relationship with documentation and the documentary. Artists can present visual reports that powerfully relate the tar sand enterprises in Canada's boreal forest to the flood-stricken regions of Bangladesh, as in Ursula Biemann's video essay *Deep Weather* (2012). In this work aerial

¹ Jonsson, "Facts of Aesthetics and Fictions of Journalismism."

² Groys, "Art in the Age of Biopolitics," 53-65.

reconnaissance footage from the global North is juxtaposed with on-the-ground recordings of post-apocalyptic life conditions endured by a particular human community in the global South as they seek to shore up their habitat against the rising waters. Alternatively, artists offer evidence of an art/life project enacted elsewhere. Here we might think of Ala Plástica's *Magdalena Shell Oil Spill* (1999-2003) for which the collective compiled a variety of documentation materials including photographs, maps and satellite imagery, relating to the leakage of thousands of tones of oil from a Shell Oil tanker into a freshwater estuary in Argentina. This material was used to build a case to force the cleanup of the area and ensure that the local community received reparations; it has also featured in a number of gallery exhibitions. Another example of this interventionist tendency is Rick Lowe's 22-years-and-counting *Project Row Houses* (1993 –), a highly localised, artwork-cum-social enterprise that works to transform a poverty-stricken district of Houston, Texas. Working collaboratively with a group of fellow African American artists, his pragmatic projects respond to the effects of rapidly changing economic conditions: escalating poverty, on the one hand, and the juggernaut of gentrification, on the other. Together they employ existing levers to improve the lot of individuals and highly localised communities by building affordable homes, supporting small business start-ups and developing programmes for young single mothers while integrating art and creativity into daily experience. This time, the barely acknowledged 'weak' documentation circulating gallery spaces and magazine pages is not the primary output.

In contrast to the majority of accounts that offer analyses of either one paradigm or another, I argue that these examples can be seen to constitute part of a web of *diverse approaches that are nevertheless connected by their reliance upon documentary modes*. In this chapter, I aim to underscore the sheer mass of activity in this vein since 1989, examining the image-document as it appears in art, analysing its place and role vis-à-vis the contemporary artwork as well as its treatment in the extant literature. To do this I reprise the iconophobic (the fear of images)-iconophilic (the love of images) dialectic proposed by John Roberts in his reading of conceptual art. Briefly outlined in the first chapter of this thesis, Roberts' account frames this dialectic as a struggle that marked the history of the avant-garde itself, finding, he argued, its roots in the Enlightenment.³ He proposed that artists' (attempted) negation and embrace of the lens-based image could

³ Roberts, "Photography, Iconophobia and the Ruins of Conceptual Art."

be read as part and parcel of the same concern to address art and its reception anew. While this dialectic resonates strongly with respect to artistic practices at the turn of the millennium, this is not, as I intend to show, along the clearly defined lines that might be expected (or indeed inferred through key critical accounts). Instead I demonstrate that apparently iconophobic social practices rely upon the documentary image and that the iconophiliac tendencies associated with the documentary turn are often predicated on the withdrawal of the image. This dialectic then is employed as an alternative route into the topic and a way to establish an overview which lays the necessary foundations for Chapter 4, where I seek to contextualise the rise and transformations that have attended documentary modes over this period before advancing a narrower definition of the social document itself.

3.2 *Iconophobia? Social practice, devisualisation and documentation*

Written back in 2002, Groys's essay 'Art in the Age of Biopolitics' appeared in the catalogue of *Documenta 11*, an exhibition project realised in the same year and frequently cited as enacting a large-scale renaissance of documentary modes, specifically as part of an interrogation of postcoloniality and globalisation. The curator Okwui Enwezor's concern with 'the terrible nearness of distant places' under this global logic was underlined by the catalogue which opens with some 30 pages of 'contextualising materials', namely media images and other captioned snapshots: a single spread covers children playing with toy guns in front of a paramilitary wall mural in Northern Ireland, Palestinian protesters clashing with Israeli police, women looking through a border fence in South Korea, a new McDonalds in Beijing and Kurdish men chatting in a street market.⁴ Yet in spite of this unusual privileging of reportage in the context of a major contemporary art event, Groys's contribution avoided any reference to the documentary genre itself (or its tropes). Instead he discussed the document in terms of its reference to *durational* artistic interventions into life, offering 'the only possible form of reference to an artistic activity that cannot be represented in any other way'.⁵ This attention to temporality echoes Nicolas Bourriaud's earlier assertion that art 'is henceforth identified as a period of time to be lived through'.⁶ Furthermore, Groys keeps the category of 'art

⁴ Okwui Enwezor, "The Black Box," in *Documenta 11: The Catalogue* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz; London: Art Books International, 2002), 44.

⁵ Groys, "Art in the Age of Biopolitics," 54.

⁶ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, 15.

documentation' open to take in a range of media and formations including painting, drawing, photography, three-dimensional objects and oral accounts – the image (and especially the lens-based image) is not foregrounded. Given the context, this can only be understood as an intentional elision. Groys's final case study, Carsten Höller's performance, *The Baudouin/Boudewijn Experiment: A Large-Scale, Non-Fatalistic Experiment in Deviation* (2001) adds weight to this argument. Incarcerating a group of individuals in a sphere of Brussels' Atomium for a day, Höller documented the piece through the oral accounts of the participants. According to Groys, this refusal of the techniques of 'reality television' reveals a core dimension of his definition of art documentation: 'Here, then, life is understood as something narrated and documented but unable to be shown or presented. This lends the documentation a plausibility of representing life that a direct visual presentation cannot possess.'⁷

This juxtaposition between Enwezor's curatorial project and Groys's text points to enduring, and, as I will argue, illuminating, tensions at the heart of artists' use of documentary modes. The latter's disinterest in the image as such is certainly striking given both the immediate context of the text and the ensuing theorizations of the 'documentary turn', yet it can easily be allied to other contemporaneous theoretical elaborations that signaled an apparent departure from visibility. After all, does it make sense still to talk about the 'visual arts' given that interventionist or service-oriented practices are (ostensibly) not designed to be mounted on walls or pedestals? As outlined in the introduction, the prevalence of documentary modes in art has coincided with a renewed interest in social processes, an interest often articulated in terms of 'turns' to ethnography, community, knowledge production and education or via the catch-all (yet contested) term 'social practice'. Nato Thompson's 2012 compendium of socially-engaged art *Living as Form* dates the rise of the latter to 1991, explicitly framing it as a complex set of responses to the emergence of a 'new neoliberal order' following the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.⁸ And indeed, despite the lavish – if ambiguously defined – illustrations that adorn the pages of Thomson's volume, the literature on social practice is particularly antipathetic towards the image, which seems to be abandoned in an overarching drive towards *devisualisation*. It is in such critical responses that I detect an *iconophobic* impulse.

⁷ Groys, "Art in the Age of Biopolitics," 60.

⁸ Nato Thompson, *Living as Form: Socially Engaged Art from 1991-2011* (New York; Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2012), 29. Of course neoliberalism predates 1989.

Whether ignored (Kester) or criticised (Bourriaud), the apparent incompatibility of the image with artworks focused on the specificities of communities, contexts and relationships has seen it – and, by extension, display more generally – approached as a negative moment of reification and consumption.⁹ Bourriaud is clear in his framing: in place of the slack, expansive and remote connections offered by the (televisual) image, relational art can offer specificity; a *tightening* of social relations.¹⁰ This desire to attend to the concrete, situational *immediacy* of live social exchange serves to distinguish such practices from the hegemony enjoyed by the non referential image in postmodernism. The influence of Guy Debord's writing on the spectacle is also plain.¹¹ Yet, according to Martin Jay, the Situationist critique of the spectacle is but one aspect of a far wider and deeper current of antiocularism that animated French thought throughout the twentieth century. Setting out to disrupt the notion that vision is the master sense of the modern era his 'long view' identifies different facets of the same tendency in number of influential thinkers, noting a particularly pervasive critique of technological innovations such as photography and television. Of particular relevance to the present discussion is Michel Foucault's analysis of the disciplining and normalizing effects of the scopic regimes of '*malveillance*', as well as Jay's framing of postmodernism as *both* the hypertrophy of the visual *and* its denegation.¹²

Those rare attempts that do address the visual components of social practice from an art historical perspective tend towards frustrated dismissal: discussing participatory art Claire Bishop has noted the suspicion attached to gallery displays of associated material (considered a 'betrayal') while also pointing to the limitations of photographic documentation. She asserts that, '[c]asual photographs of people talking, eating, attending a workshop or screening or seminar tell us very little, almost nothing, about the concept and context of a given project.'¹³ Her point is reinforced by some recent

⁹ In the introduction to this thesis I noted that Grant Kester fails to discuss the role of documentation images in his ambitious account of dialogic aesthetics. Kester, *Conversation Pieces*.

¹⁰ For this reason 'art is the place that produces a specific sociability'. Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, 18.

¹¹ Debord opens *The Society of the Spectacle* by paraphrasing Marx: 'the whole of life of those societies in which the modern conditions of production prevail presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles. All that was directly lived has become mere representation.' However, it would be erroneous to reduce the term 'spectacle' to 'mass media images'. As Debord goes on: 'The spectacle is not a collection of images; rather it is a social relation between people that is mediated by images.' Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, 12.

¹² Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes* (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993).

¹³ Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London; New York: Verso, 2012), 37; 5.

misguided attempts to perform more conventional visual analyses on unremarkable posed group snapshots from durational participatory projects.¹⁴ However, *contra* the extant literature's apparently deep-seated aversion to the visual (and particularly the lens-based outputs), I argue that an acknowledgement of the *persistence* and importance of the image-document in such contexts is vital. For not only does such documentation often play a significant role in terms of the entry of the work into art discourse and history, we can infer through them a great deal about the contemporary social artwork's conditions of production and circulation.

The debates briefly outlined in Chapter 1 that have amassed around performance art are helpful in terms of unpacking these claims: while Amelia Jones argued that the document exists in reciprocal relation to the live event, Auslander put forward related claims for the 'performativity' of documentation and the role played by the document in terms of *producing the performance as such*. Examining performance artworks that were not presented before a live audience (at least one which understood itself as such), he maintained that photographic documentation was crucial in terms of lifting out the event from the maelstrom of everyday life; of preventing its evaporation through the passage of time and transforming it into art. Furthermore, he observes that: 'the purpose of most performance art documentation is to make the artist's work available to a larger audience, not to capture the performance as an "*interactional accomplishment*" [emphasis added].'¹⁵ The address to an absent and geographically remote audience has been examined in relation to participatory practice by the art historian Dan Karlholm. In his trenchant critique of a durational socially-engaged project staged by the Turkish art group Oda Projesi in Sweden he states:

The role of the secondary public [i.e. gallery visitors] is no less essential – I would say that it is more essential – than the primary public's, to this form of art. Without the tacit consent and approval of the secondary public of more or less passive art world inhabitants, there would be no processes *as art*. But their role, as part of the everyday processes of the art world, is not acknowledged openly, which is hard not to interpret as unreflective, hypocritical or even cynical [emphasis in original].¹⁶

¹⁴ See Rounthwaite's account of the photographs of members of Homeward Bound Community Services as part of Martha Rosler's *If You Lived Here...* project at Dia Art Foundation, New York in 1989. Adair Rounthwaite, "In, Around, and Afterthoughts (On Participation): Photography and Agency in Martha Rosler's Collaboration with Homeward Bound," *Art Journal* 7, no. 4 (2015): 46-63.

¹⁵ Auslander, "The Performativity of Performance Documentation," 6.

¹⁶ Karlholm, "Reality Art," 124.

What differentiates this type of work from Auslander's examples is the lure of social realities and relations; *the demand for visualisations of precisely those 'interactional accomplishments'* that he notes are so often excised from recordings of performance art. These, Auslander argues, are not records of the whole event but excise the audience to focus on the artist's action.¹⁷ At the same time, it must be noted that in the 'God's-eye' perspective offered by the documentation associated with social practice, personal, on-the-ground experiences of contributors and participants are rarely heard directly – indeed when they are their viewpoints are often disruptive to the narrative constructed. Yet the question of whether the document merely refers to a prior event or is part of a constellation of features through which the attribution of 'art' manifests is no less relevant to social practice, in fact it becomes still more complex, drawing in a number of additional questions and concerns, most obviously ethics.¹⁸

The dearth of attention accorded to the mediation of social practice can be said to replay the historical neglect of performance art's inextricable connections with documentation (an oversight rectified only recently).¹⁹ Many of the same issues are at stake, such as the prioritisation of 'unmediated' immediacy and proximity. Yet the divergences are just as revealing. For example, the extension of the artwork into the temporality of the 'project' moves decisively *away* from the 'manically charged' present of the performance event described by Phelan towards a rather more prosaic duration often spanning weeks, months or even years.²⁰ In the most extreme cases, the temporal constraints are not delineated and projects simply remain 'ongoing'. Documentary distillations of this temporal spread must then respond to rather different sets of demands. Their form and approach varies significantly; artists might choose to produce 'exhibition-ready' video works – a process that yields outputs presumably more engaging and dynamic than the day-to-day experience of the activities. Or they might focus on 'drier' descriptive elements that may incorporate a combination of photographic images, textual reports and short video clips.

In cases of 'community-based' interventions that span long time periods (such as those

¹⁷ Consider the documentation of Carolee Schneeman's performances in which the audience does not appear.

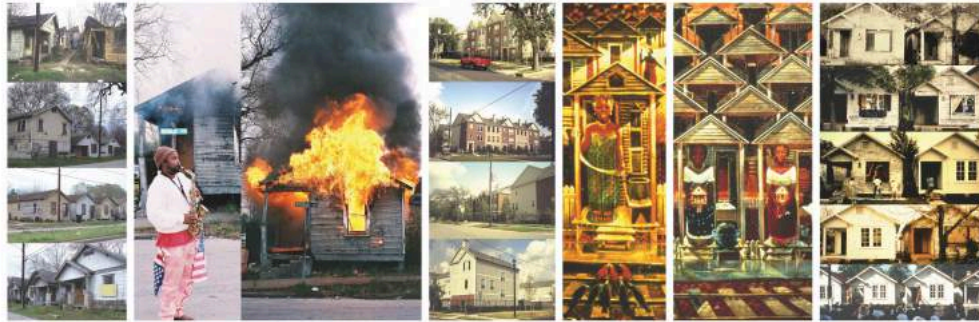
¹⁸ Chapter 7 sets the social document in relation to recent debates around ethics and contemporary art.

¹⁹ See the selective literature review offered in the introduction.

²⁰ In Phelan's words: 'without a copy, live performance plunges into visibility – a manically charged present – and disappears into memory, into the realm of invisibility where it eludes regulation and control.' Phelan, *Unmarked*, 148.

undertaken by Rick Lowe) these materials are often designed for presentation via a dedicated website platform managed by the artist(s). Here exchange value is often deliberately *collapsed* not only through their free distribution but also by their close resemblance to other types of commonplace images – advertisements for residential developments, publicity shots that might appear on a charity’s Instagram feed or funding reports. Such similarities are not accidental, rather they show that social art projects are often subject to the same demand for positive visions and success narratives as are commercial development enterprises and NGOs. Indeed, the smiling faces, bright blue skies, ‘before-and-after’ shots, and inspiring scenes of buoyant community activity featured on the *Project Row Houses* website are far from unusual. On one level, the careful avoidance of ‘victims’ in favour of ‘empowering’ images of change is the product of an acute awareness of the power disparities inherent in depicting participants.²¹ From another perspective, the singular, relentlessly optimistic viewpoint such ‘shallow descriptions’ provide is often essential to the ongoing viability of the project, not to mention the artists’ own careers, now so reliant upon effective reputation management to secure further invitations and the commissions that are essential in a competition-based art economy. The ‘proof’ of previous successes narrated through self-managed websites is invaluable in this respect.

²¹ See Chapter 7 for a more detailed discussion.



I was drawn to the Third Ward of Houston, Texas in the early 1990s. Third Ward was typical of most traditionally Black neighborhoods that were close to city centers: rich with history, declining populations, and little to no investment, infrastructure or people. Yet, even with declining resources, both human and economic, Third Ward seems so much like a city all to itself that many call it **THIRD WARD TEXAS**.

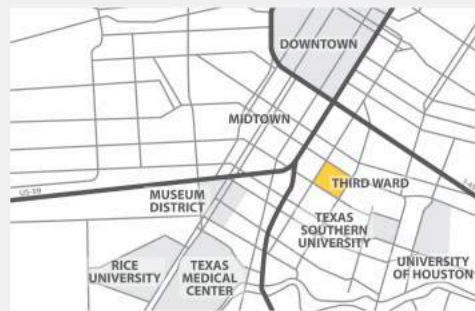
From the moment I stepped foot in **THIRD WARD TEXAS** I realized it was, and still is, a place where folks are proud to call **HOME**. Despite the dwindling population, lack of infrastructure and crime, residents that remain are determined to protect and preserve **HOME**. Most who stayed cared for their homes and added architectural and landscaping details that were reflections of their aesthetic.

THIRD WARD TEXAS has lost over half its population between 1970 and 1990, resulting in **ABANDONMENT** and **NEGLECT**. The community **MOURNED** the destruction of the neighborhood's history, house by house, building by building, institution by institution.

Meanwhile, opportunistic developers and real estate speculators are seizing the opportunity for cheap real estate and the market for middle income housing near the city center. Developers have visibly started **ENCROACHING** on the edges of **THIRD WARD TEXAS**. Block after block, expensive, high density townhomes over shadow older housing stock on the edges of **THIRD WARD TEXAS**.

Strategies are explored to **RESIST** the wholesale gentrification of **THIRD WARD TEXAS**.

John Biggers made paintings throughout his career from the late 1940s until his death in 2000 about the significance of shotgun houses and communities to African-American history. In 1993, Project Row Houses came into being as a catalyst for **REVIVING** and **REDEFINING** the image and meaning of the shotgun house community in the image of John Biggers' paintings.



As a catalyst for **REVIVING** and **REDEFINING** the shotgun house community, Project Row Houses has **PRESERVED**, designed, and **DEVELOPED** many buildings in **THIRD WARD TEXAS**. Architectural Integrity is **PRESERVED** by renovating old structures, while new buildings are designed and **DEVELOPED** for the sake of growing **THIRD WARD TEXAS** for the future.

Sustaining **THIRD WARD TEXAS** will require a continued tapping into the laden resources of the people of **THIRD WARD TEXAS**. We must **KEEP THE PEACE** and **FEED THE PEOPLE**.

Rick Lowe, May 2008



Figure 17: Rick Lowe, *Project Row Houses* (exhibition poster for the ECONOMY exhibition) 1993 –

While Lucy Lippard quickly reconsidered her early pronouncements on the 'dematerialisation' of art to acknowledge that even documents could not evade the appetites of the market, materials relating to social practice ably demonstrate that the

economies of the art world pass well beyond a concern with the production and purchase of images and objects. Moreover, as part and parcel of their role in *completing as an artwork* the live, real time durational site of the artists' concrete engagements, documents of social practice also facilitate the wider circulation and consumption of project narratives within the context of the art world itself. Such images and associated materials enable entry into anthologies, exhibition projects, magazines, websites, journals and thereby art history. Put another way, the art documentation produced in these contexts establishes and builds what the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu calls 'cultural capital' – a form of knowledge that supplies 'social energy' and contributes to social differentiation.²² Interestingly, in this context it does so both for the artwork *and* the artist as a social agent. As Gregory Sholette points out, art today requires at least some level of entrepreneurial skill and, '[r]isk requires capital. This capital comes in two forms,' he notes, 'actual financial investments and symbolic or cultural capital. No artist succeeds without access to both assets.' To this I would add that both forms must be *continuously replenished*. For Sholette, today's artistic subject – regardless of career status – is thoroughly 'ensnared by capital'.²³

Though the critical focus was placed squarely on reportage, the *Documenta 11* checklist did in fact incorporate a number of socially-engaged art projects by means of photographic, textual or video documentation. Examples include Margit Czenki's film of the Park Fiction collective's engagement with activist-citizens in their attempts to protect and collaboratively re-design one of the last remaining open spaces in a deprived district of Hamburg.²⁴ This and other examples not included, such as Women on Waves' seafaring abortion clinic set up (and funded) as an art project (2001 -), or Ala Plástica's *Magdalena Shell Oil Spill*, show the extent to which visual documentation is also directed towards *brandishing evidence of entrepreneurial artistic labour*, at once underlining its social usefulness, often through its close resemblance to other forms of work, as well as its presumed difference as 'free labour'. Roberts contends that 'the designation artist comes with a residual critical distance that is absent from commodified immaterial

²² Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1984).

²³ Gregory Sholette, "Occupy the Art World? Notes on a Potential Artistic Subject," in *ECONOMY: Art, Production and the Subject in the 21st Century*, eds. Angela Dimitrakaki and Kirsten Lloyd (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015), 176; 175.

²⁴ Other examples include Ben Kinmont's published conversations with Kassel residents centred on questioning the category of art and the exhibition of documentation relating to Maria Eichhorn's founding of a non-profit public company including the notarized deeds.

labour’ – a distance that must surely be in the process of becoming vanishingly small as artists are subjected to the same demands to evidence effectiveness and ‘transformative’ change as those in other disciplines and professions including academia and social work.²⁵ Yet, while many artists/collectives often underline the benefits of their outsider status in terms of catalysing action in situations that have become fixed or calcified, ‘dual’ professions are also frequently highlighted; for example in the case of Ala Plástica, Alejandro Meitin is categorised as both an artist and a lawyer while another member Rafael Santos is described as an artist and environmentalist. The ‘and’ is undoubtedly crucial, differentiating this type of work from predecessors including Martha Rosler and Allan Sekula who were unequivocal in positioning themselves squarely as artists. However, though Ala Plástica offer an instance whereby two professions *align* within an overarching practice, the precarity and low pay associated with creative work mean that secondary employment is commonplace.²⁶

Recognising a similar set of contingencies to those outlined by Sholette, Marc James Léger places a different emphasis, observing:

[The] pressure[s placed] on activist art practices through the normalizing effects of cultural administration and through creative industry reengineering of policy and institutions. Progressive cultural workers are thus obliged to develop forms of resistance that can allow them to act politically while still retaining in their work some legitimizing features that would allow this work to be read and understood as cultural intervention.²⁷

I argue that in this type of social practice documentation performs precisely this role of ‘legitimizing feature’, preventing the work from fully sinking into the maelstrom of ‘real life’ by lifting out and bracketing encounters *as art*. The narrative document thereby plays a role in maintaining the tension of what Roberts has called art’s ‘suspensive condition’; its location in the gap between autonomy and heteronomy.²⁸

Stephen Wright has proposed that *usership* offers a new model for engagement in art

²⁵ John Roberts, “Art and the Problem of Immaterial Labour: Reflections on Its Recent History,” in *ECONOMY: Art, Production and the Subject in the 21st Century*, eds. Angela Dimitrakaki and Kirsten Lloyd (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015), 62-63.

²⁶ According to Creative Scotland 55% of self-employed artists and arts-workers earn less than £10,000 from their visual arts activities per year. Creative Scotland, *Visual Arts Sector Review* (Edinburgh, 2016).

²⁷ Marc James Léger, *Brave New Avant Garde: Essays on Contemporary Art and Politics* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2012), 2.

²⁸ Roberts, “Art and the Problem of Immaterial Labour,” 65.

today, where works frequently carry out a purpose already undertaken by something else and are inseparable from life itself. This passes beyond the expansion of artistic labour outlined above to endow the works themselves with what he calls a ‘double ontology’; operating on a 1:1 scale, ‘practices are both what they are, and propositions of what they are.’²⁹ The concept of usership has also been taken up by the Cuban artist Tanja Bruguera in her *Arte Util (Useful Art) Archive*.³⁰ This online repository of case studies details artistic interventions from across the globe that have sought to develop ‘new methods and social formations to deal with issues that were once the domain of the state.’ Projects include a restaurant designed to facilitate residents, academics, activists and artists to address issues of food sovereignty (Asuncion Molinos Gordo, *El Matim El Mish Masry* [2012], Egypt, archive number 449), a community healthcare initiative that set up and sustained a hydroponic garden producing vegetables and plants used in therapy for HIV-infected patients (Haha, *Flood* [1992-1995], U.S., archive number 158), and a home-sharing scheme offering free accommodation for climate activists in Copenhagen (Wooloo, *Human Hotel* [2009 –] Denmark, archive number 243). Structured and numbered as archival records, each entry incorporates basic information (such as duration, location and ‘initiator’) as well as a brief description, images, an account of the goals and the ‘beneficial outcomes’.

²⁹ Stephen Wright, *Toward a Lexicon of Usership* (Eindhoven: Van Abbemuseum, 2013), 3. Bourriaud similarly felt compelled to create a bespoke glossary of terms in *Relational Aesthetics*. Elsewhere Wright has discussed the *Martha Rosler Library* in these terms (a project that functioned as a reading room), but the ‘social work’ projects of Lowe or the environmental activism of Ala Plástica would stand in equally well as examples that don’t necessarily *look like* art but are rather ‘grounded in artistic self-understanding’. Wright, *Toward a Lexicon of Usership*, 6.

³⁰ “Asociacion de Arte Util,” accessed Mar 2, 2016, www.arte-util.org.



Figure 18: Tania Bruguera and Van Abbemuseum, *Museum of Arte Útil* (exhibition view) 2013-14

A few aspects are particularly noteworthy here: first, that the images are clearly secondary to the narrative text in each document/record. Second, that the conceit of the archive was felt to be more appropriate to that of the collection – a more conventional home for artworks – presumably underlining the usability or usefulness of the contents. While the website states that the aim is to identify a critical mass of projects that reinforce or demonstrate the momentum of a historical trajectory, one of the curator-collaborators, Alistair Hudson, has made clear that the aim of the archive is to provide a toolkit, a knowledge repository for those seeking to intervene in the social fabric: the documents are intended to act both as inspiration and ‘how-to’ guides.³¹ To what extent the latter occurs, or is actually possible given the relative sparseness of information or instruction, is questionable, all the more so given the absence of any supporting evidence.

Wright, however, offers a different perspective. Echoing Groys he maintains that radical art today is ‘withdrawn, its coefficient of specific visibility too low for it to be detected and identified as such’, he does not accord art document with the same power or

³¹ Alistair Hudson, “The Useful Museum” (paper, Collecting Contemporary: Collections as Conversations symposium, The University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, Feb 16, 2016).

relevance, describing the need to shake documents of projects from their 'state of inertia', wrest residual by-products 'from their opacity', and tear their exhibition from a condition of 'mute passivity'.³² The spectre of Wall's crypt re-emerges here. While I do not dismiss this position outright, I do insist that the place, character and function of documentation is far more complex than Wright would have us believe. As he notes:

To perceive such practices as art requires some supplementary theoretical information, something that lets us know that the initiative, whatever it may be, is both what it is, and a *proposition* of what it is; some external knowledge letting us know that the initiative's existence does not exhaust itself in its function and outcome, but that it is *about* something.³³

Wright undoubtedly does a good job in articulating just how slender this 'coefficient' can be – or, in Léger's terms, how modest the 'legitimizing feature' – however, I maintain that the role that art documentation plays in this recovery or visibility process *must* be acknowledged, instigating as it does the requisite critical distance.

The art document's capacity for display and distribution inevitably raises the charge that it is – at base – a *privatising* force, effectively ensuring the capitulation of the radical artwork to the disciplinary structures of the art world. Yet another strand of activity can be identified wherein, rather than viewing documentation as an awkward but perhaps necessary by-product, artists frequently construct artificial situations *precisely* in order to record moments of social tensions as they unfold. Artur Zmijewski's riveting videos of social experiments offer a case in point: as well as restaging psychologist Philip Zimbardo's 1971 Stanford Prison Experiment with seventeen unemployed Polish males in 2005 for the work *Repetition*, he later produced *Them* (2007), a twenty-seven minute edit of (literally) incendiary pseudo-community art workshops he organised involving representatives from factions that shape contemporary Poland including middle-aged Catholic women, young socialists and Polish nationalists. The Brazilian collective BijaRi offers a more comic example in *Transverse Reality (Chicken Projects 1,2)* (2001, 2003), releasing a live chicken in two São Paulo shopping venues – distinguished by the class of their respective clientele – and recording the responses.

³² Wright, *Toward a Lexicon of Usership*, 43.

³³ *Ibid.*, 6.



Figure 19: Artur Zmijewski, *Them* (video still) 2007

What links each of these examples (and many others like them) is that, in occupying a grey area vis-à-vis 'the work' itself, video documentation is rarely subjected to sustained interrogation. Often used as a reference source in art historical accounts and compendiums, it is treated as separate – a mere vehicle. Despite mentioning the presentation of video documentation associated with BijaRi's intervention at the 2003 Havana Biennial, Thompson's *Living as Form* anthology gives no indication as to its length, medium or display conditions. Still more surprisingly, the same book pares back Jeremy Deller's *Battle of Orgreave* (2001 -) to the re-enactment of the clash between striking miners and the Thatcher police in 1984, excluding any references to Mike Figgis's film of the event screened on Channel 4 or numerous subsequent presentations that displayed the film in the context of related objects and ephemera. It appears that for theorists, historians and critics, gaining 'more bite in the real' necessitates an iconophobic suppression or downgrading of the documentary image or object that results in vital aspects of the artwork being overlooked.³⁴

I will end this section with an example of a work that constitutes a rather extreme example of the refusal of the image and documentation in order to illustrate that even in

³⁴ Ibid., 2.

their forced omission they remain implicitly central: Tino Sehgal's *These Associations* (2012). Presented as part of TATE Modern's Unilever Series and focused around one-to-one conversational exchanges between visitors and paid 'interpreters', the work's prohibition on visual documentation specifically intervened in the by now well-established connections between the 'experience' and image economies where encounters, events and products are produced to appeal to social media circuits such as Facebook or Instagram – indeed a large part of the interpreters' role was taken up with issuing reminders to attendees not to photograph or film the piece.³⁵ Exclusively narrative documentation (whether in the form of personal accounts, rumours, reviews or tweets) were presumably acceptable. Sehgal's interdiction even extended to the certificates of purchase commonly associated with conceptual art – acquisition processes must avoid even this visual or material manifestation to instead take the form of oral contracts witnessed by a notary. One of the stipulations included in the voiced agreement is that subsequent iterations cannot be photographed.³⁶ Where such instances of aversion seem to arise through a specific objection to the incursions of technology into social relations it is worth briefly noting Auslander's attempt to counter 'the reductive binary opposition of the live and the mediatized.'³⁷ Arguing that the former is both explicitly and implicitly embedded in the latter, he notes that it is not simply about the use of technology but also the influence of media epistemology.³⁸

While, in the first half of the twentieth century, Walter Benjamin memorably commented on the relationship of the reproducible image to capitalism (an economy dominated by reproduction), in the second half Debord discussed the production of a particular type of 'stimulated' viewer called forth by capitalism who exists within, and for, the spectacle. Notably, Debord argued that the same fate awaited viewers of earlier incarnations of the types of practice discussed in the section above – from those that appropriated mass media images to strategies that integrated the image into a live event, regardless of the

³⁵ Interview with *These Associations* interpreter, March 23, 2015.

³⁶ Arthur Lubow, "Making Art Out of an Encounter," *New York Times*, Jan 15, 2010, accessed Feb 15, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/17/magazine/17seghal-t.html?_r=0. In another newspaper article a reviewer complained of *These Associations* that "The whole experience feels mediated rather than 'real'." Alastair Sooke, "Tino Sehgal, Turbine Hall, Tate Modern, Review," *Telegraph*, Jul 24, 2012, accessed Feb 15, 2016, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/art/art-reviews/9421678/Tino-Sehgal-Turbine-Hall-Tate-Modern-review.html>

³⁷ Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (Abingdon, New York: Routledge, 2008), 3. Notably, even in *Relational Aesthetics* (in which a critique of 'the visual' is central) Bourriaud noted the influence of technological developments on relational art, asserting that its models appropriated 'perceptual and behavioural habits brought on by the technical-industrial complex to turn them into *life possibilities*.' Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, 69.

³⁸ Auslander, *Liveness*, 36-37.

extent to which the spectator was 'participated' or integrated.³⁹ In Chapter 4 I will take up this theme to analyse in greater depth the ways in which the deep imbrications of technology and life in digital present of the early twenty-first century have impacted upon the temporal and epistemic status of the document(ary).

3.3 Iconophilia? The return to reportage

The antipathy towards the visual in social practice is at stark variance with the surfeit of discussions on the *virulence* of images in relation to art's 'documentary turn'. Certainly, it is now abundantly clear that the abandonment of reportage functions in art after conceptual art heralded by Jeff Wall in 'Marks of Indifference' was a rather too hasty pronouncement. Much of the literature to date has framed this appetite in relation to the demand for technology-mediated experiences in the age of infotainment and 24-hour news. In his book *Picture Theory* (1994) W.J.T. Mitchell attended to the central place held by visual technologies both in terms of the communication of information and the exercise of power in the wake of postmodernism. He explicitly connected the latter's demise with the momentous historical events witnessed at the end of the 1980s. If, at first, his argument that postmodernism's aftermath has brought into focus a '*pictorial* turn' appears distant to the present discussion of the document(ary), his examination of the convergence of two previously distinct forms of image power – that of spectacle and surveillance – in visual addresses to a public sphere anticipates more recent literature.⁴⁰ In his words, 'America 1991' unveiled the New World Order of total television and mass destruction; 'a new version of the "military industrial complex"'.⁴¹ Turning not to the field of contemporary art but to television news, he took images communicated from the nose of a 'Smart Bomb' during Operation Desert Storm as emblematic. He observed the strategic replacement of visual recordings of bodily trauma with these abstract, remote and robotic images that were nevertheless capable of eliciting powerful responses of fascination, anxiety and paranoia, his own astonishment at the persuasive abilities and power of the U.S. mass media to use such material to curtail dissent and promote compliance is apparent. In Mitchell's view, this deployment of neutral surveillance

³⁹ Guy Debord, "Editorial Notes: The Avant-Garde of Presence (1963)," in *Guy Debord and the Situationist International: Texts and Documents*, ed. Tom McDonough, trans. John Shepley (Cambridge MA; London: MIT Press, 2002): 137-152.

⁴⁰ W.J.T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 417; 327.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 369; 415.

footage of spectacular violence was crucial to the 'narrative construction' of the conflict: for him, the coverage succeeded in nothing less than transforming 'a divided, sceptical American public into a consensus of passive acceptance and image consumption.'⁴²

Jean Baudrillard took up similar themes in response to the same conflict, underscoring a growing fascination with the intersections between the functions of reportage and media spectacle. After first appearing in the newspapers *Libération* and *The Guardian* in 1991, his collection of three essays on the topic were then extended and published as a book provocatively entitled *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*.⁴³ Baudrillard argued that WWII's 'hot' violence and the cold war's subsequent 'balance of terror' had given way to a '[p]romotional, speculative, virtual' conflict in which technical virtuosity produced only uncertainty, and the event vanished into information itself. Such 'real time' information is dismissed as useless 'junk', while the available images are held variously to be 'poor', 'sinister', indifferent to truth and structurally unreal. 'Whom to believe?' Baudrillard asks, replying: 'There is nothing to believe.'⁴⁴

Though these writers both address an iconophilic urge in its relation to a 'New World Order' brought about through the fall of the Eastern Bloc and the ensuing war in the Gulf, Baudrillard does so by developing his well-established themes of seduction and hyperreality.⁴⁵ Mitchell, on the other hand, attempted to call time on the postmodern era and to differentiate the then current concerns and theatrical formations from what had gone before. Yet if Mitchell's focus on spectatorship, the affective dimensions of reportage and the pressing requirement for critical descriptions of the world resonates strongly with subsequent theorisations of art's relationship with documentary modes, he does not articulate his argument in these terms. That a serious engagement with documentary as such – and particularly with the *evidential* aspect of images – remained unthinkable in both cases is indicative of prevailing attitudes in the early 1990s. This was to change.

⁴² Ibid., 409. It is worth noting that his discussion of the good vs evil narrative that was advanced feeds into discussions on the rise of ethics dealt with in Chapter 7.

⁴³ Jean Baudrillard, *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*, trans. Paul Patton (Sydney: Power Publications, 1995). (First published in 1991 in French.)

⁴⁴ Ibid., 30; 42; 41.

⁴⁵ Both writers explicitly refer to the 'New World Order', a phrase used by President Bush in 1990. Ibid., 53.

Artists' emerging preoccupation with the power and, moreover, *complexity* of documentary reportage at this time of profound historical transformation is exemplified in the 1992 work *Videograms of a Revolution* (*Videogramme einer Revolution*). In collaboration with the Romanian writer Andre Ujica, the German filmmaker, artist and theorist Harun Farocki produced a chronological reconstruction of the five days leading up to the fall of Nicolae Ceaușescu's regime in December 1989, using 'found' video footage shot by citizens as well as material transmitted from state-run television studios occupied by the protestors. Here was a revolution that purported to broadcast itself in real time, deploying the televisual image as a weapon. If self-documentation could not only bear witness to events but actively shape their direction, this appeared to constitute a powerful articulation of the usurpation of the written word by the visual document in revolutionary praxis.⁴⁶ Yet only a few months later the established narrative of the uprising was destabilised. Death tolls were revised radically downwards across the country. In the Western city of Timisoara – scene of the initial small-scale protest and violent suppression – 70 deaths were variously found to have been inflated to between 1,000 and 12,000 in the international news.⁴⁷ Shocking images of corpses recorded on site and widely circulated were revealed not to be victims of the massacre, directly contradicting the claims of the time. Even the execution of the Ceaușescus was said to be restaged for the cameras six hours after their deaths. These disclosures garnered a great deal of press and theoretical attention.

Yet while historical accounts acknowledge that manipulation did occur (often in the search for suitably striking visual articulations of the violence), their readings of the discrepancies tend to be measured, observing that casualty estimates are notoriously difficult to estimate during times of conflict and unrest or suggesting that the filmed corpses had recently been exhumed in the course of a frantic search for those missing following the killings and mass arrests. The philosopher Giorgio Agamben adopted a rather more extreme position, holding that the latter scene had been cynically simulated – thereby capturing a new turn of world politics:

What the entire world was watching live on television, thinking it was the real truth, was in reality the absolute nontruth; and, although the

⁴⁶ The work has been acquired by MoMA. While copy shops were prohibited and all typewriters were under state control, video cameras were permitted.

⁴⁷ Peter Siani-Davis, *The Romanian Revolution of December 1989* (Ithica; London: Cornell University Press, 2005), 281.

falsification appeared to be sometimes quite obvious, it was nevertheless legitimized as true by the media's world system, so that by now it would be clear that the true was, by now, nothing more than a moment within the necessary movement of the false. In this way, truth and falsity became indistinguishable from each other and the spectacle legitimized itself solely through the spectacle.⁴⁸

Unsurprisingly, Baudrillard's interpretation was similar: the triumph of the virtual over the real in both Romania and the Gulf meant that 'the question of truth and reality can no longer be asked.'⁴⁹



Figure 20: Harun Facorcki and Andre Ujica, *Videograms of a Revolution* (video stills) 1992

Returning to *Videograms*, on the one hand, a sceptical attitude towards images and critical interrogation of reportage is clearly apparent: Farocki and Ujica use footage of protesters posing and performing to camera as well as a replay of the repeated attempts of an English speaking journalist to record his segment, offering an insight that belies the presumed immediacy of the news. On the other, they consciously deployed the modes and tropes of documentary film: voice over, compelling narrative construction and witness testimony. For example, the opening sequence records a hospitalised woman regaining her composure for the camera, addressing the lens to detail her assault by the security forces and call for her fellow revolutionaries to continue the uprising. Eva Kernbauer has discussed the film's simultaneous *deconstruction* of the revolution's politics of representation (an approach so familiar from postmodern practices) and

⁴⁸ Siani-Davis, *The Romanian Revolution of December 1989*, 281. Giorgio Agamben, *Means Without End: Notes on Politics*, trans. Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 80-81.

⁴⁹ Jean Baudrillard, "The Timisoara Syndrome: The Télécratie and the Revolution," *D: Columbia Documents of Architecture and Theory* 2 (1993): 70.

reconstruction of the events through narrative.⁵⁰ Arguing it pursues a different approach to media theory for the early 1990s she remarks that:

Videograms of a Revolution allows the collected images to depict history, without counteracting their spectacularity or corruption, without aiming at a polarity between manipulation and authenticity, but rather by addressing the question of how authenticity could be mediated even if the notion of reality remained tainted as a mere effect of spectacularity.⁵¹

Published in 2010, Kernbauer's account reflects concerns that have dominated much of the literature on artists' attraction to documentary reportage: namely, *the tension between corruption and credibility*. Artists have apparently been drawn by the crisis in news journalism, precipitated not only by economic constraints and the faltering of belief (in images and institutions alike) but through the rise of user-generated content and alternative distribution channels.⁵² Alfredo Cramerotti has coined the term 'aesthetic journalism' as a means to frame the 'institutionalisation' of investigative methodologies (including field research, interviews and surveys), data analysis and information dissemination in art since the 1990s.⁵³ His discussion engages both extant artworks and the possibilities of potential future lens-based practices to consider art's role in constructing an alternative to the mainstream 'corporate-led' information apparatus.⁵⁴ A central aspect of Cramerotti's thesis is that art's difference (and thereby value) lies in its ability not to provide evidence or answers but to raise questions – and in 'coaching' its viewers to do the same. In line with many of his contemporaries, he argues that this is best achieved in critical 'hybrid' works that are ambiguous and reflexive – works that make *no claim* to produce a transparent picture of the real, yet that do not limit themselves to negative acts of destabilisation. 'Aesthetic journalism works', Cramerotti claims, 'by combining documents and imagination.'⁵⁵

⁵⁰ Eva Kernbauer, "Establishing Belief: Harun Farocki and Andrei Ujica, "Videograms of a Revolution"," *Grey Room* 41 (2010): 72-87.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁵² While the purpose and destination of Romanian citizens' camcorder recordings were not always clear, advances in social media, communication and image effectively completed the circuit in the 21st century.

⁵³ Cramerotti, *Aesthetic Journalism*. The 'artist as reporter' category avoids the more academic resonance of the 'artist-as-ethnographer' conceptualised by Hal Foster while also addressing the communication and 'service' orientation of practice more directly.

⁵⁴ A similar point is made by Jonsson who argued that art has the capacity to address the blind spots of mainstream journalism and produce an alternative media circuit. Jonsson, "Facts of Aesthetics and Fictions of Journalism," 60.

⁵⁵ Cramerotti, *Aesthetic Journalism*, 114.

Iconophilia, then, takes on peculiar characteristics in a context predicated on an overwhelming *anxiety* about (rather than love for) the visual, paradoxically accompanied by a burgeoning demand for the mediation of social realities. Against this backdrop of compelling uncertainty, artists' engagements with reportage follow various diverging paths. On the one hand there is, once again, a pervasive desire to juxtapose the values and social functions associated with documentary with the irrational, spectral, subjective and imaginative. Indeed, the political efficacy of works that appear most frequently in major exhibitions and prominent theoretical accounts is often claimed to be grounded precisely by their *embrace of ambiguity* and *indeterminacy*.⁵⁶ For example, The Atlas Group Archive's 'hysterical' documents that engage with the fraught histories of the Lebanese civil wars (1975-1991) through fictionalised accounts and corrupted imagery presented as evidence; Zarina Bhimji's slow cinematic surveys of abandoned sites that withhold any further contextualising narrative; or Steve McQueen (and others') propensity to plunge viewers in and out of petrol darkness – in his case a calculated yet temporary *withdrawal* that, T.J. Demos argues, intensifies the experience and 'works to pry open meaningful possibilities for the interpretation of the film's aural and visual sensations, which are *not bound to pedantic or informational* forms of framing [emphasis added]'.⁵⁷ It is this immersive and poetic form of 'corrupted' documentary that has found a home most easily in the environs of high art, whether museums or blue-chip commercial galleries, an acceptance that further reinforces what Owen Logan has called the 'privatisation' of documentary.⁵⁸

Another rich seam of activity more easily set in relation to Farocki and Ujica's *Videograms of a Revolution* is the video essay – indeed their title already invokes the concatenation of images and writing. Carles Guerra has noted that the essayist practices that emerged with such vigour around the turn of the century deployed images as part of explicitly pedagogic enterprises.⁵⁹ Observing a decisive shift in literacy models from verbal to visual, he argued that the video essay constituted a *pragmatic* response to the ceaseless onslaught of images and relentless transmission of events as visually legible. For him, such works sought to manage the inherent unreliability – and, moreover,

⁵⁶ See Cramerotti, *Aesthetic Journalism*, 30; Demos, *The Migrant Image*. I will return to critique this idea in Chapter 4.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁵⁸ Forbes, "Situating Realism."

⁵⁹ Carles Guerra, "Narratives of Europe: Video Essays and Collective Pedagogies," in *The Greenroom: Reconsidering the Documentary and Contemporary Art #1*, eds. Maria Lind and Hito Steyerl (Berlin: Sternberg Press and CCS Bard, 2008): 144–64.

insufficiency – of the documentary image by weaving it into structures geared towards an alternative kind of knowledge production premised on exchange, and where trust is established through affinities and networks. Guerra presents narrative (albeit provisional, layered and subjective) as a means by which to regain a measure of critical agency and circulate alternative interpretations of the world, under circumstances where images as ‘raw realities’ otherwise proliferate and run loose. The Swiss artist and theorist Ursula Biemann’s widely influential account of the video essay as an ‘in-between’ experimental genre has echoed this focus on management processes, specifically prioritising the ‘organizing of complexities,’ *not* the documentation of realities.⁶⁰ The video essay is frequently presented as having roots in a post-structuralist framework within which the text is privileged and ‘truth’ is understood to be constructed through intertextual exchange. Put another way, it is allegedly to be addressed as evidence not of reality but of a *position*. Two notable exceptions to this perspective are of relevance to the present discussion: taking Biemann’s own output as her case study, in 2007 Angela Dimitrakaki provided a theory that went against post-structuralism to instead claim the video essay as a new *feminism*.⁶¹ Furthermore, she argued that the ‘dialectical tension between “construct” and “real space,”’ forged in her examples ‘subtend[ed] a move from fiction to reality.’⁶² Amy Charlesworth followed in 2013, locating the video essay within a genealogy of the documentary while emphasising social purpose, utility and artists’ attempts ‘to negotiate the vicissitudes of truth.’⁶³

These experiments with the reportage capabilities of the lens have been accompanied by recurring questions around viewership and the possibilities of perception. Returning to W.J.T. Mitchell, Jan Verwoert yoked the pictorial and documentary turns, challenging assumptions around the pacifying, or even ‘paralysing’, capacities of the image and its collapse of critical distance. Instead he noted the prevalence of sophisticated capacities for ‘double viewing’ across popular culture – the (pleasurable) process of holding,

⁶⁰ Ursula Biemann, “The Video Essay in the Digital Age,” in *Stuff It*, ed. Ursula Biemann (New York: Springer, 2003): 8-11. The term ‘video essay’ has been connected to the 1940s avant-garde filmmaker Hans Richter’s conception of the ‘Film Essay’ as a category that encompasses yet moves beyond the mere presentation of facts and information in documentary film to attend to ‘the “invisible” world of thoughts and ideas’. See Hans Richter, “The Film Essay: A New Form of Documentary Film,” cited in Nora M. Alter, “Memory Essays,” in *Stuff It*, ed. Ursula Biemann (New York: Springer, 2003), 13-14.

⁶¹ Angela Dimitrakaki, “Materialist Feminism for the Twenty-first Century: The Video Essays of Ursula Biemann,” *Art Journal* 30, no. 2 (2007): 205-232.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 223.

⁶³ Charlesworth, *The ‘Video-Essay’ in Contemporary Art*.

informed distance and involvement, fascination and skepticism in sustained tension.⁶⁴ Groys and Hito Steyerl have also examined the persistence of belief, respectively attending to the paradoxical power of disturbed, interrupted or low-resolution images to reinforce a sense of authenticity and veracity.⁶⁵ In her influential account of the *potency* of documentary modes at the turn of the century Steyerl argues that such images found their decisive force *not in an indexical relation to the real but in their ability to generate an affective response*. For her, the ‘uncertainly principle’ that comprises documentary’s core quality during this time – the amplification of always present doubts around its relation to objective truth – is the impetus behind its ascendancy precisely because it participates in ‘post-representational’ circumstances characterised by instability, precarity and economies of affect. Viewers in contemporary society she observes are ‘torn between false certainties and feelings of passivity and exposure, between agitation and boredom, between their role as citizens and their role as consumers.’⁶⁶ I am persuaded by the significance that Steyerl affords to the affective capacities of documentary modes, as well as the radical update she implies has occurred with respect to their founding associations with power, ideology, control and domination.⁶⁷ Here the marked difference between postmodernist preoccupations with unfixity or instability and the ambiguity and doubt foregrounded by so many artworks corralled under the ‘documentary turn’ is brought into sharp focus. While the former can be said to be underpinned by a deconstructive impulse that seeks to undermine conceptions of truth, the other is better described as *constructive*, seeking to open up new routes to an idea of truth that builds in attributes beyond the objective. This position is exemplified by Jacques Rancière’s much cited assertion that the real must be fictionalised in order to be thought.⁶⁸

I agree that truth has indeed made a forceful return, *however*, I would go further to *argue against the implied eclipse of the evidential*. In my view, *affect and evidence are not mutually exclusive* and, as I will show, the latter is precisely what differentiates the

⁶⁴ Jan Verwoert, “Double Viewing: The Significance of the “Pictorial” Turn to the Critical Use of Visual Media in Video Art,” in *Stuff It*, ed. Ursula Biemann (New York: Springer, 2003): 24-33.

⁶⁵ Hito Steyerl, “Documentary Uncertainty,” *A Prior Magazine* 15 (2007), accessed May 3, 2009, http://www.aprior.org/n15_content.htm.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ The transmission of fear has been discussed widely in this respect. See also Brian Massumi “Fear (The Spectrum Said),” *Positions* 13, no. 1 (2005); T.J. Demos, “Image Wars,” *Zones of Conflict* (New York: Pratt Manhattan Gallery, 2009).

⁶⁸ Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (London; New York: Continuum, 2011).

‘document trend’ in art and the social document. Groys’s contention that the terrorist is an iconophile who takes exceptional measures to end the critique of representation is significant here. He states:

After so many decades of modern and postmodern criticism of the image, of mimesis, of the [sic] representation, we feel ourselves somewhat ashamed by saying that such images of terror or torture are not true, not real. We cannot say that these images are not true, because we know that these images have been paid for by a real loss of life—a loss of life that is documented by these images.⁶⁹

Presented with documentation of terrorist beheadings and scenes of torture at Abu-Ghraib prison, we are ready to believe once again. Strong and virulent images such as these are, then, better understood as weapons rather than propaganda. Once again the empirical truth and use of the image as evidence or information has to be seen in close relation to its ‘symbolic value within the media economy of symbolic exchange.’⁷⁰ It is to this renewed claim on the real that I aim to attend, this time with respect to art.

3.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have offered a more detailed overview the general ascendancy of documentary modes in art since 1989, together with its theorisations, as well as registering significant omissions. I have argued that the dividing line between apparently ‘iconophobic’ social practices and ‘iconophilic’ documentary practices is not useful. Rather than articulated by a simple division between the commitment to the live engagement against the mediated, a dialectic persists across these formulations, manifesting in various ways across a spectrum of approaches: while the durational encounter often proves to be dependent upon its imbrication with narrative and the documentary image, its open and enthusiastic adoption in the documentary turn of the 1990s and early 2000s is frequently concomitant with strategies of interruption, fictionalisation, demotion and withdrawal. However, in contrast to these dominant accounts I have identified an alternative prism through which to view the appearance on documentary modes in art – one that privileges the evidential and that acknowledges that the marked attention to the real and to truth indicates that something different is

⁶⁹ Boris Groys, “Art at War,” in *Art Power* (London: MIT Press, 2008), 125

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 126-127.

happening. The analysis of this strand – which gives us the social document – will take up the remainder of this thesis.

CHAPTER 4

The New Cause: Globalisation, Biopolitics and Practices of Social Knowledge in Art since 1989

4.1 Introduction

Following the collapse of Eastern European communism and the acceleration of global capitalism, artistic practice and its models of reception have undergone profound shifts. Whether using the lens to map the new social realities produced or participating directly in struggles for alternative futures, artists have adopted a range of strategies that have brought forth new core themes in art and its discourses including mobility, labour, ecology, economic relations, networks and activism. These themes can be argued to identify the decisive conditions of contemporary modernity. In this chapter, I will advance a definition of the social document, contending that it is positioned at the centre of these transformations and, as such, demands theorisation. I aim to assert its specificity and difference from the ‘documentary turn’ as well as distinguish my theorisations from the literature associated with the latter. To restate: I do *not* propose that the social document constitutes an artistic ‘genre’, but that it arises out of, and as part of, the reconfigured artwork.

My research proceeds from three points of departure: 1) The social document can identify, encompass, and thereby set in relation, different types of artistic engagement that, on the one hand, appear to seek the collapse of art into non-art, or, on the other, attempt to integrate social reality (and its critique) into art. 2) That a demand is thereby placed on art to partake in the production and dissemination of social knowledge – and that this demand bears particularly on lens-based outputs. 3) The hypothesis that the social document constitutes the exemplary artistic response to social, political and economic realities since 1989. Accordingly, my research questions are: Why has the demand for documentation increased in parallel with the shifting political and cultural realities induced and accelerated by what has come to be termed ‘globalisation’? What

differentiates current formations from what has gone before – particularly the practices associated with postmodernism in which photography and video held such a position of dominance?¹ Is the social document only capable of registering symptoms and consequences or can it participate in / contribute to social change and struggle? How does art's reconfiguration as one among many platforms of engagement with the social transform art's self-identity? Ultimately, what is art's difference?

In order to examine the social document and attend to its various formations as well as theoretical contexts, it is first necessary to further contextualise its rise. This chapter is therefore organised around two thematic sections through which I 'turn' the question of documentary modes in the 21st century – a) globalisation and, b) biopolitics. These themes are by no means isolated from one another and many concepts and ideas recur, enabling a more detailed and rigorous analysis. My field of enquiry is thereby not limited to contemporary art; rather, I seek to situate the social art document in relation to broader usages and transformations of documentary modes. I begin by *contextualising* the ascendancy of the social document – firstly, by unpacking a transition from 'postmodernism' to 'globalisation', and secondly, through a consideration of the transformations undergone by labour – as well as production and consumption more generally – during this period. The second section builds upon this discussion to consider the rise and efficacy of biopolitics as a theoretical framework for the analysis of the social document. The concluding section builds upon the preceding observations and arguments in order to move towards a definition of the social document thereby laying the groundwork for Part II of this thesis in which subsequent chapters address and unpack particular thematic strands and priorities.

¹ See Chapter 2.

4.2 GLOBALISATION

Re-articulating the contemporary

The question of 'the contemporary' as a descriptive cultural marker has generated a flurry of publications, conferences and articles in recent years.² The art historian Terry Smith's sustained engagement with the subject has included the organisation of a symposium at the University of Pittsburgh in 2004 focused around the following provocation: 'In the aftermath of modernity, and the passing of the postmodern, how are we to know and show what it is to live in the conditions of contemporaneity?'³ Similarly, Hal Foster's 2009 editorial for a special issue of *October* addressing 'The Contemporary' unequivocally asserted that the paradigm of postmodernism had 'run into the sand'.⁴ One of his respondents, Alexander Alberro, focused his contribution on the dominance of the concept of globalisation as an attempt to 'name the present', arguing that it characterised the new historical period ushered in by the events of 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union.⁵ The faltering of postmodernism's hegemony – or what Jonathan Harris has called its terminal fade – and the concomitant ascendancy of globalisation can be witnessed especially from the 1990s onwards when the term (which was formulated in the fields of within sociology and political history) entered the media, colloquial speech and the humanities with gusto.⁶ If the avoidance of 'postmodernism' as a term is evidenced by the decline in its usage, a good deal of energy in the fields of art history and curatorship where nevertheless channelled towards proposing answers to the question of its successor, even if often managing to avoid explicitly naming the object that had been overcome.⁷ Notably it is the watershed moment for documentary modes in

² Hal Foster et al., "Questionnaire on 'The Contemporary'," *October* 130 (2009): 3-124; Julieta Aranda, Brian Kuan Wood, Anton Vidokle, eds., "What is Contemporary Art? Issue 1," *e-flux journal* 11 (2009), accessed Aug 20, 2016, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/11/61342/what-is-contemporary-art-issue-one/>; Julieta Aranda, Brian Kuan Wood, Anton Vidokle, eds., "What is Contemporary Art? Issue 2," *e-flux journal* 12 (2010), accessed Aug 20, 2016, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/what-is-contemporary-art-issue-two/>; Boris Buden, Maria Hlavajova, Simon Sheikh, *Former West: Art and the Contemporary After 1989* (Cambridge MA; London: MIT Press, 2016).

³ Terry Smith, *What Is Contemporary Art?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 1.

⁴ Foster, "Questionnaire on 'The Contemporary'," 3.

⁵ Alexander Alberro, "Questionnaire on 'The Contemporary'," *October* 130 (2009): 55-60.

⁶ Jonathan Harris, "Introduction: With Postmodernism Grounded," in *Meaning and Interpretation After Postmodernism*, ed. Jonathan Harris (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007), 1. He goes on to state that 'postmodernism understood as a powerful discursive entity has ended ... 'globalization' has replaced it more or less tout court since the mid-1990s.' Ibid., 4.

⁷ There are of course exceptions to this avoidance, including (as noted in Chapter 2) Hardt and Negri's *Empire* trilogy. In terms of art historical attention Hal Foster asked "Whatever Happened to Postmodernism?" in *The Return of the Real* (Cambridge MA; London: MIT Press/October Books, 1996):

contemporary art that offers a particularly clear case in point. Orientated by the curator, Okwui Enwezor, to address what he called a 'turbulent time of unceasing cultural, social, and political frictions, transitions, transformations, fissures, and global institutional consolidations,' the exhibition *Documenta 11* (2002) specifically sought to retrieve the postcolonial subject from the postmodern mire of so-called 'identity politics'.⁸

Various described as a set of processes, an era and a condition, globalisation has been seen as both contributing to the breakdown of geographic, political, cultural and economic boundaries as well as intensifying inequalities across the planet. While global trade and international exchange is of course nothing new, globalisation (across many phases) has been identified as the 'signature dish of capitalism', while the recent rise of the term has been linked with the increased mobility of capital, labour and production processes as well as decolonisation and extraordinary technological advances – particularly in terms of communications.⁹ The financial crisis of 2008 rendered connections that previously were often abstract in the minds of the population apparent – often painfully as an economic crisis soon became a crisis of social stability. The implications of *scale* must also be highlighted as well as the return to previously maligned conceptualisations of totality – in the words of one artist: 'global phenomena require new conceptual means to help us grasp their immense totality.'¹⁰

The cultural theorist Imre Szeman has observed that, as a flexible and amorphous yet fundamentally compelling concept, globalisation at first seems to perform an updated version of the same role as postmodernism, 'naming the character and dynamics of the contemporary moment, if with far more attention paid to the material realities, struggles and conflicts of contemporary reality on a world-wide scale.'¹¹ Yet the differences between the two, Szeman goes on, are fundamental. This is perhaps most obvious in their usage: if the hermetic 'postmodernism' failed to gain substantive traction beyond the

205-226. See also Dimitrakaki and Lloyd, "The Last Instance"; Harris, "Introduction: With Postmodernism Grounded."

⁸ Okwui Enwezor, "Preface," in *Documenta 11_Platform 5: Exhibition Short Guide* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2002), 6.

⁹ Cindi Katz, "On the Grounds of Globalization: A Topography for Feminist Political Engagement," *Signs* 26, no. 4 (2001): 1213-1234.

¹⁰ Ursula Biemann, "Reorganising Women on a Global Scale: Remote Sensing," in *Mission Reports: Artistic Practice in the Field, Video Works 1998-2008*, eds. Ursula Biemann and Jan-Erik Lundstrom (Umeå, Sweden: Bildmusset, Umeå University, 2008), 39.

¹¹ Imre Szeman, "Imagining the Future: Globalization, Postmodernism and Criticism," *Frame: Tijdschrift voor Literatuurwetenschap* 19, no. 2 (2006): 16-30 (available at <http://individual.utoronto.ca/nishashah/Drafts/Szeman.pdf>).

academy, 'globalisation' by contrast has the advantage of attaining broad public recognition and acceptance.¹² 'Globalisation' is equally at home in the pages of newspapers, World Bank reports, domestic discussions and named as the object of activist dissent. As Szeman dryly points out, 'the Zapatistas did not rise up against postmodernism.'¹³ Moreover, globalisation's *relation* to culture bears no resemblance to that of postmodernism (which, for him, was primarily an aesthetic category):

If postmodernism comes to our attention through various formal innovations that prompt us to consider symptomatically what is going on in the world to generate these forms, globalization seems to invert this relationship, placing the emphasis on the restructuring of relations of politics and power, the re-scaling of economic production from the national to the transnational, on the lightspeed operations of finance capital, and the societal impacts of the explosive spread of information technologies. With globalization, we thus seem to have suspended what was central to debates and discussions of postmodernism—the *category of representation* [emphasis added].¹⁴

Over the course of this thesis I will argue that the position of this latter category is considerably more complex than Szeman suggests, however, I am in agreement with his contention that culture in the era of globalisation has been effectively demoted, to become 'little more than a name for just one of the many aspects of commodity production and exchange today.'¹⁵ Szeman's position is endorsed by Marc James Léger in his 2012 essay 'Art and Art History After Globalisation' where he begins by observing the extent to which globalisation's social forms have expanded and reframed culture as an expedient 'resource' for economic development.¹⁶ Terry Smith also acknowledged the role of capitalist economic relations when attempting to identify an emergent 'aesthetics of globalization', not only in terms of the proliferation of 'Spectacle Art', biennials and the concentration of power within commercial or multinational art institutions but in terms of the small-scale, interactive and communicative offerings which 'seek sustainable flows of survival, cooperation and politics.'¹⁷ As I will argue, the social document is uniquely placed in terms of its ability to act within, and across, these poles.

¹² While the term 'postmodernism' certainly has appeared in the pages of the broadsheet newspapers, and, in the latter half of the 2000s, rather belatedly in beer adverts (Brewdog), it *cannot* be said to have achieved widespread common usage and comprehension in the same way.

¹³ Szeman, "Imagining the Future," unpaginated.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Marc James Léger, "Art and Art History After Globalisation," *Third Text* 26, no.5 (2012): 516. Here he also cites George Yúdice's *The Expediency of Culture: Uses of Culture in the Global Era* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2003).

¹⁷ Smith, *What Is Contemporary Art?*, 8.

The subordination of culture to economic concerns forms a consistent refrain in accounts of contemporary art in the era of globalisation. At a policy level, the rise of the 'creative industries' (together with the attendant requirement for creative entrepreneurs) and a dependency on the 'economic case' for culture (whether measured by its ameliorative impact, capacity to create employment, draw tourism revenue, or enhance national 'brands') have become commonplace across Northern Europe.¹⁸ At the same time debates on the rapid reconfiguration of art world infrastructures since 1989 – most easily apprehended in the entwining of art and finance through speculation and the proliferation of large-scale temporary exhibitions – are well rehearsed.¹⁹ Frequently associated with city marketing and culture tourism, Alberro notes that 'peripheral' biennials also effectively operate as scouts for the Western art market.²⁰ Yet in 2011 Angela Dimitrakaki pushed far beyond questions of funding, market sales and tourism when she addressed the repercussions of the ideological triumph of neoliberalism following the integration of the former Soviet bloc and China into capitalist markets: she proposed that the departure enacted by art since 1989 is best understood as the replacement of postmodernism's cultural subject with an 'economic subject of globalisation'.²¹ Our exhibition project ECONOMY (2013) began the process of fleshing out this idea using curatorial methodologies.²² As the title suggested, and as the accompanying essay affirmed, our object was the impact of the economy's transformation following the consolidation of *global capitalism* – to a certain extent we

¹⁸ For a discussion of the 'entrepreneurialisation' of arts and culture see Angela McRobbie, "'Everyone is Creative': Artists as Pioneers of the New Economy?," *Be Creative! The Creative Imperative*, 2003, accessed 21 September 2016, http://www.k3000.ch/becreative/texts/text_5.html. The *Guardian* newspaper summarised the then new UK culture secretary's position thus: 'When British arts are exported, they act, she will say, as a kind of "relationship marketing" exercise that helps "attract investment which will drive jobs and opportunities here at home. It opens doors for UK plc and makes it easier for businesses to export, and expand.'" Charlotte Higgins, "British culture should be seen as commodity, says Maria Miller," *Guardian*, Apr 24, 2013, accessed 21 February 2016, <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2013/apr/24/british-culture-commodity-maria-miller>. For Dutch examples see Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 14.

¹⁹ This seismic shift is usually explicitly connected with the year 1989. See Paul O'Neill, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture* (Cambridge MA; London: The MIT Press, 2012), 51; Sabine B Vogel, *Biennials – Art on A Global Scale*, (Vienna: Springer, 2010).

²⁰ Alberro, "Questionnaire on 'The Contemporary'," 57.

²¹ Angela Dimitrakaki, "The Spectacle and Its Others," in *Globalisation and Contemporary Art*, ed. Jonathan Harris (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2011): 191-211. An earlier version of this essay was presented as a research paper: Angela Dimitrakaki, "Art and Labour Today: On the Globalisation of Discontent" (paper, Sites of Conflict symposium, University of Nottingham, Jul 2, 2008).

²² Curated by the author and Angela Dimitrakaki, ECONOMY presented works by over 30 artists across two venues – the Centre for Contemporary Arts (Glasgow) and Stills (Edinburgh) – between January and April 2013. See Appendix C and www.economyexhibition.net. The associated book was published in 2015: Angela Dimitrakaki and Kirsten Lloyd, *ECONOMY: Art, Production and the Subject in the 21st Century* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015).

deliberately avoided the more nebulous, obfuscating (if more palatable and indeed fashionable) descriptor 'globalisation'.²³ Our interest lay in providing evidence about the fact that capital as a social relation had both legitimised and made widespread a category of human relations known as 'the economy'. This was a category that a bourgeois history of art (and, interestingly, postmodernism) had been committed to rendering hidden or irrelevant. As art historians, we were not aware of a period of art production (certainly not a period that could be described as 'global' in its purview) with such an apparent emphasis on the processes and subjectivities that made up the 'economy'.

The selected works frequently addressed the proliferation of 'economic', rather than cultural, others; from single mothers in the U.S. to an animated documentary on child slaves in the Sudan to Biemann's aforementioned video essay engaging with communities on the frontline of climate change. Occasionally works rejected negative appraisals and attempted to offer visions of resistance and hope: the exhibition also included a live participatory dimension undertaken by the collective WochenKlausur which attended to the complexity of this 'othered' position by engaging with four unemployed women from the Drumchapel area of Glasgow. If such individuals were once regarded as part of a redundant surplus population, *Participatory Economics* (2013) corroborated Fredric Jameson's argument that, at this stage of capitalism 'the extra-economic or social no longer lies outside capital and economics but has been absorbed into it: so that being unemployed or without economic function is no longer to be expelled from capital but to remain within it.'²⁴ In Chapter 7 I will pick up this argument specifically in relation to recent analyses of gentrification processes that concern not only space but also subjectivity.

It is worth noting that our initial exhibition proposal, dating back to 2010, focused on questions of labour and production, reflecting the proliferation of such themes across the field of curatorial action in the same year, possibly accelerated by the fallout of 2008 financial crash which prompted stark reminders of the emerging realities of *global production* as well as steeply escalating levels of unemployment. Yet our discussions and

²³ Here I would draw a comparison with Nottingham Contemporary's *Uneven Geographies* (2012) exhibition in which the term 'globalisation' is privileged over 'capitalism', particularly in the promotional materials. The former is deployed 14 times in the short foreword. 'Capitalism' is instead reserved for the safer territories of the extended essay by Alex Farquharson's co-curator, the art historian T.J. Demos. Alex Farquharson and Jim Waters eds, *Uneven Geographies* (2012), accessed Jan 15, 2016, <http://www.nottinghamcontemporary.org/art/publications>.

²⁴ Fredric Jameson, *Representing Capital: A Reading of Volume One* (London: Verso, 2014), 71.

research quickly moved us to the overarching pressing relevance of the economy at large – within which labour became thematised but did not remain at the centre.²⁵ That said, and for reasons worth drawing out further, the exhibition was *not* titled CAPITALISM nor did we discuss ‘capitalist subjects’. Our intention was not to attend to the subsumption of, or to, capital but rather to address something more complex – namely, the autonomisation of the economic field from the political field; the economy’s spilling over into ‘apparentness’. As constituted through the antagonism defining the relationship between capital and labour, *economic* subjects have thereby risen to prominence. As well as attempts to reject or criticise economic relations, this focus has also led to active attempts to institute alternative economies – as evidenced by the recent momentum attached to the concept of the commons. In this thesis my concern is with the ways in which the production of the social document intersects with, underpins and problematises these tendencies.

A number of works in the ECONOMY exhibition inevitably engaged with the mobility of people across the frontiers of nation-states, for example Tanja Ostojić’s *Looking for a Husband with EU Passport* (2000-05) and Angela Melitopoulos’s video essay installation *CORRIDOR X* (2006) which dealt with migration from Eastern and/or Southern to Western/Northern Europe as a major factor in the latter’s economic stability. The *geographic and spatial* conditions of advanced capitalism often denoted by the term ‘globalisation’ were clearly of import, calling to mind Neil Smith’s and David Harvey’s respective accounts of ‘uneven geographical development’ under neoliberalism.²⁶ Smith’s descriptions of parallel yet contradictory processes of geographical ‘equalization’ (in terms of production) and ‘differentiation’ (in terms of capital accumulation based on dispossession) can also be connected to other influential works not included in ECONOMY such as Allan Sekula’s epic photo essay *Fish Story* (1989-1995). Here the artist takes on the representational challenge of documenting globalisation – what Jameson called ‘a system so vast that it cannot be encompassed by

²⁵ See, for example, John Roberts’ labour theory of culture: John Roberts, *The Intangibilities of Form: Skill and Deskilling in Art After the Readymade* (London; New York: Verso, 2007); Julieta Aranda, Brian Kuan Wood, and Anton Vidokle eds., *Are You Working Too Much? Post-Fordism, Precarity, and the Labor of Art* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2011); *The Workers: Precarity/Invisibility/Mobility*, Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (2011); the series of workshops organised by Iaspis, Stockholm (2010) and the associated publication Cecilia Widenheim, Lisa Rosendahl, Michele Masucci, Annika Enqvist, and Jonatan Habib Engqvist eds., *Work, Work, Work: A Reader on Art and Labour* (Stockholm: Sternberg Press and Iaspis, 2012).

²⁶ Neil Smith, *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital, and the Production of Space* (New York, NY: Blackwell, 1984); David Harvey, *Spaces of Global Capitalism: Towards a Theory of Uneven Geographical Development* (London; New York: Verso, 2006).

the natural and historically developed categories of perception with which human beings normally orient themselves.’²⁷ Sekula proceeded by visually mapping its hidden – yet indispensable – *material* dimensions and sites, from standardised shipping containers to dockyards, corroborating John Berger’s earlier observation made in the early 1970s that it is now ‘space, not time, that hides consequences from us’.²⁸

The exhibition’s primary address, however, was to a rather different type of frontier; it engaged critically with how the economy is embedded into concrete lived experience – as Maurizio Lazzarato noted in 2012 ‘the modern notion of “economy” covers both economic production and the production of subjectivity.’²⁹ At that particular historical juncture, again in the wake of the 2008 global financial crash, reference to the economy had permeated beyond newspapers’ financial sections, moving over to become a constant headline presence in the world news, health and well-being, and – of course – culture pages. Disturbing examples of such embeddings were therefore not difficult to find. Books with ominous titles like *The Body Economic: Why Austerity Kills* (2013) sought to describe the social truth of unhinged neoliberal dogma through an analysis of the catastrophic consequences of austerity, which, the authors noted, in Greece alone, saw a 52 per cent rise in HIV, a doubling in suicide, rising homicides and the return of malaria.³⁰ At the other end of the socioeconomic spectrum psychology magazines were reporting on the ‘pain of privilege’, said to precipitate increased rates of anxiety, depression and self-harm amongst relatively wealthy teenagers in the U.S..³¹ If in 2013, the year when *ECONOMY* was presented, research concerning the social meaning and impact of economic relations tended to be interdisciplinary (manifestly no longer carried out *only* by economists), the curatorial narrative intended to demonstrate the extent to which artists presciently grasped this development, long before it had become common knowledge.

Art, we argued, has engaged with these new conditions of production and reproduction, where all aspects of life are subject to the domination of capitalist economic relations, in

²⁷ Fredric Jameson, *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), 2.

²⁸ John Berger, *The Look of Things* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), 40.

²⁹ Maurizio Lazzarato, *The Making of the Indebted Man: An Essay on the Neoliberal Condition* (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e) 2012), 11.

³⁰ David Stuckler and Sanjay Basu, *The Body Economic: Why Austerity Kills* (New York: Basic Books, 2013), xiv.

³¹ Suniya Luthar, “The Problem With Rich Kids,” *Psychology Today*, Nov 5, 2013, accessed Nov 8, 2013, <http://www.psychologytoday.com/articles/201310/the-problem-rich-kids>.

a striking variety of ways – as indicted in the span of keywords that framed the project research and selections: work, sex, life, enclosures, specters and exodus. To give just one thematic example; the wildly ‘uneven’ production of artistic subjectivity was addressed through the juxtaposition of two self portraits: Tracey Emin as successful career woman immersed in the creative economy (*I’ve got it all* (2000)) and Kai Kaljo’s recitation-to-camera of the numbers that indicate her failure as a ‘woman’ and an ‘artist’ in the context of the new capitalist system in post-Soviet Estonia (*Loser* (1997)).



Figure 21 (left): Tracey Emin, *I’ve got it all* (ink-jet print) 2000

Figure 22 (right): Kai Kaljo, *Loser* (video still) 1997

The more participatory works *mirrored* the internalisation of the economy’s frontier in what, I argue, is best understood as an update of Miwon Kwon’s conceptualisation of art’s ‘site’: while Kwon traced this site’s detachment from geographic and environmental contexts into discursive relations, its latest relocation has led it to subjectivity itself. Works like WochenKlausur’s (aptly titled) *Participatory Economics* or Rick Lowe’s *Project Row Houses*, initiated in the early 1990s and presented via documentation, demonstrated art’s quest to make itself useful has frequently entailed a particular politics of *inclusion*. And yet this politics developed not around recognition (identity) but about expanding the sites and subjects of distribution (economy). In the case of WochenKlausur the establishment of a new worker self-managed cooperative, a venture through which the women could (potentially) derive income and confidence (‘worth’), while, *Project Row Houses* offers training and education opportunities for young single mothers. Both these examples articulated a need for further research into the connections between art and production: what relevance does Luc Boltanski and Ève

Chiapello's claim in *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (1999) that artistic critique was appropriated and absorbed into management discourse still hold for outputs in the 2010s?³² Or, from the other perspective, how does whatever we understand by 'art' transform when production does?

If the sheer prevalence of documentary modes across the ECONOMY checklist illustrated the extent to which they have become central to artists' attendance to the 'material realities, struggles and conflicts of contemporary reality on a world-wide scale', our curatorial research also demonstrated the variety of demands placed on narrative documentation.³³ For not only are documentary modes deployed in order to attend to the *external* transformations brought about through globalisation, they are also required to communicate something of this *internal* impact, mapping the advances of capitalism into ever-deeper strata of social existence. Put another way, *the document is central to artists' various engagements with capitalism's new frontier: ourselves.*

Re-contextualising the document: production and consumption in the 21st century

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's millennial theorisation of globalisation as a centreless 'Empire' of capital that knows no outside has proved to be highly influential in contemporary art practice and discourse – not least in terms of these borderless processes of exploitation and domination.³⁴ Built on the old European imperialisms but differentiated from them as a new stage of capitalism, Empire is presented as a space of brutal economic divisions and hierarchies, while its expansive network simultaneously introduces alternative mechanisms of control as well as new opportunities for, and means of, 'encounter'. The transformation of production processes with the rise of post-Fordism (based on mobility, adaption and flexibility), they argue, has brought forth the hegemony of 'immaterial labour', a new form of 'socialised work(er)' responding to the dissolution of the boundaries between production and reproduction.³⁵ Far from contradicting Sekula's documentary accounts of the displacement (rather than disappearance) of conventional industrial labour, this hegemony is measured in

³² Boltanski and Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*.

³³ Szeman, "Imagining the Future," unpaginated.

³⁴ See Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire; Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (London: Penguin Books, 2004); *Commonwealth* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009).

³⁵ Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, 65.

‘qualitative’ rather than quantitative terms; that is, by the degree that ‘immateriality’ influences and impacts upon other (or indeed all) forms of labour as well as society itself. Its privileged products include images, knowledge and relationships, or, in Hardt and Negri’s words, *social life itself*: ‘Just as [...150 years ago...] all forms of labour and society itself had to industrialize, today labour and society have to informationalize, become intelligent, become communicative, become affective.’³⁶

This account is of import in terms of understanding the type of labour required to produce art documentation and social documents. A number of art historians and curators have added to a broader, cross-disciplinary analysis of labour today defined by attributes including mobility (the ability, willingness and means to travel), and advanced communication skills including the ability to persuade, influence and ‘engage affectively’ with others.³⁷ By extension, Hardt and Negri’s thesis is also of relevance to comprehending what an artwork *can* be at this point in history – what characteristics are valued (and how). The concept of immaterial labour is indeed frequently employed in discussions of contemporary art, often in the same vein as by Hardt and Negri, whereby its presumed emancipatory potential is affirmed. However, it remains highly contested and it is worth briefly touching on a few of the debates here in order to better grasp the contexts the social document emerges through and exists within.

Drawing a parallel between its rapid acceptance and that experienced by the ‘de-materialisation of art’ three decades before, Roberts has pointed out that Lazzarato was quick to abandon the term ‘immaterial labour’ after triggering its recuperation in the mid-1990s.³⁸ He quotes: ‘No sooner had we borrowed the concept than we were faced with ambiguities. People interpreted *material* and *immaterial* as opposites.’³⁹ Indeed, the complexities of their shifting entwinements has been interrogated from a feminist perspective by theorist Leopoldina Fortunati. Acknowledging that immaterial labour has become valorised by capital, spreading like ‘a virus throughout the whole economic system’, she notes that this process has involved *exporting the dynamics of the domestic*,

³⁶ Ibid., 109.

³⁷ Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another: Site Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2002); Nicolas Bourriaud, *Altermodern* (London: TATE, 2009); Dimitrakaki, *Gender, ArtWork and the Global Imperative*.

³⁸ Roberts, “Art and the Problem of Immaterial Labour,” 49.

³⁹ Maurizio Lazzarato, “Conversation with Lazzarato,” with Bojana Cvejic, Vanessa Theodoropoulou, Natasa Petresin-Bachelez and Ana Vujanovic, trans. David Pickering. Joint issue of the *Journal de Laboratoires* and *TkH Journal for Performing Arts Theory* 17 (2010): 12, cited in Roberts, “Art and the Problem of Immaterial Labour,” 49.

*reproductive sphere to the world of goods and commodities.*⁴⁰ At the same time, the reproductive sphere (or process) itself has 'intensified' as a site of production. Political scientist Kathi Weeks frames it thus:

The interpenetration of production and reproduction has deepened as domestically produced goods and services continue to be replaced with commodified forms, and many modes of service and caring labour are transformed into waged forms of employment. Production and reproduction thus come to resemble one another more closely, in terms of both their respective labour processes and their outcomes. Second, not only is reproductive labour more clearly productive today, as evidenced by its many waged forms, but productive labour is increasingly reproductive in the sense that it often creates not only strictly economic goods and services but also social landscapes, communicative contexts, and cultural forms. Indeed social practices and cultural codes are both inducted into the production and circulation of commodities and generated from it.⁴¹

Though Fortunati does not discuss documentary modes specifically, her interrogation of these shifts and the growth of immaterial labour in relation to the increase of technology (and immaterial consumption) is useful to the present discussion in that she attends to seismic changes in their sites of production, dissemination and reception. As a result, journalism can be understood as only one of many points of contact that informs developments in artists' use of documentation.

In Fortunati's analysis, not only does immaterial labour set material labour in motion, it also increasingly requires material supports – these days in the form of technological devices and digital infrastructures. This mechanisation of specific aspects of immaterial and reproductive labour has involved using old and new media (from TV and newspapers right through to the Internet and mobile phones) as a means to exert control over the domestic sphere and to intensify the production of value therein. The spread of intellectual technologies (i.e. machines that stimulate intellectual work) affords new opportunities to generate economic outcomes from communicative interaction while also, in Fortunati's view, precipitating further the 'dematerialization' or 'theft' of the real as users are encouraged to live out second-hand realities. While her critique can be connected to highly problematic nostalgic positions that dream of a return to some distant authentic, technology-free lived reality, Fortunati's broader discussion succeeds

⁴⁰ Leopoldina Fortunati, "Immaterial Labor and Its Machinization," *ephemera* 7, no. 1 (2007): 139-157.

⁴¹ Kathi Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries* (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2011), 140-141.

in bringing new dimensions to the analysis of post-Fordism, which, from the 1970s on has encouraged and experimented with the entry of private life into the formal economy.

Fortunati was writing at the cusp of 'web 2.0' (the so-called 'architecture of participation') when usage of social media expanded, and, when the production of image documents became thoroughly popularised.⁴² At once both *domesticated* and radically public, certain formations in particular encapsulate the digital economy's further reconfiguration (disruption) of traditional (segregated) categories of production and consumption examined by Tiziana Terranova in 2000.⁴³ Here we might 'follow the money' to analyse how the production of a single 'selfie' produces wealth – and for whom. Asserting that we live in the 'age of the algorithm', the philosopher Alexander Galloway has noted that while mathematical algorithms certainly perform a key role in the extraction of value, they remain dependent on human labour. Taking Google as his example, he highlights the electricity required to run the server farms before stating:

Nevertheless, the value being extracted is gleaned from the *large reservoirs of micro labor performed by web users around the planet*. Users perform micro labor whenever they send email, post messages online, or update websites. Hence Google is merely skimming value from information networks that ultimately have their origins in human laboring activity [my emphasis].⁴⁴

To this list of everyday activities I would add the production of image documents. Or we might instead attend to how such self-portraits can be understood as *performative documents* – an idea that can again be connected to the creation of particular experiences or goods (such as cocktails) explicitly for the purpose of documentation and digital circulation through platforms such as Instagram (launched October 2010) or what Sophie Berrebi has called the 'amnesic recordings' of Snapchat (introduced in 2011).⁴⁵ At the beginning of 2016 Credit Suisse estimated that Instagram alone would be a \$5.3 billion business by 2017.⁴⁶ Here, Paolo Virno's discussion of 'living labour' is pertinent.

⁴² Tim O'Reilly, *Web 2.0: Compact definition*, Radar, 2005, accessed Sep 21, 2016, <http://radar.oreilly.com/2005/10/web-20-compact-definition.html>.

⁴³ Tiziana Terranova, "Free Labor: Producing Culture for the Digital Economy," *Social Text* 63, vol 18, no. 2 (2000): 33-58.

⁴⁴ Alexander R. Galloway, "The Poverty of Philosophy: Realism and Post-Fordism," *Critical Inquiry* 39 (2013): 358.

⁴⁵ Sophie Berrebi, *The Shape Of Evidence: Contemporary Art And The Document* (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2015), 218.

⁴⁶ Erin Griffith, "Instagram Will Be a \$3 Billion Business This Year: Analyst," *Fortune*, 2016, accessed Jul 6, 2016, www.fortune.com/2016/01/25/instagram-3-billion-business-this-year/.

He argues that thoughts and desires are made productive as: ‘the old distinction between “labour” and “non-labour” ends up in the distinction between remunerated and non-remunerated life.’⁴⁷ And, ‘[s]ince social cooperation precedes and exceeds the work process, post-Fordist labour is always, also, *hidden labour*.’⁴⁸ In such precarious and entrepreneurial times there exists an incessant demand for ‘self-branding’: the production of images that either evidence success, or are deemed newsworthy, as part of the production of a marketable personality.

Fortunati’s discussion of the consumption patterns of the new immaterial workers bears further on the question of precisely what *functions* documentary modes are being called upon to deliver in the early twenty-first century; namely, the appetite *for* immaterial labor (or, as I argue, image documents of it) such as affection or psychological support. In an observation that resonates strongly with developments and strategies in social practice as they have evolved in art Emma Dowling has noted more recently in *Love’s Labour’s Cost* that:

We sense our alienation and long for a feeling of authenticity – for real, meaningful experiences and connection with others. How frustrating and exhausting then, that our encounters are shaped more like transactions.⁴⁹

Chapter 7 of this thesis deals in more depth with how such demands in turn drive the production of art documentation that chronicles experiences of care, intimacy and even therapy. For now I will remain with a broader consideration of documentary modes (i.e. beyond the art world), connecting back to Fortunati’s own example of the ‘mechanization’ of certain aspects of sexuality. She frames this in terms of a delinking, a transference of specific ‘ethereal’ aspects of romantic and sexual human relations to the mediated imagination – dating, communication and information, and, most obviously, erotic and ‘relationship’ fantasy.⁵⁰ This separation of the immaterial from the material has significantly impacted on the form (and, Fortunati argues, quality) of erotic life. To be sure, documentary modes play a crucial part in these processes of mechanization,

⁴⁷ Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life*, trans. Isabella Bertolotti, James Cascaito, and Andrea Casson (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2004), 103.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Emma Dowling, *Love’s Labour’s Cost: The Political Economy of Intimacy* (London, Verso, 2016). This theme was explored earlier in Eva Illouz, *Cold Intimacies: The Making of Emotional Capitalism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007). I will return to this reference and theme in Chapter 7.

⁵⁰ On this topic Ursula Biemann’s video essay *Writing Desire* (2000) examines impact of the digital age on the ‘marketplace of desire’ and the global circulation of women’s bodies.

detachment and, of course, commodification. Dating sites enable users to construct (within set limits) 'profiles' through a combination of narratives, documents (not unlike the project reports featured on WochenKlausur's website) but the Internet's creation of what Beatriz Preciado has called 'a new global porn ecology', loosely premised on the visual documentation of sexual encounters and electronic sexual surveillance, is of an altogether different order of influence.⁵¹ In my view, it is impossible to address the place of the image document in the era of globalisation without attending to this context – arguably the most powerful, ubiquitous formation – where modes of 'usership' are fully integrated with spectatorship.

If the digital selfie can be situated in relation to other, more subjective and personal, forms of photographic self-documentation such as snapshots and family albums, they can also, by extension, be connected to early photographic portraits.⁵² For Allan Sekula, the honorific function of these 'ceremonial portraits of the bourgeois self' (which at once extended, popularised and degraded previous traditional forms) is one side of the double operation performed by early photography.⁵³ It is fused, he argued, in complex ways with a *repressive* function and the introduction of the panoptic principle into everyday life, exemplified at the sharper end by what he terms 'instrumental realism' of police photography.⁵⁴ John Tagg underscores this connection, suggesting that: 'The portrait is therefore a sign whose purpose is both the description of an individual and the *inscription* of a social identity [emphasis added].'⁵⁵ The nineteenth century's

⁵¹ Beatriz Preciado, *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era* (New York: Feminist Press, 2013). Beatriz Preciado is now known as Paul Preciado. For the sake of clarity I will remain with the former moniker and pronoun here as this corresponds with those that the cited texts were written and published under.

⁵² Though there is no space to discuss his points here in depth, Daniel Rubinstein has emphasised the selfie's dependency on continuous reinvention and adaption as well as its condition of 'undecidability', linking it to the demands of the network society. He argues that: 'The selfie is not concerned with the historical past, with arresting a fleeting moment for posterity. It is not a photograph in the traditional sense of freezing something and making it available for all future instances. Correctly understood, the selfie does not belong to the past at all, as it encapsulates the present moment as "ecstatic temporality."' And: 'The selfie opens up a possibility of a discourse about the self and about photography that is not bound to indexicality, representation or memory but instead suggests a meditation on the forces of the network expressed through the plurality of fragments' These proposals will be useful to the final section of this chapter. Daniel Rubinstein, "The Gift of the Selfie," in *Ego Update*, eds. Shahin Zarinabl and Sinaida Michalskaja (Düsseldorf: Alain Bieber, NRW-Forum, 2015): 163-177.

⁵³ Allan Sekula, "The Body and the Archive," *October* 39 (1986): 6. Sekula also draws attention to the contemporaneous reception of the apparently 'democratised' form of portraiture in the US context, which focused on its potential to reinforce social cohesion and familial ties in a nation of migrants. His observation that such images articulated 'a nineteenth-century familialism that would survive and become an essential ideological feature of American mass culture' has particular import today, extending to social media 'friends' networks.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 7; Tagg, *The Burden of Representation*, 37.

⁵⁵ The connection between the two is underlined by John Tagg: 'By the 1880s, the head-on view had become the accepted format of the popular amateur snapshot, but also of photographic documents like

entwinement of photography as a new technique of representation with new strategies of governance, regulation and discipline (outlined by Foucault) has been addressed in the introduction to this thesis and will be expanded upon further in the latter part of this chapter. While in this context photographic documents are associated with the classification, physiognomy and the identification of social pathologies – what Tagg referred to as archives of subjection – Preciado explicitly links pornography with these early histories of ‘objective’ processes of scrutiny, asserting that: ‘It is impossible to disassociate the history of early pornographic images from the history of medical archives of deviant, deformed, and crippled bodies and from colonial photography.’⁵⁶ She then exports Bruno Latour’s and Steve Woolgar’s concept of an ‘inscription device’ from the scientific context to underline this association with the document: developed as part of their anthropological analysis of a science laboratory this term refers to an item of apparatus (or configuration of such items) that transforms material substance into a usable document (in this case a figure or diagram), using Derrida’s notion of inscription to designate an operation prior to, or rather more basic than, writing.⁵⁷ Preciado states:

We could consider pornography as an ‘inscription device’ aimed to produce the modern sexual subject and its pleasures as visible and naturalized facts. The homosexual, the hysterical, the fetishist, the sadomasochist, and later the intersexed and transsexual subjects were invented as visible and depictable typologies. Moreover, the pornographic image behaves as the ‘inscription’ of pleasure: the production of immutable and readable ‘evidence’ of sexual subjectivity.⁵⁸

The relevance of pornography to the histories of documentary modes, then, exceeds its interwoven roots with the lens: the term ‘pornography’ entered the Oxford English Dictionary in 1857, less than two decades after photography was first commercialised by Fox Talbot, and some of the first images ever processed depicted sexual acts. The point here is that the very conception of (documentary) objectivity in this era was not *only* steeped in colonial ideology but also desire and pleasure, drawing together evidential and affective capacities.

prison records and social surveys in which this code of social inferiority framed the meaning of representations of the objects of supervision or reform ... The portrait is therefore a sign whose purpose is both the description of an individual and the inscription of a social identity.’ Ibid., 37.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 64; Preciado, *Testo Junkie*, 232.

⁵⁷ Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar, *Laboratory Life: The Construction of Scientific Facts* (London: Sage Publications, 1979), 51. Here the authors focus on the prominence and significance of documents in the production of scientific knowledge in the 1970s.

⁵⁸ Preciado, *Testo Junkie*, 232.

The stimulating aspects of evidential modes and materials has been underlined in more recent times by the exceptional popularity of surveillance pornography, exemplified by the rapid rise of 'porncams' in the 1990s as well as more quotidian enterprises such as jenniCAM (1996-2003). Here the 'lifecaster' Jennifer Kaye Ringley employed webcams to publish a constant flow of images of her bedroom to a remote audience of (mostly male) guest viewers and paying subscribers, revealing occasional sexual acts as well as the banalities of the domestic sphere.⁵⁹ These images were supplemented on the website with video and audio clips and cropped images of her body parts together with autobiographical description, as well as her own work responding to copious amounts of fan emails (labour that was, of course, documented by the cameras). In the 'frequently asked questions' pages she asserted that:

This site is not pornography. Yes, it contains nudity from time to time. *Real life* contains nudity. Yes, it contains sexual material from time to time. *Real life* contains sexual material. However, this is not a site about nudity and sexual material. It is a site about *real life* [emphasis in original].⁶⁰

Anticipating the popularity of reality television, Ringley's recording *produces* her life 'narrative' through sequentially produced images garnering range of responses. While her dissolution of boundaries between public and private provoked mockery and even disgust, it was also interpreted as a valuable way to produce knowledge on female life experience – indeed, the structure of the project in many ways resembles the methodologies of an anthropological enquiry.⁶¹ Others focused on the implications of her integration of flesh and machine in the creation of a 'cyborg identity', following Donna Haraway's definition: 'a creature of social reality as well as creature of fiction' that is not held by the polarities of public and private.⁶² (This is long before 'the common' appeared as a third term, and before definitions of 'public' and 'private' came under

⁵⁹ 'Estimates varied around the level of popularity *Jennicam* enjoyed as the media and public interest grew in the late 1990s, but reports of three, four and five million 'hits' *per day* were common and a 1997 Reuter's report put it as high as twenty million'. Barry Smith, "Jennicam, or the Telematic Theatre of a Real Life," *International Journal of Performance Arts and Digital Media* 1, no. 2 (2005), 92. Smith also notes that 'web-audience male/female ratio was estimated at its commencement to be 75:1'. *Ibid.*, 97.

⁶⁰ Jennifer Ringley, "JenniCam – frequently asked questions," JenniCam, accessed Apr 25, 1998, <http://www.jennicam.org/faq/general.html>. Cited in Krissi M. Jimroglou, "A CAMERA WITH A VIEW: JenniCAM, Visual Representation, and Cyborg Subjectivity," *Information, Communication & Society* 2, no. 4 (1999): 440.

⁶¹ Here it is useful to compare Latour and Woolgar's interrogation of 'laboratory life' mentioned above which depended upon rigorous descriptive observations of particular time periods and practices as well as 'photograph file' depicting machines and their outputs, scientists and secretaries at work as well as spatial contexts including labs, office desks and the interior of fridges.

⁶² Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 149; 151. Also cited in Jimroglou "A CAMERA WITH A VIEW," 441.

revision.)⁶³ The fascination with the intersections of technology and life is a prominent theme across recent theoretical literature, and is one that has considerable bearing on conceptions and uses of documents in the twenty-first century. Preciado puts it in startling terms, asserting that while Marshall McLuhan, Buckminster Fuller and Norbert Weiner observed in the 1950s that: ‘the technologies of communication functioned like an extension of the body. Today, the situation seems a lot more complex – the individual body functions like an extension of global technologies of communication.’⁶⁴

Here, it is worth reflecting on how present debates connect with and depart from those that were core to postmodernist arguments. Foucault’s emphasis on diffuse power held particular influence in the latter where the enmeshment of bodies, machines and subjectivities were held to grant data and information considerable significance. Their use has been understood to revolve around narrativising and exerting control over the past or present. Foucault wrote:

Among the fundamental conditions of a good medical ‘discipline’, in both senses of the word, one must include the procedures of writing that made it possible to integrate individual data into cumulative systems in such a way that they were not lost; so to arrange things that an individual could be located in the general register and that, conversely, each datum of the individual examination might affect overall calculations.⁶⁵

Fast forward to today and the industrial ultrarapid collection and interpretation of data is rather orientated towards predicting the future through techniques such as behavioural forecasting. For example, consider recent advances in facial recognition software used in shopping centres and cities. As one ‘insider’ put it in a covert interview with a major U.K. newspaper, most valuable to retailers ‘are the predictive analytics that come from tying that one piece of information, your face, to your whereabouts, to your patterns, to the way I move through time and space.’⁶⁶ Theorisations must now respond to these developments to overcome postmodernism and understand Foucault’s diffused

⁶³ In the words of Endnotes, for example: “in the modern capitalist era, the scope of private exploitation spans the entire social landscape.” Endnotes, “The Logic of Gender: On the Separation of Spheres and the Process of Abjection,” *Endnotes* 3 (2013), accessed Oct 12, 2016, <https://endnotes.org.uk/issues/3/en/endnotes-the-logic-of-gender>.

⁶⁴ Preciado, *Testo Junkie*, 44.

⁶⁵ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin, 1991), 190.

⁶⁶ Chris Frey, “Revealed: How Facial Recognition Has Invaded Shops – and Your Privacy,” *Guardian*, Mar 3, 2016, accessed Mar 3 2016, <http://www.theguardian.com/cities/2016/mar/03/revealed-facial-recognition-software-infiltrating-cities-saks-toronto>.

power as, ultimately, the diffused economy. The question then becomes how to reinvigorate conceptualisations of documentary modes – and thereby the social document – in order to attend to these developments which, significantly, concern not simply the body but ‘life’.

My aim here has been to attend (albeit briefly) to some of the ways in which conceptions and practices of documentary modes have transformed in relation to globalisation’s discursive and institutional forms and structures. In doing so I gesture towards Tagg’s insistence that the presumed ‘externals’ of photography (the technology’s connections to, for example, the state) are rather ‘the very conditions which furnish the materials, codes and strategies of photographic images, the terms of their legibility, and the range and limits of their effectiveness.’⁶⁷ I have set up a number of ideas and strands of enquiry that will be further unpacked over the course of the thesis. Prime among them is the close association between documentary modes, the exercise of power and the question of reality (and realism). If lens-based documentary modes have – from the outset – been implicated in the devolution and permeation of capitalist social regulation into ever-new domains of life, the challenge is to consider how this plays out in the contexts of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The accepted lineage of the art document’s ‘aesthetics of administration’ – referring to conceptual art’s apparently de-personalised systems and associations with dry, utilitarian evidence – must be updated in relation to the virulent lives of what can be called today’s malleable and affective ‘*hot documents*’, that are equally (if not more) at home in the reproductive sphere.⁶⁸

What happens, then, to our frames of interpretation when the document is no longer just a material object to be organised, curated (in the conventional sense of preservation) and used within a particular system, but rather something (material or immaterial) that can be self-produced, performed and circulated, to create a point of intersection within a flow of participatory production and regulation? If, as Steyerl has suggested, ‘[t]he network structure of the Internet has become the basis of any social “environment”’, is an image document’s ability to move and adapt more significant than its static power housed and valorised within specific structures of authority? How do documentary modes help to produce the kinds of ‘complex social workers’ suited to the era of

⁶⁷ Tagg, *The Burden of Representation*, 64-65.

⁶⁸ Benjamin Buchloh, “Conceptual Art 1962-1969.” Note that in Chapter 1 I also argued against the ‘dry’ line.

globalisation and 'soft power' or what Nina Power calls 'soft coercion'?⁶⁹ Furthermore, to what extent has this yet more intensive regime of data collection and interpretation and this *permeation* of documentary modes into life-worlds rendered such modes attractive to artists? Indeed, it is clear that life (in as abstract and broad terms as possible) is now the site of production for both capitalism and art, which is why debates around biopolitics carry such weight at present. This is the topic to which the next section will turn.

4.3 VECTORS OF THE BIOPOLITICAL⁷⁰

Globalisation as biopolitical reality

Biopower and biopolitics are two widely circulated terms from recent political theory that speak to the historical specificity and outstanding complexity of the contemporary social experience. Though they have not attained the same level of popularisation as 'globalisation', their proliferation across a range of discourses and disciplines is marked. As Jacob Collins has said: 'It now seems clear that biopolitics, or something like it, is going to be a key category for addressing what transpires in the twenty-first century.'⁷¹ Yet art history remains an exception with very few scholars from the discipline using the term. Here I aim to address this oversight, building on our contention in the ECONOMY volume that the *prioritisation of biopolitics over micropolitics* underlines the abandonment of a postmodern visual arts idiom.⁷² To this I would add that it is in relation to discussions on biopolitics that the distinctions between, and indeed connections with, current demands made on art for the production of social documents and similar tendencies in the 1960s and 70s become apparent. The aim here, then, is to trace a few vectors of the biopolitical in contemporary art, in order to ground and further interrogate the developments outlined above; and to test the hypothesis that the social document constitutes *the* exemplary artistic output in biopolitical times.

So what is biopolitics? Literally 'life' (Greek: *bios*) politics, it encompasses many different theoretical positions and has been deployed in discourses and debates relating to

⁶⁹ Nina Power, "Soft Coercion, the City and the Recorded Female Voice" [unpublished essay].

⁷⁰ This title is taken from Malcolm Bull, "Vectors of the Biopolitical," *New Left Review* 45 (2007): 7-25.

⁷¹ Jacob Collins, "The Birth of Biosecurity," *New Left Review* 81 (2013): 145.

⁷² Dimitrakaki and Lloyd, "The Last Instance," 1.

(among many others) the war on terror, abortion, biomedical science (such as stem-cell research), asylum policies, the rise of neoliberal capitalist globalisation and the possibilities for a democratic future.⁷³ It concerns the management and shaping of life itself, and indeed 'lifespan', 'lifetime' and 'lifestyle' have become watchwords. Introducing the term, Thomas Lemke has noted the desire to *connect* strategies which, on the one hand, reduce human life to its basics, to those on the other, that seek to engineer and optimise it: from refugees and incarceration to biotechnologies and other interventions that enhance performance or life expectancy. He argued that it is the present instability of the boundaries between life and politics that has provoked such sustained interest.⁷⁴

In his introductory remarks to a special issue of *New Left Review* devoted to 'Globalization and Biopolitics', Malcolm Bull argues that the two themes need to be juxtaposed and differentiated, 'if we are to grasp the connections between them, and also to understand why the activism associated with the former has been transformed into the passivity characteristic of the latter.'⁷⁵ While I wish to hold on to this call I am not convinced by Bull's active/passive characterisation and, by contrast, I will approach *globalisation as a specifically biopolitical reality*. This accords with Hardt and Negri's conception of Empire as a 'regime of biopower'; a new stage of capitalism in which production takes place within a 'globalized biopolitical machine'.⁷⁶ However, I agree with Bull on two further counts: that *reproduction* remains a primary problem, or as he terms it, 'how to extract from the global economy the means to stay alive, healthy and relatively autonomous'; and, that (as climate change powerfully demonstrates) the politics necessitated at present 'is at once *more intimately personal and more globally consequential* than any before [emphasis added].'⁷⁷ It is from this perspective that the dominant characteristics of the social document are rendered intelligible: the centrality of social reproduction as well as the simultaneous demands for highly personal chronicles *and* an address to totality. Or, put another way, analyses of how political power intersects with the private, the lived and the corporeal. I will use the term '*biopolitical globalisation*' and argue that it is precisely the conditions thereby produced that give rise to the social document.

⁷³ There are two words for 'life' in Greek: 'zoé' and 'bios'. The second is understood as 'social life'.

⁷⁴ Lemke, *Biopolitics: An Advanced Introduction*, 4.

⁷⁵ Malcolm Bull, "Globalization and Biopolitics," *New Left Review* 45 (2007), 1.

⁷⁶ Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 41; Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, 40.

⁷⁷ Bull, "Globalization and Biopolitics," 1.

Bare Life

To date, what mention biopolitics has received in contemporary art discourse has primarily been channelled through Giorgio Agamben's articulation of the separation of *zoé* from *bios*, or natural being (simple vivant) from a political subject whose existence is legally affirmed. In his appraisal of *Documenta 11*, Enwezor asserted that the meaning of the term

documentary that was of philosophical interest to our main purpose in *Documenta 11* – and I believe this was demonstrated throughout the entire length and breadth of the project, in all the platforms, symposia, workshops, et cetera – refers to Giorgio Agamben's idea of bare life or naked life.⁷⁸

Here, then, is the philosophical thread that connects Enwezor's and Groys's respective contributions to *Documenta 11*. Notably it prompts them both to turn to questions of documentation, albeit, as noted in Chapter 3, in divergent ways. Taking the concentration camp as the 'biopolitical paradigm of the West', Agamben proposed that it defined a border between exclusion and inclusion, as well as a distinction that would (somewhat controversially) connect Auschwitz inmates with detainees of Guantánamo, asylum seekers who may now reside in the Calais refugees camps and brain dead hospital patients awaiting the harvesting of their organs, all under this category of 'bare life' or life outside the protection of law.⁷⁹ He asked to what extent this state of biopolitical exception is regularised to become 'an essential component of contemporary political rationality'; to what extent these excepted subjects are not only emblematic of modernity but reveal the exposure of all subjects to such forms of power and potentiality for their reduction.⁸⁰ His subsequent conclusion that bare life is yet to achieve any form of political or cultural representation has occupied much recent curatorial and art historical discourse with an overarching question, namely: *does contemporary art*

⁷⁸ Okwui Enwezor, "Documentary / Verite: Biopolitics, Human Rights and the Figure of 'Truth' in Contemporary Art," in *The Greenroom: Reconsidering the Documentary and Contemporary Art #1*, eds. Maria Lind and Hito Steyerl (Berlin: Sternberg Press & CCS Bard, 2008), 97.

⁷⁹ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford California: Stanford University Press, 1998), 181. In his later volume he asserted 'Inasmuch as its inhabitants have been stripped of every political status and reduced completely to naked life, the camp is the most absolute biopolitical space that has ever been realized – a space in which power confronts nothing other than pure biological life without any mediation.' Agamben, *Means Without End*, 41.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 37-45.

practice have the means to represent new social subjects that contemporary philosophy and political theory have often posited as 'unrepresentable'?

Anthony Downey has argued for this urgency of precisely this requirement vis-à-vis 'the "zones of indistinction" in which we find modern-day *homo sacer*'.⁸¹ His selected examples of artworks that address the task include Artur Zmijewski's disturbing video *80064* (2004), during which we watch the artist coercing a 92 year-old Auschwitz survivor into having his identification tattoo refreshed, despite his clear protestations, and a 1996 work from Marcelo Brodsky's *Buena Memoria* (Good Memory) series which centred on the 'disappearances' staged by the state during Argentina's dirty war using photographs found in the artist's personal archive. Though these works engage documentary modes to articulate the narratives of individual victims of state violence, Downey orientates his attention towards the physical sites they refer to: the detainment camps, holding cells and torture chambers that underlie each story. His further examples connect these sites to other forms of liminal space from precious settlements for the displaced, as in Ahlam Shibli's documentation of Arab al N'aim, a Galilee village that does not appear in official maps in the series *Unrecognised* (2000), to perilous border zones, such as Yto Barrada's photographic documentation of Tangier and the Strait of Gibraltar from where so many attempt to illegally cross into 'Fortress Europe'.⁸² Parenthetically, the explosion of anti-migrant politics has constituted a core concern of art since 1989, though it must be acknowledged that few works move beyond what can be categorised as an *ethical* response in their attempt to mediate the tension and tragedy.

Meanwhile, in a similar vein to Enwezor's *Documenta 11*, T.J. Demos thematises Agamben to focus on the dark underside or shadows of globalisation in his volume *The Migrant Image: The Art and Politics of Documentary during Global Crisis* (2013).⁸³ Again the *spatial* emphasis, already present in the title's dual allusion to human migration and image dissemination, is quickly reinforced by his identification of key terms including mobility, exile, statelessness and nomadism. Taking the first decade of the twenty-first century as his focus, the events of 2001 are posited as part of a series of defining

⁸¹ Anthony Downey, "Zones of Indistinction: Giorgio Agamben's Bare Life and the Ethics of Aesthetics," *Third Text* 23, no. 2 (2009), 110.

⁸² One of forty-five unrecognised settlements of the Palestinian Bedouin of the Negev region in which basic facilities for a population's reproduction cannot be built.

⁸³ Demos, *The Migrant Image*. His earlier work in this area includes T.J. Demos, "The Art of Darkness: On Steve McQueen," *October* 114 (2005): 61-89; T.J. Demos, "Moving Images of Globalization," *Grey Room* 37 (2009): 6-29.

historical episodes through which any lingering utopian – or at least smooth and optimistic – visions associated with globalisation gave way to fractured, deregulated, crisis-ridden geographies and an ‘emerging social and economic apartheid’.⁸⁴ Though writing before the escalation of catastrophes unfolding at Europe’s borders, mainly as a consequence of the brutal war in Syria, Demos echoes Agamben’s arguments for the unassailable centrality of the figure of the refugee and the production of bare life, this time specifically as a ‘political effect of globalization’.⁸⁵



Figure 23: Steve McQueen, *Caribs' Leap / Western Deep* (video still) 2002

I have already observed that re-imagined notions of ‘appropriation’, ‘liminality’ and ‘ambiguity’ are in vogue at present. These are framed by Demos first in terms of the construction of a more active and responsible viewer – though no evidence of such a transformation is offered – and second, as inventing ‘new paradigms of authenticity’ founded upon uncertainty. It is precisely on these uncertain grounds, he argues, that truth must be ‘reinvented’. Moreover, for him, they have become an appropriate means

⁸⁴ Demos, *The Migrant Image*, 246.

⁸⁵ Agamben, *Means without End*, 22. Demos writes: ‘For Agamben, globalization represents an emerging paradigm of newly empowered sovereignty expanded worldwide, bringing with it corresponding zones of transmigration and statelessness.’ Demos, *The Migrant Image*, 30. Here the commonplace and highly problematic effort to distinguish between the ‘deserving’ refugee (ideally children) from the ‘opportunistic’ migrant (an instance where entrepreneurial drive is read negatively) must be remarked upon. This is frequently discussed on moral grounds but also carries legal implications and consequences. For more see Adam Taylor, “The Difference between a Migrant and Refugee, in One Sentence,” *Independent*, Aug 28, 2015, accessed Aug 3, 2016, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/the-difference-between-a-migrant-and-refugee-in-one-sentence-10476567.html>.

to represent artistically 'life severed from representation politically'.⁸⁶ Discussing the strategic use of darkness in Steve McQueen's moving image work *Western Deep* (first presented at *Documenta 11*), Demos argues that that the extensive use of visual interruptions and periods of black-out 'powerfully joins its cinematic indeterminacy to the indeterminacy of a certain kind of biopolitical being', specifically, black South African miners.⁸⁷ Indeed, he ascribes this 'resistance to concretization' an extraordinary degree of political import: when Steve McQueen cancels the light to disorientating effect it is apparently 'as if we [the viewers] find ourselves in the mine shaft', encountering difference in a 'space of sociability and of an alienating separateness, a space, perhaps, of bare life, and of the political solidarity that would contest its existence.'⁸⁸ Demos's (rather naïve, in my view) perspective, then, is that affective ambiguity provides opportunities for a more visceral *empathetic* connection and thereby new possibilities of political engagement. Conventional documentary capture plays a much reduced role in this respect – the 'real' of the image is claimed to be endlessly deferred, thereby evading the pitfalls of precritical notions of transparency and the lens's predilection for victims. For Demos and others, recourse to the 'micropolitics of opacity' and ambiguity (taken here as a term that stands in for strategies of vagueness, contradiction and fictive tropes) offers a neat way to sidestep hazards, permitting the use of the always problematic documentary impulse towards exposure while underscoring its limitations and simultaneously offering a critique of representation.⁸⁹ This 'visual blindness' remains a visual trope or tactic – not a rejection of visibility as such – and Demos leaves little doubt that he values affect *over* information.⁹⁰

The account presented in *The Migrant Image* thereby rests upon differentiating art world case studies from traditional – implicitly conservative – understandings of documentary, emphasising time and again the challenges they pose to concepts of truth, fact and evidence while deploying terms including 'quasidocumentary' and 'postdocumentary'.⁹¹ However, his assertion that artists (heroically) throw documentary modes into crisis both elides longstanding debates and experimentation within the documentary genre

⁸⁶ Demos, *The Migrant Image*, xv. Though he does not cite him, here Demos echoes Niru Ratnam's earlier argument: Niru Ratnam, "Art and Globalisation," in *Themes in Contemporary Art* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2004): 277-310.

⁸⁷ Demos, *The Migrant Image*, 41. This use of darkness can be productively compared with the Brechtian approach in *Nightcleaners* though Demos does not take this correlation up.

⁸⁸ Demos, *The Migrant Image*, 51, 52.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 247.

⁹⁰ Though it must be noted that *Western Deep* nevertheless remains a *depiction of labour*.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 178.

(again I cite Grierson's 'creative treatment of actuality') and gives him an opportunity to soften any enduring attachment to participating directly in movements for social change. Favouring artists who 'place the will towards political instrumentality in abeyance' he calls for us to 'relinquish the question of "effectiveness", when it comes to cultural practices deemed political', perhaps unintentionally calling to mind the exhibition literature associated with one of the most famous incursions of documentary into the environs of the white cube: the *New Documents* exhibition presented at MoMA in 1967.⁹² Here the curator John Szarkowski took great care to highlight the photographer's shift from social action to 'more personal ends': 'Their aim has been not to reform life, but to know it ... They like the real world ... and find it no less precious for being *irrational* [emphasis added].'⁹³ Is this return to liberal ambiguity another example of what Brian Holmes has called 'the conventional bluff of picture politics'?⁹⁴ To be sure, the established forms and structures of the art world (and indeed *artwork*) remain distinctly untroubled by the latest deployment of documentary modes Demos describes, and the material and economic realities of mediatory contexts are rarely discussed. Furthermore, in his desire to affirm the novelty of the 'reinvented' documentary addressed, he fails to attend to the transformations – which I have begun to outline above – in conceptions of documentary modes: art, affect and poetry are tasked with breathing life – and even political agency – into this form, conceived as fixed, dry and oppressive.

⁹² Ibid., 174.

⁹³ From John Szarkowski, Introduction to *New Documents* exhibition brochure, 1967, in MoMA archives, New York. Cited in Ribalta, "Introduction: Outline for a Map of the Debates around Documentary in the 'Long 1970s'," 19.

⁹⁴ Brian Holmes, *Unleashing the Collective Phantoms: Essays in Reverse Imagineering* (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 2008), 86.



Figure 24: Yto Barrada, *Advertisement Lightbox – Ferry Port Transit Area, Tangier* from the series *A Life Full of Holes: The Strait Project* (photograph) 1998–2004

That bare life is best documented negatively, as absence, is underlined in another example where he finds more poetically (and apparently politically) charged visual holes, once again in Yto Barrada's photography. *Advertisement Lightbox – Ferry Port Transit Area, Tangier* (2003) shows the black silhouettes of two children, their arms spread over a colour-saturated image of a ferry ship ploughing through the water. Here, he argues, is a moving and potentially melancholic visualisation of the becoming of the refugee. Like many of his contemporaries, Demos frequently cites the work of Jacques Rancière who maintains that art thrives precisely on its own ambiguity (an ambiguity that stems from its position caught between autonomy and heteronomy) and that recent hybrid 'documentary fictions' effectively reconfigure the real as an effect to be produced rather than a fact to be understood.⁹⁵ Alongside Agamben's work, then, Demos's argument takes in Rancière's well-known rehabilitation of the relation between politics and aesthetics. The French philosopher also makes a connection between political and

⁹⁵ Jacques Rancière, "Documentary Fiction: Marker and the Fiction of Memory," in *Film Fables*, trans. Emiliano Battista (Oxford; New York: Berg, 2006), 158.

legal exclusion with invisibility and inaudibility, asserting that, in order to destabilise existing systems of control, those who are denied visibility and political presence must be reinserted and 'seen'.⁹⁶ Accordingly, Demos also makes claims for the artistic practices of bare life he discusses that 'reorganize our political image of globalization; [revealing] its crisis points and provid[ing] a more equitable division of appearance.'⁹⁷ Here he echoes the sentiments of Raqs Media Collective: 'In an unequal world, the struggles around the question of who is able to render whom visible and for what purpose is [sic] central to any reflection on how we see and are made to see the world.'⁹⁸ And so if, as Demos asserts, documentary's visual reports continue to offer the most obvious means to address such imbalances and *extend visibility*, his position on the politics of vision appears to be curiously unresolved.

In either case, whether negative or positive, the question of representation remains central to Demos's argument. However, I am not persuaded that rendering the excluded visible necessarily constitutes a positive step towards their *political inclusion* – an implicit idea that I consider to be an odd remnant of now outdated theories associated with postmodernism.⁹⁹ Here Phelan's acerbic reference to the political power that (strangely enough) is not afforded to naked young women is pertinent, as is the capitalist economy's demonstrable love of difference and news-journalism-as entertainment's predilection for (dark) pictures of humanity.¹⁰⁰ Added to this, as Sven Lütticken has observed, 'being visible is a socioeconomic imperative that all individuals and institutions have to contend with in the Facebook economy.'¹⁰¹ Despite stressing the political value of the images he examines, Demos does not appear to grasp what is of new and urgent import in terms of the turn towards documentary modes and the document trend.

⁹⁶ Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*.

⁹⁷ Demos, *The Migrant Image*, 94.

⁹⁸ Raqs Media Collective, "A Frame of Mind: Researching Documentaries," Raqs Media Collective, 2000, accessed Sep 3, 2008, www.raqsmediacollective.net/texts11.html.

⁹⁹ Indeed, this was a topic debated, particularly within feminist art history, during the period associated with postmodernism.

¹⁰⁰ See Chapter 2 and Phelan, *Unmarked*, 10.

¹⁰¹ Sven Lütticken, "Social Media: Practices of (In)Visibility in Contemporary Art," *Afterall* 40 (2015): 17.

The insights that the notion of biopolitics lends to questions of *visibility* add useful dimensions to the iconophobia/iconophilia debates outlined previously. If a signifier of bare life is a life that is specifically indiscernible and *undocumented* – both in terms of official papers and cultural representation – the process of exposure by means of the lens continues to connect with the deployment of biopower, through processes of identification, control and (sometimes tortuous) exploitation or victimisation.¹⁰³ Unsurprisingly passports and identification papers are thematised in a number of the works Demos discusses including Barrada's depictions of Africa's 'burnt ones' (those who burn their passports before departing the continent and attempting to gain citizenship elsewhere) and Biemann's attention to the variously stateless and undocumented peoples in her video essay *Sahara Chronicles* (2006-7). It is only in the case of Emily Jacir's *Where We Come From* (2001-2003), in which the artist foregrounds her dual citizenship by utilising her U.S. passport to document herself performing tasks in Palestine for those unable to make the journey, that Demos acknowledges the exceptional mobility of the artist herself. This contrasts with Dimitrakaki's observation that such mobility is now a decisive feature of artistic labour in an art economy where travel is frequently essential to the production of the artwork itself, as well as the management of a 'career'.¹⁰⁴ That documentation is well suited to such dispersed and itinerant working conditions – not only in terms of communicating social realities from 'elsewhere' but in terms of the ease of their transportation, and, if necessary reproduction – raises questions as to whether the one gives rise to the other or vice versa. From this perspective, the distinction between McQueen and the miners, Biemann and the Saharan subjects, and Barrada and the migrants becomes one of *class divide articulated at a global level*. This divide is most clearly apprehended and indeed underscored by the presentation of such documentation at biennials and mega-exhibitions that demand *excessive* levels of mobility on the part of both producers and viewers.

The prevalence of engagements with passports in art produced since 1989 underscores its status as a singularly powerful document *and* supreme object of desire. Even when

¹⁰² From Tagg, *The Burden of Representation*, 103.

¹⁰³ Images from Abu Graib being the obvious case in point.

¹⁰⁴ Dimitrakaki, *Gender, ArtWork and the Global Imperative*, 107-149.

appreciating the internalisation of power and control the passport remains an exemplary external marker and instrument of state management. It emerged in its modern form not long after the invention of photography and took up the same head-on view – what Barthes called the ‘brute photo (frontal and clear)’ – deployed in social or ethnographic surveys and prison record, or, as Tagg puts it, adopted a ‘code of social inferiority [that] framed the meaning of representations of the objects of supervision or reform.’¹⁰⁵ The evidential force of the image is here braided with other information (now including biometric data) to further bolster use value.

In 1991 the Slovenian collective NSK (*Neue Slowenische Kunst*) initiated a durational project entitled *State in Time* (1991 -) in which they established a pseudo-nation together with a passport as an essential accoutrement of citizenship.¹⁰⁶ A substantial number of applications were received, many of which were reportedly from Nigerians, some of whom being under the impression that Slovenian nationality was on offer. Alfredo Jaar’s manufactured pile of *One Million Finnish Passports* (1995) – brimming with a sense of potential – had to be protected by a high security glass screen before being destroyed after display as part of his agreement with the authorities. One year later, for the tenth edition of *Documenta*, artist-activists participated in a workshop called [*über die grenze*] ([*cross the border*]). Setting up a temporary passport exchange office they invited exhibition attendees to donate their identification documents in order to assist others designated ‘illegal’. Unlike Jaar, the project was allied from the start with a social movement (Kein Mensch ist illegal), and as Brian Holmes succinctly put it: ‘[t]he participants of [*über die grenze*] broke the conventional contract with the art institution, by refusing to stop at the borders of representation [emphasis added].’¹⁰⁷

Similar charges have been levelled against Tanja Ostojić’s work, including her aforementioned *Looking for a Husband with EU Passport* (2000-05), in which she attempted to gain her own (this time German) privileged papers through advertising for a partner online. Here, then, was an alternative – if no less familiar – attempt to cross over utilising gateways that nevertheless retain powerful *material* dimensions. The

¹⁰⁵ Roland Barthes “Rhetoric of the Image,” in *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), 44; Tagg, *The Burden of Representation*, 37.

¹⁰⁶ The project played out in the maelstrom that surrounded the dissolution of Yugoslavia. Despite its fictional basis, the project generated a deluge of applications for citizenship, mostly from African nationals assuming that it accorded Slovenian nationality.

¹⁰⁷ Holmes, *Unleashing the Collective Phantoms*, 87.

international marriage certificate together with enlarged copies of pages from the artist's passport complete with visa stamps formed part of the exhibition display; official documents woven together with documentation from the project 'evidencing' the various stages, from the email responses to the initial advert to the wedding photograph. Significantly, the video piece that occupies the centre of the installation includes a brief close-up of sexual intercourse. This juxtaposition of two categories of documentation – pornography and official papers – underscores the deep connection between the public and private spheres as well as the economy's permeation of both. More recently, Khaled Jarrar's issue of 'State of Palestine' passport stamps gained mainstream media attention for his *Live and Work in Palestine* (2011). Undertaking the action first at a Ramallah bus station and then in various European cities, Jarrar also began photographing recipients with their freshly marked pages and collating accounts of their subsequent experiences at the Israeli controlled border through the project's Facebook page. At least one such interaction resulted in the abrupt cancellation of an Israeli passport – despite the holder's protestations that it was merely an art project.¹⁰⁸

I list this (incomplete) set of examples to demonstrate the extent to which the passport's appearance in artistic practice prioritises the document's *bios*-granting capacity – rather than conceiving it as a 'death certificate' or 'casket' of information'.¹⁰⁹ The passport's unique power frequently enables an artwork or art gesture to make a tangible impact on the terrains of individual lives – a topic that I will return to shortly. In his account of the 'age of biopolitics' Groys similarly attends to the 'life-giving' potential of documentation, this time by referring to the artificial 'replicants' in Ridley Scott's 1982 film *Blade Runner* who are narrativised into existence, and inscribed into history by means of (fake) identification and photographic documents. Notably, the latter in the form of personal snapshots are just as – if not more – decisive in this process as are official materials as they align with implanted memories that also function as a virtual form of fake documentation. These accoutrements form part of the 'style' of life that transforms it from *zoé* into *bios*, and, once again, the bond between personal and public documentation is affirmed.

¹⁰⁸ Harry Weeks, "Crossing Borders: The Art of the Passport," CITSEE, 2011, accessed May 9, 2016, <http://www.citsee.eu/citsee-story/crossing-borders-art-passport>.

¹⁰⁹ Monica Mayer, "Macular Degeneration: Some Peculiar Aspects of Performance Art Documentation," in *Perform, Record, Repeat: Live Art in History* (Bristol: Intellect, 2013), 113; Wall, "Dan Graham's Kammerspiel," 511.

And so, despite the focus of some recent literature in the field of art history, biopolitics does not stop at the border as it were. Rather, it can be articulated as the politics of live and let die.¹¹⁰ Consider, for example, the complex 'passport politics' of Europe wherein the ability to move *without* high-level documentation in the Schengen Zone is considered a privilege and a core E.U. 'value' – clearly non-E.U. citizens are not entitled to this value.¹¹¹ Here, it is Foucault's work (later reformulated by Agamben) that is of the most use: if, on the one hand, biopolitics has effectively articulated increasingly prevalent attitudes of indifference and outright hostility to those who are not incorporated as rights-bearing citizens, on the other 'side' it also describes ever-expanding social control through the surveillance, mapping and regulation of the bodies of individuals and populations – often framed in terms of 'care'. On one morning alone in May 2016, reports of the disposal of thousands of unidentified drowned victims of the so-called European 'migrant crisis' in unmarked graves, sat alongside news items on the publication of new data on tooth decay levels in children – a juxtaposition that spoke directly to the connection between proliferation of death and the protection and optimisation of life.¹¹² While Demos attended to the image politics of the former I will now turn to analyse the negotiation of the latter in contemporary art in order to demonstrate that *the dispossessed of 'crisis globalization' are not the only economic subjects of relevance to the production and primacy of the social document*.¹¹³

Passion and perspective; excite and control¹¹⁴

Ana Maria Garcia's 1982 documentary film *La Operación* addressed both the mass sterilisation of Puerto Rican women from the late 1930s onwards and the island's use as a testing ground for the development of the oral contraceptive Pill during the late 1950s and early 1960s, linking these events to the imposition of an economic strategy named 'Operation Bootstrap'. According to the U.S. government, successful population control

¹¹⁰ I take this phrase from Stephane J Beale: "Live and Let Die: Did Michel Foucault Predict Europe's Refugee Crisis?," *The Conversation*, 2016, accessed May 10, 2016, <https://theconversation.com/live-and-let-die-did-michel-foucault-predict-europes-refugee-crisis-55286>. Beale in turn is paraphrasing Foucault who discussed 'the power to "make" live and "let" die.' Foucault, "Society Must be Defended," 62.

¹¹¹ The connection between freedom of movement and access to the single market is key part of the debate on the form that Britain's exit from the E.U. will take following the 2016 referendum.

¹¹² Vladimir Hernandez and Nassos Stylianou, "Buried without a Name," *BBC News*, May 10, 2016, accessed May 10, 2016, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/resources/idt-91f3683c-5e3c-4a2e-92eb-7d7f6a024c02>; Michelle Roberts, "Under Fives Tooth Decay 'Improving'," *BBC News*, May 10, 2016, accessed May 10, 2016, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-36254914>.

¹¹³ Demos states that he coined this term. Demos, *The Migrant Image*, xiii.

¹¹⁴ Tagg, *The Burden of Representation*, 203; Preciado, *Testo Junkie*, 51.

measures and the provision of decent living accommodation were key to the raising of Puerto Rican living standards. Preciado has since described these events as a 'paradigmatic case of transition from the colonial regime to postcolonial economic and political control.'¹¹⁵ Analysing the need to trial the Pill prior to commercial release, on the one hand, as well as the construction of social policy and new housing architecture on the other, she persuasively argued that their intersection provided the U.S. drug developers with the 'cage of ovulating females' they so desperately desired.¹¹⁶ The women themselves were considered to be passive and docile while the transformed living and working environments enabled the context necessary for effective surveillance and testing. A parallel programme of rapid industrialisation sought to exploit cheap labour and transform the island's economy into a centre for pharmaceutical, chemical, and electronics production. In one disturbing scene, *La Operación* shows the women who worked in the factories by day and took part in the trials in the home (ingesting the tablets and injecting themselves, taking their own daily temperature and vaginal smears, collecting their urine, completing charts and meeting with social workers) learning that they had acted as the first human guinea pigs, to their obvious distress.



Figure 25: Ana Maria Garcia, *La Operación* (film still) 1982

¹¹⁵ Preciado, *Testo Junkie*, 178.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 180.

I describe this film and the historical events it addresses here as it introduces and thematises a number of the concepts associated with a Foucauldian conception of biopolitics, including; 'populations', fertility, biotechnological innovations, reproductive control, data collection, modelling and knowledge production. Foucault observed back in the 1970s that in the biopolitical era 'life' has been placed at the heart of political battles and economic strategies. My reading of the passport-as-document above, owes a great deal to his description of the transformation from sovereign power and its right over death ('deduction'), to a new form of power that was instead orientated towards fostering and investing in life (or 'generating forces'), as well as administrating, developing and securing them.¹¹⁷ He locates the emergence of this new regime of biopower firstly in the seventeenth century and then developing into a new phase in the second half of the eighteenth century, a historical moment marked both by new innovations in the field of technology, medicine and society that opened up possibilities for releasing the control of the biological over life and history (through disease and famine, for example), as well as the advent of modern liberalism.¹¹⁸ The theoretical perspective on biopolitics he outlined noted two – thoroughly imbricated – poles of this new form of power: 'The disciplines of the body and the regulations of the population.'¹¹⁹ While 'techniques of power' were centred upon individual bodies, 'life' was effectively abstracted from the singularity of lived experience 'up' to the 'global mass'. Supervision and interventions were directed towards shaping and directing it; from a concern with lifespan to healthcare and environmental interventions.¹²⁰ As essential to the development of capitalism, biopower produced a 'normalizing society':

Such a power has to qualify, measure, appraise, and hierarchize, rather than display itself in its murderous splendor; it does not have to draw the line that separates the enemy of the sovereign from his loyal subjects. It effects distributions around the norm.¹²¹

¹¹⁷ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1979), 136.

¹¹⁸ Foucault, "Society Must be Defended," 63; Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 142. Notably, Federici disagrees and argues that it began to emerge much earlier in the 16th and 17th centuries as a result of a population crisis that turned reproduction and population growth into matters for the state. Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch* (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 2009).

¹¹⁹ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 139.

¹²⁰ Foucault, "Society Must be Defended," 63; 66.

¹²¹ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 144.

Biopolitics, then, is a 'know-how' of power that, particularly from the nineteenth century onwards, *takes life under its care*.¹²² In the course of this process, knowledge and power tessellate. It is worth emphasising at this point that it is specifically Foucault's work in this area that has been 're-discovered' and deployed in Marxist discourses relating to globalisation – a development that is perhaps unsurprising given their shared focus on *scale*.

As Lemke observes, following Foucault's work: 'recent studies of biopolitical processes have focused on the importance of knowledge production and forms of subjectivation' – as I will argue, two vital aspects in terms of theorising the social document.¹²³ Others, however, have drawn attention to Foucault's ambiguous attitude towards neoliberalism in his latter texts, noting in particular his negative assessment of social security and the welfare state, which he framed as an instrument of biopower.¹²⁴ In the case of Daniel Zamora's interpretation, this is tied to his prioritisation of 'the excluded' in social struggles over and above 'the exploited,' or resistance predicated on an economic basis: 'In [Foucault's] view poverty and economic inequality were essentially a nineteenth century problem.'¹²⁵ However, subsequent elaborations on Foucault's thesis have stressed the economic dimension, frequently noting that biopower has intensified since the latter stages of the twentieth century. Hardt and Negri have also remarked upon this intensification (or deepening), but they give it a more specific meaning when saying that with Empire biopower is 'the *real subsumption* of society under capital' and focus on the tendency towards what they call 'biopolitical production'.¹²⁶ Immaterial labor, they argue, 'is *biopolitical* in that it is oriented toward the creation of forms of social life ... Ultimately, in philosophical terms, the production involved here is the production of subjectivity, the creation and reproduction of new subjectivities in society.'¹²⁷ In the multitude's biopolitical productivity they see political possibilities – namely the emergence of new organisational forms, the expansion of the commons and the possibility of global democracy.

¹²² Foucault, "Society Must be Defended," 72. The distinction between biopolitics and biopower is not clearly drawn by Foucault.

¹²³ Lemke, *Biopolitics: An Advanced Introduction*, 119.

¹²⁴ Daniel Zamora, "Foucault and the Excluded," in *Foucault and Neoliberalism*, eds. Daniel Zamora and Michael C. Behrent (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016), 69.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 68.

¹²⁶ Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 255; Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, 94-95.

¹²⁷ Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, 66.

It is however Preciado's work that, in bringing Foucault (via Hardt and Negri) up to the twenty-first century, helps to advance my conceptualisation of 'hot documents' proposed above. She argues that a new theorisation of biopolitics is required, one capable of addressing the production of power and the subject in what she calls the 'pharmacopornographic' regime.¹²⁸ While *Demos* dealt with the affective dimensions of the outside – of bare life – namely fear and terror, Preciado builds upon *The History of Sexuality* to posit sex and sexuality as the 'main objects' of political and economic activity. In this era of 'advanced technocapitalism, global media, and biotechnologies' she argues, a new condition of the body has emerged:

The modern biopolitical body, as Foucault suggested, is no longer a one-dimensional surface where power, law and punishment come to be inscribed, but rather a *thick interiority* where life, but also political control, take place in the form of exchange, traffic, communication.¹²⁹

Re-emphasising that biopower dwells *internally*, Preciado discusses the body's technomanagement under biopolitical post-Fordist capitalism through the pharmaceutical interventions such as the Pill, Viagra, Prozac or Testosterone, on the one hand, and the ubiquitous audiovisual masturbatory logic of pornography, on the other. While she joins others in conceiving the body as an information network, Preciado also foregrounds its material and desiring aspects; the goal of their regulation through drugs and a mediatic regime is not the production of things or even pleasure but rather the 'control of political subjectivity by means of the management of the excitation-frustration circuit.'¹³⁰ Technology is enmeshed with the interconnected bodies of the multitude while the new corporeality 'blurs the traditional modern distinction between art, performance, media, design and architecture'.¹³¹

If Preciado's focus on the corporeal is clear, the biopolitical foregrounding of the issue of *life* – the politics of its control and the conditions of its production – is of greater import to the present discussion. What is fascinating is that current literature offers two, apparently oppositional, lines of thought. Groys's view is that '[t]he dominant medium of modern biopolitics is ... bureaucratic and technological documentation, which includes

¹²⁸ Preciado, *Testo Junkie*, 45; 16.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 159.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 25; 304.

¹³¹ Ibid., 43-44.

planning decrees, fact-finding reports, statistical inquiries, and project plans.’¹³² He further notes that its principle concern is lifespan itself, asserting that ‘biopolitics [is] the true realm in which political will and technology’s power to shape things are manifested today.’¹³³ Meanwhile, Preciado’s proposals on the enmeshment of image, text and the corporeal begins to point to the ways in which documentary modes can be located as part of the global diffusion and interpretation of information as well as a *highly affective* ‘excitation-frustration circuit’, to not only modulate populations but to reach down into *lifeworlds*.¹³⁴

The experimental life

I have sketched above a brief outline of theorisations of biopolitics to suggest that such perspectives are key to understanding the prevalence and diversity of documentary modes in the art field. Given that *intervention* and *exposure* characterise biopolitical times, the predominance of documentation should come as no surprise. They are *enmeshed with the production and management of both ‘big data’ and the minutia of intimate lives* – a divide that is increasingly being overcome through the invention of new biopolitical tools. If the regime of truth is the backdrop against which the normalising functions of biopolitics operate, it must be observed that documentary modes in art display a tendency towards the marginal, or less visible – not only in terms of refugees but also, as I will show, in their engagement with narratives of care and sex.¹³⁵ This can be orientated towards exposing alternative perspectives on a given social reality (of reading reality against the grain, as it were) and may take the form of drawing the operations of power into the light, perhaps through accentuating strategies of over-identification: addressing those lives, processes and relationships that are devalued or considered to be otherwise socially irrelevant – in other words, from the dark mines right through to dark rooms.

As we have seen in terms of the extant literature’s account of *thematisations* of biopolitics in contemporary art documents, those works that seek to render ‘bare life’ visible are

¹³² Groys, “Art in the Age of Biopolitics,” 56.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ As she argues: ‘Pornography – which sexualizes production and converts the body into information – and its closed circuit of excitation-capital-frustration-excitation-capital provide in a particularly clear way a key to understanding any other type of post-Fordist cultural production.’ Preciado, *Testo Junkie*, 271-272.

¹³⁵ This tendency is in keeping with practices within the documentary genre.

privileged. It is a focus that can be situated in relation to a historical lineage of the ethnographic project, or even Hal Foster's 'artist as ethnographer' paradigm through which he analysed the output of artists committed to addressing representational blind spots.¹³⁶ Yet other similarly prevalent concerns can be identified; not least care. For struggles around inclusion and exclusion are not always delimited geographically; many art projects attend to other aspects of capitalist deterritorialisation, focusing on those who occupy the fissures and gaps 'on the inside', as it were.¹³⁷ We might think of social practices that intercede in the reproductive sphere to perform functions previously considered to be the responsibility of biopolitical state welfare, health or environment departments. Taking into account the perspectives afforded by conceptualisations of biopolitics, such narratives of care or compassionate surveillance clearly become the corollary to narratives of victimisation or discipline.¹³⁸ As such they often place an emphasis on life as *potential*, and the desire to integrate the excluded into neoliberal capitalism, usually via entrepreneurship. As Šefik Tatlić has observed: 'bare life is not one that would perceive itself as a victim: it has the tendency to see itself as potential bios, potential "success story"'.¹³⁹ Art documentation plays a vital role in terms of constructing and disseminating precisely these stories, and indeed subjectivities.



Figures 26 and 27: Ruti Sela and Maayan Amir, *Beyond Guilt: The Trilogy* (video stills) 2003-05

¹³⁶ Hal Foster, "The Artist as Ethnographer," in *The Return of the Real* (Cambridge MA; London: MIT Press/October Books, 1996): 171-203.

¹³⁷ In Chapter 3 I noted that such interventions through social practice are frequently orientated towards producing positive accounts through the associated narrative documents, linking it to the demands and expectations of funders as well as the progression of the artists' careers.

¹³⁸ I will return to the social document's chronicles of care in the second part of this thesis.

¹³⁹ Šefik Tatlić, "The Truth Machine: The Relationship between Life and Sovereign Power," in *Integration Impossible? The Politics of Migration in the Art Work of Tanja Ostojić*, eds. Marina Gržinić and Tanja Ostojić (Berlin: Argobooks, 2009), 232.

Sex presents another thematisation in art documentation consistent with Foucault and Preciado's foregrounding of sexuality and sexual practices as an exemplary target of biopower.¹⁴⁰ However, it is notable that particularly in the case of female artists the imbrications of sex with power and capitalist economic relations is frequently not examined from a distance. Rather it is *lived*. Ruti Sela and Maayan Amir's *Beyond Guilt: The Trilogy* (2003-05) comprises short videos documenting intimate exchanges between the artists and strangers in Israeli bar toilets and bedrooms. In the first installment they prolong conversations with groups of men by offering to perform sexual acts, while the second shows a sequence of meet-ups on a hotel bed arranged over 30 minute intervals via online sex chat rooms. A female prostitute is invited to record her encounter with the artists for the final episode. Discussions flit from sex to state violence, drawing forth the connections between them in the post-Fordist era. The sense of threat is frequently palpable as the artists place themselves in what appear to be highly vulnerable situations. In a similar vein, Emma Sulkowicz's web-distributed *Ceci N'est Pas un Voil* (2015), which displayed documentation from the artist's (re)staging of her own rape alongside an open comments section. The unease, discomfort, and even distress, that is induced when viewing such material arises precisely because art appears to have dissolved into life, with all the implications and consequences that brings.¹⁴¹ At the same time these examples can be said to both render visible *and banalise* violence – a contradictory maneuver that raises pressing questions of the social document: is it always orientated towards the 'social good,' as defined in liberal societies, or can it also be manipulative, unclear and narcissistic?

Here a crucial aspect – one overlooked by Demos – rises to prominence; namely, the transformation that *the artwork itself* can undergo in biopolitical times.¹⁴² Groys posits that in this age art seeks to become life – to become a lifeform – 'not merely to depict life or to offer it art products.'¹⁴³ He draws a parallel between advances in cloning technologies which threaten the 'removal of life from its site' and advances in art that see

¹⁴⁰ 'Sexuality exists at the point where body and population meet. And so it is a matter for discipline, but also a matter for regularization.' Foucault, "Society Must be Defended," 71.

¹⁴¹ Dimitrakaki has addressed two such instances of women artist's sexualised labour, both of which were featured in the ECONOMY exhibition: Tanja Ostojić's *Looking for a Husband with EU Passport* (2000-05) described above and Andrea Fraser's *Untitled (Documentation)* (2003-06), in which the artist records her sexual liaison with an art collector in an encounter arranged via her gallerist. Angela Dimitrakaki, "Labour, Ethics, Sex and Capital: On Biopolitical Production in Contemporary Art" *n.paradoxa* 28 (2011): 5-15.

¹⁴² I emphasise that I am not arguing here that biopolitical art necessarily pertains to sex and sexual labour.

¹⁴³ Groys, "Art in the Age of Biopolitics," 55.

it separated from the object – now ‘art documentation’.¹⁴⁴ Dimitrakaki goes further, using the term ‘biopolitical art’ to refer to strategies where the focus on the artist’s body has been *superseded by the artist’s life* and ‘social relations, the conditions and site of production, become the artwork.’¹⁴⁵ Another feature of biopolitical art that distinguishes it from performance is that it is not necessarily encountered *directly* by an audience – or at least one that understands itself as such: documentation is therefore required to not only reveal but *produce* artworks that would otherwise remain invisible as such and irresolvably elsewhere.

Groys uses theories of biopolitics to explicitly foreground the entanglements between the real or natural and the artificial: both technological and artistic strategies, then, are orientated towards shaping and modulating *lifespans*. Biopolitical art, then, enacts a structural shift that sees the artist emerge as a biopolitical producer in that *their lives and work are fully implicated*. It thereby presents instances of what Agamben referred to as the ‘*experimental life*’ (this time in the art rather than scientific sphere): utilising their own ‘reality’ and lives as research subjects the artists are accountable only to themselves, and, ‘research can freely and fully coincide with biography.’¹⁴⁶

4.4 TOWARDS A DEFINITION OF THE SOCIAL DOCUMENT

Experimental incursions and economic subjects

The purpose of this first part of the thesis has been to lay some groundwork through which the documentary modes – and specifically the social document – can be effectively analysed as well to raise salient questions that can help guide future thought. As part of this endeavour I have sought to provide an appraisal of the more general rise to prominence of documentation and documentary modes in art. It is now necessary to narrow the frame and advance a more precise definition of the social document itself. On the basis of the discussion so far a number of themes, ideas and arguments that bear upon such a definition can be identified. Indeed, I argue that the social document’s

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 64

¹⁴⁵ Angela Dimitrakaki, “Women’s Lives, Labour, Contracts, Documents: The Biopolitical Tactics of Feminist Art, Act Two and a Half,” in *ECONOMY: Art, Production & The Subject in the 21st Century* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015), 6.

¹⁴⁶ Agamben is discussing the case of a biochemist suffering from leukemia who opted to experiment upon himself. He states: ‘It is easy to see that “experimental life” is a *bios* that has, in a very particular sense, so concentrated itself on its own *zoé* so as to become indistinguishable from it.’ Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 186.

outstanding relevance to contemporary art history can, in part, be attributed to its ability to span and encompass developments in both participatory or interventionist practice and lens-based media: it expresses *both* a move beyond disciplinary boundaries and a reinforced concern with the lens.¹⁴⁷

To restate, then, I am not arguing that the social document constitutes a genre or category of art but is rather an *effect that arises through or is produced by* a range of practices that intersect with social relations. While it has gained increasing traction since 1989, its lineage can be traced back through the history of contemporary art, at least to 1968. If its ascendancy is undoubtedly closely connected to reconfigurations of the artwork, here I disagree with Groys who posits a sharp divide between the *absent* artwork and present *non-art* documentation. Instead I argue that the 'art' has not so much retreated or disappeared but has rather become *unmoored*. Put another way, through its direct engagement with life it has undergone a *dispersal* across a number of mutually dependent sites, encounters, moments and objects.¹⁴⁸ The form and importance accorded to the social document therein therefore becomes a matter of the precise *calibration* of the artwork in a given case. In this way *the artwork becomes even more individually unique and completely non-autonomous*. Furthermore, as thoroughly integrated the social document cannot – straightforwardly at least – be conceived as an extrinsic and transmittable 'end product' through which the work reaches fulfilment. Does the complexity of its structure and interrelationships potentially open the social document up to a concern with the present (rather than the past), to some of the more 'performative' characteristics that, in Virno's terms, are necessary for politics? Following Hannah Arendt, Virno likens the performance of the virtuoso to political action, noting that they are both marked out by a 'sense of contingency, the absence of a "finished product," the immediate and unavoidable presence of others.'¹⁴⁹ Or does the moment of *closure* manage to assert its dominance through the very act of documentation, ultimately leading the social document to the same fate as the conceptual art document outlined by Wright, whereby it effectively enforces the *capitulation* of the artwork to the disciplinary structures of the art world?¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷ As Groys notes, art documentation is by no means the sole purview of the lens. My account of the social document's lineage has intentionally taken in Mary Kelly's *Post-Partum Document* for this reason.

¹⁴⁸ A move that connects it to theorisations of performance art documentation.

¹⁴⁹ Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude*, 52-53.

¹⁵⁰ Wright, *Toward a Lexicon of Usership*, 42.

Always cleaving to social relations, the social document is concerned with *experimental incursions into the territories of social life*, whether directly participating in such infringements, mediating them, or both. Here I use the term ‘experimental’ in its full sense, meaning provisional and based in personal experience (as opposed to conjecture) but also, ‘experience observed’.¹⁵¹ Duration is therefore of crucial relevance to the social document and the artwork of which it is a part; the latter can potentially span any length of time from five hours to five years to five decades. Again this harks back to Debord’s writings, and specifically the claim that ‘the program of our period is rather to dissolve art in the experience of time.’¹⁵² Over half a century later, in 2015, Sven Lütticken could assert that ‘time is the ultimate medium of contemporary art’ before going on to acknowledge that ‘[a]rticulating shared time as a *social medium* is both highly necessary and fiendishly difficult.’¹⁵³

I have already tied the social document’s extraordinary currency to its ability to effectively distil time periods and multifarious activities into narrative. In this respect, it is eminently suited to the logic of the project – a structure that, as discussed, has asserted its hegemony across contemporary production. Yet, here again I emphasise the complexity at hand: if, on the one hand, the social document can be treated as a report on *past* activities, on the other, the structure of the project points to the wider flow of labour and activity within which it is inserted. From this latter perspective, the materials, knowledges and relationships produced are used to inform *future* projects. An exemplary case would be the ‘projects’ tab on WochenKlausur’s website which lists and ever-growing number of engagements. Bojana Kunst’s nuanced discussion of the ‘projective time’ that artists and cultural workers are caught in is useful on this point.¹⁵⁴ Expected to ‘successfully negotiate both realized and unrealized projects in addition to projecting new imaginaries upon the future,’ the artists’ life and work are intertwined through the project, producing a specific temporal logic that has consequences for conceptualisations of documentation and the social document in particular. Kunst observes that while the project is apparently orientated towards the realisation of possibilities, the transformation of subjectivities and a moment of completion or

¹⁵¹ *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., Vol. V, s.v. “experimental.”

¹⁵² Debord, “Editorial Notes: The Avant-Garde of Presence,” 141.

¹⁵³ Lütticken, “Social Media.”

¹⁵⁴ Bojana Kunst, “The Project Horizon: On the Temporality of Making,” *Manifesta Journal* 16 (2013), accessed Nov 3, 2016, <http://www.manifestajournal.org/issues/regret-and-other-back-pages#page-issuesregretandotherbackpagesprojecthorizontemporalitymaking>.

consummation, this notion of progressive and linear chronological drive is false. Drawing an analogy with debt culture she notes that the project is predicated on promises for the future. The result is a lack of present time, a constant 'dispossession of duration' and – as the future is already imagined in the present – both excessive standardisation and an enduring fascination with the 'promise' of incomplete or in-process work.

Kunst's observations draw attention to the social document's frequently *provisional*, future-orientated character as well as its attempt to grasp the diminishing *present* moment. Under circumstances where, in her terms, 'we are constantly projecting, but we don't actually move anywhere,' the evidence of action and the hints of consummation offered by documentation assumes additional value. At the same time, the dispersed artwork inevitably operates across different registers and times producing a fractured temporality that variously lags, then intensifies. The narrativisation offered by the social document often plays a large part in smoothing and *regularising* these experiences through distillation, editing and curatorial tactics.

Returning to the notion of experimentation, the social document can be viewed as an 'inscription device', described above as an apparatus capable of converting material substance, material realities, into something *useable*. In relating this concept to pornography, Preciado discussed the provision of *evidence* of (sexual) subjectivity as well as its role in *producing* 'the modern sexual subject'. Following on from my account of the thesis underpinning the ECONOMY curatorial project, I again posit that a core attribute of the social document is its commitment to the *visual depiction of economic subjects*. An exemplary case is that of Phil Collin's work *marxism today* (2010) in which the artist interviews former Marxist-Leninist teachers from the GDR about their lives before and after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Similar themes were taken up by the Hungarian collective Big Hope (Miklós Ehrhardt and Dominic Hislop) in *Talking about Economy* (2003). Residents of two cities – Berlin and Dunaujvaros (formerly Stalin City) – were invited to respond to a set of questions: What is economy's role in society? How would you describe a good economy? How would you describe a bad economy? What is your personal relationship to work? Drawn from a range of occupations the interlocutors include a factory worker, a teacher, a receptionist and an E.U. Advisor. The accumulation of their responses articulate the different facets of the impacts of the seismic economic transformations that the region has undergone since 1989 and 1992, variously detailing

how their own attitudes, life opportunities and confidence levels have been shaped and changed.¹⁵⁵



Figure 28: Phil Collins, *marxism today* (video still) 2010

Though a marked predilection for particular economic subjects can be discerned across the mass of social documents that have been produced over this time period – miners, migrants, sex workers and carers feature prominently – I am not suggesting that there is a drive to produce typologies, as Preciado argued in relation to pornography. Nor do I wish to argue against the prevalence of labour as an artistic theme *per se*. If the economic subject is constituted through the struggles between capital and labour, does the social document simply visually articulate instances of these struggles? Or does it experiment with other ways to engage? Furthermore, the social document does not restrict itself to forms of portraiture; chronicles of social *relations* constitute a significant output. In many cases these encounters are plainly – to adopt Emma Dowling’s phrase – ‘shaped like transactions’.¹⁵⁶ As ‘culture’ is effectively demoted, what once might have been approached as an ethnographic analysis, now privileges an economic dimension. This shift is easy to discern in the examples that follow in subsequent chapters, particularly

¹⁵⁵ An edited transcript of the video interviews was also published in newspaper format and can be downloaded from the Big Hope website: “Talking about Economy,” Big Hope, accessed Jun 6, 2016, <http://www.bighope.hu/talkingabouteconomy/>.

¹⁵⁶ Dowling, *Love’s Labour’s Cost*.

those that thematise sexual encounters, such as in the work of Andrea Fraser's *Untitled* (2003-06), or Dani Marti, analysed in Chapter 7 of this thesis.

And so, in attending to the new economic subjects of biopolitical globalisation, the social document does not restrict itself to narrating economic pain (whether the artist's own or that of others). Rather, critical strategies in artistic documentation also encompass depicting the institution of applicable alternatives, or articulating new possibilities for living. Oliver Ressler's practice offers one example: rather than sink into (or even overidentify with) normative economies, he seeks out models from across the globe which offer examples of active disidentification from the capitalist economy and its configurations of organised society. Made in collaboration with Dario Azzellini, *Comuna under Construction* (2010) documents and reflects on the building – literal and metaphorical – of a self-organised community in Venezuela through the establishment of 'community councils'. The film follows an ongoing curatorial venture initiated by Ressler in 2003 which compiles video-interviews with activists, theorists and film-makers each addressing the theme and project title: *Alternative Economics, Alternative Societies*.¹⁵⁷ While some offer analyses of historical examples of direct democracy, others attend to questions of labour or potential future strategies.

¹⁵⁷ Interview transcripts and a record of exhibition dates and venues can be found on the artists' website: "Alternative Economics, Alternative Societies," Installations, Videos and Projects in Public Space by Oliver Ressler, accessed Jul 13, 2016, http://www.ressler.at/alternative_economics-2/.



Figure 29: Oliver Ressler *Alternative Economics, Alternative Societies* (installation) 2003 – 2008

The curatorial approach adopted by Ressler can be said to echo something of the ‘worktable’ strategies I discussed in Chapter 1 in relation to the *Tucuman Arde* experiment: gathering and spatialising information while extending and inviting others to inhabit the editorial process.¹⁵⁸ Yet while in the Argentinean case the social document-as-exhibition was deployed as an instrument of local activism, in Ressler’s case the meeting point was remote to the ‘primary audience’ of the participants themselves. Discussing a later curatorial project that addressed similar topics again using documentary modes, the artist makes his intention plain, noting that his aim was to ‘transform a (former) factory into a site for the production of knowledge and discussion of new social and economic models able to outrun the deadening capitalist realism on offer.’¹⁵⁹ In this short quote, Ressler identifies a number of lines of thought and practice that I will unpack over the remainder of this thesis. For now I will simply contend that in

¹⁵⁸ See Chapter 1.

¹⁵⁹ Oliver Ressler, e-press release, “*Confronting Comfort’s Continent*,” Jul 14, 2016.

these instances the social document effectively conflates desire on the part of the viewer with the dreams of *hopeful* (economic) subjects.¹⁶⁰

Rethinking representation¹⁶¹

As well as interventionist pragmatism, the social document must also be situated in relation to radical art's concomitant attention to oppositional pedagogies and active citizenship. To take just one aspect of this vein of activity, the rise of anti-globalisation protest and struggle for global justice from the mid 1990s saw the production of numerous lens-based projects that contributed to the rich histories of documentation of social movements across the globe.¹⁶² Persisting with his longstanding commitment to documentary modes, Allan Sekula produced 80 slides organised into a narrative sequence for his series *Waiting for Tear Gas (White Globe to Black)*, depicting the anti-G8 demonstrations that accompanied Seattle's WTO summit in 1999. Excerpts were later published in the collective book *Five Days that Shook the World: Seattle and Beyond* alongside other accounts, as well as the movement's goals and objectives. Refusing the position of journalist-outsider Sekula committed himself to operating by a different set of rules that rendered him just as vulnerable to the threats alluded to by the title as his fellow protestors: 'no flash, no telephoto lens, no gas mask, no auto-focus, no press pass and no pressure to grab at all costs the one defining image of dramatic violence.'¹⁶³ Steve Edwards joined Zanny Begg in linking this work to theorisations of the multitude – in Edwards' case, arguing that Sekula's 'de-skilled' endeavor offers a vision of the collective from below (as opposed to figurations of the mob from above).¹⁶⁴ Given that he also discusses the depiction of the anti-capitalist crowd in *Waiting for Teargas* in terms of '(horizontal) relationality' it is in some ways surprising that he did not speak instead of 'documentation from *within*'. That such a vantage point has become commonplace in the

¹⁶⁰ I unpack this idea further in Chapter 7.

¹⁶¹ Here I am borrowing the title of the well-known anthology that theorised postmodernism. Brian Wallis ed., *Art after Modernism: Rethinking Representation* (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984).

¹⁶² For an intelligent and comprehensive look at these histories see Memou, *Photography and Social Movements*.

¹⁶³ Allan Sekula, "Waiting for Tear Gas," in *Five Days that Shook the World: Seattle and Beyond*, eds. Alexander Cockburn, Jeffrey St. Clair (London; New York: Verso, 2000), 121.

¹⁶⁴ Steve Edwards, "Commons and Crowds: Figuring Photography from Above and Below," *Third Text* 23, no. 4 (2009): 447-464; Zanny Begg, "Photography and the Multitude: Recasting Subjectivity in a Globalised World," *Borderlands e-journal* 4, no.1 (2005), accessed Jul 16, 2012, http://www.borderlands.net.au/vol4no1_2005/begg_art.htm; Zanny Begg, "Recasting Subjectivity: Globalisation and the Photography of Andreas Gursky and Allan Sekula," *Third Text* 19, no. 6 (2005): 625-636. Edwards references Hardt and Negri's conceptualization of the multitude from which he differentiates his own.

era of social media gives Sekula's material a prescient edge, particularly given the debates that have emerged around the impact of such networks in the relation to the Arab Spring and Occupy movement. However, Edward's concern to differentiate the series from snaps of demonstrations that might appear in personal albums misses this changing potential in terms of the circulatory life of images.¹⁶⁵ Lazzarato goes further. Identifying a shift from the paradigm of representation to the paradigm of the event, he notes that while in the former images, signs and statements represent the world, in the latter they 'contribute to allowing the world to happen' and 'create possible worlds' – an *active and constitutive* role he associates with the same Seattle protests.¹⁶⁶ I read Sekula's series as another effort to *cross the borders of representation*; as an attempt to engage with the event as described by Lazzarato – to play a part in the production of revolutionary – or at least *resistant* – subjects.



Figure 30: Allan Sekula, from the series *Waiting for Tear Gas (White Globe to Black)* (detail; photograph/slide) 1999

Lazzarato's proposed paradigm shift finds echo in Szeman's provocative claim referenced earlier in this chapter that in the era of globalisation 'we [...] seem to have suspended what was central to debates and discussions of postmodernism – the category of representation.'¹⁶⁷ I have also discussed above Demos's foregrounding of reflexive

¹⁶⁵ Edwards, "Commons and Crowds," 454.

¹⁶⁶ Maurizio Lazzarato, "Struggle, Event, Media," Republic Art, May 2003, accessed Jul 13, 2016, http://www.republicart.net/disc/representations/lazzarato01_en.htm.

¹⁶⁷ Szeman, "Imagining the Future," unpaginated.

withdrawal in 'artified' documentary, a position that apparently taps into and thematise the crises in representation said to preoccupy the fields of both aesthetics and politics at present. While both are frequently charged with concealing private interests, any claims for a direct correlation between the two, or indeed the suggestion that representation is the main site of struggle in both have been problematised.¹⁶⁸ My own position is that though art is no longer *necessarily* conceived as a practice of representation (as the literature surrounding social practice attests), there has been a concomitant and decisive move into the territories of social reality, a reengagement with truth (a concept that still elicits discomfort) and a *prioritisation of documentary evidence*.¹⁶⁹

Christoph Behnke has framed the prevalence of 'documentarism' as a move to abandon:

the discourse-analytical or deconstructive technique of second-order observation that dismantles everything, and *against one's better judgement*, to leave the commanding post and become politically committed, in the lowly realms of reality [...] with the help of documents [emphasis in original].¹⁷⁰

Behnke's apparent bemusement at a naïve use of photographic documents that 'should' be impossible highlights that documentation's primary difference is that it does not square with the 'picture politics' of postmodernism which dealt with the spaces associated with representation as a key site of ideological contestation. While clearly not abandoning processes of representation, the construction of the image is of considerably less import than its evidential possibilities. Here I am suggesting that the social document carries forth something of the situational immediacy of social practice. Its core enunciation is not so much the Duchampian 'this is art', but rather '*this happened*', or even, 'this is happening'. Here a shift can be discerned from the ready made to its opposite: the unique event/process. With its more explicit connection to truth, the social document both challenges the idea that the camera is only capable of producing a text and raises questions regarding the viewer's position: to what extent does the social

¹⁶⁸ See Steve Edwards, "Two Critiques of Representation (Against Lamination)," Chto Delat, Mar 2012, accessed Jul 16, 2016, <http://chtodelat.org/b8-newspapers/12-38/steve-edwards-two-critiques-of-representation-against-lamination/>; Hito Steyerl, "The Spam of the Earth: Withdrawal from Representation," *e-flux journal* 32 (2012), accessed Jul 16, 2012, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/32/68260/the-spam-of-the-earth-withdrawal-from-representation/>.

¹⁶⁹ The absence of the term 'representation' from much of the literature associated with art's turn to the social is striking – for example it does not appear at all in the glossary Bourriaud provides at the end of *Relational Aesthetics*, nor is it included in Wright's *Lexicon of Usership*.

¹⁷⁰ Christoph Behnke, "The Documentary Method," in *The Need to Document*, eds. Vit Havránek, Sabine Schaschl-Cooper and Bettina Steinbrügge (Zurich: JRP Ringier, 2005), 69.

document attempt to rise above or bypass interpretation? Does it effectively challenge the power accorded to the reader in the discourses associated with postmodernism? What are the implications of the social document's *reassertion of art's apparently broken connections with representation*?

4.5 Conclusion: Instrumental realism and social knowledge

How, then, to frame this latest return to reality, evidence and use? Behnke's surprise might have been mitigated though reference to the discourses around biopolitics, for in the time of biopolitical globalisation, *power has undoubtedly tightened its grip on the real*. The philosopher Frédéric Gros has named 'control' and 'regulation' as key practices of biosecurity, for which the production, collection and management of evidence and information are once again central. Tracing and tracking individuals using GPS and RFID technologies, matching them to documents and files, and advanced 'profiling' techniques are dedicated, in his words, to 'securitize the world by delivering it from hesitations, opacities and doubts.'¹⁷¹ At the same time, regulation manages flows through 'soft' strategies of *persuasion and dissuasion*. I describe these techniques of biosecurity here in order to posit that they constitute a new form of '*instrumental realism*' for the twenty-first century.¹⁷² Returning the conceptualisation outlined in the introduction to this thesis, the document can be understood as a form that the mediation of knowledge and power assumes. And here I must highlight once again the transformative pressures exerted upon conventional understandings of documentary modes in biopolitical globalisation and their relevance to an understanding of the social document: the deep *imbrication* of the image document across strata of life, from this kind of surveillance and data visualisation right down to intimate relations self-documented through domestic technologies and the 'architecture of participation'. Far from always adopting an external position and being concerned with 'oppressive totalisations from above', it is frequently (radically) proximate.¹⁷³

In biopolitical times, then, power is closely aligned with knowledge of life, not only in terms of constructing an evidential base, but in building affective and plausible

¹⁷¹ Frédéric Gros, *Le Principe Sécurité* (Gallimard: Paris, 2012), cited in Jacob Collins, "The Birth of Biosecurity?," 145.

¹⁷² Here I refer back to Sekula's use of the same term in relation to police photography. See Sekula, "The Body and the Archive," 7.

¹⁷³ This compelling phrase is borrowed from Edwards, "Commons and Crowds," 448.

narratives capable of *persuasively* defining what is socially relevant as well as the horizons of the possible. And so, in the concluding section of this chapter, I want to return to the second point of departure I articulated at the outset; namely, that there is a demand placed on art to partake in the production and circulation of *social knowledge*, and that this demand gives rise to the social document. In the thesis Introduction I noted that the etymological roots of ‘document’ (together with the historical practices associated with it) are entwined with the production of knowledge. The rise of pedagogic and knowledge-producing artistic practices has been well noted in the literature addressing art’s documentary and social turns.¹⁷⁴ While the emancipatory potential of knowledge is appreciated in Marxist thought, the attention afforded to this tendency in contemporary art practice also frequently frames it as complicit with the paradigm of ‘cognitive capitalism’ and the ascendancy of the knowledge economy.¹⁷⁵ I advance the term ‘social knowledge’ here for a number of reasons, first and foremost among them however, is that it holds out a possibility of uniting practice and theory. In the paragraphs that follow I will briefly outline conceptualisations of social knowledge as they have appeared in other disciplines with a view to establishing some avenues of thought that will be elaborated in the following chapters.

Approaching the topic from a Marxist perspective back in 1975, sociologist Martin Shaw viewed social knowledge as a form of knowledge *about* and of ‘the social’ – social relations, practices and processes. Describing its importance to the modern capitalist society’s development, he also emphasised the pressing need for new forms of social knowledge as part of the struggle for social transformation. In terms of the former he noted the ubiquity of the systematic and ever more complex collection of data on ‘every conceivable kind of social activity’, framing it as symptomatic of capitalism’s *necessary* preoccupation with the modification of human relations:

To change the worker as a natural force of production means to control him as a person. To control the worker as an individual means to confront his

¹⁷⁴ See, for example, Guerra, “Narratives of Europe”; Simon Sheikh, “Talk Value: Cultural Industry and the Knowledge Economy,” *On Knowledge Production: A Critical Reader in Contemporary Art* (Utrecht, BAK, basis voor actuele kunst and Revolver, 2008): 182-197. The issues arising from re-defining art as research (specifically its vulnerability to subsumption by the ideologies and methods of neoliberal educational policies have been discussed in Simon Sheikh, “Objects of Study or Commodification of Knowledge? Remarks on Artistic Research,” *Art & Research* 2, no. 2 (2009), accessed May 15, 2016, <http://www.artandresearch.org.uk/v2n2/sheikh.html>; Tom Holert, “Art in the Knowledge-based Polis,” *e-flux journal* 3 (2009), accessed May 15, 2016, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/03/68537/art-in-the-knowledge-based-polis/>.

collective social existence, even if indirectly. Hence despite its tendency to represent all human relations as abstract, objective and natural, the real social relations between wage-labour and capital do require the system to 'understand' the human, social reality of the worker. But of course it needs to do this in a way that helps to maintain the social relations of production, not one which calls them into question.¹⁷⁶

There is a clear link between this perpetuation of power through observation and the accrual of data with theorisations of biopolitics outlined above. By extension, Shaw argued, documents and their management are 'inherent in the "formal rationality" of modern capitalist organisation.'¹⁷⁷ He contrasts this 'ordinary' variety to forms of 'social scientific' social knowledge, the growing demand for which he links to the same need for information and explanation. '[T]he small number of categories of intellectuals traditionally maintained in class societies to interpret and mould social consciousness have been submerged and replaced by a vast new array of practitioners of social understanding, pure and applied.'¹⁷⁸ To this array of practitioners we now add the contemporary artist.¹⁷⁹

John Tagg has described the realist image as bringing into circulation a 'hidden corpus' of social knowledge or 'everyday know-how' that is crucial to the interpretation of the object as 'real' or 'realistic'.¹⁸⁰ This perspective connects with conceptions of social knowledge that distinguish it more rigorously from traditional academic contexts and processes, as a form of knowledge acquired not in the classroom but rather evolved through experience and dialogic exchange. While some literature on the subject highlights the personal, 'situated' dimension of social knowledge, dealing with, for example, children's learning 'in the world', as it were, one teaching resource on the subject contrasts the top down model of the textbook with the social knowledge produced through either a discussion with the authors or a reading group. In both, social knowledge is framed as an evolving *subjective* resource that is developed through

¹⁷⁶ Martin Shaw, *Marxism and Social Science: The Roots of Social Knowledge* (London: Pluto Press, 1975), 12.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 10. Here Shaw is referencing Max Weber's characterisation of bureaucracy.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 12-13.

¹⁷⁹ Ruth Erickson and Catherine Spencer convened a conference panel on visual artists' (their term) deployment of techniques and tactics from sociology since the 1960s. Two observations can be made: 1) that the production of documents is central to such practices and, 2), there is a pressing need for more work in this area to update Hal Foster's 'Artist as Ethnographer' paradigm. "In the Field: Artists' Use and Misuse of Social Science since 1960," a panel discussion presented at the College Art Association's 103rd Annual Conference on February 11-15, 2015.

¹⁸⁰ Tagg, *The Burden of Representation*, 100.

experience, social interaction and collective participation.¹⁸¹ How is the social document positioned with respect to these divergent uses and interpretations? Does it avoid precipitating closure or ‘totalising from above’ and instead participate in a more open process of social knowledge production?¹⁸² Can it circumvent neoliberal imperatives that posit that knowledge – like culture – must be economically viable? To what extent is art as an institution capable of overcoming the difference between theory and practice – and what role does the social document play in the attempt? Finally, how can social knowledge be connected to realist endeavours? These questions, together with those posed elsewhere in this chapter will inform my analyses of the case studies featured in Part II of the thesis.

To conclude, a number of features distinguish the social document as a formation: 1) Through the recording of experimental ‘live’ incursions it aims at a critical apprehension of, or engagement with, social, relations, processes and struggle, frequently privileging situated knowledge.¹⁸³ 2) It arises as part of a broader artwork, forming part of a constellation of elements that make up and define the artwork as such. This means that, in contrast to the genre of social documentarism, the social document in art is never a single image. Equally, while some cases the distribution and calibration of the artwork means that documentation is a relatively small part, the social document cannot be dismissed or ignored as a mere by-product. 3) It signals a prioritisation of evidence and a reengagement with truth. This, however, does not entail a restriction of attention to surfaces and dry facts – rather I have introduced the idea of the ‘hot document’ in order to address the importance of affective dimensions. 4) Groys argued that art documentation always points away from the present, storing ‘art’ and only alluding to its deferral.¹⁸⁴ By contrast I submit that the social document is not held to any particular temporal address. As the examples above show, it can variously refer to the past, seek to act within the present and envision futures. 5) Finally, in this foundational chapter I have argued above that the social document constitutes an exemplary artistic output in the

¹⁸¹ Shilpa Shanbhag, “Alternative Models of Knowledge Production: A Step Forward in Information Literacy as a Liberal Art,” *Library Philosophy and Practice* 8, no. 2 (2006), accessed Jul 15, 2016, <http://www.webpages.uidaho.edu/~mbolin/shanbhag.htm>.

¹⁸² Here I am paraphrasing Edwards, “Commons and Crowds,” 448.

¹⁸³ Though this is certainly not to contend that all social documents (or indeed their producers) are necessarily poised to, as Holmes puts it, ‘dissolve, at the crisis points, into the vortex of a social movement.’ Holmes, *Unleashing the Collective Phantoms*, 93.

¹⁸⁴ Boris Groys, “Comrades of Time,” in *Cognitive Architecture: From Biopolitics to Necropolitics: Architecture & Mind in the Age of Communication and Information*, ed. Deborah Hauptmann and Warren Neidich (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2010), 96.

era of biopolitical globalisation. I am particularly interested in how this contention – given biopolitics’ focus on life – plays out in relation to the avant-garde concern to eradicate the distance between art and life. Here, Stewart Martin’s comments on relational aesthetics are salient: ‘the dissolution of art into life is not simply emancipatory but a dissolution of art into *capitalist* life [emphasis added].’¹⁸⁵ In the discussion above I have also commented on the subordination of culture to economy, an idea which Evan Mauro has expanded on, noting how this ‘resource’ can be ‘seen as part of a larger strategy of the biopolitical management of life and populations.’¹⁸⁶ If this can be read as an extension of Althusserian ideas on art and culture’s incorporation in a vast administrative machine, Mauro’s subsequent assertion requires further thought in relation to the trajectory and political priorities of the social document:

After the midcentury realization of biopolitical state forms, but before the subsequent institutional critiques of the Keynesian regulation of social life, and the ways these critiques were repurposed by a resurgent neoliberalism to scale back the institutional security of “life” under the midcentury nation-state in favor of greater flexibility, precarity, and self-management — these, and not only the logic of commodification, make up the “politics” against which the avant-garde needs to be defined.¹⁸⁷

It is with these comments in mind that I will turn now to develop my arguments further in Part II of the thesis by attending to specific themes and offering more detailed analyses of particular case studies.

¹⁸⁵ Stewart Martin, ‘Critique of Relational Aesthetics,’ *Third Text* 21, no. 4 (2007): 373.

¹⁸⁶ Evan Mauro, “The Death and Life of the Avant-Garde: Or, Modernism and Biopolitics,” *Mediations: Journal of the Marxist Literary Group* 26, no. 1-2, (2012-2013): 135.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 135-136.

PART II

THE POLITICAL PRIORITIES OF THE SOCIAL DOCUMENT

CHAPTER 5

The Curatorial

5.1 Introduction

Discussing *Documenta 11* in a 2002 edition of *frieze*, the critic Thomas McEvilley noted: 'In a sense the agenda proclaimed by these curators gave one a sense of déjà vu; or rather, it seemed not exactly to usher in a new era but to set a seal on an era first announced long ago.'¹ Historically positioned as one of the foremost events in the Euro-American visual arts calendar, *Documenta's* large-scale survey exhibitions are now presented every five years in Kassel, Germany. Under the artistic direction of the Nigerian-born American scholar, activist, critic and curator Okwui Enwezor, the eleventh edition strove to break new ground at the turn of the millennium, coincidentally coinciding with the fallout from the 9/11 attacks on the U.S..² Marked apart by the privileging of lens-based documentary formats together with the inclusion of an unprecedented number of non-Western artists, the exhibition surveyed social and economic asymmetries from across the globe.³ Though frequently designated as a watershed moment on these terms, a number of precedents can be identified including Martha Rosler's smaller-scale exhibition project *If You Lived Here...* (1989) realised at the Dia Art Foundation in New York and Catherine David's *Documenta X* (1997) – a previous iteration of the quinquennial that was claimed by Brian Holmes to perform 'a Napoleonic conquest of neoliberal globalization as an object for artistic discourse.'⁴ This preponderance of documentary modes in curatorial projects of varying scales gained considerable

¹ Thomas McEvilley, "Documenta 11," *frieze* 69, January-February 2002, accessed Feb 5, 2009, http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/documenta_112/.

² The *Documenta 11* curatorial team included Carlos Basualdo, Ute Meta Bauer, Suzanne Ghez, Sarat Maharaj, Mark Nash and Octavio Zaya.

³ Though Ogbechie has noted that non-Western artists represented only about 20 percent of the total number of participants. Sylvester Okwunodu Ogbechie, "Ordering the Universe: *Documenta 11* and the Apotheosis of the Occidental Gaze," *Art Journal* 64, no. 1 (2005), 81. The critic Chin-Tao Wu has pointed out that before 2002, 90% of artists in the exhibition had been born in Europe or North America. However, she questions the claim that *Documenta 11* represented 'the full emergence of the margin at the centre': in fact 78% of the artists featured were living in North America or Europe. Chin-Tao Wu, "Biennials without Borders?," *Tate Papers* 12 (2009), accessed May 12, 2015, <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/12/biennials-without-borders>.

⁴ Rosler's project will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 6. Holmes, *Unleashing the Collective Phantoms*, 86.

momentum over the course of the early twenty-first century with the presentation of a spate of exhibitions across the globe.⁵ It appears, then, that the somewhat antithetical origins of the white cube and the documentary genre, outlined in the introduction to this thesis, have been comprehensively overcome.

This chapter begins with two observations: 1) That it was in the curatorial sphere that the remarkable prevalence of documentary modes within contemporary art practice was at first signaled, acknowledged, and interrogated; 2) That this formal prevalence paralleled the ascendancy of 'biennial culture' as well as that of the curator as a highly visible *creative* figure – two tendencies that have seen the hegemonic group exhibition further entrenched as the primary mechanism through which art is encountered. However, in what follows I will frame the connection between developments in the curatorial field and the rise of the social document as something far more complex and revealing than simply another instance of the institutional identification, capture and dissemination of art's latest 'turns'. Arguing instead that these shifts are structurally interlinked, I maintain that the curatorial does not *subtend* artistic production and ask to what extent the social document can be considered to be – like the document itself – an *effect of mediation*. The figure of the twenty-first century curator can be said to occupy two antithetical positions; on the one hand, perceived as a figure of complicity, ensuring the incorporation of art into an administrative machine, while, on the other, seen to push art into new more radical territories. I consider what new dimensions an analysis of the social document can bring to these debates: *is it, in fact, the social document that consistently leads artists and curators alike back to the institution and back to the formats and formulas sanctioned by capital?* Or can its reconfiguration of the artwork be linked

⁵ Other examples since the year 2000 include; *Després de la Notícia - Documentals Postmèdia /After the News - Post-Media Documentary Practice* at the CCCB, Barcelona (2003) curated by Carles Guerra; *Proof* at the Australian Centre for the Moving Image, Melbourne (2004) curated by Mike Stubbs; *Experiments with Truth* at the Fabric Workshop and Museum, Philadelphia (2004-5) curated by Mark Nash; *Universal Experience: Art, Life & the Tourist's Eye* at The Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Chicago (2005) curated by Francesco Bonami; *The Need to Document* at the Halle fuer Kunst, Luneburg and Kunsthau Baselland, Basel (2005) curated by Vit Havranek, Sabine Schaschl-Cooper and Bettina Steinbrugge; *Reprocessing Reality*, at the at the Chateau de Nyon, Switzerland (2005) and P.S.1 MOMA, New York (2006) curated by Claudia Spinelli; *Making History: Art and Documentary in Britain from 1929 to Now* at Tate Liverpool, Liverpool (2006); *No More Reality* at BELEF, Belgrade (2006) curated by Jelena Vesic and Claire Staebler; *Come and Go: Fiction and Reality* at the Gulbenkian Museum, Lisbon (2008) curated by Christine Van Assche; *The Cinema Effect: Illusion, Reality*, and *The Moving Image, Part 1: Dreams; Part 2: Realisms* at the Hirshhorn Museum, Washington D.C. (2008) curated by Tanya Barson; *The Greenroom* at the Hessel Museum, CCS Bard (2008) curated by Maria Lind and Hito Steyerl; *Zones of Conflict* at Pratt Manhattan Gallery (2008) curated by T.J. Demos; *Performing Evidence* Smart Project Space, Amsterdam (2009) curated by Anke Bangma; *Berlin Documentary Forum* at HWK, Berlin (2010 -2014) curated by Hila Peleg; *Not Yet: On the Reinvention of Documentary and the Critique of Modernism* at Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid (2015) curated by Jorge Ribalta.

to a renewed and expanded 'curatorial function' across the field of contemporary cultural practice, the implications of which pass well beyond the traditional pursuits of exhibition organisation, collection care or connoisseurship?

Beginning with a brief overview of the relationship between the social document and the institution, I then go on to examine how the prevalence of documentary modes in art more broadly has intersected with what has become known as 'the curatorial'. Firstly, I do so through an analysis of two major projects that have explicitly interrogated the forceful emergence of documentary modes in the field of contemporary art: *The Greenroom* (2008) and *Documenta 11* (2002). The pressing need for a more nuanced understanding of this relationship is underscored by the chapter's central case study: *A Crime against Art* (2007), an example which offers a uniquely rich – if rather awkward – object of study in that it not only prompts a deeper interrogation of the reconfiguration of the artwork described in Chapter 4; but in that it also constitutes a social document of the cultural field itself. More specifically, it documents the social relations between economic subjects from within the world of contemporary art – particularly those between the artist and the curator. In this way it offers further insight into the conditions that have precipitated the *coincident* rise of the social document and the curatorial more generally. Once again, the impossibility of considering the social document in isolation is recognised and this time the emphasis is placed on the question of mediation.

The case studies from the 1960s and 1970s discussed in Chapter 1 demonstrated the extent to which artists attended to questions and practices of mediation in the course of their production of art documents, frequently positioning it as a core aspect of the artwork itself. Avoiding professional arbiters, artists and collectives often preferred instead to appropriate the curatorial role when seeking to participate in political struggle. Notably, in taking up this now familiar position of 'the artist-as-curator', they remained broadly committed to exhibition making, even at the same time as deploying strategies of disruption and self-removal. While *Women and Work: A Document on the Division of Labour in Industry* (1973-75) was displayed in an established gallery space, Trades Council and polytechnic, the 'exhibition-condemnations' staged for *Tucuman Arde* (1968) occupied trade union headquarters.⁶ The Hackney Flashers' didactic

⁶ As Longoni notes, the exhibitions were conceived not as the final work but rather as a phase in a large-scale programme of counter information. See Longoni, "Avant-Garde Argentinian Visual Artists Group, *Tucumán Burns*, 1968."

intervention *Who's Holding the Baby* (1976-77) also prioritised community-focused displays in libraries and town halls beyond the rarified walls of the art institution.⁷ These examples, then, can be said to have attempted to variously subvert or circumvent established mediation formats and sites.



Figure 31: Kay Hunt, Margaret Harrison and Mary Kelly, *Women and Work: A Document of the Division of Labour in Industry* (exhibition view, TATE Switch House Level 3 display, 2016) 1973-75

Unsurprisingly, subsequent curatorial projects that have attempted to recover such historical social documents for the white cube and ‘anaesthetising’ museum have been met with a measure of scepticism. Discussing her own work *If You Lived Here...* (1989) – largely ignored and even repressed in its own moment – Martha Rosler dryly remarked that its later enthusiastic recuperation proved correct her rule of thumb regarding

⁷ Their website states: “The twenty-nine-panel exhibition was presented on lightweight, laminated material designed to be robust and easy to hang in non-gallery settings. It was launched at Centerprise Community Centre in Kingsland Road, Hackney, London in 1978. It then went on tour to community, political and educational events and venues round the country. In 1979 it was included in *Three Perspectives on Photography* at the Hayward Gallery in London. This attracted controversy and some criticism from the art establishment.” “History,” Hackney Flashers, accessed Jul 14, 2014, <http://hackneyflashers.com/history/>. Tobin notes that the latter invitation to exhibit also provoked heated debates within the collective itself, with some members arguing that participation would inevitably impair the political efficacy of the work. Amy Tobin, “1970s Agit-Prop and Feminism’s Futures,” Unpublished response to The Hackney Flasher’s 40th Anniversary Event at Chats Palace, 2014, accessed Jul 31, 2015, http://www.academia.edu/9265294/Hackney_Flashers_1970s_agitprop_and_Feminisms_Futures.

‘which political and social issues the art world likes: those long ago or far away.’⁸ Victoria Horne has commented upon the use of previously marginalised practices and histories (once again feminist) to ‘belatedly empower’ institutions, analysing the TATE’s acquisition and display of the *Women and Work* archive.⁹ Asking whether ‘homogenizing nostalgia is an inevitable outcome of the exhibition form,’ she discusses the issues arising from the re-presentation of radical art projects at a distant remove from their intended time and place of address.¹⁰ She concludes that the conservative a-temporal display and interpretation tactics employed effectively *fixed* the documents in a remote historical moment, reducing them to the status of a historical curiosity of little relevance to contemporary times.

That the site of presentation was deemed to be of crucial relevance to the work is in keeping with the debates precipitated through the first wave of institutional critique during the 1960s and 70s when artists sought to challenge the isolation enforced by the white cube. In 1972 Robert Smithson likened the curator’s role to that of a warden who coerces the artist to fit into ‘fraudulent categories’ and prepares the ‘politically lobotomized’ work of art for consumption.¹¹ Four years later *Artforum* published Brian O’Doherty’s now infamous essay in which he sought to reveal the constructed and ideologically loaded nature of a gallery design thoroughly intertwined with the development of modernist art. He described sealed windows, controlled artificial lighting, polished floors and the blank expanses of ‘neutral’ white walls as systematically excluding the outside world, creating a timeless limbo for the appraisal of artworks by disciplined, disembodied, spectators.

Fast forward to the turn of the millennium and it is plain that the prevalence of documentary modes in art since 1989 has been narrativised primarily via curatorial endeavours. Survey shows seeking to chart the terrains of this unexpected development have been particularly common while other exhibitions have been orientated towards the identification of specific themes – most commonly globalisation, warfare, labour. Yet

⁸ Martha Rosler, “Place, Position, Power, Politics,” in *The Subversive Imagination: Artists, Society, and Social Responsibility*, ed. Carol Becker (New York; London: Routledge, 1994), 69.

⁹ Victoria Horne, “Institutional Dissonance: Tate Britain, BP and Socialist-Feminist History,” *Radical Philosophy* 186 (2014), 64.

¹⁰ Grant has also addressed temporal relations in feminist practice, proposing that we rethink them via the paradigm of frandom. Catherine Grant, “Fans of Feminism: Re-writing Histories of Second-wave Feminism in Contemporary Art,” *Oxford Art Journal* 34, no.2 (2011): 265-286.

¹¹ Robert Smithson, “Cultural Confinement (1972),” in *Robert Smithson, The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: The University of California Press, 1996), 155.

even given the apparently insatiable appetite for such displays, their moment is – again – often cast as a deeply conservative one; their space a site where the life and use value of the document is *tamed*, or even extinguished, in preparation for its (re)production and consumption as ‘art’.

Angela Dimitrakaki goes further in her account of the documentation associated with the biopolitical artwork, arguing that it not only asserts the position of the viewer as detached and superior but also ‘subdues the effects of any political risk taken by the artist, suggesting that ultimately all was carefully managed art rather than uncontrollable life.’¹² And indeed, the social document does distill multifarious and open-ended processes into a (usually) digestible and ‘satisfying’ chronicle or story that is both mobile and reproducible. However, as previously stated, I disagree with both Groys’ and Dimitrakaki’s contention that the artwork and its documentation are separate, the artwork always taking place elsewhere. In my view, this position reheats vital aspects of modernist art theory whereby the art was held to be produced in another space – in that case, the studio. As Griselda Pollock memorably stated in her counter to this privileging of the singular creative event: ‘Feminist materialist theory suggests that the studio, the gallery and the exhibition catalogue are not separate, but form interdependent moments in the cultural circuit of capitalist production and consumption.’¹³ It is to this notion of *interdependency* that I want to attend and push further with respect to twenty-first century cultural production. If the social document’s relationship to the artwork is not a straightforward or oppositional one, does this necessarily imply a more negative view of the biopolitical artwork whereby the administrative obligation is fully integrated?

5.2 *The persistence of display*

The document’s attraction to the exhibition form and sites of display is clear enough; after all, curating continues to be a key structural requirement for entry into the art world and, as outlined in the Introduction, the document as a formation is inseparable from mediation. But what more can be said about the curator’s predilection for documents? More specifically, has an increasingly influential curatorial practice

¹² Dimitrakaki, “Women’s Lives, Labour, Contracts, Documents,” 101. Dimitrakaki further suggests that institution of art is a space where ethics, *not* politics, thrives. I will return to the questions associated with the intersections of ethics, aesthetics and politics in contemporary art in Chapter 7 of this thesis.

¹³ Griselda Pollock, “Painting, Feminism, History,” in *Destabilizing Theory: Contemporary Feminist Debates*, eds. Michele Barrett and Anne Phillips (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 146.

precipitated new approaches in order to mediate and engage with the shift to documentation?

The Greenroom: Reconsidering the Documentary and Contemporary Art (2008) curated by Maria Lind and presented in CCS Bard College's Hessel Museum of Art took the ascendancy of documentary modes in art as its focus. Spread across 25 spaces including corridors, classrooms and a library, the exhibition comprised over 170 works by 80 artists, the majority of which were presented in the museum's sequence of white cube galleries. A series of small-scale spaces each hosting an individual artist's work encircled two large cavernous rooms; in one, photographic series from the Marieluise Hessel Collection were tightly packed across the expanse of walls in a claustrophobic salon-style hang. This challenging installation was countered in the adjacent atrium by Olivia Plender's *Newsroom* (2008), a flexible construction designed to resemble a 1970s TV studio and play host to a number of talks, screenings, discussions and performances held over the duration of the exhibition. Corridors and nearby teaching facilities were also turned over for the display of work while the library, opened to the public, displayed related publications, periodicals and monographs curated by Milena Hoegsberg.



Figure 32: *The Greenroom* (exhibition view) 2008

The Hessel Museum of Art is part of the Center for Curatorial Studies in Art and Contemporary Culture at Bard College in New York State. Opened in 2006, the new building's slick surfaces and attuned lighting combined with the conventional four-month duration and choice of established artists gave the *The Greenroom* the look and feel of a medium-scale museum exposition, an appearance which perhaps accounts for reviewers' perplexed responses.¹⁴ Finding the exhibition wanting both in terms of curatorial criteria and well-honed display tactics, *frieze* magazine's Benjamin Carlson described the show as 'frustratingly broad in scope' while, writing in *Artforum*, William Kaizen saw both problems and potential in Lind's 'undifferentiated' strategy which referenced virtually every documentary strategy adopted in mainstream contemporary art.¹⁵ Critics often focused on the photography salon as a particularly alarming case in point: here, war photography was set cheek-by-jowl against autobiographical accounts of failed relationships and the height of the displays occluded some works entirely. The exhibition seemed to speak directly to Allan Sekula's assertion that '[o]nly formalism can unite all the photographs in the world in one room.'¹⁶

Lind's introductory text framed the display as 'a subjective inventory that seeks to explore where the land lies for the documentary in contemporary art.'¹⁷ This approach was mirrored in the publication of an associated anthology of existing texts released under the same title. These surveys or stock-takes were intended to form the basis of a broader research project developed with the artist and theoretician Hito Steyerl whereby a 'Reference Group' of artists (all working with documentary modes) were invited to take the project forwards through their own practice in a manner of their choosing.¹⁸ This strategy closely echoed the 'Sputnik' model Lind adopted during her time as Director of the Kunstverein München. Here, a circle of artists, writers and curators were identified as partners or 'travelling companions' and asked to advise, comment upon and create new programmes for the institution. In keeping with this ethos, the title of *The Greenroom* was intended to conjure associations with backstage

¹⁴ The exhibition ran from the 27th of September 2008 until the 1st of February 2009.

¹⁵ Benjamin Carlson, "The Greenroom Review," *frieze* 122, April 2009, accessed Mar 5, 2010, http://www.frieze.com/issue/review/the_greenroom/; William Kaizen, "The Greenroom," *Artforum*, March 2009, 238-239.

¹⁶ Allan Sekula, "Dismantling Modernism, Reinventing Documentary (Notes on the Politics of Representation)," in *Photography Current Perspectives* (Rochester: Massachusetts Review, 1978), 238.

¹⁷ Maria Lind, "The Greenroom Exhibition Guide," CCS Bard, accessed Jun 16, 2010, <http://www.bard.edu/ccs/exhibitions/sites/exhibition.php?g=788086&type=1>.

¹⁸ The reference group included artists Petra Bauer, Matthew Buckingham, Carles Guerra, Walid Raad and Hito Steyerl.

activities, re-orientating the project away from the moment of performative display and towards research, discussion and reflection: ‘the “just before” and the “right after” moments of less scripted performances and unexpected encounters.’¹⁹

Two sets of public presentations were intended to bookend the declared core of the project, which was designed to remain closed from public view. While the first instalment proposed a subjective mapping of already-existing artworks and writings, the final exhibition and publication was to act as a culmination (though at the time of writing [March 2016], these are yet to appear). The exhibition and the materials it incorporated were thereby treated as documents, as both evidence of past activities and as starting points from where productive activity can take place. Lind cites artistic practice as the primary inspiration behind her own working methodologies, particularly those orientated around process and performative structures rather than object-based production.²⁰ Her curatorial projects are often durational, collaborative, informal and openly subjective. Yet her attempt to approach the presentation of a collection in a similarly provisional spirit was lost on frustrated critics who, Lind admitted, simply ‘didn’t get it’, underlining the challenges presented when pursuing alternative approaches in such a heavily coded environment.²¹

The attempt to re-conceive – or even *downplay* – what Charles Esche has called the ‘showroom function’ is common to many other curatorial projects that engage with documentary modes.²² In its commitment to a position and stated aim to ‘find out what comes after imperialism’, *Documenta 11* offers an obvious – and by now widely discussed – example.²³ The geographic and formal shifts proposed through the exhibition were part and parcel of broader transformative curatorial premise which framed the display itself as only one of five interdisciplinary ‘Platforms’. Venturing beyond the traditional 100 days of presentation to run from April 2001 until September 2002, other contributions took the form of conferences, workshops, screenings and debates staged across four continents, culminating in series of publications. Each Platform was envisaged as an open network for organising knowledge while the structure itself was intended to invert

¹⁹ Lind and Steyerl, “Introduction: Reconsidering the Documentary and Contemporary Art,” 7.

²⁰ Maria Lind, *Detours* lecture, Glasgow, Apr 29, 2010.

²¹ From a conversation with the author 2010 as part of the *Radical Complicities* conference hosted by the National Galleries of Scotland exploring curatorial practice. Organised by the author and Angela Dimitrakaki.

²² Charles Esche, “Rooseum Mission Statement.”

²³ McEvilley, “Documenta 11,” unpaginated.

the usual hierarchies – in particular the primacy of the exhibition itself. This approach built on David's '100 Days – 100 Guests' programme for *Documenta X* (itself a nod towards Joseph Beuys' *100 Days of the Free International University* presented as part of the 1977 edition) where specialists from across different disciplines were brought together to discuss and debate 'the great ethical questions of the century's close.' This was, rather unconvincingly in my view, framed by one critic as a '*post-retinal*' view of art as a site for cognitive engagement and social criticism.²⁴



Figure 33: *Documenta 11* (exhibition view) 2002

In many ways *Documenta 11* attempted to keep up the challenge to the prioritisation of visibility. Yet the exhibition form persisted, its conventions barely troubled 'on the ground' by the introduction of what Enwezor referred to as his effort to expand 'the locus of the disciplinary models that constitute and define the project's intellectual and

²⁴ The critic was far from convinced by the 'grimly cerebral affair'. Ken Johnson, "A Post-retinal Documenta," *Art in America* 85, no.10 (1997): 81- 88.

cultural interest.²⁵ This involved the inclusion of materials that would not be considered out of place as a visual accompaniment to an evening newscast or as a piece of photojournalism in a Sunday magazine – indeed many of the works presented fitted with the Australian journalist John Pilger’s definition of ‘slow news’: grinding narratives, usually relegated to weekend afternoon broadcasting, with no spectacular event ready to abbreviate complex layers of history and politics.²⁶ Reviewers duly noted the prevalence of photography, film and video in Enwezor’s edition; while one estimated that there was over 600 hours worth of time-based material, another described it as ‘the least arty *Documenta* yet’.²⁷ Perhaps to compensate for this apparent lack, other critical responses tellingly focused upon the ‘masterful’, ‘elegant’ and even ‘classical’ display of the material within *Documenta*’s traditional museum environs. A member of the curatorial team’s later explanation of the strategy revealed the power accorded to the exhibition form: ‘[c]rucially, this *Documenta* insisted that in order to communicate effectively, indeed *in order to function as art at all*, all the work had to function aesthetically: that is, be well installed and presented [emphasis added].’²⁸ Enwezor’s claim, then, to move ‘outside the domain of the gallery space to that of the discursive’ did not seek to abandon display (or even disrupt its conventions) but still to approach it as one route among many through which the problematic of globalised postcolonialism could be examined. Put another way, Enwezor attempted to use the agency of the curatorial gesture to ‘participate’ the documents presented in the debates which he regarded as the project’s core. The exhibition not only provided visual evidence and, in many cases, critical analysis through art documentation, it also visibly connected disparate sites through their juxtaposition; from the streets of Lagos (‘Muyiwa Osifuye’) to India’s landless poor (Ravi Agarwa) to the border zones between Eastern and Western Europe (Pavel Braila).

Three things are worth highlighting here. Firstly (and as stated), the endurance – indeed dominance – of the display model, irrespective of the organisers’ attempts to frame their respective projects otherwise. In the case of *The Greenroom*, an education institution that offers one of the more prestigious postgraduate degrees in curatorial practice would

²⁵ Enwezor, “The Black Box,” 42.

²⁶ John Pilger, *Hidden Agendas* (New York: New Press, 1999).

²⁷ Eleanor Heartney, “A 600-hour Documenta,” *Art in America* 19, no. 9 (2002): 95; McEvelley, “Documenta 11,” unpaginated.

²⁸ Mark Nash, “Reality in the Age of Aesthetics,” *frieze* 114, April 2008, accessed Sep 15, 2010, <https://frieze.com/article/reality-age-aesthetics>.

appear to provide an ideal context for an experimental and durational research-driven project. If, then, Lind's incorporation of what can be described as apparently conservative selection and exhibition mechanisms is at first surprising, her decision can, at least in part, be put down to the demands of her contract. That these were to be staged in such an impressive yet geographically remote venue points to the requirement not for a level of footfall suited to mass modes of curatorial address but to the promotional demands of the institution where annual student fees are in excess of \$30,000. Lind's ability to secure works by high profile artists and attract reviews from major art magazines, including *Artforum* and *frieze*, makes for a persuasive branding and marketing strategy. Discussing *Documenta 11*, the philosopher Stewart Martin has noted, that efforts (undertaken at a narrative level) to dilute, or, more accurately, distribute the attention afforded to the exhibition displays were lost on the majority of reviewers who ignored or dismissed the other Platforms as superfluous.²⁹ Though Martin argues that this amounted to a 'serious misconception of the project', their response most likely aligned with that of the reported 650,000 exhibition visitors – a figure that compares with the 10,000 who attended the other Platforms combined, with the proceedings of some only being published some time after the displays had closed. That the *group* exhibition remains the primary mechanism of encounter with art is affirmed by the relentless proliferation of biennials across the globe. Yet at the same time, as Martin rightly observes, Enwezor's attempted '*détournement* of the spectacular visibility of Documenta' is now also par for the course.³⁰ I would add that this implicit critique can also be understood as a radical 'brand refreshment' for the institution at the turn of the millennium. Putting services of a set of highly mobile interlocutors to work in Vienna, New Delhi, St. Lucia and Lagos effectively transformed *Documenta's* status as a bastion of Euro-American culture to that of a *global event*.

Secondly, the respective curatorial conceits deployed documents specifically as *fragments*. Far removed from the connotations of this term familiar from discourses around postmodernism, here the fragment was invoked as part of an overarching whole; a narrative enquiry set out in the terrains of the curatorial. In this way, the administrative or management dimensions of the curatorial function can be argued to predispose it towards documentation: powerful star curators (Enwezor and Lind not least among them) operating as personality-centred brands while requiring more provisional

²⁹ Stewart Martin, "A New World Art: Documenting Documenta 11," *Radical Philosophy* 122 (2003): 7-19.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 18.

materials to organise and elevate through their own authorial gestures as *creative and intellectual practitioners*. Documentation can be said to respond particularly well to this incorporation into such discursive frameworks; treated as words on a page, individual documents are subordinated to the meta-narrative of curatorial intention.³¹ Pushing this logic still further, the curatorial project of *Documenta 11* emerges as a social document.³²

Thirdly, and finally, I wish to emphasise this *double* focus on display and *discursive* paradigms. While talks, symposia and panel discussions have long been a staple feature in museum programmes, they have historically been viewed as supplementary activities designed to pick up and expand upon the themes raised within a particular exhibition. As the above examples show, one of the most striking features of post-millennial curatorial approaches (or indeed institutions) considered ‘progressive’ is the concerted attempt to move such activities from the periphery to the centre.³³ As in the case of *Documenta 11*, such infrastructural changes are closely connected to the prioritisation of art as a viable field for knowledge production. Reflecting upon the ‘discursive turn’ Simon Sheikh has suggested that contributions to such programmes can be viewed as the *performative* staging of discourse and even as constituting a genre.³⁴ This statement implicitly points to the rising *visibility* of interlocutors in both the production of art and the production of meaning. Irit Rogoff summarises these shifts thus:

The old boundaries between making and theorizing, historicizing and displaying, criticizing and affirming have long been eroded. Artistic practice is being acknowledged as the production of knowledge and theoretical and curatorial endeavours have taken on a far more experimental and inventive

³¹ The question of what *kind* of words must then follow – in relation to an exhibition of documents of social practice staged at the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw in 2016 the curators variously described their project as a map and a ‘visual essay’, noting their realisation that they were not doing an exhibition about nouns but rather exhibiting verbs. Bean Gilsdorf, “Art Beyond Art: Making Use at the Museum of Modern Art Warsaw,” The Exhibitionist Blog, 2016, accessed Sep 27, 2016, <http://the-exhibitionist.com/art-beyond-art-making-use-at-the-museum-of-modern-art-warsaw/>.

³² I will take up this idea and examine it in greater detail in Chapter 6’s analysis of Martha Rosler’s *If You Lived Here*....

³³ Progressive arts institutions have internalised the impact of artists’ institutional critique to develop what Nina Möntmann, has termed a system of ‘auto-critique’ and what Jonas Ekeberg defined as ‘New Institutionalism’. ‘Moving beyond simple presentation frameworks, such auto-critical art centres seek to reject the demands of the neoliberal event economy and offer sites for discourse and exchange which are capable of conceiving research and artistic production together.’ Nina Möntmann, “The Rise and Fall of New Institutionalism: Perspectives on a Possible Future,” in *eipcp* (2007), accessed Jan 15, 2011, <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0407/moentmann/en>; Jonas Ekeberg, ed., *New Institutionalism* (Oslo: Office for Contemporary Art Norway, 2003). Notably, such New Institutions are reliant upon highly conspicuous, itinerant curators. Indeed, they are perhaps better described as *durational curatorial projects*.

³⁴ Sheikh, “Talk Value,” 184.

dimension, both existing in the realm of potentiality and possibility rather than that of exclusively material production.³⁵

Rogoff's call for a move beyond criticism and critique to a programme of 'criticality', in which meaning is understood as a process which *takes place* rather than something which requires excavation by experts, is made with these conditions in mind.³⁶ Groys has similarly argued that complex processes of production and presentation force the recognition that, despite the persistence of the personality-centred brand, the intact, singular model of authorship is now meaningless as the creative role is divided amongst a range of protagonists.³⁷

A focus on the respective attempts to orientate *The Greenroom* and *Documenta 11* according to discursive rather than display paradigms problematises any reductive attempts to view the curator's 'rebirth' as one predicated on the ousting of both the critic, and even the artist, to become the arbiter of taste and the creator of meaning. Vesna Madzoski has surmised the etymological lineage of the term 'curator', taking in the Ancient Roman references to the care of individuals unfit to manage their own affairs (children, women and madmen) or public infrastructure, Christian clergymen of the Middle Ages (the cura of souls), those invested in the care and interpretation of objects held within museum collections, and, after World War II, trained professionals tasked with discovering artists or scenes and producing exhibition projects.³⁸ Madzoski frames this latter development in relation to the rise of the *independent 'she-curator'*, a powerful yet precarious figure commissioned on a temporary basis to work more closely with the processes of artistic production and at ever greater remove from the institution's protective infrastructure (if not its gallery spaces). In Paul O'Neill and Mick Wilson's succinct articulation, the controlling, authorial curator is also conspicuously absent. Instead, they argue that curating has become a 'processual' activity, 'the organisation of emerging and open-ended cultural encounter, exchange and enactment'.³⁹ Meanwhile, in

³⁵ Irit Rogoff, "From Criticism to Critique and Criticality," *eipcp* (2003), accessed Jan 15, 2011, <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0806/rogoff1/en>, 2003.

³⁶ Irit Rogoff, "Smuggling' – An Embodied Criticality," *eipcp* (2006), accessed Jan 15, 2011, eipcp.net/dlfiles/rogoff-smuggling, 2006.

³⁷ Boris Groys, "Multiple Authorship," in *Art Power* (London: MIT Press, 2008): 94-100.

³⁸ Vesna Madzoski, *De Cvratribvs: The Dialectics of Care and Confinement* (New York; Dresden: Atropos Press, 2013): 17-40.

³⁹ Paul O'Neill and Mick Wilson, eds., *Curating and the Educational Turn* (London: Open Editions, 2010).

the pages of the latter's edited volume Jan Verwoert remarked that: 'To curate means to talk things into being.'⁴⁰

In terms of locating current developments, Elke Krasny's alternative genealogy of modern curating offers considerable insight. Looking back to the 18th century. She notes the emergence of the museum in parallel with that of the *salonnière* – a private space, often engineered by women, in which 'alive, lived and practiced knowledges' were shared.⁴¹ She contends that each gave rise to a different trajectory: an exhibitionary complex and a conversational complex. Accepting Krasny's dual model, the privileged position held by the social document in contemporary art at present can be seen as due – at least in part – to the intersection of these two tendencies. It responds effectively to the new conditions of production where traditional structures and roles are diffusing. This chapter's central case study is a social document that attends to the labour, structures and economic subjects of the art world. As its analysis will show such structures and roles are not dissolving entirely but are rather re-emerging in altered states and relations in a process that has significant ramifications in terms of both how the artwork is constituted and how it operates. *A Crime against Art* offers a particularly intriguing example, wherein the tendencies and tensions encountered in the curatorial projects discussed above are both integrated and pushed still further into remarkably sharp relief. Here is an instance where the social document cannot be said to contribute to a curatorial narrative or discursive project (still less dismissed as merely providing supporting evidence). Rather, its production directly participates in and advances the proceedings.

5.3 Case study: *A Crime against Art*

On 18 February 2007, three days after the Madrid train bombers' trial commenced, another court convened in the same city, this time swapping the heavily guarded confines of the courthouse for an annexe room at the ARCO art fair.⁴² Inspired by the

⁴⁰ Jan Verwoert, "Control I'm Here: A Call For the Free Use of the Means of Producing Communication," in *Curating and the Educational Turn*, eds. Paul O'Neill and Mick Wilson (London: Open Editions, 2010): 23-31.

⁴¹ Elke Krasny, "Curator-as-Carer: Towards a Feminist Historiography of Curating" (paper, Writing/Curating / Making Feminist Art Histories conference, The University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, Mar 28, 2014).

⁴² On the morning of 11 March 2004, 191 people were killed and up to 1,800 injured by the explosion of ten backpack bombs on four rush-hour commuter trains in Madrid. Twenty-nine individuals were indicted over the attacks. The trial commenced on 15 February 2007 and ended on 2 July 2007.

mock trials organised by avant-garde movements in the 1920s and '30s, the artist, Anton Vidokle, and the curator, Tirdad Zolghadr, 'turned themselves in', assigned the roles of Prosecution, Defence and Judge to their peers and delineated the charges: 'Collusion with the Bourgeoisie and Other Serious Accusations'.⁴³ Captured by three sets of cameras, material from *The Trial* was later used as the basis for *A Crime against Art* (2007), a video directed by the curator, Hila Peleg. Commissioned by a commercial art fair seeking to confirm its position at the forefront of the *Zeitgeist*, Vidokle and Zolghadr opted to grasp this particular instance of complicity, and stimulate a critical examination of their practices, which have claimed to be orientated away from market structures and towards the circumvention of commercial spectacle.⁴⁴ By adopting the model of the mock trial, they aligned their activities with the lineage of the historical avant-garde, questioning whether and, if so, how art can continue to operate critically under the current socio-political conditions. Ultimately, their stated goal was to use the context of *The Trial* to investigate and clarify the extent to which their activities sustained the critical potential of art by carving out new spaces and modes.



Figure 34: Anton Vidokle, *unitednationsplaza* (aerial view and event with Martha Rosler and Anton Vidokle), 2006–2007

The Trial was also framed as an offsite part of the *unitednationsplaza* (2006-2007) programme, a project initiated by Vidokle in a disused office space above a supermarket in former East Berlin and dedicated to exploring the notion of the 'exhibition-as-school'. *unitednationsplaza* is credited as the producer of *A Crime against Art* and many of the

⁴³ The mock trial of the author, Maurice Barrès, was conducted by André Breton on 13 May 1921. Represented by a dummy and accused of 'crimes against the security of the mind', the event marked the final stages of the implosion of Dada.

⁴⁴ *The Trial* was programmed as part 'The 5th International Contemporary Art Experts Forum' at ARCO alongside lectures and discussions which examined new markets for contemporary art, new systems and channels for production together with collecting art.

protagonists, including the director, Peleg, either played a direct role in the organisation and activity of the initiative or contributed to the associated events and publications. This social document went on to be presented as part of *unitednationsplaza*'s programme, both in Berlin and Mexico, and was released online through its web-archive in January 2011.⁴⁵ *The Trial, A Crime against Art*, *unitednationsplaza* and *Martha Rosler Library* are just a few of the activities, initiated and co-authored by Vidokle, which seek to evade the usual institutional frames of the art world. Ostensibly privileging discourse over display, collaboration is central to Vidokle's practice: he regularly works with a small circle of artists, critics and curators to realise projects of varying scales, many of which interact or are interdependent. While acknowledging the complex authorship structure underpinning these projects, Vidokle can be regarded as the common denominator, determinedly maintaining his position as an artist and the status of the projects as experimental artworks.

A crucial aspect of Vidokle's projects is the funding model on which they are based. He is a co-founder of *e-flux*, a company established by a group of artists in 1999 around the simple concept of building an international network and associated mailing list for the electronic distribution of information. As part of their marketing strategies, leading museums, galleries, biennials, magazines, art fairs and publishers throughout the world use the *e-flux* service, which provides access to the inboxes of over seventy thousand visual arts professionals. The proceeds from this (highly lucrative) venture fund a programme of independent art projects, often initiated by Vidokle, which are either web-based or 'physical public projects'; the *e-flux* oeuvre does not include conventional exhibitions or the production of art objects.⁴⁶ While *The Trial* was directly financed by ARCO, *unitednationsplaza* and *A Crime against Art* were both funded by *e-flux*, creating the highly unusual situation of one artwork directly financing (and marketing) a series of other artworks.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ "unitednationsplaza Archive," accessed Feb 18, 2011, www.unitednationsplaza.org.

⁴⁶ In October 2008, the cost of a single *e-flux* release was €700. Between three and seven releases were circulated each day. In October 2016 a single release was £940.

⁴⁷ Here a comparison can be drawn with VALIE EXPORT's *Transparent Space* (2001 -), a public artwork which also works on both the artistic and curatorial planes. Sited in Vienna, this room-sized glass cube was intended to offer an exhibition space for other women.



Figure 35: Anton Vidokle, *A Crime against Art* (video still), 2007

The video itself begins with the onscreen caption ‘with Jan Verwoert as THE JUDGE’. Announcing the key protagonists in the manner of daytime soaps, *A Crime against Art* echoes the tone of the initial press release for *The Trial*, which revelled in the kitsch drama of the TV courtroom. The accused don their Sunday best, the judge’s bench is raised and the layout of the room roughly corresponds to that of a legitimate court, minus the jury. The surprisingly small audience – many of the seats are vacant – and occasional sighting of camera equipment, leads and lighting, indicate that the process of filming was integral. Distilling an eight-hour event into 90 minutes, Peleg has retained the atmosphere of a courtroom (which anyone who has experienced Western centres of justice will recognise), deftly capturing that curious combination of flamboyant, grandiose drama and procedural banality. The majority of the video consists of simply-framed head-shots of those speaking, intermittently animated by the disengaged gestures (drinking coffee, whispering, pouring water) of the cast or the openly bored expressions of audience members and ‘public witnesses’. The protagonists indulge in cans of Red Bull to keep the monotony at bay. While there is no additional soundtrack, Peleg has introduced a number of stylistic interventions into the footage, representing

the artist Liam Gillick's contribution solely as a textual interlude between chapters and completely editing out four testimonies.⁴⁸ Aside from these additions and omissions, the film follows the same format as *The Trial* itself, commencing with opening declarations, progressing through a series of verbal testimonies before concluding with closing statements and the all-important verdict. The cast was drawn from Vidokle's circle of collaborators and represents an influential selection of curators and critics from the European art scene. Charles Esche (Director of the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven) acts as the Defence opposite the double-act of Vasif Kortun (then Director of Platform Garanti in Istanbul) and the formidable Chus Martinez (then Director of the Frankfurter Kunstverein) as the Prosecution. In an attempt to establish the current conditions of art production and reception, Maria Lind (then Director of IASPIS in Stockholm) delivered an 'Expert Testimony' followed by 'Witness Testimonies' from Anselm Franke (then Artistic Director of Extra City Center for Contemporary Art in Antwerp, and co-curator, with Peleg, of 'Manifesta 7') and artist, Setareh Shabazi, a contributor to, and participant in, the *unitednationsplaza* programme respectively. The omnipresent critic and editor of *frieze* magazine, Jan Verwoert, presided over all with his magisterial quiff, crisp white shirt and obligatory black plastic spectacles.

A Crime against Art can be described as a feedback loop between practice and discourse, presenting a critique of itself and the wider project of which it is a part. As a case study it demonstrates the extent to which the social document *can resist straightforward classification as art* – despite its conformance with major tendencies in the art field, not least the deployment of documentary modes and the gravitation towards discursive paradigms. This ambiguity, which lies at the heart of many of Vidokle's projects, merits further consideration. Is *A Crime against Art* an artwork and, if so, what kind of implications does this have for the practice, production and reception of contemporary art? In particular, what can it tell us about the *structures* of art in terms of its circulation, for example through the institution?

⁴⁸ Fia Backström, Lourdes Fernández and Javier Garcia Montes' testimonies were deleted along with two elements categorised in the programme as 'Evidence Presentations'; Dirk Herzog's screening of *Multitudes*, a film documenting the inaugural weekend of *unitednationsplaza* in October 2006 and 'I Can't Work Like This, Printed Project, Dublin', an edition of the *Printed Project* Journal co-edited by Vidokle and Zolghadr and presented as part of the *unitednationsplaza* programme.

In his analysis of Duchamp, Thierry de Duve proposes that the readymade effectively stripped the work of art back to the defining statement 'this is art', and he proceeds to delineate the enunciative conditions which, for him, remain true for art in general:

there are conditions for the existence of art in a given cultural formation. They are: given (1) an object, (2) an author, (3) a public, and (4) an institutional place ready to record this object, to attribute an author to it, and to communicate it to the public.⁴⁹

For de Duve, these ingredients must come together in a moment – similar to that at which mayonnaise 'takes' – in order for the object to be inscribed as art. It is productive to consider *A Crime against Art* against these criteria as, from the outset, it is apparent that even the basic declaration 'this is art' is not so much stated as covertly whispered. Nowhere in the press material or programme information is the video explicitly classified; yet when I directly questioned him, Vidokle casually confirmed that he does indeed, consider it, along with his other projects, to be an artwork.⁵⁰

While de Duve admittedly used the term 'object' in its broadest sense, Vidokle's wider practice exemplifies the critic and curator Simon Sheikh's proposal that 'we focus on art as a place "where things can happen" rather than a thing "that is in the world"'.⁵¹ The DVD itself is not fetishised as an art object in the usual way: it can easily be bought for a fee of €25 and is streamed free of charge online. The terms of authorship are similarly troubled and dispersed; the 'enunciator' is not the video's director but an individual who is complexly defined as initiator, funder and participant. Vidokle is, therefore, only one of a number of protagonists who could potentially make the claim for artistic status. Peleg's directorial role is framed by Vidokle as her 'contribution' to the work; when invited to take part in *The Trial*, she asked if she could instead organise and direct a film of the proceedings. This anecdote suggests that the DVD is only one component in the productive activity of artistic and curatorial labour. Yet although the model of co-authorship employed in *A Crime against Art* once again effectively displaces and disperses the artwork, as a social document it continues to play a crucial role in the circulation and actualisation of the work *as art* beyond the moment of *The Trial's* initial enactment.

⁴⁹ Thierry de Duve, *Kant after Duchamp* (London: MIT Press, 1996), 391.

⁵⁰ Anton Vidokle, e-mail correspondence with author, May 5, 2009.

⁵¹ Sheikh, "Talk Value," 195.

According to de Duve, the basic mix of the viewer – able to heed the pronouncement ‘this is art’ – and the moment of exhibition combine to constitute conditions *under which lens* the genre of art can be ascribed. However, while *A Crime against Art* undoubtedly has a viewership – deliberately limited, though it is, to a small enclave of art world professionals and enthusiasts – and while it has repeatedly been screened across the world, the moment of its ‘exhibition’ is as unwieldy as its process of enunciation.⁵² To consider for a moment the ‘binding agent’ of the mayonnaise – the institution – the video’s relationships with the spaces of display of contemporary art have tended to be tangential, consigned to education or events programmes rather than the gallery space. In many ways the format, length and structure make it far more suited to screenings in education spaces, on home viewing systems, or through international film festival circuits where it has indeed been embraced. The white (or black) cube, by contrast, must continue to strain to accommodate longer moving image works with conventional narrative structures that are intended to be viewed in a single sitting. My own presentation of *A Crime against Art* at Stills in Edinburgh took place in the education and events space. Here, viewers were invited to watch from comfortable sofas in a room specifically designed as an informal and relaxed space more conducive to open discussion – calling to mind Krasny’s alternative curatorial genealogy stemming from the *salonnière*.⁵³

That traditional exhibition structures do not emphatically confirm *A Crime against Art*’s status as art highlights two major shifts: the work does not *need* to be visible as art and the institution, as a physical venue, is no longer a *requirement* for it to be visible as art. By using curatorial and administrative methodologies as part of his artistic practice,

⁵² Screenings venues include Kasseler Kunstverein, Kassel, Germany (2007); Copenhagen International Documentary Film Festival, Copenhagen, Denmark, winner of the ‘New Vision Award’ (2007); *unitednationsplaza*, Berlin, Germany (2007); Berlin International Film Festival (2008); Zaim, Yokohama, Japan (2008); Hot Docs Canadian International Film Festival, Toronto, Canada, ‘Official Selection’ (2008); Stills, Edinburgh, UK (2008), The New Museum, New York, USA, (2008), Arnolfini, Bristol, UK (2009). Vidokle openly admits that his projects are ‘aimed primarily at a certain professional audience of artists, curators, art historians, etc.’ Stephen Wright, ‘Artistic Agency in the Absence of the Public, Interview with Anton Vidokle,’ in *Martha Rosler Library*, eds. Paul Domela and John Byrne (London: Liverpool Biennial of Contemporary Art, London, 2008), 20.

⁵³ However, as Felicity Allen has astutely noted, the attributions of radicality bestowed upon recent curatorial moves into sites conventionally reserved for education rest upon the exclusion of the work of anonymous, precarious and usually female gallery educators working since the 1980s. Such exclusions, she argued, are necessary for the construction of yet another heroic avant-garde – this time in the field of curatorship – suited to the demand for literature on curatorial histories to service the swelling ranks of postgraduate cohorts. Felicity Allen, paper given at KEYWORDS event on the term ‘Curatorial’, Edinburgh College of Art, Mar 8, 2016.

Vidokle is able to bypass the traditional authorities of the institution and the curator at will, partnering with major organisations only when it suits his purpose. To a large extent, the associated projects, *e-flux* and *unitednationsplaza*, have assumed the vital functions of recording, attributing and announcing, enabling Vidokle to effectively frame his own practice. De Duve's 'institution', then, is more accurately described as a *field* of contemporary art, in which individual venues are only an interdependent part of the dispersed authority structures of the art world – structures in which *e-flux* is firmly embedded as an important player.



Figure 36: Anton Vidokle, *A Crime against Art* (video still) 2007

Foregrounding labour which usually remains largely invisible – this time curatorial – *A Crime against Art* is an exemplary instance of Rogoff's proposal that theorists, writers, critics and curators imbricate themselves by inhabiting the problem rather than simply analysing it.⁵⁴ Just as it challenges the traditional relationships between artwork, institution, artist and viewer, the social document also captures the extent to which the roles and relationships between the protagonists have been transformed; *one artist has*

⁵⁴ Rogoff, "Smuggling," unpaginated.

instigated a project and organised the activity of no less than six critics and curators, not simply to perform selective or interpretative functions but also to provide the majority of the material content of the work in the form of discourse. Furthermore, and in a yet more complex twist, while the curatorial gesture was able to elevate documentary materials to the status of art in projects like *Documenta 11*, here we see the social document promoting the curators precisely by rendering them visible. During *The Trial*, all of the protagonists are referred to as ‘art world agents’, eradicating distinctions between the roles of artist, critic, curator and theorist still further.⁵⁵

5.4 Performing projects, instituting networks, stimulating epistephilia

In order to explain these developments, it is necessary to look beyond the field of art to broader conditions of production. Discussing his particular brand of co-authorship, Vidokle (rather vaguely) states that he aims for ‘a different kind of subject: not an individualist subject of a capitalist society, not a collective commune, but something else – a kind of collaborative entity that incorporates many different subjectivities.’⁵⁶ It is vital for him that each contributor is able to retain his/her individual identity, even when operating in the thick of the group. In their analysis of the evolving procedures of capitalism, Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello commentate extensively on the societal shifts of the late twentieth century which saw the symbiotic models of the network and the project achieving dominance.⁵⁷ Offering a more open, non-hierarchical, collaborative model, the network effectively precipitated new modes of working, capable of harnessing the potential of these flows, favouring different skills sets and placing new demands upon the worker. Projects manifest themselves as the highly activated sections of such networks, making production and accumulation possible. Gleaned from an analysis of management texts, these observations can be productively transferred to the field of contemporary art. While grassroots initiatives operate on a project-by-project basis, the institution of art has been refreshed and re-animated through the same logic, as can be seen in both New Institutionalism and the exponential rise of biennials noted above.⁵⁸ Boltanski and Chiapello further suggest that ‘relational qualities’ are the cement

⁵⁵ As is the case in many of his projects, Vidokle himself rarely contributes to the content of the programmes other than to reflect upon their structures and methodologies.

⁵⁶ Anton Vidokle, e-mail correspondence with author, May 5, 2009.

⁵⁷ Boltanski and Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*.

⁵⁸ The same can be said of the artwork itself, as the discussion presented in Chapter 3 of this thesis demonstrates.

of projects; as artists, curators, theorists and other specialists coalesce over specific durations of time to *perform* projects, collaboration and interactivity are framed as vital strategic features. They specifically discuss the privileging 'not of standardized knowledge but of personal, integrated knowledge' as well as 'the preserved memory of previous projects.'⁵⁹

It is as *symptoms* of such conditions that the curator and the social document have ascended to such prominence. Both are invested in mediation, are able to function effectively not as isolated components but as 'nodes' or 'singularities' within networks – i.e. consolidated yet relational points of information and knowledge – while also actively engaging with the production of (social) knowledge. Indeed, while the artist is regularly cited as a pioneer (and victim) of precarious labour conditions, it is the figure of the curator that exemplifies the requirements of network-based project work. As an independent creative worker occupying a link position, the forging and facilitation of new collaborations between institutions and individuals is a core element of the contemporary curator's practice. The spirit of entrepreneurialism, which Chin-tao Wu has shown to dominate every phase of contemporary art, has found a new innovator.⁶⁰

Yet this fascination with what can be called the *curatorial function* passes beyond investments in particular individuals to be imbued across what the sociologist Manuel Castells calls the 'network society'.⁶¹ Identifying the emergence of this new social structure in the mid 1990s, Castells argued that it constituted itself as a global system, and was characterised by the dominance of the network model at all the key dimensions of social organisation and practice.

The video *A Crime against Art* not only documents these conditions, it also sharpens and *intensifies production*. In doing so, it corroborates the findings of the artist Rainer Ganahl who has been organising, and recording, reading seminars since 1993. In contrast to Vidokle and Peleg, he treats the video footage of his week-long events as a by-product; left unedited they are stored and rarely viewed. Instead the presence of the cameras is used to institute the proceedings, prime the participants and focus their conversations

⁵⁹ Ibid., 116.

⁶⁰ Chin-tao Wu, *Privatising Culture: Corporate Art Intervention Since the 1980s* (London; New York: Verso, 2002).

⁶¹ Manuel Castells, *The Network Society: A Cross-cultural Perspective* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2004).

on topics that have ranged from 'Reading Frantz Fanon' (Geneva during the G8 protests, 2003) and 'Reading Democracy' (Gwangju, 2010) to 'Reading Elias Canetti, Crowds and Power' (Miami 2014).⁶² Ganahl, however, *does* class the (mute) colour photographs he takes of the same events as part of his artwork alongside the S/L (Seminar/Lectures) series which documents lectures by well-known personalities from academia, including both the speakers and audiences.⁶³ This returns us to the proposal outlined in the Introduction – that the document both requires mediation and can be viewed as a *form that mediation assumes*. In the case of *A Crime against Art* the intercession is *pedagogic* in character.

That the social document is so closely aligned with discursive curatorial projects dedicated to knowledge production and pedagogy is unsurprising given that the etymological roots of the term 'document' connote teaching and the documentary genre's investment in 'stimulat[ing] epistophilia'.⁶⁴ While David Lusted defines pedagogy as addressing 'the transformation of consciousness that takes place in the intersection of three agencies – the teacher, the learner and the knowledge they together produce,' the projects discussed here (and many others like them) appear driven to take this logic further.⁶⁵ In many ways their methodologies resonate particularly strongly with those developed by the Brazilian educator and theorist Paulo Freire. Dedicated to the engendering of critical perception through dialogic, problem-posing methodologies, Freire regarded education as an essential, creative tool for social transformation. In contrast to traditional 'banking' models, premised upon a conception of the individual as a passive, malleable vessel into which information can be deposited, his method centred around the reformulation of this teacher-student dichotomy. Students become critical-co-investigators, working collaboratively in small forums or 'circles' alongside 'dialogic teachers' to analyse self-selected themes which are related to their own experiences of the world. The goal is to re-present a themes – or reality – not as a narrative lecture, not as a fixed actuality, but rather as a problem which can be worked upon critically.⁶⁶ In

⁶² Grammel and Zarbock call this the 'initializing model' of video production. Soren Grammel and Gerhard Zarbock, "Worktop Video" in *The Need to Document*, eds. Vit Havránek, Sabine Schaschl-Cooper and Bettina Steinbrügge (Zurich: JRP Ringier, 2005), 111.

⁶³ For a discussion see Chris Mills & Nick Muellner, "No Ideas but in Things: Photography at Learning's Limit," *Art Journal* 65, no. 2 (2006): 84-101.

⁶⁴ Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary*, 40.

⁶⁵ David Lusted, "Why Pedagogy," *Screen* 27, no. 5 (1986): 3.

⁶⁶ Freire's methods contributed to the development of 'Participatory Action Research' (PAR), a methodology that continues to be employed by social movements and applied in literacy programmes, technology development and academia. Again, the focus remains on countering the practices of 'extractive'

Pedagogy of the Oppressed, where Freire both sets out his philosophy and provides an operative handbook, visual aids (usually sketches or photographs alternately referred to as ‘codifications’ or ‘cognisable objects’) are recommended as a focus through which the process of critical reflection can begin.⁶⁷ To be fully effective, he stipulates that images must represent familiar situations, offer neither explicit, propagandistic content nor be overly enigmatic: their purpose is to encourage the perception of dialectical relations and so they must operate as a ‘thematic fan’. They are not mere objects to be possessed, end points of the cognitive act, but rather provocations.

Is this how documents and social documents are ultimately conceived in the projects discussed above? The format of the ‘Platforms’, ‘Reference Groups’ and ‘sleeping cells’ (advocated by Lind during her witness testimony at *The Trial*) certainly appears to replicate something of Freire’s dialogic ‘circles’. Yet the analogy quickly begins to falter: in place of the mixed group of co-investigators comprising both intellectuals and those whose knowledge has been gleaned through lived experience, the participants in the projects above are entirely comprised of ‘experts’ drawn from the same field – indeed familiar names crop up time and again in such ventures. If further layers of so-called ‘publics’ follow in their wake – those who attended (and perhaps contributed to) the associated events and forums, the exhibition audience, those who read the book and so on – the potential for direct collaboration is inversely proportional to the distance from the centre. While the core network generate ever-stronger links, the majority are effectively relegated to periphery and must content themselves with weaker substitutes.

Yet more significant is the observation that even these peripheral audiences are relatively privileged. With the exception of the projects which limit their concern to the art world itself, Freire’s intended participants – those with ‘lived experience’ of the social realities and issues under question – are not afforded an opportunity to contribute directly. Instead, migrant labourers working on oil pipelines, South African mine workers or poverty-stricken Nigerians are only able to enter the discursive zone only *through the social document as subjects*: they are not the beneficiaries of the social knowledge produced. The divide instituted by the lens and the exhibition form is not so easily overcome.

research and generating a non-coercive system based upon a sustained cycle of reflection / analysis / action.

⁶⁷ Freire, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

5.5 Conclusion

Discussing the ‘culturalisation of politics’ the Russian collective Chto Delat? remarked that, since the beginning of the 1990s, sectors of the creative class had mistakenly begun ‘to understand themselves as a revolutionary class, as a subject of history with enough power to transform both culture and society at large.’⁶⁸ Evincing something of this rhetoric, in their respective testimonies at *The Trial*, Franke commented that, with no visible outside, the avant-garde frontier has become internalised, while Lind advocated that critical artistic practices retreat from the public eye and adopt the stance of a ‘sleeping cell’. In these comments the coincidence of two highly publicised trials taking place at the same time, in the same city, assumes a peculiar relevance. Yet despite the apparent allusions to resistance groups and even terror cells, it is worth emphasising that there is nothing inherently radical or transgressive about the network. As Castells, explains:

It is characteristic of the networked society that both the dynamics of domination and of resistance to domination rely on network formation and network strategies of offence and defence.⁶⁹

In the network society it is not possible to rehearse divisions that set the complicit curator-warden or the fatally compromising institution against ‘radical’ artworks. The interdependencies identified by Pollock have been reinforced to the point of porosity through the (subtle or overt) reconfigurations that the artwork, the institution and creative producers have undergone. With its own networked structure, and as well suited to the priorities of the new landscape which privilege both display and discursive paradigms – from small-scale research groups right through to mega exhibitions – it can be of no surprise that the social document has come into its own during this period. The case study presented in the next chapter will advance this discussion on the social document in relation to mediation and curatorship.

⁶⁸ Dmitry Vilensky, Gerard Raunig, “An Issue of Organisation: Chto Delat?,” *Afterall* 19 (2008), accessed Oct 24, 2010, <http://www.afterall.org/journal/issue.19/issue.organisation.chto.delat>.

⁶⁹ Castells, *The Network Society*, 35.

CHAPTER 6

Social Reproduction

6.1 *From housework to housing*

'Come in, We're HOME': the welcome message painted in red Serif letters onto the door glass immediately proposed an alternative relationship to the Dia Art Foundation exhibition galleries in New York's Soho district. Pointing to a hospitable – if incongruous – set of associations, the sign indicated that over the threshold the usual white cube fare would be in short supply. Sure enough, despite responding to an invitation extended by a prestigious institution known for its programme of solo exhibitions by white male artists, reports and visual documentation suggest that Martha Rosler's project *If You Lived Here...* felt more akin to an occupation, or, perhaps more appropriately, a squat. Packing in an unholy array of activities over the first half of 1989, including three sequential exhibitions, four 'Open Forums' and street-based interventions, it addressed issues relating to urban space, with gentrification, housing and homelessness positioned as central themes.¹

¹ The exhibitions were titled *Home Front, Homeless: The Street and Other Venues* and *City: Visions and Revisions*. The associated book was published two years later in 1991. Brian Wallis, ed., *If You Lived Here...: The City in Art, Theory and Social Activism* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1991).



Figure 37: Martha Rosler, *Home Front*, part of *If You Lived Here...* (exhibition view)
1989

If You Lived Here... captured many of the salient features associated with contemporaneity in artistic practice. Conceived as a discursive documentary project it encompassed a negotiation of conceptions of 'community' as well as an overt concern with capitalist economic relations while deploying collaborative production methodologies that engaged with social activism. At the same time, it furthered Rosler's enduring commitment to institutional critique: in a later essay, the artist acknowledged her recalcitrant desire to 'violate the pristine qualities of their perfect little white-walled box.'² The sheer range of materials, data and positions that were brought to bear on the core themes was indeed jarring for the time, as was the evident reliance upon documentary modes. A heterogeneous collection of work by over 200 invited artists, activists, architects and local people, it incorporated videotapes screened on television monitors, urban plans and an example of an emergency hut-shelter erected by the Mad Houser collective. Photography, woodcuts, collages and children's drawings crammed the walls alongside real estate adverts and graphs illustrating steeply rising levels of wealth inequality. Any lingering associations with rarified cultural space were dispelled by the presence of sofas and soft furnishings, while active participation was encouraged through the inclusion of reading rooms, recycling points and, as part of the second

² Martha Rosler, 'If We Lived Here...' in *Place, Position, Presentation, Public*, ed. Ine Gevers (Amsterdam: Jan Van Eyck Akademie, 1993), 83.

exhibition instalment, a temporary office space run by Homeward Bound Community Services.³



Figure 38: Martha Rosler, *Home Front*, part of *If You Lived Here...* (exhibition view)
1989

The open forums and associated book proceeded along similar lines, resisting closed or authoritative formats and prioritising use value. Stating in her essay contribution that *If You Lived Here...* 'was not only *about* but explicitly *in* the city', Rosalyn Deutsche pointed to the situated character of an artwork that was at once highly reflexive (particularly with regards to Dia's own role in the transformation of the local urban context into an 'Artists' Zone') and that aimed to create a genuinely alternative kind of social space in response to the urgent issues of the time.⁴ Here was a physical articulation of Rosler's stated desire to produce 'an imaginary space in which different tales collided'; a notion that applied equally to her use of photomontage techniques in *House Beautiful: Bringing the War Home* (1967-72) which evinced the influence of Bertolt Brecht's realist approach

³ A self-organised collective of predominantly male and African American members who had inhabited City Hall Park for six months in 1988 to protest political indifference to homelessness.

⁴ Rosalyn Deutsche, "Alternative Space," in *If You Lived Here...: The City in Art, Theory and Social Activism*, ed. Brian Wallis (Seattle: Bay Press, 1991), 45. The title was appropriated from the advertising slogans that lined the commuter rail tracks, attempting to entice the middle-classes in from their suburban fold: 'If you lived here, you'd be home by now.'

on her work. For this series she spliced together pages from *Life* magazine using her scalpel to cut together documentary and news reportage from the Vietnam War with lifestyle sections and advertising to prise open a critical distance and palpably connect the politics underpinning 'public' oppression abroad and 'private' oppression in the home. Her disturbing montages show a terror-stricken parent carrying a wounded baby through the pristine living spaces of an affluent US citizen and a housewife pulling back curtains to reveal a male-dominated battlefield beyond the window. The series was distributed via Women's Movement grassroots publications, and as photocopies at demonstrations before being remade for display in museums and commercial galleries some years later.⁵



Figure 39: Martha Rosler, *Cleaning the Drapes* from the series *House Beautiful: Bringing the War Home* (photomontage) 1967-72

The absence of *If You Lived Here...* from the established lineages is perplexing: Miwon Kwon's account of the 'unhinging' of site specificity in U.S. art from environmental contexts to the mobile sites of discourse affords the project no mention, and it falls just beyond the temporal brackets of Nato Thompson's *Living as Form* compendium of

⁵ Rosler reprised many of the same tactics in response to the Iraq war for the new series *House Beautiful: Bringing the War Home, New Series* (2004-2008). If the technology behind image production had changed in the intervening three decades, the complicity of the press and the political commitment to imperialism had not.

socially-engaged practice.⁶ Realised during the ‘winter years’ of the 1980s, just a few months before the fall of the Berlin Wall and the ensuing consolidation of capitalist globalisation, it appears that, for many at least, *If You Lived Here...* was awkwardly out of time. Its more recent recuperation was instigated in 2009 through both Nina Möntmann’s analysis of its significance for the histories of 1990s ‘New Institutionalism’ in the pages of *e-flux journal* and a display of the project archive in the same organisation’s basement gallery in New York’s Lower East Side.⁷ In 2015, the curator Jorge Ribalta’s Madrid exhibition *Not Yet: On the Reinvention of Documentary and the Critique of Modernism* adopted a different approach, recreating a segment of one of the original exhibitions (complete with period furniture) and positioning it at the *close* of a consideration of documentary discursive production in the ‘long 1970s’.⁸ Yet according to the interpretation materials, the inclusion of this full-scale model was primarily driven by its exemplification of the effort to ‘dismantle’ modernism through means other than the lens or questions of representation – namely the critique and regeneration of the art institution itself. In this chapter I will take a different approach to argue that *If You Lived Here...* constitutes an exemplary instance of an exhibition/artwork operating as a social document. In doing so I aim to both highlight its connection to (and indeed problematisation of) the discursive curatorial ventures discussed in the previous chapter and loop back to the argument initiated in Chapter 1 where I insisted on the centrality of documentary modes within specifically *feminist* strategies. Within these struggles and histories the social document as a formation has undergone radical experimentation and development.

If a feminist perspective has been missing from the various recoveries of *If You Lived Here...* outlined above, the project has also been neglected by surveys of ‘feminist art’ – despite Rosler’s undoubted prominence within these histories, both in terms of practice and theory, as well as her readiness to affirm feminism as her ‘central frame of reference’.⁹ Instead, discussions tend to centre on her brief but hilariously acidic performance-to-tape *Semiotics of the Kitchen* (1975) and other works within her

⁶ Kwon, *One Place after Another*; Thompson, *Living as Form*.

⁷ Nina Möntmann, “(Under)Privileged Spaces: On Martha Rosler’s *If You Lived Here...*,” *e-flux journal* 9 (2009), accessed Oct 3, 2015, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/09/61370/under-privileged-spaces-on-martha-rosler-s-if-you-lived-here-8230/>. The archive exhibition later toured to Europe with presentations at Casco (Utrecht) and La Virreina (Barcelona).

⁸ *If You Lived Here...* occupied the final room of the Madrid exhibition while an excerpt from Rosler’s text on (and as part of) the artwork occupied the final pages of Ribalta’s exhibition book.

⁹ Martha Rosler, *Decoys and Disruptions: Selected Writings, 1975-2001* (New York; Cambridge MA: MIT Press in association with International Center of Photography, 2004), x.

substantial oeuvre that deal explicitly with sexual politics, the economies of service and sites of domesticity.¹⁰ Yet while her Dia project did not conform to the thematic dominance of the gendered private sphere observed in prior intersections of feminism and art, Rosler dedicated the associated book to ‘women around the world who organize their buildings and their blocks and their neighborhoods to secure decent conditions for everyone and to maintain a sense of place.’¹¹ *If You Lived Here...* enacts a significant shift: away from models that had preoccupied many feminist artists, such as that of the classed post-war housewife, towards addressing an urban subject produced under neoliberal capitalism.

In this chapter I will reappraise *If You Lived Here...* by employing theories of ‘social reproduction’ elaborated in feminist political economy. I will consider what value the theories associated with this concept can bring to an analysis of both the social document and to feminist art history. More specifically I ask whether the adoption of such a viewpoint can help to identify and illuminate previously neglected threads – not least among them a reliance on documentary modes – connecting artistic production from the late 1960s through to the present day. My intention is not to simply undertake a historical inventory, rather, I intend to advocate the usefulness of a social reproduction perspective to the facilitation of current struggles and the future of a contemporary feminism.¹²

6.2 Social reproduction, topography and cognitive mapping

If the terms ‘labour’ and ‘economy’ have forcefully emerged at the heart of contemporary arts’ critical lexicon, the same feat cannot be claimed for the more unwieldy (yet deeply connected) ‘social reproduction’. That in 2016 ‘social reproduction’ has failed to assert itself as one of the early 21st century’s keywords does not reflect developments within feminist thought on the left where it has undergone an impressive resurgence. Historically, social reproduction has been connected to discussions of the private domestic sphere where normally female labour sustains and then replenishes the

¹⁰ See Helena Reckitt, *Art and Feminism* (London: Phaidon, 2006); Molesworth, “House Work and Art Work.”

¹¹ Martha Rosler, “Fragments of a Metropolitan Viewpoint,” in *If You Lived Here...: The City in Art, Theory and Social Activism*, ed. Brian Wallis (Seattle: Bay Press, 1991), 43.

¹² A special issue of *Third Text* is forthcoming in 2017, co-edited and with an introduction by Angela Dimitrakaki and myself. It will examine the impact of social reproduction on art and the art world from industrialisation through to globalisation.

working population, both on a daily basis and over the course of generations. Taking a more comprehensive view, recent feminist literature usually identifies three main aspects of social reproduction summarised by Isabella Bakker as: 1) biological, encompassing both the reproduction of the species and the environment, 2) the maintenance of working subjects, and, 3) those activities, practices and services connected to caring, socialisation and the fulfillment of human needs.¹³ It involves the provision of necessities such as food, shelter and healthcare right through to the production of social values through culture and education.¹⁴ In recent years what Kathi Weeks has described as its 'contradictory' relationship with capital accumulation has become yet more pronounced: intensified processes of biopolitical globalisation, the associated restructuring of the nation state, together with the re-privatisation of services, responsibilities and risks, have been concomitant with significant changes in labour patterns.¹⁵ While capitalist structures of domination and exploitation remain predicated on race and class, it is also amongst the experiences of women that the impact of these dislocating re-organisations can be most plainly witnessed, as the prevalence of phrases like the 'feminisation of poverty/labour/survival' attests.¹⁶

Meg Luxton has argued that, though the accumulation of theoretical work that has developed around the concept of social reproduction has its roots in the analysis of the sex/gender division of labour and the domestic labour debates, 'too often conventional feminist use of social reproduction still focuses on women's work in the home.'¹⁷ For her, the strength of the concept lies in its potential to support a perspective capable of apprehending how various institutions (from the market and the state to the family and third sector) intersect, and which, at the same time, remains alert to the specificities of gender, race and class:

By developing a class analysis that shows how the production of goods and services and the production of life are part of one integrated process, social reproduction does more than identify the activities involved in the daily and generation reproduction of daily life. It allows for an explanation of the structures, relationships, and dynamics that produce those activities.¹⁸

¹³ Ibid., 4.

¹⁴ Kate Bexanson and Meg Luxton, eds., *Social Reproduction: Feminist Political Economy Challenges Neoliberalism* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006), 3.

¹⁵ Weeks, *The Problem with Work*, 27.

¹⁶ See Diane Elson, ed., *Male Bias in the Development Process* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995); Mary E. Hawkesworth, *Globalization and Feminist Activism* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006).

¹⁷ Bexanson and Luxton, eds., *Social Reproduction*, 36.

¹⁸ Ibid., 37.

Unsurprisingly, much recent writing tends to focus on the social and spatial impact of fresh attacks on the connections between production and reproduction.¹⁹ In doing so, it frequently offers valuable integrative accounts that attempt to illuminate the hidden – and often remote – structural supports and shadows of conventional production and the formal economy, capturing connections between disparate contexts and situations.

Though the concept of social reproduction offers a range of analytic tools and perspectives, in this chapter I focus primarily on one particular research strategy and how it might begin to shape a consideration of the use of documentary modes within *If You Lived Here....* geographer Cindi Katz's conception of 'topography' was developed around the turn of the century in response to the requirement for a gendered oppositional politics focused on social reproduction: 'the early 21st century', she argues, 'requires a new form of organizing, a new political agenda, and a new more nuanced scale of practice.' For Katz, the era of globalised or 'vagabond' capitalism ('that unsettled, dissolute, irresponsible stalker of the world') demands approaches capable of examining its complex, interlinked effects and repercussions.²⁰ The process of gathering and mapping topographical data appropriates techniques of surveillance and control, generating thoroughly *material* place-based knowledge through 'thick descriptions' that apprehend *both* the descriptive detail of particular sites as well as the 'totality of the features that comprise the place itself.'²¹ Grounded in the social sciences, her own academic work takes the form of multi-angled textual examinations of the disruption of social reproduction in particular locations – in one case working on a village in central eastern Sudan and Harlem in New York. So, while Marx ventured into the 'hidden abode of production', Katz offers topographies and countertopographies as methodologies suitable for excursions into the diffuse, tangled and arguably even more obscured arenas of globalised social reproduction.²²

¹⁹ Some hold that 'Social Reproduction Feminism' constitutes a theoretical framework though this has been contested. See Sue Ferguson, "Canadian Contributions to Social Reproduction Feminism, Race and Embodied Labor," *Race, Gender & Class* 15, no. 1-2 (2008): 42-57.

²⁰ Cindi Katz, "Vagabond Capitalism and the Necessity of Social Reproduction," *Antipode* 33, no. 4 (2001), 719; 709.

²¹ Ibid, 720. 'Thick description' is a methodology used by anthropologists and others, widely associated with Clifford Geertz.

²² Marx, *Capital*, 279.

The resonance between Katz's proposals and Fredric Jameson's earlier call for a new aesthetics of 'cognitive mapping' is clearly apparent, albeit for the social sciences rather than the arts.²³ First elaborated in a lecture in 1983, then published as a short essay in 1988, Jameson's conception sought to revive the pedagogic function of the work of art while pushing to the fore questions of representation; that is, the substantive challenges posed for the work of art in terms of addressing the *unrepresentable* conditions, processes and sites of late capitalism. Though Jameson acknowledged his inability to imagine the precise form of such an aesthetic, his hopes for 'the emergent primacy of mechanical reproduction' (photography and video) have certainly been borne out, while the intervening years have also seen contemporary art's drive towards research and knowledge production lend a particular weight to processes of mapping and critical cartography.²⁴ Yet it is in theorisations of the expansion of documentary modes and practices that his ideas have found substantive resonance. In *The Migrant Image* T.J. Demos returns to another of Jameson's texts to interrogate his belief in the future of a 'cartography that could translate the Real' as part of his analysis of artists' use of documentary modes, arguing that such a conception is in danger of reaffirming the problematic connection between representation and 'truth' as well as 'situating the viewer as a docile recipient of factual information.'²⁵ As discussed in Part I of this thesis, Demos (somehow unconvincingly) advocates instead for the political potential of ambiguity and irresolution. However, returning to Jameson's words shows that his conception is considerably more nuanced than the reading offered by Demos:

The cognitive map is not exactly mimetic, in that older sense; indeed the theoretical issues it poses allow us to renew the analysis of representation on a higher and much more complex level... Surely this is exactly what the cognitive map is called upon to do, in the narrower framework of daily life in the physical city: *to enable a situational representation on the part of the individual subject to that vaster and properly unrepresentable totality* which is the ensemble of the city's structure as a whole [emphasis added].²⁶

Jameson's conceptualisation of mapping has also informed Carles Guerra's analysis of the ascendancy of documentary modes in art while Angela Dimitrakaki has explicitly

²³ Jameson, "Cognitive Mapping."

²⁴ Jameson, "Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism."

²⁵ Demos, *The Migrant Image*, 219. Demos refers instead to Jameson's essay "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism."

²⁶ Jameson, "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," 89-90.

connected it to the reassertion of materialist feminism in her analysis of Ursula Biemann's video essays.²⁷

Katz's 'topography' offers one way then to add meat to the bones of Jameson's sketched outline as well as a productive framework for examining the strategies adopted within *If You Lived Here....* As I will discuss, implicitly recognising the *impossibility of representing social reproduction*, both Katz and Rosler privilege the *relations between fragments* in their respective attempts to bridge the gaps between the economic, the ideological, and lived subjectivity. At the same time, the importance afforded by Katz to the accrual and mapping of data is analogous to the central place held by documentary modes in *If You Lived Here....* For not only did the cycle of exhibitions include a large proportion of documentary video and photography, the project frame also served to force an expansion of the definition of 'document' beyond stylistic tropes or conventional genre categorisations. Excised from their usual contexts and treated as repositories of information, individual components (from the recreated tenement kitchen to the posters, recycling bins and spoken testimonies) were ascribed an evidential status – even whilst, in some cases, retaining their use value. Of course Rosler's sceptical attitude towards traditional documentary is well known through her influential theoretical writings on the subject that point to the genre's naturalisation of unequal power relations and evacuation of politics.²⁸ Here then is an artwork developed in the light of these trenchant critiques that experiments with new approaches to the documentary project – one that I argue constitutes a 'social document'. A crucial aspect of this enterprise is the attempt to describe, engage with, and intervene in the territories and practices of social reproduction.

6.3 Home truths: In and around the city

*If you can't afford to live here, mo-o-ve!!*²⁹

If You Lived Here... was undoubtedly realised under contradictory and crisis-riven conditions; a moment when social polarisation in the US had reached achingly visible levels. For many the provision of basic human needs was faltering, rendering the true

²⁷ Guerra, "Narratives of Europe." Biemann herself refers to her work as topographic. See Ursula Biemann, "Remotely Sensed: A Topography of the Global Sex Trade," *Feminist Review* 80 (2005): 180-193.

²⁸ See Chapter 4 of this thesis and Rosler, "In, around and Afterthoughts," 151-206.

²⁹ New York City Mayor Ed Koch's quote was printed on the wall of the *If You Lived Here... Home Front* exhibition.

costs of social reproduction starkly apparent. As the 1980s housing crisis deepened Peter Dreier and Richard Appelbaum observed that: '[t]he spectacle of homeless Americans living literally in the shadow of luxury condos and yuppie boutiques symbolized the paradox of the decade.'³⁰ Fundamental economic shifts including de-industrialisation and reduced or stagnating incomes gave rise to an 'affordability gap' as real-estate speculation and gentrification schemes became widespread, their effects compounded by changes in public policy and budgets which saw federal housing assistance radically cut and a chronic dearth in supplies of homes for those on low incomes. Statistics on homelessness over this period have been much contested – both in terms of scale and composition. Joel Blau's account of the various wrangles over figures identifies a study cited in 1988 by the National Alliance to End Homelessness as the most reliable judgment: 735,000 people on any one night across the U.S., and 1.3 to 2 million people over the course of an entire year.³¹ One year later, during the *If You Lived Here...* programme, this figure translated into 82 per cent of New Yorkers encountering the homeless during the course of their daily routine.³² Arguably, what became known as the city's 'homeless crisis' was very much predicated on this relatively sudden, yet relentless, *visibility*.

Alive in the mind of the project's audience would also have been the police riot in Tompkins Square Park on the city's Lower East Side just a few months prior. A sleeping place for the dispossessed, the site had become charged with tensions around gentrification.³³ The pivotal confrontation in August 1988 was ignited by brutal police attempts to impose a curfew, clear encampments and evict squatters. During the 'Housing' open forum the geographer and project interlocutor Neil Smith referenced this notorious incident, tracing a shift in urban discourse from the 1960s onwards in which fear of the blighted and declining U.S. city was steadily replaced by the romantic optimism – and violence – of the frontier.³⁴ Likening the language of gentrification to nineteenth-century literature on the conquest of the wilderness, he argued that the

³⁰ Peter Dreier and Richard Appelbaum, "American Nightmare: Homelessness," *Challenge* 34, no. 2 (1991): 46-52.

³¹ Joel Blau, *The Visible Poor: Homelessness in the United States* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 24. See pages 15-24 for an account of the data and interpretations.

³² Cited in Blau, *The Visible Poor*, 3; 220.

³³ See Rosalyn Deutsche and Cara Gendel Ryan, "The Fine Art of Gentrification," *October* 31 (1984): 91-111.

³⁴ See 'Housing: Gentrification, Dislocation and Fighting Back' held on 28 February 1989 as part of the *If You Lived Here...* programme. Transcript in Wallis, *If You Lived Here...*, 108-114. Similar points are rehearsed in Neil Smith, "Of Yuppies and Housing: Gentrification, Social Restructuring, and the Urban Dream," *Environment and Planning D* 5 (1987): 151-172; Neil Smith *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City* (London: Routledge, 1996).

‘pioneering’ spirit had framed both sites as socially uninhabited: just as Native Americans were considered to be less than social and effectively part of the physical landscape, so was the urban working class. *If You Lived Here...* dealt with this neoliberal ‘taming’ process and its fallout.³⁵



Figure 40: Martha Rosler, *City Visions and Revisions*, part of *If You Lived Here...* (exhibition view) 1989

While the gendering of the terminology Smith cites is plain, contemporaneous debates were beginning to attend to a class-based division of female experiences of gentrification, addressing women’s position as both drivers and victims of a process influenced by transforming patterns of production and reproduction.³⁶ In terms of the former, women’s struggle for inclusion and subsequent entry into the workforce was frequently credited with stimulating demand for expensive private housing in central locations as well as alternative lifestyles. Yet the successful incorporation of some women did not entail a substantive challenge to the exclusionary order of the system itself, resulting in disparities of experience across a range of positions, with those nearer

³⁵ Rosler certainly wasn’t alone in focusing attention on the housing crisis and privatised urban renewal: artistic responses to gentrification are well represented within the Political Art Documentation/Distribution (PAD/D) archive. See Gregory Sholette, “The Grin of the Archive,” in *Dark Matter: Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture* (London: Pluto Press, 2011): 46-70.

³⁶ See Liz Bondi, “Gender Divisions and Gentrification: A Critique,” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 16, no. 2 (1991): 190-198.

the bottom of the income hierarchy often subjected to displacement.³⁷ Countering the formerly prevalent picture of white, male alcoholic street dwellers, the statistics gathered by Blau indicate that women made up 46 per cent of the total homeless population across the US, while slightly more than half were people of colour. His figures also suggest that the latter years of the 1980s saw the number of homeless families in certain cities (including New York) rise starkly, again to more than half the population.³⁸ Materials mobilised as part of *If You Lived Here...* addressed these complexities together with the centrality of gender and race to the transformations of social relations underway. As in other projects however, Rosler does not directly acknowledge their thematic prominence. For example, discussing her *Garage Sales* of 1973 and 2012 she notes that, though an analysis of the position of women was integral, she preferred to leave the topic unspoken, partly on the basis that 'feminist talk' tended to foreclose responses but also because she aimed to implicitly connect such questions to issues of value, commodity fetishism and community.³⁹ Similarly, the tactical invocation of what Rosler called the '(trendy) issues of "the city"' in *If You Lived Here...* at once glossed the unusually high visibility of women in public space and served to bring fresh and valuable perspectives to the public/private dichotomy that feminism was so keen to deconstruct in the 1970s, often through deployment of documentary modes.⁴⁰

6.4 A relational social document

Like Katz, Rosler was concerned with performing excavations, with reviewing and critiquing 'the social and political-economic relations sedimented into space'.⁴¹ The artist later asserted that it was her interrogation of power relations within a very particular place, rather than pursuing a more abstract 'critique in general', that made *If You Lived Here...* so distasteful to the art world of the time.⁴² No doubt the large proportion of 'non-art' documentary materials exacerbated this response, yet the *descriptive* attributes of the document were plainly indispensable in terms of denaturalising neoliberal urbanism

³⁷ This is not of course to argue that women were the sole cause of urban transformation during this period, as Damaris Rose maintains, a 'multiplicity of processes' precipitated gentrification. See Damaris Rose, "Rethinking Gentrification: Beyond the Uneven Development of Marxist Urban Theory," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 2 (1984): 62.

³⁸ '[t]he 40 percent of the sheltered population in families in 1988 was almost twice the proportion of 21 percent who were homeless four years earlier'. Blau, *The Visible Poor*, 25-26.

³⁹ See Abbe Schriber, "In Conversation: Martha Rosler with Abbe Schriber," *The Brooklyn Rail*, Feb 5, 2014, accessed Aug 22, 2015, www.brooklynrail.org/2014/02/art_books/martha-rosler-with-abbe-schriber.

⁴⁰ Rosler, "Place, Position, Power, Politics," 69.

⁴¹ Katz, "Vagabond Capitalism and the Necessity of Social Reproduction," 721.

⁴² Rosler, "Place, Position, Power, Politics," 60.

and rendering social contradictions visible. To give just a few examples, Marie-Annick Brown presented documentation tracing the financial history of a single apartment building in Harlem, from construction to neglect and subsequent revival as a highly desirable real estate; Bob McKeown's documentary photographs covered the formation of the Homeless Union in Wayne County, Michigan in 1988 while Dan Graham and Robin Hurst's contribution tackled corporatised 'public' space using images and text.⁴³ Notably the items and works selected by Rosler for display approached the negotiation of space not only as classed but also as gendered. Many of the video works in particular dealt with *women's* perspectives, giving voice to mothers concerned about rising rents and following others in their experiences of eviction, fights for access to adequate housing and attempts at homemaking. This focus addressed the relative lack of visibility around family experiences of housing crises, where reliance upon the homes of relatives or other forms of stop-gap accommodation was common. Other inclusions documented and interrogated the harrowing challenges that faced maligned 'bag ladies'; lone, highly vulnerable women precariously sustaining themselves on the streets and through a dysfunctional shelter system. These close descriptions entwined geographic anchors with personal chronicles, documenting how – and to what level – social reproduction was accomplished in a range of contexts from dispossessed families to artist collectives. Captured and disseminated by videotapes, audio and written recordings as well as through testimonies at the open forums, they provided vital topographic coordinates that grasped the *intimate* dimensions of the neoliberal administration and creation of poverty.

⁴³ Notably not all documentary inclusions could be described as 'reconstructed'. Admitting that many displayed little evidence of reflexivity, Rosler was careful to foreground questions relating to the politics of representation within the project narratives, at one point using the exhibition context as a platform for the continuation of trenchant debates around what she refers to as 'victim photography'. Rosler, "Fragments of a Metropolitan Viewpoint," 37; 34.



Figure 41: Martha Rosler, *Homelessness: Conditions, Causes and Uses*, part of *If You Lived Here...* (exhibition view) 1989

The centrality of embodied or ‘situated’ knowledge within *If You Lived Here...* must be seen in relation to the feminist acknowledgement of the importance of such perspectives to any history or indeed political project.⁴⁴ However, just as Katz (echoing Jameson) asserted that ‘situated knowledge alone is not enough, and the notion may even have begun to hobble our political imaginations,’ Rosler could not accept ‘straight’ documentary forms that stop – so to speak – at the experiential.⁴⁵ Rather, they had to be mediated, or, (in her words) ‘intelligently situated – and that usually means textually anchored.’⁴⁶ In the case of *If You Lived Here...* mediation took the form of *experimental curatorial strategies* that established lines of elevation by setting a variety of topographic coordinates – subjective, statistical, theoretical – in relation to each other. While the range of perspectives Katz advocates are readily apprehended in Rosler’s eclectic, polyvocal project, the artist’s use of the expanded exhibition form spatialised the investigations and pluralised their interpretations. Also in evidence are the beginnings of something comparable to Katz’s ‘contour lines’: connections drawn between geographically and culturally distinct places or instances as part of a process she calls

⁴⁴ See Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective,” *Feminist Studies*, 14, no. 3 (1988): 575-599; Ferguson, “Canadian Contributions to Social Reproduction Feminism, Race and Embodied Labor,” 47.

⁴⁵ Katz, “Vagabond Capitalism and the Necessity of Social Reproduction,” 723.

⁴⁶ Steve Edwards, “Secrets from the Street and Other Stories,” *Ten.8* 35 (1989/90): 41.

‘countertopography’. Though the majority of the exhibition materials presented concerned housing and gentrification in New York City at the tail end of the 1980s, a good proportion focused on how the same issue played out across other sites in the U.S. as well as internationally in other so-called ‘originating cities’ such as London.⁴⁷ In Katz’s words, ‘[f]inding, demonstrating, and understanding these connections and what they give rise to are crucial to challenging them effectively.’⁴⁸ The strength, then, of Rosler’s engagement with what I am calling ‘topographical curating’ lay in this *cumulation* of heterogeneous materials to build thick descriptions that attended to *the causes, effects and contexts* of a crisis in social reproduction.



Figure 42: Martha Rosler, meeting conducted by Homeward Bound Community Services, *Homeless: The Street and Other Venues*, part of *If You Lived Here...* (event view) 1989

Engineering receptive contexts in which artists, activists, community groups, support organisations, theorists, urban planners and homeless people could come together, *If You Lived Here...* clearly took a different approach to the ‘taking care’ of art that the etymological roots of the verb *curare* are often taken to imply. Not limited to the

⁴⁷ Overseas examples included Lorraine Leeson, Peter Dunn’s *Docklands Community Poster Project*, based in London’s East End throughout the 1980s.

⁴⁸ Katz, “Vagabond Capitalism and the Necessity of Social Reproduction,” 721.

organisation and preservation of objects, the project addressed a need to forge connections: Neil Smith later noted that although a number of groups and struggles were formed around the intersecting issues relating to homelessness, squatting and housing at this time, in New York at least, they rarely came together in city-wide movements.⁴⁹ It was in this fractured context that Rosler's brand of radical hospitality aimed to produce and consolidate a community of interest. The importance accorded to the series of four open forums is indicative: held monthly on weekday evenings, invited speakers and audience members responded to specific themes ranging from housing and homelessness to planning.⁵⁰ With the exception of the forum dedicated to the complexities of artists' positions vis-à-vis gentrification only one creative practitioner was represented on each panel. Reporters, lawyers, members of community action organisations and academics took up the majority of positions while advertising posters emphasised the open floor policy, appealing to local people to attend and speak out. These public forums were far from ancillary and were organised in close conjunction with the exhibition programme. Just as in the displays, distinct areas of concern and struggle were drawn into close proximity through the participation of groups variously battling to enhance the visibility of the specific challenges facing people living with AIDS (ACT UP), secure adequate accommodation for precarious families living in the Brooklyn Arms Hotel (Parents on the Move) or offer practical assistance for artists interested in developing collectively owned studio co-ops (ArtistSpace). Edited transcriptions of the animated discussions later appeared in the associated publication, tellingly labelled by *Publishers Weekly* as 'a practical manual for community organizing.'

Rosler's desire to use her practice to create a space where 'different tales' – and, I would add, voices – could collide undoubtedly found concrete expression as a social document in *If You Lived Here....*⁵¹ However, despite clearly inheriting the commitment to collaborative working methodologies that shaped so many of the previous crossings between feminism and artistic practice, Rosler's gestures towards the dispersal of creative production did not ultimately trouble her own position. Her retention of authorship status both nods to the project's location in the heart of the mainstream art

⁴⁹ Neil Smith, "New Globalism, New Urbanism: Gentrification as Global Urban Strategy," *Antipode* 34, no. 3 (2002): 442.

⁵⁰ The open forums were titled: 'Housing: Gentrification, Dislocation, and Fighting Back!' (28 February 1989), 'Artists' Life/Work: Housing and Community for Artists (14 March 1989), 'Homelessness: Conditions, Causes, Cures' (26 April 1989), 'Planning: Power, Politics, and People' (16 May 1989).

⁵¹ Rosler, "Place, Position, Power, Politics, 58.

world and prefigures the current requirement for participatory and social practice to promote a marketable name or, in its place, brand. Nevertheless, *If You Lived Here....* must be viewed as another example of an experimental *worktable* that effectively produced both the displayed materials and live contributions as part of the *relational* social document.⁵² As Rosler's previous writing on the subject suggests, their most significant attribute was their supportive relation to (and direct engagement with) social activism; for her, a prerequisite for the necessary reinvention of the documentary project.⁵³

6.5 *Bringing it back home: Life at the frontier*

Occupying a hinge historical moment, *If You Lived Here...* signaled core themes that have come to define the outset of the twenty-first century – (forced) mobility, precarity and, not least, shelter. Smith described the 1970s and 1980s as the 'anchoring phase' of gentrification, the wave before the process became a truly global urban strategy.⁵⁴ The intervening years have seen this more recent (uneven) systematisation intersect in complex ways with the 2008 financial crisis. With housing debt at its epicenter, mass insecurity, evictions, abandonment, homelessness and escalating struggles for the right to housing have figured prominently in its long wake. Repercussions have seen the use of austerity rhetoric in the U.K. to justify the removal and reduction of state benefits that subsidised private rental costs for lower income households, exacerbating the urgent lack of affordable housing and leading to the segregation of cities.⁵⁵ Meanwhile, a swell of foreclosures that precipitated the loss of homes for hundreds of thousands of people in Spain was followed in 2015 by the election of female city mayors on explicitly anti-

⁵² Here I'm using the definition of 'relational' as provided by the Oxford English Dictionary: 'Of or belonging to human relationship' and 'Of, belonging to, or characterized by relation in general,' as well as its usage in grammar: 'A conjunction or preposition considered as a relation-word; a relational particle.' *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., Vol XIII, s.v. "relational."

⁵³ Rosler, "In, around and Afterthoughts," 196.

⁵⁴ Smith, "New Globalism, New Urbanism," 40. For a critical account of gentrification processes and debates pertaining to the global south see Loretta Lees, Hyun Bang Shin, Ernesto Lopez-Morales eds., *Global Gentrifications: Uneven Development and Displacement* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2015).

⁵⁵ See Kate Webb, "Unpicking the Unravelling of Housing Benefit," Shelter Policy Blog, Jul 9, 2015, accessed Nov 1, 2015, <http://blog.shelter.org.uk/2015/07/budget-2015-unpicking-the-unravelling-of-housing-benefit/>; Nick Duxbury and Jess McCabe, "The Rise of the Housing Activist," Inside Housing, 1 May 1, 2015, accessed Aug 15, 2015, <http://www.oceanmediagroup.co.uk/features/housingprotests/>. The well-reported actions of the Focus E15 mothers who occupied homes in an empty London estate to resist their 'decant' to cheaper cities and agitate for adequate social housing provision, prompted a repeat of NYC Mayor Ed Koch's prescient admonishment over two decades prior when the borough mayor reportedly advised them: 'If you can't afford to live in Newham, you can't afford to live in Newham.' See Jasmin Stone, "Why March for Homes," *Guardian*, Jan 31, 2015, accessed Aug 15, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/jan/31/march-for-homes-focus-e15-mums-london-homelessness-priced-out-area>.

austerity and anti-eviction platforms.⁵⁶ If the UK was already familiar with the displacements and appropriations of space stemming from the financialisation of housing production and consumption, they constituted a relatively new experience in the context of Southern Europe.⁵⁷ From this perspective, the debates on neoliberal urbanism and gentrification that undergirded the *If You Lived Here Project...* anticipated and prefigured these latest socio-spatial restructurings under the neoliberal agenda for globalisation. It is under these material conditions that social reproduction has been spurred to attention.

Alexandra Kokoli has observed that: '[l]ike the body, "home" never ceases to be a major concern for feminism'.⁵⁸ Indeed, feminist activists, scholars and artists have long countered the autonomous conception of the home as a neutral, congenial and self-contained space, seeking instead to connect it to other sites of social and economic life. Those video works within Rosler's oeuvre, now so deeply embedded within the established narratives of feminist art history, were concerned with precisely this effort. Whether documenting her parody of a housewife aggressively wielding cooking utensils in *Semiotics of the Kitchen* or the systematic measurement of her naked body by clothed clinicians in *Vital Statistics of a Citizen, Simply Obtained* (1977), Rosler's early documentary videotapes observed the private female, isolated in highly controlled domestic and pseudo-scientific environments. *If You Lived Here...* takes the next step, describing and addressing women (in the plural) as subjects that 'live' under the general pressure of the neoliberal remaking of the urban fabric. Even without naming it as such, each of these works implicitly acknowledge the pivotal place that social reproduction holds in the organisation of a given capitalist society. The pronounced, and unfamiliar, presence of women in the context of a project focused on the city is a consequence of the way in which *If You Lived Here...* foregrounded social reproduction by connecting the public (urban space) to the private (the *lives* of the people it presents). The documents of women forced to exist publicly, shamed for failing to make 'happy homes', undoubtedly constitute the most extreme articulation of this presence, brutally demonstrating that domestic space is classed and materially under threat. Yet throughout the wide spectrum of lived perspectives, statistics and information

⁵⁶ Amy Goodman, "From Occupying Banks to City Hall," Democracy Now, Jun 5, 2015, accessed Aug 15, 2015, http://www.democracynow.org/2015/6/5/from_occupying_banks_to_city_hall.

⁵⁷ Thanks to Angela Dimitrakaki for this latter insight.

⁵⁸ Alexandra M. Kokoli, "Undoing "Homeliness" in Feminist Art: *Feministo: Portrait of the Artist as a Housewife* (1975-7)," *n.paradoxa* 13 (2004): 83.

presented – and despite the fact that Rosler did not explicitly connect the project with a strictly female experience – the social truth that it is women who carry the burden of reproducing social life, of being homemakers, is strikingly apparent.

In this chapter I have used *If You Lived Here...* as a case through which to affirm the concept of social reproduction's relevance to feminist art history and begin the process of identifying a continuum of women artists who have tackled this problem. Moreover, its reappraisal not only points to the centrality of *documentary modes* within this continuum, it demonstrates their complexity and indeed sophistication of their deployment. In this way, reviewing historical and current art practices from a social reproduction perspective prises open opportunities to establish fertile connections and elaborate alternative narrative arcs – here specifically that of the complex trajectory of the social document.

Helena Reckitt's incisive remarks on the 'memory lapse' to which Nicolas Bourriaud fell victim in his influential account of the relational practices of the 1990s were the first to connect art's more recent forays into the social field to feminism, calling attention to his elision of feminist precedents (and with them the stark challenges they pose to his theory), the gender politics of his featured artists as well as the 'feminisation' of artistic and curatorial labour.⁵⁹ While these observations are undoubtedly useful, the framework offered by theories of social reproduction can be deployed to push critiques of social and socially-engaged practice (old and new) in fresh directions, not least in terms of underlining the relevance of feminist analyses *beyond* the walls of the home. Further inclusions for the alternative lineage called for here would include and connect many examples cited elsewhere in this thesis such as Kay Hunt, Margaret Harrison and Mary Kelly's *Women and Work: A Document on the Division of Labour in Industry* (1973-75); Mierle Laderman Ukeles's provocative attempts to valorise caring labour by raising it the status of Art through the photographic documentation of her *Maintenance Art Performances* (1973-74); and Ana Maria Garcia's chilling documentary *La Operación* (1982) discussed in Chapter 4 which offered an historical analysis of the mass sterilization of Puerto Rican women as part of an economic policy centred on the labour preferences of U.S. manufacturing industries based on the island. In each of these

⁵⁹ Helena Reckitt, "Forgotten Relations: Feminist Artists and Relational Aesthetics," in *Politics in a Glass Case: Feminism, Exhibition Cultures and Curatorial Transgressions*, eds. Angela Dimitrakaki and Lara Perry (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press: 2013): 131-156.

examples there is a marked reliance upon documentary modes to excavate and traverse the links not just between production and reproduction, but to grasp – as Luxton put it – their condition as parts ‘of one integrated process.’⁶⁰

More recently, the rise of social practice in art since 1989 has seen artists and collectives document their responses to contradictions and crises in the processes of social reproduction, often stepping in to plug gaps in provision that have opened up as a result of the retreat or absence of the welfare state.⁶¹ In bringing new dimensions to discussions on the constitutive role of culture in the preservation of power and the reproduction of the dominance of capital (both at an ideological and material level), artistic social practice both acts within the terrains of social reproduction and finds itself caught in its predicaments: on the one hand, operating as a palliative (symbolic or concrete) and thereby reproducing capitalist social relations while, on the other, offering potential grounds for counter struggles. In chronicling the ways in which individuals, families and communities negotiated a large-scale economic project, *If You Lived Here...* registered a similar enduring paradox: the documentation, close descriptions and propositions at once revealed the *creativity* of everyday practices centred on resistance and the invention of new forms of social reproduction as well as the apparently boundless (though certainly not painless) human capacity for absorption, adaption and survival. What Rosler’s artwork is notable for is its conscious attempt to register and yet look beyond isolated instances of need (which inevitably elicit a charitable or ethical response), to situate the experiences of individual subjects in relation to what Jameson calls ‘that vaster and properly unrepresentable totality.’⁶²

Identifying social reproduction as the ‘pulsating heart’ of the entire capitalist system, Leopoldina Fortunarti recently noted that the reproductive sphere has also been the site of the most relevant political and social movements of the last decades, from the Arab uprisings to the Indignados movement in Spain, to Occupy Wall Street in the United States.⁶³ Yet there remain inherent and entrenched difficulties in terms of organising

⁶⁰ Bexanson and Luxton (eds), *Social Reproduction: Feminist Political Economy Challenges Neoliberalism*, 37.

⁶¹ See the examples given in Chapter 3, which can be considered afresh through the social reproduction lens. This issue is examined in greater depth in Chapter 7 of this thesis through a close examination of WochenKlausur’s project *Participatory Economics* (2013). See also Casco’s ‘living research’ project titled *Grand Domestic Revolution*.

⁶² Jameson, “Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism,” 90.

⁶³ Leopoldina Fortunarti, “Social Reproduction, But Not As We Know It,” *Viewpoint Magazine*, 5 (2015), accessed Dec 11, 2015, <https://viewpointmag.com/2015/10/31/social-reproduction-but-not-as-we-know-it/#fn4-5164>.

politically within the territories of social reproduction. Seen in the light of Katz's critical topographies, Rosler's exhibition-as-social document constitutes a prescient attempt to prepare the grounds for action by apprehending the intersections between state policies, the logic of capital accumulation, domestic life and the formation of subjectivity. In their respective offers of an analytic research tool and an experimental documentary project, Katz and Rosler join many others in stressing the importance of *material social practices* to understanding and opposing the 'abstractions' of neoliberal urbanism and globalisation.⁶⁴ In both, the political value of theorisations of social reproduction are brought into sharp focus: namely, the articulation of the urgent need for a materialist feminism that addresses both *the actual conditions in which most women live* and what can be registered as 'work' in the more fluid category of social life.

⁶⁴ Katz, "On the Grounds of Globalization."

CHAPTER 7

Ethics and the Economy of Care

7.1 *The constitutive encounter*

The preceding chapters have shown that, as an increasing number of artists site their practice within the social fabric of everyday life, the ‘encounter’ has been placed at the heart of a newly defined aesthetic experience. While my analysis of the social documents that arise as part of such works revealed an unmistakable focus on *economic* subjects, it must also be observed that ‘art encounters’ are persistently theorised in terms of *ethics*. In this chapter, I ask how, and in whose interests, the ethical and the economic are connected. I begin with an account of the peculiar immediacy of ethical questions to the social document, enquiring to what extent contemporary iterations of the latter *precipitate* a concern with ethics. Arguing that current debates on the intersections of ethics and aesthetics both misrepresent and overlook dominant tendencies in artistic production, I seek to overcome the binary critical stalemate that has become so entrenched while also considering what the invocation of ethics occludes from view. Stressing that it is necessary to take a *holistic* view of the artwork as such, I ask how the ‘encounter’ is constituted: what actually finds its way into contemporary art’s address to real life? What does the social document actually chronicle? And what can it tell us about artistic labour and production in the era of biopolitical globalisation?

My discussion centres on an examination of social documents produced through two practices in the 2010s. Notably, care and reproduction remain central concerns. Elaborating upon Chapter 4’s account of the priorities of biopolitical globalisation as well as the parallel rise of ‘hot documentation,’ I argue for the pressing relevance of this focus to a theorisation of the contemporary social document. The positioning of this analysis following the account of Martha Rosler’s *If You Lived Here...* is intended to grasp and further interrogate the shift delineated in Part I of this thesis – though, to restate, if the historical trajectory plotted is indeed linear, it is not necessarily progressivist.

7.2 Ethical delirium

There can be little doubt that ethics has risen to new levels of prominence at the outset of the 21st century. Ethics committees proliferate across our institutions while ethical issues dominate both the media and political arenas. The term has also been resuscitated within academic discourse where a resurgent interest in relational ethics, from Emmanuel Levinas's work on alterity to the more recent development of an ethics of care, has been matched by a particularly vociferous set of positions which warn of the threat posed by the triumph of ethics in the wake of postmodernism.¹ Here, ethics is frequently equated with the emphatic emergence of a globalised liberalism after the end of the Cold War. In the words of Chantal Mouffe this 'moralisation of society is ... a consequence of the lack of any credible political alternative to the current dominance of neoliberalism.'² Similarly, Alain Badiou's *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, published in 1993, is an attack levelled at the contemporary 'ethical delirium' based on the de-politicising ideology of human rights. Dedicated to the preservation of the status quo, this defensive brand of ethics is intimately linked with both the logic of capital and the perceived impotence of parliamentary democracy. On the one hand, this correlation engineers an apathetic form of public consensus around the *spectacle* of the economy while, on the other, it blocks the possibility of active, emancipatory politics. In short, for Badiou, ethics amounts to 'a genuine nihilism, a threatening denial of thought as such.'³ What Mouffe and Badiou point to is a connection between the completion of capitalist globalisation and a privileging of an ethical value system well suited to the 'end of history' (as argued most famously by Francis Fukuyama), based around, or at least implying, notions of consensus and natural rights.⁴

It should come as little surprise that contemporary art has participated in this revival. The production, dissemination and consumption of images have historically dominated debates around ethics and aesthetics.⁵ These have of course been the subject of long-

¹ For an interdisciplinary examination of the ethical turn see Marjorie Garber and Beatrice Hassens, eds., *The Turn to Ethics* (London: Routledge, 2000).

² Chantal Mouffe, "Which Ethics for Democracy," in *The Turn to Ethics*, eds. Marjorie Garber and Beatrice Hassens (Routledge: London, 2000), 86.

³ Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil* (London: Verso, 2001), 3.

⁴ Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992).

⁵ Publications include Diarmuid Costello and Dominic Willsdon, eds., *The Life and Death of Images: Ethics and Aesthetics* (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 2008).

running debates within the documentary genre itself where the inherently imbalanced power relationship between photographer or filmmaker and subject has been extensively explored.⁶ Much of the debate has focused on how to alleviate the worst excesses of this power disparity, specifically in terms of the subject – how to protect the most vulnerable, the most ‘deserving’.⁷ Yet, as Brian Winston and Allan Sekula (among many others) showed back in the 1970s and 1980s, the situation is further complicated by the documentary lens’s apparently insatiable *appetite* for the victim. While Sekula talked of filmmakers’ predilection for ‘aiming the camera downwards’, Winston later lambasted what he called ‘the tradition of the victim’, a tendency he saw as the product of Grierson’s dedication to social amelioration combined with Flaherty’s poetic romanticism which so powerfully placed the trials of individuals at the centrepiece of his narratives.⁸ In her polemical essay ‘In, around, and Afterthoughts (on Documentary Photography)’, Martha Rosler expanded on the theme, attacking the liberal ideology and ‘moralism’ underpinning social documentary images which exoticised subjects and produced voyeurs.⁹ Not for her the ‘Christian ethics’ which called for charity to relieve the symptoms of suffering in place of a revolutionary politics capable of attacking the root cause.

Though such questions retain their tenacious grip when considering lens-based documentation, they must be thought afresh in light of art’s latest re-emergence as a social practice and the rise of the social document. Indeed, artists’ various engagements within the social realm have brought a new, more urgent, focus on ethics. Given that ethical discourse is principally concerned with ways of dwelling, or forms of being in the world, and – importantly for this discussion – *being with* others, this is understandable. Concrete engagements within the social matrix implicate the lives of artists and their participant/subjects; they start businesses, participate in social movements, get married, have sex and even die within the artwork’s structure. Given its straddling of the issues

⁶ The same interrogation has occurred in ethnography and other social sciences.

⁷ In Pryluck’s words from 1976: ‘those least able to protect themselves require the greatest protection. In the extreme, utter helplessness demands utter protection.’ Calvin Pryluck, “Ultimately We Are All Outsiders: The Ethics of Documentary Filming,” in *New Challenges for Documentary*, ed. Alan Rosenthal (London: University of California Press, 1988): 266.

⁸ Sekula, “Dismantling Modernism, Reinventing Documentary,” 237; Brian Winston, “Documentary: I Think We Are in Trouble,” in *New Challenges for Documentary*, ed. Alan Rosenthal (London: University of California Press, 1988): 21-33. Sontag offered perhaps the best known interrogation of the power relationship produced by the lens: “To photograph people is to violate them, by seeing them as they never see themselves, by having knowledge of them that they can never have, it turns people into objects that can be symbolically possessed.” Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (London: Penguin Books, 1979), 14.

⁹ Rosler, “In, around and Afterthoughts.”

pertaining to both the lens and the situational immediacy of participatory or social practice, ethical questions and debates bear upon the social document in particularly complex ways. It follows that any analysis of the intersections between ethics and aesthetics *cannot* be restricted to the lens-based ‘product’ of the social document; rather, the *whole of the artwork* of which it is a part must be taken into account.



Figure 43: Artur Zmijewski, *80064* (video still) 2004

For the most part, discussions on ethics in contemporary art have placed a narrow emphasis on the *ethical valance* of artworks. This has produced a prolonged shock-versus-salve critical impasse that found its clearest expression in the spat between Claire Bishop and Grant Kester that played out in the pages of *Artforum* in 2006.¹⁰ There exists a prolific – and demonstrably highly popular – seam of artistic production where, in

¹⁰ Bishop, “The Social Turn,” 178-83; Grant Kester, “Another Turn,” *Artforum* 44, May, 2006, 22-24. While Bishop argued that artists should be free to ‘act on their desire without the incapacitating restrictions of guilt’ Kester focused on the political deficit of the avant-garde obsession with shock. Further attempts have since been made to consider afresh the relationship between art and ethics. Situated in the light of Badiou’s critiques, one example is Nina Möntmann’s edited volume *Scandalous: A Reader on Art and Ethics* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2013).

creating scenarios specifically for the camera and 'secondary', geographically remote audiences, priority is afforded to shock tactics. Indeed, in such cases the lens apparently operates as a licence: individuals who may have been framed as collaborators and participants in another type of project, are instead cast as material to be coerced and controlled by the artist. Here we might think of Artur Zmijewski's documented social experiments such as *80064* (2004): over the course of 11 minutes we witness the artist apparently coercing a 92 year-old Auschwitz survivor into having his identification tattoo refreshed, despite his clear protestations. Or the Dutch artist Renzo Martens' documentary *Episode III – Enjoy Poverty* (2008) over the course of which he variously exploits, ignores and otherwise humiliates poverty-stricken Congolese workers and families.



Figure 44: Renzo Martens, *Episode III – Enjoy Poverty* (video still) 2008

These contemporary instances of transgression in the art field can be set in relation to the long lineage of works that have railed against ethical strictures, breaking taboos and offending audiences in the name of subversion, while at the same time forming a vital part of the continuing legacy of the 'autonomy of art' which *demands* transgression by explicitly linking it with originality and therefore success. Furthermore, as Steven Shaviro points out:

Neoliberalism has no problem with excess. Far from being subversive, transgression today is entirely normative... The point is always to reach “the edge of burnout”: to pursue a line of intensification, and yet to be able to pull back from this edge, treating it as an investment, and recuperating the intensity as profit.¹¹

Of course, the social document plays an important role in the commodification of live encounters. Yet just as the current ethical delirium has given us the *artist-as-sociopath*, this figure apparently finds his counter in the *artist-as-social-worker* frequently witnessed in socially-engaged practice. However, my intention here is *not* to offer a simplistic account that allies those works that give primacy to documentation with transgressive tendencies and those that locate the moment of ‘art’ in the live encounter with amelioration. Rather, I will argue, the conception of the social document offers a means to break down any such sharp distinctions.

Both polarities from the shock-salve stand-off can be easily incorporated into capitalist economic imperatives, and it is with this point that examinations of the connections between ethics debates and economic relations in art tend to stop. I aim to show here that, in the present phase of capitalism, just as art *reveals* the economy to be a suppressed matrix of human relations, the debates and discourses surrounding art today are effectively displaced into the territories of ethics. At the same time, the complex artistic practices under discussion serve to show how this primacy of ethics is often *reproduced and reinforced* by the social document.¹² My observations are not intended to negate ethics as a discrete field of enquiry but instead call for a more integrated account of how discourses on ethics are subject to historical processes that necessarily entail an economic dimension – a dimension that becomes critically manifest under pressure from neoliberalism. Hopefully, the same observations also help to bring forth the political contradiction at the heart of radical artistic practice today: *is critique compatible with the reproduction of the relations being critiqued?*

¹¹ Steven Shaviro, “Accelerationist Aesthetics: Necessary Inefficiency in Times of Real Subsumption,” *e-flux journal*, 46 (2013), accessed Feb 26, 2015, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/46/60070/accelerationist-aesthetics-necessary-inefficiency-in-times-of-real-subsumption/>.

¹² It is worth emphasising that Zmijewski and Martens offer exemplary instances of a strong tendency within contemporary artistic production whereby artists perform within actual social relations to build powerful narratives around thematic flashpoints that appear to have been taken from the contents page of an applied ethics textbook, including poverty, war, social justice and the Holocaust.

7.3 Care in action

The demand for a theoretical framework better suited to the interrogation of socially-minded art practices has led some critics to touch upon relational ethics: that is, enquiries which view the basis of ethics as a relation (or response) to a particular other. Grant Kester's work has been highly prominent in this field. Foregrounding the discursive dimensions of collaborative cultural production, his analysis deals with 'dialogic projects' which unfold beyond the usual confines of the art institution. Deriving his concept from the Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin's model of dialogical experience, Kester also calls upon Levinas's 'face-to-face' encounter and Habermas's discourse theory to flesh out an analytical system grounded in concrete (rather than abstracted) intersubjective – or 'discursive' – ethics. Within Kester's schema, communicative interaction is integral to the formation of subjectivity and the possibility of transformative action. Conversation is positioned at the heart of his account of dialogical aesthetics which calls for an alternative skill set defined by the artist's ability 'to catalyze understanding, to mediate exchange, and to sustain an ongoing process of empathetic identification and critical analysis.'¹³ Though he mentions forms of reciprocal exchange which do not prioritise speech acts (specifically listening and gesture), Kester's focus on dialogue ultimately limits his ability to fully articulate and address the affective components which play such a crucial role in artistic practices performed within the social interstice. One way to address this gap would be to expand into the relatively recent discussions around the dynamics of care.

Associated primarily with positions informed by feminism, care ethics similarly proceeds from a point of particular interpersonal relations rather than the deployment of impartial and universalised rules or principles.¹⁴ Characteristics of attentiveness, openness, directedness and empathetic responsiveness continue to be privileged while the development of emotional sensitivity together with feelings (specifically those that have been educated and reflected upon) are considered crucial in terms of ascertaining what morality recommends in a given situation.¹⁵ The insistence upon mutual

¹³ Kester, *Conversation Pieces*, 118.

¹⁴ Virginia Held locates the beginnings of care ethics discourse with the essay "Maternal Thinking" by philosopher Sarah Ruddick 1980 and observes that the quantity of published material on the subject expanded dramatically after 1990. Virginia Held, *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political, and Global* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 26; 28.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

interdependence not only prioritises the cooperative well-being of all those involved in the relation; it also carries with it a critique of liberal individualism. However, the predication of 'care' on unequal power relations may account, at least in part, for Kester's hesitancy.¹⁶ Such relations may refer to the bond between a mother and child, care-giver and patient or, beyond the immediate personal context, between citizens of wealthy societies and 'persons who are suffering deprivation in distant parts of the globe.'¹⁷

Arguing against moralising 'paternalistic' approaches, Kester cites an array of projects in which he claims artists have worked with 'politically coherent communities' to build creative frameworks for mutual learning and support. Yet the same examples – and many others like them – address particular needs within *communities marked by precarity*: migrant workers, rural communities hit by financial crises and victims of domestic abuse. Furthermore, by their very nature care relations shift and change over (a life) time: they go beyond 'saintly' gestures and require 'a deep and thoughtful knowledge of the situation, and of all of the actors' situations, needs and competencies.'¹⁸ In short, the ethics of care offers a highly productive grounding for the kind of practices Kester champions. Recognising this identifies and illuminates hitherto under-analysed aspects of social art practices and their documentation, allowing for a more incisive critique to be drawn.

The occlusion of the substantive emotional, psychological, somatic and care- (even love-) orientated facets of the contemporary artwork is not, however, restricted to Kester's accounts.¹⁹ From Nicolas Bourriaud's 'relational aesthetics' through Miwon Kwon's 'discursive site' to Alfredo Cramerotti's 'aesthetic journalism', the focus has been squarely placed upon communication, negotiation, information and knowledge production.²⁰ Indeed, this tendency is particularly marked in the majority accounts of documentary modes in art. In Chapter 4 I noted the pressing requirement to rethink conceptualisations of the document in general – and the art document in particular – by replacing the notion of the neutral receptacle with that of the relational: I called for an

¹⁶ In *Conversation Pieces*, Kester is at pains to contrast the reciprocity of dialogic practices with a style of community art which he likens to Victorian-era social work, engaged not only in the alleviation of the effects of poverty but also in reform – more specifically, the moral regeneration of the poor.

¹⁷ Held, *The Ethics of Care*, 157.

¹⁸ Joan Tronto, *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care* (London: Routledge, 1993), 136.

¹⁹ A critical account of artistic engagements with the concepts and practices of care since the 1960s remains to be written.

²⁰ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*; Miwon Kwon, "One Place after Another: Notes on Site Specificity," *October* 80 (1997): 85-110; Alfredo Cramerotti, *Aesthetic Journalism* (Bristol and Chicago: Intellect, 2009).

expansion of the document's straightforward associations with administration and dry utility to bring into focus the 'hot document's' adaptive and affective dimensions. Yet despite the growing critical currency that accompanies discussions of affect, the concept of care remains vexed. In the field of philosophy, the hostility encountered by advocates of the relational ethics of care has been attributed to its perceived 'soft' and gendered associations with the private sphere, neediness and sentimentality. At the same time, care (like social reproduction more generally) has typically been excluded from theorisations of the formal economy. What forms, then, do care relations take in the encounters produced through the contemporary artwork? How are these imbricated with and mediated through the associated social documents? Focusing on two practices – those of WochenKlausur and Dani Marti – the analysis that follows considers how these relations can be grasped and theorised.

7.4 Care: In or out of the economy?

Commissioned as part of the ECONOMY project WochenKlausur's *Participatory Economics* (2013) is an artwork with which I have been deeply involved from the point of its inception.²¹ It is a project that exposed many of the hazards artists face when working on the political terrain in an era when (once again) the latter becomes a battleground centred on economic privilege and economic deprivation. Yet the challenges facing critics who seek to address such socially-engaged practices are considerable, particularly as only parts of durational artworks are accessible to non-participants, that is, to those who are not intended to be directly involved in the production of the artwork. The social documents that arise offer one of only very few routes through which critical and art historical analysis can be attempted.²² *Participatory Economics* therefore offered an opportunity for me to gain greater insight into the production processes involved (though even as the curator my experiences inevitably remain fragmentary) and to undertake an appraisal of the social documents produced from the perspective of an 'insider'.

²¹ The work has subsequently been renamed on the artists' website as *Women-led Workers' Cooperative* but I will use *Participatory Economics* here.

²² Other sources include the reflections of artists and participants gleaned through reports or interviews conducted after-the-fact.

In this case, documentation once again performed a range of functions within the structure of the artwork. The artists recorded the project as it unfolded, mounting the photographs chronologically in a line along the wall of their workspace and using them as memory aids, motivation material as well as an efficient means to ‘evidence’ action and present the project to visitors. WochenKlausur also produced social documents that took the form of standardised text-image reports presented on the collective’s website (incorporating four photographs plus 500 words of narrative copy written by the artists themselves), and a short documentary video with explanatory voiceover and interviews which appears on the commissioning institutions’ website.²³ Edited and combined versions of WochenKlausur’s project reports are also frequently displayed in gallery exhibitions of their work. However, these social documents only cover the duration of the collective’s involvement: recordings ceased after the ‘close’ of the project and no further information on its subsequent life is publicly available.

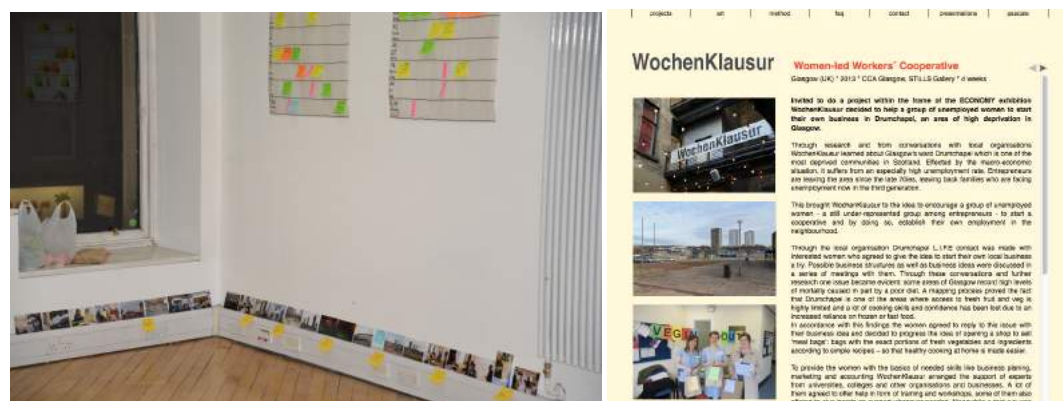


Figure 45: WochenKlausur, *Participatory Economics* (studio image and website report screengrab) 2013

Orientated around an intensive four-week residency based in the Centre for Contemporary Art (CCA) in February 2013, WochenKlausur’s initial proposal for *Participatory Economics* was developed following preliminary research and a brief site visit to meet key ‘stakeholders’ as part of a tour organised and facilitated by the curators. Their resulting plan built around the concerns of the CCA as the host institution and their existing connections with Drumchapel L.I.F.E., a grassroots organisation operating in an area of the city with high deprivation levels and led by a particularly dynamic director. While attending to this context, the artists were nevertheless keen to capitalise on their

²³ “*Women-led Workers’ Cooperative*,” WochenKlausur, accessed 16 Mar 2016, <http://www.wochenklausur.at/projekt.php?lang=en&id=41>. The video was directed by the Glasgow-based artist Caroline Douglas.

own ‘outsider’ status (and symbolic capital) by identifying a distinct set of needs and offering something additional to the local context. The ensuing proposal to ‘encourage and support the formation of a worker self-managed cooperative’ in Drumchapel specifically set out to engage with unemployed local women and address the nutritional issues that stem from limited access to fresh fruit and vegetables due to the closure of local supermarkets.²⁴

Over the course of the month-long residency, four artists (including an invited Glasgow-based practitioner) set up what is best described as a ‘caring infrastructure’; accruing knowledge on business models and legal structures, securing the support of local politicians, fundraising, building new connections between existing agencies and institutions, arranging offers for free training workshops and hands-on assistance, and setting up an advisory board to provide long-term development support. The progress of this administrative work was documented through images of wall mounted timetables and task lists strewn with fluorescent Post-it notes, meetings with key individuals and shots of the artists working at their laptops in their temporary office-cum-studio.



Figure 46: WochenKlausur, *Participatory Economics* (documentation of the studio)
2013

The relative ease with which WochenKlausur set up this infrastructure was, however, not repeated in their attempts to bring together a group of unemployed female participants willing to commit to the project. Amidst considerable challenges, a fragile circle, fluctuating from seven to three individuals, was eventually established. Working under the name ‘Vegin Out’, they decided to centre the new business around the sale of

²⁴ Class and access to nutritious food is a long-standing issue in Glasgow. For an outline of the notorious ‘Glasgow Effect’ see Lucy Ash, “Why Is Glasgow the UK’s Sickest City?,” BBC News, Jun 5, 2014, accessed Jul 19, 2014, www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-27309446.

‘meal bags’ which contained a simple recipe card together with the exact quantities of required ingredients. Recognising that the cooperative would require some time to evolve, at the end of the short residency WochenKlausur appointed the local artist as a temporary facilitator and tasked her with carrying the project through the next stage of development. At the ‘concluding’ public forum organised by the curators and held at CCA, WochenKlausur presented their report using PowerPoint documentation. Yet the artists did not feel it was appropriate to invite the nascent group as it was yet to cohere and, as publicly stated, they did not want to ‘make an exhibition’ of the women. The achievements of the initial phase included a successful pilot project realised by three local women together with the artist-facilitator, securing further development funds and the establishment of an infrastructure of individuals and organisations committed to supporting the initiative. The project then went on to operate under the aegis of the CCA’s education programme but, while attempts were made to sustain and then resuscitate it, the momentum declined and ultimately fizzled out.

In 1996 Hal Foster’s identification of an ‘ethnographic turn’ in art took aim at artists’ move into the ‘expanded field of culture’ which he regarded as fraught with the risk of dilettantism and based upon an appetite for cultural alterity.²⁵ However, in *Participatory Economics* – and in numerous other projects like it – alterity opens up on an *economic* register. WochenKlausur’s experiences in Drumchapel, though very specific to the context, reflected aspects of previous artworks through which they have engaged with communities marked by the effects of long-term unemployment. In the case of *Participatory Economics*, the artists cited the considerable challenges they faced in asking potential members to lead a cooperative enterprise based on their own ideas and interests. In the first instance, many women either thought that this was yet another activity with which they had to become involved in order to continue receiving unemployment benefits or that they were being asked to ‘help out’ with the artists’ project. WochenKlausur’s observations echoed the frustrations of Drumchapel L.I.F.E who have repeatedly argued that local residents are rarely asked to contribute their own ideas or be included in decision-making processes which affect their lives. In this sense, the ‘subject’ WochenKlausur tackled was none other than the one produced through *disempowerment*: internalised disempowerment guaranteed to crystallise as inability to proceed to even reformist (let alone, revolutionary) action. Or, in capitalist governance’s

²⁵ Foster, “The Artist as Ethnographer.”

parlance as a 'lack of motivation', widely encountered 'among the poor' and seen as the real reason why they cannot 'lift themselves' out of poverty. For their part, WochenKlausur saw the apparent passivity they often encountered as the result not only of a deeply rooted lack of self-confidence but as part of a survival mechanism. Ultimately, though the aim was to foster a sense of agency as well as 'realistic' employment opportunities through the establishment of a cooperative venture, in practice the artists and institutions involved were required to mediate every part.

However, *none* of the challenges and setbacks experienced by WochenKlausur during their time in Glasgow are registered in the social documents arising from the project. The relative scarcity of images of the participants themselves is particularly notable, with the artists acknowledging that they sought to both 'protect the women's dignity' and avoid disrupting sensitive meetings through the presence of a camera.²⁶ On the occasions that the women do appear, they are cheerful, active and in public.²⁷ The reasoning behind the social documents' elision of both the project's failures and the vulnerability of the participants is, on one level, plain enough – the artists' approach can even be framed as part and parcel of the caring infrastructure. Yet WochenKlausur are clearly well-rehearsed in the debates on photography's reproduction and reinforcement of extant power relations outlined above: founding members of the group have noted that their development of an interventionist approach was in fact spurred precisely by frustration with the claims and limitations of social documentary photography.²⁸ I would argue, however, that the 'demoted' social documents that they do produce and circulate sustain the same *moral affirmation of usefulness* while also revealing much about the formation of subjectivity.²⁹

²⁶ From discussion with the artists.

²⁷ Only two images could be reasonably categorised as negative: the grey mass of a bleak towerblock looming against an unforgiving landscape and a similarly windswept semi-derelect car park.

²⁸ WochenKlausur, "Lets Talk About Another Concept," *On Curating* 24 (2014): 69.

²⁹ Larne Abse Gogarty offers a cogent critique of this assumption in her forthcoming article for a special issue of *Third Text* co-edited by the author and Angela Dimitrakaki. Larne Abse Gogarty, "Utopianism and Utilitarianism in Arte Útil," *Third Text* 31, no. 5 (2017) forthcoming.



Figure 47: WochenKlausur, *Participatory Economics*
(image of participants during pilot project) 2013

If the rather anodyne social documents that form part *Participatory Economics* are easy to dismiss, countering this urge by instead taking them seriously is a revealing exercise. To elaborate, my juxtaposition of the resolutely positive accounts presented through this case study with those of Rosler's *If You Lived Here...* in the previous chapter is designed to push into relief a significant shift. The geographer Mark Davidson has argued that the displacements associated with gentrification now pass beyond the 'excessive' spectres of forced evictions seen in Tomkins Square Park (and documented in many of the videotapes presented in Rosler's project) to take in more moderate forms by which individuals experience loss.³⁰ In a similar vein, sociologist Kirsteen Paton sets the use of gentrification as a key policy strategy in post-industrial Glasgow in relation to the promotion of neoliberal entrepreneurial individualism and consumer citizenship.³¹ Her compelling account examines the *rejection of class identity* and attempts of individuals to construct neoliberal identities as a control strategy during turbulent times. Most strikingly, she refers to this updated form of gentrification a *bulimic condition* whereby people and communities are simultaneously included and excluded: everyone is invited

³⁰ Mark Davidson, "Gentrification in Crisis: Towards Consensus or Disagreement?," *Urban Studies* 48, no. 10 (2012): 1987-1996.

³¹ Kirsteen Paton, *Gentrification: A Working-Class Perspective* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014).

but those who cannot adapt sufficiently in order to find redemption are rejected. If gentrification's frontier has thereby been internalised, so has art's 'site'. *Participatory Economics* is far from an exception: countless social practices address a desire to make art useful by finding ways to 'reanimate' individuals and communities, precisely by helping them to '*participate*' in capitalist social and economic relations. It is precisely this transformed situation that WochenKlausur's *care-full* social documents both capture and act within so effectively: i.e. *not* the effort to interrogate (let alone struggle against) inequality but art's role in this new identity construction process – in helping the women to (at least appear to) respond with adequate enthusiasm to an opportunity that promises a chance to pass over from exclusion to inclusion. Here, then, is one facet of the evolution of the social document under the conditions of biopolitical globalisation in which an art project offers the context for the acquisition of a particular type of social knowledge.

In Chapter 3 I posited that social documents occupy a crucial position in the complex web of twenty-first century artistic patronage in terms of securing future institutional invitations for 'social' practitioners – as well as their place in art history. WochenKlausur's model of setting up relatively small-scale art interventions which address concrete, and often highly urgent, needs that clearly emerge out of economic relations was initiated in 1992. The distinctions between their highly temporary catalytic ventures and the durational endeavours of conventional community art are illuminating – most obviously perhaps, their adoption of the project model undoubtedly appeals to funders and attention-hungry culture centres looking for highly marketable ventures which apparently carry limited risk of necessitating an ongoing service-level commitment. Further observations can however be drawn. Firstly the relationship with the institution itself: as Jason E. Bowman has noted, the embrace of new social practices that frequently claim to be 'commons-generative' by contemporary arts institutions stands in stark contrast to the fate of community art which is *not* dependent on the art institution and is being systematically evicted from the now vulnerable spaces with which it was once affiliated (think of libraries and youth clubs).³² With some justification, Bowman inveighs against the occlusion of community practice from the histories of contemporary art in Scotland and particularly Glasgow. The amnesia to which he attends

³² Jason E. Bowman, "What is at Stake in Community Practice? What Have We Learned?," *Liverpool Biennial Journal* 5, accessed Oct 13, 2016. <http://www.biennial.com/journal/issue-5/what-is-at-stake-in-community-practice-what-have-we-learned>.

is at least in part due to community practices' unwillingness or inability to pay the same level of attention to branding, self-narrativisation and the production of 'history-making' as either their neo-conceptualist counterparts in Scotland or latter-day social practice. Here, then, further complexities attending the social document's particular imbrication with the institutions of art (and its curators) pass into view, as well as the concomitant demand for specific characteristics – namely, a historicising and inspiring account aimed not at participants but at secondary audiences and stakeholders. The role of the institution – and indeed its licence to act experimentally and, moreover, influence artistic production – is therefore something that merits further analysis.³³



Figure 48 (left): Snapcorps, *Hi Ho Giro* (detail; photographs on panel with text) 1994

Figure 49 (right): Snapcorps, *Hi Ho Giro* (detail; text from one panel) 1994

'Mirror Mirror

on the wall'

Myth – 'Britain is a classless society' (John Major)

The increases in **inequality** of income during the 1980s dwarfed the fluctuation in inequality seen in previous decades. (For Richer For Poorer' Institute of Fiscal Studies 1994)

The rich get **richer** and the poor get **poorer**. 'In 1960 the richest fifth of the world's population had average incomes 30 times greater than the poorest fifth... By 1990 they were receiving 60 times more' (Oxfam poverty Report 1995)

In 1998/89 **tax cuts** for individuals in the richest 1% amounted to £22,680 per person, a sum greater than the total income of any person in the bottom 95% of the population.

A Labour research survey in 14 companies found that 22 directors earned in one week what the average manual worker earns in a year.

Annual tax unpaid by UK businesses around £20 billion.

In Wester Hailes, Edinburgh, 50% of households **survive** on incomes of £5000 a year or less, 79% have incomes below £10,000, and 11% have incomes of less than £2,500 a year. People are relatively **worse off** than they were five years ago and the gap between those in work and the unemployed is growing.

³³ Such an analysis must also take into account the enforcement of particular models of working by funding institutions. Creative Scotland, for example, offer money through their 'Project Funding' route.

With these contentions in mind a fruitful comparison can be drawn between *Participatory Economics* and a work made through a community photography group nearly a decade before, that also dealt with crises in social reproduction, unemployment and the closure of local supermarkets. Based in Wester Hailes, a public housing estate in Edinburgh, the Snapcorp photography group emerged through community education services. Their *Hi Ho Giro* (1994) staged a satirical critique of the predicament producing a slide-to-tape video and images documenting the exploits of costumed group members 'Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs' as they negotiated their way through Department of Social Security bureaucracy in 'Fairy' Hailes. This material was accompanied by texts on large boards (refashioned cheap doors) that gave a sobering edge to their capers, describing in detail (and with screeds of supporting data) the effects of deepening inequality coupled with a declining welfare system. The work wove together the machinations of local politics, taxation and benefits systems, the introduction of the National Lottery, and protests against the 'Criminal Justice and Public Order Act' instigated by John Major's Conservative government. This was a project that prioritised politics over ethics.

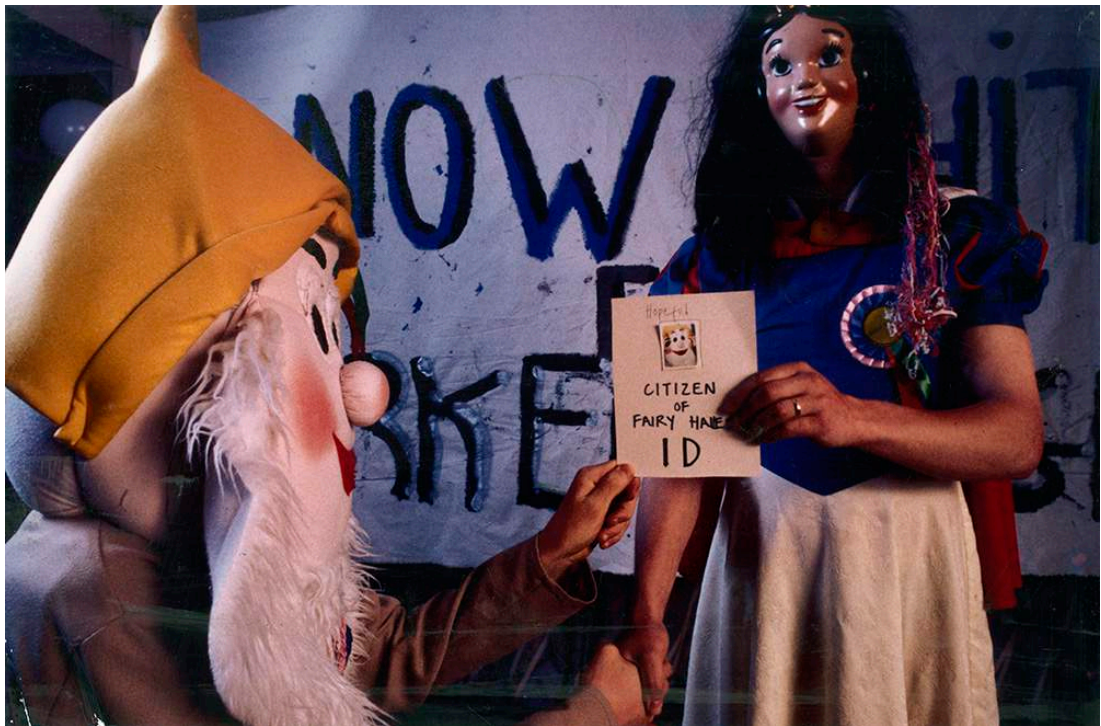


Figure 50: Snapcorps, *Hi Ho Giro* (detail, photograph) 1994

As Bowman might have predicted, *Hi Ho Giro* had almost been 'lost' to the histories. Scottish photographer Owen Logan and I made an attempt to redress this omission in 2014, digging out the materials from the dusty storage facilities of a community centre to re-present the work as part of our exhibition on realist strategies for the GENERATION 'showcase' of 25 years of contemporary art in Scotland.³⁴ Part of a strong lineage of community photography groups and workshops, Snapcorp were animated by a similar concern to keep 'the least possible distance between those who produce and those who consume the images'.³⁵ This stands in contrast to the address of WochenKlausur's documentation to ever more remote gallery and Internet audiences. A further point of divergence is Snapcorps' explicit use of the production and interpretation of documentation as part of a collective interrogation of class conflict theory. Describing the group as a political education process, they emphasised that the group gave members an opportunity to articulate their (dissenting) voice through photography and made plain the significance of their affiliation with an education rather than arts context.³⁶

7.5 Documenting a 'labour of love'

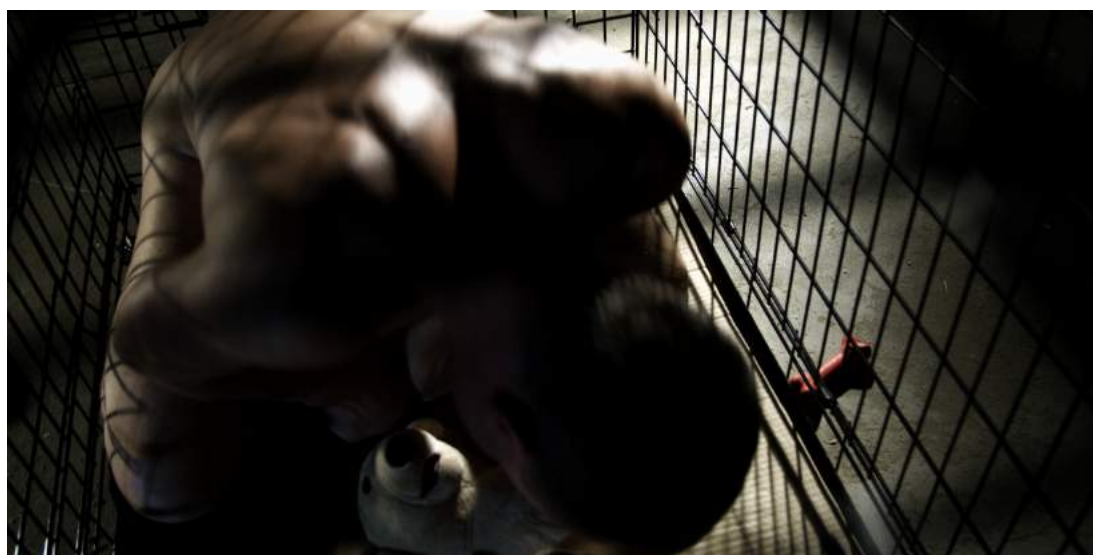


Figure 51: Dani Marti, *Good Dog* (video still) 2012

³⁴ Bowman singles out Lowndes monograph *Social Sculpture* and the GENERATION project for critique. Sarah Lowndes *Social Sculpture* (Glasgow: Stopstop, 2003). While I broadly agree that both presented a 'monosyllabic' and sanitised account, he affords no mention to efforts that sought to disrupt their smooth retellings by highlighting the importance of groups like Snapcorps and Variant Magazine. See Appendix D for an account of *The King's Peace: Realism and War*.

³⁵ Don Slater, "Community Photography," *Camerawork* 20 (1980): 8-9.

³⁶ Rob Hoon (Snapcorps member), discussion with author, Feb 5, 2014.

The 'encounter' structured around care is constituted very differently in the work of Dani Marti which moves into the intimate private spaces of the home and bed. Mining his own relationship networks and forging new ones, Marti creates and documents scenarios with homosexual men from the art world, gay scenes in his home cities and the more loose-knit communities generated by online sites like Gaydar. Encounters with each individual last anywhere between a few hours and many months but the terms of the transaction are always clear: he offers intimacy, attention and sometimes sex in exchange for access to – and recordings of – the lives of his participants. The edited social documents of these semi-constructed, yet real-life, scenarios are then displayed on screens in the gallery. Presented as part of the ECONOMY exhibition, his video *Good Dog* (2012) offered an insight into the impact of economic relations on the formation of (sexual) subjectivity. The protagonist, Graeme, is a staff manager at a bowling alley where he has been employed since the age of 16. Ground down and emptied out, he finds release in his spare time by descending into an elaborate role-play in which he performs as a dog. The 16-minute film shows him acting out this temporary escape in the presence of (and encouraged by) the artist, capturing both his fierce need for submission and the intense self-loathing that accompanies it.

Jim Solo (2011) depicts Marti's relationship with a vulnerable, overweight man from a town in West central Scotland. Struggling to articulate his feelings yet desperate for physical interaction, his frustration and desire for the artist are plain. The brutal exposure of Jim's bloated, aging body is matched by a disturbing depiction of extreme emotional poverty: ashamed of his sexuality, with no support network or indeed language to express himself, Jim appears as the antithesis of the artist who offers him comfort, acceptance and sexual experience. This, now rather familiar, power dynamic between artist and subject has, as noted above, been extensively explored in the documentary genre. However, the complication that the artist's conspicuous presence poses for the direct application of such a critique here is made apparent in *Bacon's Dog* (2011), a visceral account of the first sexual experience of Peter Fay, a 65 year-old writer, curator and art collector from Sydney, Australia. Condensing footage captured over a five-month period into an oppressive 11-minute vignette, Peter's need for Marti's touch, care and support is countered by his marked eloquence, self-awareness and social status.

In this case, placed squarely within the network-driven economies of the art world, the artist is recast in a considerably less secure position as a sex therapist/worker.³⁷



Figure 52: Dani Marti, *Jim Solo* (video still) 2011.

Marti's relentless focus on the corporeal, somatic points of encounter (caressed skin, eager embrace, mingled breath) is matched by an attempt to document the emotional dimensions of the experience; moments of unbound desire, pleasure, jealousy, shame and loneliness. Yet it is the economy of production – the transactional underpinnings of the care (or love) relations presented – that is made plain to the extent that it constitutes a central theme in the work itself. The sociologist Eva Illouz's work is particularly illuminating in thinking through the incursions of market logic into the terrains of intimate life. Specifically, she introduces the concept of 'emotional capitalism':

a culture in which emotional and economic discourses and practices mutually shape other, thus producing ... a broad, sweeping movement in which affect is made an essential aspect of economic behaviour and in which

³⁷ *Bacon's Dog* can be read as an attempt to engage with, and ultimately manipulate, the a-symmetric power relationship between the curator and the artist. Tanja Ostojić used a similar tactic in her *Strategies of Success /Curator Series* (2001-2003).

emotional life – especially that of the middle classes – follows the logic of economic relations and exchange.³⁸

Two things are worth highlighting here: first, that Marti's social documents patently attend to the insatiable demand for the public exposure of private life, and second, that, according to Illouz, the salient consequence of this preoccupation with emotions has been the rise of a therapy culture in which such emotions' evaluation and effective management have become ever more central to both home and work life (should such a distinction be upheld). She argues that the emotional competence (skills in linguistic expression together with analytic and interpretative abilities) gained through exposure to therapy culture reinforces class stratification: a well-developed emotional habitus enables contemporary subjects to better compete both in relationships and in the workplace.³⁹ In her words: 'there are now new hierarchies of emotional well-being' – and indeed Marti's work offers ample evidence in support of this claim.⁴⁰

The performative frame of art is brought to bear on Marti and WochenKlausur's social experiments primarily through processes of documentation which delivers 'live' social realities into the presentation (and market) contexts of the art world. As I have argued, audiences are thereby able to witness and register the emergence of a variety of economic subjects either from the safe confines of exhibitions or through the narrative social documents offered online or in associated publications. Significantly, given the centrality of artistic labour within the reconfigured contemporary artwork and its documentation, these subjects now include the artist him/herself. (While WochenKlausur's accounts offer evidence of action and labour, in Marti's case his own 'work' is rendered visible as part of the artwork.) The production of the lens-based or narrative social document therefore not only opens up this position for critical reflection, it also provides a grounding for and, moreover, actively invites, *ethical* interrogation of the social relations presented.

Within the field of relational ethics 'care' has been variously elaborated as a practice, a concept, a motive, a virtue and work. Held's attempts to overcome the associated debates have led her to prioritise a consideration of 'caring relations' and the 'practices of care'.

³⁸ Illouz, *Cold Intimacies*, 5.

³⁹ Illouz's research bring up to date the sociologist Norbert Elias's observation that the longer bonds of dependency established through the formation of the State made the management of emotions central to the stability and success of societies. Elias, *The Civilizing Process*.

⁴⁰ Illouz, *Cold Intimacies*, 73.

In doing so, she frequently distinguishes work from emotion and motive, arguing that though care incorporates labour, its intrinsic relationality and basis in values (such as the commitment to meeting needs effectively) mean that it is also much more.⁴¹ However, Held's account has not kept pace with transformations in understandings of what constitutes contemporary labour, particularly in terms of the integration of production and reproduction. In addition to Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's account discussed in Chapter 4, sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild has convincingly argued that emotions have become a *resource*: 'love and care have become the "new gold"'.⁴² The question that arises then, and which has seemingly radicalised a range of art practices in the past two decades, is: what are the implications for 'care' when capitalism has 'married the emotional skill of being together with the dead calculus of the economy?'⁴³

In the introduction to this chapter I asked what *kind* of labour is required to produce the social document ('hot' or otherwise) in the era of biopolitical globalisation. In recent years artistic labour has often been framed as cultural mediator of broader socio-economic conditions: for example, Miwon Kwon established that in the late 1990s artists' roles and practices could be seen as part of the move towards a service- (rather than industrial production-) based economies. Yet the demands for affective and caring labour in the production of artworks (and the careers of their makers) have, by contrast, received considerably less attention.⁴⁴ Produced by means of what can be described as *bouts of extreme care*, WochenKlausur's and Marti's social documents demonstrate the multiplicity of forms such labour can take.

If care in *Participatory Economics* was performed at a remove 'in public', through a pragmatic engagement with the local context and the administrative routes of negotiation, fundraising and networking, Marti took WochenKlausur's commitment to 'active listening' to new levels in the private domain. Both approaches demanded responsiveness, the ability to generate trust and 'experimental' relationships, as well as a willingness on the part of the artist to surrender his or her life to the project for its

⁴¹ Held, *The Ethics of Care*, 36.

⁴² Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, 109; Arlie Russell Hochschild, "Love and Gold," in *Global Woman: Nannies, Maids and Sex Workers in the New Economy*, eds. Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Russell Hochschild (London: Granta Books, 2002), 26.

⁴³ Carl Cederstrom and Peter Fleming, *Dead Man Working* (Alresford: Zero Books, 2012), 37

⁴⁴ The category of care serves to foreground the material, emotional and moral dimensions of affective labour. Though affect encompasses both the mind and body, reason and emotion, it is usually discussed in terms of cognitive labour.

duration. As transient outsiders, these artists must *visibly demonstrate* that they offer something different, something more than that which is already in play. Yet WochenKlausur's evidenced diplomacy, altruism and moral purpose contrasts sharply with the ambiguities that surround Marti's motivations, as inferred from the filmed chronicles of alienation and fulfillment he carefully prepares for the audiences of art institutions. The artist's knowledge of the contexts where these chronicles become public is a salient factor in the process of the artwork's production. The oscillation between sensitivity and opportunism – even cynicism – is left unresolved by the extracts presented in the social documents which do *not* elaborate on the artist's broader relationship with his participants. Questions regarding whether harm was caused in the process of production or if genuine and even enduring bonds developed remain purposefully unanswered. What is clear is that Marti's personal charm (what is referred to as 'personality') plays an important part in facilitating the encounters, enabling him to set up a form of therapeutic relationship, which passes beyond accepted norms, and elicit confessional storytelling. Though sexual encounters hardly constitute unfamiliar territory for contemporary art, the level of *emotional* promiscuity required on Marti's part is discomfiting. After all, while Andrea Fraser's sexual liaison with a collector was, according to the record of her artwork *Untitled* (2003), a one-night stand, Marti must provide something more akin to the durational intimacy of the 'girlfriend experience' offered by sex workers who exceed the parameters of traditional prostitution. A clear example, then, of the entwinement of the artist's life and work described by Bojana Kunst in her discussion of the 'project horizon'.⁴⁵

Dimitris Papadopoulos and Vassilis Tsianos's conception of 'embodied capitalism' is useful when considering Marti's labour. While recognising that the whole of the worker's life has the potential to produce value, the regime of embodied capitalism operates by dissolving and recombining the working subject, selecting and appropriating only the subjectivities required: 'The individual only looks like an individual in its apparent bodily shape, but in reality it becomes a genetic source, an automated client, a host to a virus, a set of competencies, a self-creating assemblage of skills, a register and a code, a body capable of extreme mobility.'⁴⁶ Marti's labour in the 'personality marketplaces' of

⁴⁵ Kunst, "The Project Horizon," unpaginated.

⁴⁶ Dimitris Papadopoulos and Vassilis Tsianos, "DIWY! Precarity in Embodied Capitalism," in *ECONOMY: Art Production and the Subject in the 21st Century*, eds Angela Dimitrakaki and Kirsten Lloyd (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015), 132.

Internet dating and the art world demand a high degree of careful and protracted self-marketing, self-cultivation and persuasive skills in order to set up repeatedly productive scenarios. Though the films document concrete interactions between two individuals, when we see him step in to comfort Graeme (or, in other works, to gently question his subjects, touch them or become aroused), Marti himself is oddly peripheral. He remains muted to the extent that his own identity appears to have been hollowed out in order to arrive at a condition of pure responsiveness that spurs his informants to expand into the gap he leaves. In short, this is artistic labour that requires, and relies upon, the consistent re-production and documentation of a highly specific artist-subject. Furthermore, the *type* of subjectivity demanded – a ‘good listener’, a self-effacing, sexy and yet compassionate and supportive individual – clearly does not square with conventional gender roles. But as analyses of what ‘feminisation of labour’ might describe in contemporary art are conspicuously lacking, it is hard to place Marti’s work, and subject, of care into a historically specific production context of demonstrable, recognisable characteristics.

The respective social documents of *WochenKlausur* and *Dani Marti* reveal how differently care can be calibrated under the conditions of post-Fordism. Referring to the common distinction made between those who ‘care about’ and ‘take care of’ issues or people and the hands-on activity of care-giving, the political scientist Joan Tronto argues that it is gendered, raced and classed.⁴⁷ In the examples drawn from the art world considered in this chapter, however, the role of *public* ‘fixer’ is occupied by a group of women while the *private*, intensely physical caring-giving is performed by a homosexual man.⁴⁸ In both cases care and love are not only seen to be produced but are *documented as productive*.

Are these works, then, closer to an ethics of care or an economy of service? Hochschild’s analysis of an altogether different order of experiences – those of female migrant labourers – underlines the complexity of this question, and renders visible a ‘global capitalist order of love’. Provocatively framing love as a resource which is extracted from the poorer regions of the globe to address a ‘care deficit’ in wealthy countries, she

⁴⁷ Tronto, *Moral Boundaries*, 115.

⁴⁸ The delivery of a project by an all-female group was an unusual situation for *WochenKlausur*. The collective was originally founded by Wolfgang Ziggel and there are five men and four women in the core team.

describes the processes by which the love offered by nannies has been displaced and then partly produced or assembled in the rich North. She quotes a Filipina woman who cares for the baby of a professional couple in California: 'I love Ana more than my own two children. Yes more! It's strange I know. But I have time to be with her. I'm paid. I am lonely here. I work ten hours a day, with one day off. I don't know any neighbours on the block. And so this child gives me what I need.'⁴⁹ The love professed here – which involves providing a service, the development of affective bonds and the thoroughgoing commitment to the child's wellbeing – is both absolutely integral to her care labour *and* an excess. The nanny's account exemplifies the inherent difficulties in seeking to distinguish between care labour, caring attitudes and the production of moral values. As an 'active emotional labourer', she shows that when care is part of capitalist production the personality is not merely sold or put to work. Rather this labour of intensive emotional self-management becomes a process of *subjectification*.⁵⁰

7.6 Care ethics in art: For whom? And what for?

The above suggest that we need to review the question of the 'encounter' in contemporary art as a platform for intriguing ethical entanglements. Indeed, we need to think carefully about its poles: who is drawn in to its orbit and what are the processes of implication? Only then can we proceed to negotiating the meaning of the encounter. For, contrary to what ethics discourses in art tend to tell us about the primacy of the engagement between artist and participant, I want to suggest that the old-fashioned 'spectator', rather than the trendier 'participant', is ultimately addressed when a narrative of care is stitched together, performed and pictured by means of the social document. Boris Groys has argued that in the biopolitical age a dependency on the narrative document is the indispensable flip side of art's urge to become life itself:

Today's consumer of art prefers art to be brought – delivered. Such a consumer does not want to go off, travel to another place, be placed in another context in order to experience the original as original. Rather, he or she wants the original to come to him or her – as in fact it does but only as a copy.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Hochschild "Love and Gold," 24.

⁵⁰ Arlie Russell Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling* (London: University of California Press, 2012).

⁵¹ Groys, "Art in the Age of Biopolitics," 63.

The artist is tasked with firstly intervening in and shaping lives, *then* producing abridged versions of encounters through texts and images. The examples cited here demonstrate the range of formulations currently in play. Yet though Groys offers an incisive account of the new viewership dynamics at the heart of biopolitical art, he does not elaborate on the conspicuous *appetite* amongst curators and consumers for these condensed accounts of durational lived experience. Or, more specifically, for engaging summations of particular types of intersubjective experience – such as those orientated around caring relations and care labour.

Franco 'Bifo' Berardi's approach to contemporary alienation focuses on the experiences of the 'cognitariat', describing the impact of a prevalent mediatisation whereby anguish and frustration stem from 'the social, linguistic, psychic, emotional impossibility of touching the thing, of having a body, of enjoying the presence of the other as tangible and physical extension.'⁵² It is under these circumstances – Bifo's 'paralysis of empathy', Hochschild's 'care deficit' – that *the social document has chronicled visions of proximity, care and action*. Of course in doing so, it simultaneously addresses the lack and reinforces it: the encounter is performed by others, their bodies and lives remain remote. Moreover, as the cases analysed here illustrate, these documents affirm that caring attitudes and values can be generated within and even *through* capitalist relations. In art as in other areas of life, then, the capacity of care to generate new and unpredictable bonds can make the current economic order appear viable and acceptable. And we have to consider to what extent art is inadvertently participating in the valorisation of such an acceptance. After all, returning to Hochschild's migrant informant, why should we oppose a nanny's emotional attachment to children she has not given birth to or, for that matter, a man willingly offering another much longed for physical intimacy? As observers, when presented with such scenarios, any unease we feel implicitly identifies us with a tired morality, a remainder of a past organisation of life, out of step with an era when the commercialisation of feeling is renewing the very meaning of love and human bond. In the new emotional economy care and intimacy are outsourced to (among others) artists. Apparently, it is up to us as spectators to appreciate and embrace the prospects when 'everything that is solid melts into air' once more.

⁵² Franco 'Bifo' Berardi, *The Soul at Work: From Alienation to Autonomy* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2009), 109.

CHAPTER 8

Realism

8.1 'Can it be that it still shows signs of life?'¹

For my concluding chapter I will return to elaborate upon the central – and final – hypothesis around which the preceding chapters have been orbiting: that the social document participates in and develops the tenacious yet vexed tradition of realism as a critical commitment. As Raymond Williams has observed, definitions of the term speak to a contentious history, which has established a number of (often contradictory) lines of thought as well as rich debate.² Here I will follow an understanding of realism that positions it as a fundamentally *experimental* and political *practice*, its relevance held by its context and time of production. The German dramatist, cultural theorist and filmmaker Bertolt Brecht asserted that: 'Realism is not a mere question of form ... Reality changes; in order to represent it, modes of representation must also change.'³ The division this statement appears to assume clearly predates the contention (familiar from post-structuralist theory) that representation is *imbricated with* reality, rather than operating as a detached and tardy observer. Yet, Brecht's call for an understanding of realism that positions it as a fundamentally dynamic, precarious and malleable methodology found traction in his own time and continues to do so; the French painter Fernand Léger proclaimed (albeit in a rather different vein) that 'each era has its own realism', while in his analysis of the history and reception of photography over the course of the twentieth century John Roberts made a compelling case for realism's 'contextual basis'.⁴

¹ Ernst Bloch, "Discussing Expressionism," in *Aesthetics and Politics*, Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Ernst Bloch, Bertolt Brecht, George Lukács (London: NLB, 1977), 16. Bloch is referencing expressionism here – before Georg Lukács reoriented the debate to realism. The full quote reads 'Expressionism assuredly does not belong to the present; yet can it be that it still shows signs of life?'

² Williams, *Keywords*: 257-262.

³ Bertolt Brecht, "Against George Lukács," in *Aesthetics and Politics*, Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Ernst Bloch, Bertolt Brecht, George Lukács (London: NLB, 1977), 81; 82.

⁴ John Roberts, *The Art of Interruption* (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 1998), 10.

The art historian David Craven has attributed the recent upsurge in scholarly interest around the 'social realism' of the first part of the twentieth century to an urgent desire to grasp 'realism's contemporary pertinence to critiques of corporate capitalism.'⁵ What *kind* of realist aesthetic, then, is called forth in the age of biopolitical globalisation? Or, as Craven asked in relation to another context: 'What does 'realism' have to do with a reality at present mediated at every turn by forces that wish to direct, not simply reflect, everyday existence?'⁶ And so, I ask to what extent realism remains a key issue for art. Does the 'recovery' of realism aid the development of a nuanced understanding of the social document and its ascendancy? Or does it ultimately corroborate the charge that documentary mimesis is *always* destined to be connected to naturalism? What sort of realism and social practice is produced by the entrepreneurial mentality and the 'artistic critique of capitalism' today? Viewed the other way, does the social document (in its various calibrations) illuminate the pressing challenges faced by the contemporary realist project?

In 2009 Mark Fisher deployed the term 'capitalist realism' as a substitute and update for 'postmodernism', arguing that it was important to differentiate a point in history – once again bracketed by the fall of the Berlin Wall – during which capitalism had been naturalised to such an extent that it 'seamlessly occupies the horizons of the thinkable.'⁷ Though he is careful to align his argument for succession specifically with Fredric Jameson's conception of postmodernism, the correlation between the two labels remains disconcerting, for Fisher's appears to be the very antithesis of postmodernism: 'capitalist' firmly reasserts the primacy of economic (rather than cultural) relations while 'realism' returns to a roundly spurned methodology. Notably, postmodernist and post-structuralist thought frequently offers a flattened, even simplistic interpretation of realism, tying it to uncritical, mimetic representations that adopt a positivistic approach considered to be insupportable in the wake of their insights.⁸ Lyotard's disparaging observation that realism 'always stands somewhere between academicism and kitsch',

⁵ David Craven, "Realism Revisited and Re-theorised in 'Pan-American' Terms," *Third Text* 21, no. 3, (2007): 307.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Ropley: Zero Books, 2009), 8. He goes on to describes it as 'a pervasive *atmosphere*, conditioning not only the production of culture but also the regulation of work and education, and acting as a kind of invisible barrier constraining thought and action.' *Ibid.*, 16. Parenthetically, it should be noted that a group of West German artists working in the 1960s including Gerhard Richter, Konrad Lueg, Manfred Kuttner and Sigmar Polke among others also referred to themselves under the brand of 'Capitalist Realists' (playing on the histories of 'Socialist Realism').

⁸ Here of course there are striking parallels with attitudes towards documentary modes in the heyday of postmodernism, as outlined in Chapter 2. See Beaumont, "Introduction: Reclaiming Realism."

for example, captures the paradoxical dismissal of its perceived dry intellectuality *and* naivety or popular appeal. In Fisher's usage (which is not tethered to the territories of art but rather addresses broader socio-political conditions) realism is associated, on the one hand, with a pernicious commonsensical attitude that is indeed stultifying, encapsulated by the admonishment to 'be realistic'.⁹ On the other, faced with an abstraction (capitalism) that has effectively incorporated all externalities Fisher lent on Brecht, together with Foucault and Badiou, to suggest that the first step of any emancipatory politics must be to re-articulate the parameters of what seems realistic by disrupting the appearance of the 'natural order'; of *rendering visible capital and its techniques*.¹⁰

Following their influence in the 1970s Brechtian approaches and themes have manifestly once again gained currency and momentum in the field of contemporary art, particularly since the 2008 financial crisis (or precisely when the 'realities' of the economy became all too apparent). This resurgence can be easily apprehended in those practices that foreground Brecht's influence – such as the Russian collective Chto Delat? (What Is to Be Done?) in their learning plays, newspapers and other outputs, or in the explicitly Brechtian theme adopted by the Croatian curatorial group WHW for 11th Istanbul Biennial *What Keeps Mankind Alive?* – as well as in a broader critical interest in strategies of disruption, estrangement and refunctioning in art practices that seek to engage or influence social realities.¹¹ It appears that, just as Jameson observed back in 1977, Brecht remains 'easily written in terms of the concerns of the present.'¹² Discussing the same 2009 edition of the Istanbul Biennial the writer and curator Pablo Lafuente observed that: 'The selection was almost exclusively of work that could be classified as realist.'¹³ Gail Day, Steve Edwards and David Mabb later remarked that attention to Brecht's output aligns with those historical junctures 'when possibilities for activism and cultural intervention open up.'¹⁴ Affirmations of an inherent connection between realist endeavours and political organisation have been given a more negative slant by others

⁹ Not in the sense of the well-known Situationist call to 'Be Realistic: Demand the Impossible.'

¹⁰ Fisher, *Capitalist Realism*, 17.

¹¹ Alexander Alberro, "Life Models," *frieze* 148, June-August 2012, accessed Aug 11, 2016, <https://frieze.com/article/life-models>.

¹² Fredric Jameson, "Reflections in Conclusion," in *Aesthetics and Politics*, Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Ernst Bloch, Bertolt Brecht, George Lukács (London: NLB, 1977), 204.

¹³ Pablo Lafuente, Pip Day, Maria Muhle, "The 11th Istanbul Biennial," *Afterall Online*, 2009, accessed 2 Aug 2016, <http://www.afterall.org/online/istanbul.biennial>.

¹⁴ Gail Day, Steve Edwards and David Mabb, "What Keeps Mankind Alive?": the Eleventh International Istanbul Biennial. Once More on Aesthetics and Politics," *Historical Materialism* 18 (2010): 148

who have taken up the 'realism question' more generally to note that periodic recoveries of realist approaches – like documentary – often occur at times of transition and crisis.¹⁵ As discussed in Chapter 1, this was indeed the case during those years associated with the adjustment from the hegemony of Fordism to post-Fordism which witnessed an intensive re-politicisation of art precisely *through* realist motives and approaches.

Day, Edwards and Mabb's argument that the return to realism in the early twenty-first century participates in a marked 'shift to the left' is of relevance to this thesis, particularly their claim that this very shift signals that 'there is something approaching an authentic anticapitalist avant-garde at work.'¹⁶ Though they set under this umbrella 'critical realist' approaches alongside – yet distinct from – interventionist or relational engagements as well as 'cognitive mapping' projects, a broader perspective can be adopted to address practices that pertain to social realities and that frequently entail the production of the social document.¹⁷ Furthermore, as I have already noted, while the charge of commodification is particularly easy to level at art documentation, this single criticism fails to appreciate its complexity, particularly in terms of its position vis-à-vis the production and mediation of the artwork.¹⁸ This makes the three authors' articulation of a pressing need for Marxist analyses of contemporary art to move beyond such well-worn critiques and advance and complicate their responses to politically-engaged practices particularly pertinent to the premise of this study.¹⁹

8.2 'More 'real' than reality itself'²⁰

With these thoughts in mind, it is notable that recent attempts to discuss or define realism in relation to twenty-first century artistic production have been sporadic and

¹⁵ Dieter Roelstraete, "Modernism, Postmodernism and Gleam: On the Photorealist Work Ethic," *Afterall* 24 (2010), accessed 12 July 2016, <http://www.afterall.org/journal/issue.24/modernismpostmodernism.and.gleamon.the.photorealist.work.ethic#footnote4687>.

¹⁶ Day et al., "What Keeps Mankind Alive?," 167. This reinvigorated interest in the avant-garde as it relates to contemporary artistic practice can be identified across a range of curatorial and art historical endeavours. See Enwezor, "The Black Box," 45; Léger, *Brave New Avant-Garde*.

¹⁷ Day et al., "What Keeps Mankind Alive?," 167.

¹⁸ See Chapters 1 and 3 of this thesis.

¹⁹ Day also problematises the undifferentiated reduction of all forms of contemporary art to 'the commodity' by leftist criticism in art in "Realism, Totality and the Militant *Citoyen*: Or, What Does Lukács Have to Do With Contemporary Art," in *Georg Lukács: The Fundamental Dissonance of Existence*, ed. Timothy Bewes and Timothy Hall (New York; London: Continuum, 2011): 203-219.

²⁰ This phrase is borrowed from Devin Fore, *Realism after Modernism: The Rehumanization of Art and Literature* (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2012).

circumspect. This evasion can be put down, at least in part, to the considerable weight of historical debates that render the territories quite so murky and perilous. Those few considerations which undertake a more sustained examination of realism's relevance to contemporary art have frequently sought to distance – *if not entirely divorce* – realism from any latent connection to documentary modes. As a case in point, two conference papers presented in 2013 and 2014 by Kerstin Stakemeier and Tamara Trodd respectively, proposed that the U.S. artist Ryan Trecartin – known for his hyper-saturated videos depicting accelerated worlds of futuristic dream-like excess – be taken as a contemporary proponent of realism.²¹ Trodd found strong parallels with Brecht's theatrical output; not only in Trecartin's disruptions, appropriations and amplifications, but in his presentation of thoroughly alienated subjects interpolated with new media.²² Both presenters foregrounded the artist's portrayal of the 'realities' of economic relations as well as the absence of a pre-existent media experience – or indeed any past whatsoever. Trecartin's overbearing concern with surface, then, neither pivots on an indexical relation to an external reality nor on the desire to pass beyond appearance to reveal an underlying reality. While Trodd highlighted the artist's refiguration of the 'abstract realities' of the internet as both substitute and technological 'second skin', intriguingly Stakemeier cast this 'digital core of subjectivity' as an updated version of Crimp's 'Pictures' generation, which, as I argued in Chapter 2, privileged the theatrical dimension of picture-making *specifically over documentation*.

²¹ Kerstin Stakemeier, "Realism and Naturalism: Another Media-Specificity" (paper, Tenth Annual Historical Materialism Conference London, November 8, 2013); Tamara Trodd, "Ryan Trecartin's Abstract Realism" (paper, Art in the Age of Real Abstraction symposium, UCL, London, May 10, 2014). Trecartin's highly constructed and theatrical works like *I-Be Area* (2007) and *Center Jenny* (2013) depict isolated (yet always connected) individuals as mere by-products of consumption in what he calls 'non-linear' looping narratives. See the artist's vimeo <https://vimeo.com/trecartin>, and http://www.saatchigallery.com/artists/ryan_trecartin.htm.

²² To this list I would add visual pleasure and engagement with models of popular entertainment.



Figure 53: Ryan Trecartin, *Center Jenny* (video still) 2013

This temporal orientation towards fictional, 'speculative' futures (rather than an historical past, or indeed urgent present) can be identified in numerous contemporaneous works including Melanie Gilligan's episodic videos such as *Popular Unrest* (2010).²³ Once again addressing the interpolation of technology with everyday life, Gilligan's compelling drama depicts a familiar yet altered world in which all economic transactions and social interactions are overseen by a system called 'the Spirit'. Various described as a medium, a totality and a web of social values, every aspect of life falls under its regime. It possesses the (biopolitical) ability to measure, compare and thereby control all dimensions of human existence; productivity is logged and analysed but, as one of the characters observes, 'feelings are one of the things the Spirit understands best.' In a published conversation with Gilligan I asked where she would situate her work in relation to a political, or 'critical' realism. Agreeing with my point that the thematics addressed in films like *Popular Unrest* were familiar to the histories of realist endeavours – the elaborations on labour, the attempts to de-mystify economic

²³ 'Speculation' has been the focus of much philosophical and theoretical thought in the 2010s. Vishmidt has offered a fascinating discussion on the entwining of art and finance utilising speculation. See Marina Vishmidt, "Indifferent Agent: Speculation as a Mode of Production in Art and Capital," in *ECONOMY: Art Production and the Subject in the 21st Century* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015). On the recent uses of the philosophical current known as speculative realism for a return to the studio and the object, see Svenja Bromberg, "The Anti-political Aesthetics of Objects and Worlds beyond," *Mute*, July 2013, accessed Sep 7, 2013, www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/anti-politicalaesthetics-objects-and-worlds-beyond; Katerina Kolozova and Eileen A. Joy, eds., *After the Speculative Turn: Realism, Philosophy and Feminism* (Earth, Milky Way: punctum books, 2016).

systems and processes, the commitment to knowledge production (as well as the use of humour and entertainment to that end) – she described her films as ‘compression of quite particular research on historically contingent events ... and at the same time broader and more abstract theorizations of the larger systemic forces that shape them.’²⁴

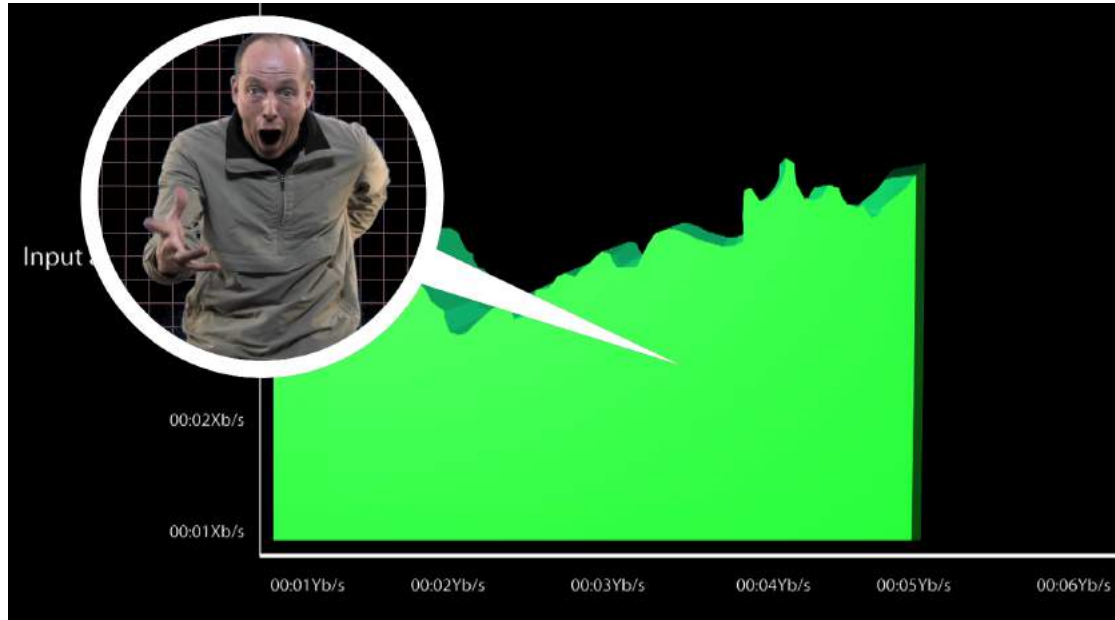


Figure 54: Melanie Gilligan, *Popular Unrest* (video still) 2010

The dark and claustrophobic re-visioning of Georg Lukács’s conception of reality as a totality – one indivisible from the operations of globalised capital and, apparently, this time, truly seamless – can also be related to conceptions of the ‘total system’ advanced by the Frankfurt School, which ‘expressed Adorno’s and Horkheimer’s sense of the increasingly closed organization of the world into a seamless web of media technology, multinational corporations, and international bureaucratic control.’²⁵ That said, the fantasy and virtual reality tropes adopted in *Popular Unrest* ally with Jameson’s proposals that have emerged through his longstanding theoretical engagements with realism; most recently, his argument that that the realist works of the present and future will necessarily be science-fictional.²⁶ This claim resonates with Jameson’s earlier call for

²⁴ Angela Dimitrakaki and Kirsten Lloyd, “(Re)Making the World: An Interview with Melanie Gilligan on Capitalist Exchange, Subject Formation and ‘Social Synthesis,” in *ECONOMY: Art Production and the Subject in the 21st Century* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015), 196.

²⁵ Jameson, “Reflections in Conclusion,” 208.

²⁶ Fredric Jameson, *Antinomies of Realism* (London; New York: Verso, 2013), 298.

realism to restore 'some active and even playful/experimental impulses to the inertia of its appearance as a copy or representation of things.'²⁷

Here, then, are instances of realist 'enstagings' that evade derogatory charges of linearity, transparency and descriptive accuracy. While they capture many features, themes, concerns and approaches that have been associated with past realisms, they rely not on direct mirroring but on more elastic (yet no less 'realist') notions of cognition and recognition. Added to these critiques, if, as I discussed in Chapter 4, contemporary art has undergone an economic turn, and, at the same time, what can be called *capital's 'representational problem'* (already pointed to in Marx's work) has been underscored by the structural transformation associated with financialisation, artistic recourse to the realms of the virtual, fictional, abstract and speculative is perhaps unsurprising.²⁸

To underline this tendency, Hito Steyerl's contribution to the German Pavilion at the 2015 Venice Biennale *Factory of the Sun* (2015) took the form of an immersive installation that resembled a virtual reality holodeck.²⁹ Moreover, while the associated interpretation materials claim that the piece sits 'somewhere between a documentary approach and full on virtuality', the eidetic video presents the incessant dancing of a gold-clad YouTube star and his avatars, actors parodying corporate spokesmen, tropes of online gaming and clearly manipulated news footage of protests. 'This is what realism looks like today,' Steyerl asserted in a public discussion hosted by The Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles.³⁰ Yet despite her claims – as well as her reputation as one of the leading theorists of the documentary turn – it is difficult to see how *Factory of the Sun* can be associated with a documentary approach. In her analysis of other works within Steyerl's oeuvre, Stakemeier has affirmed this connection with realism but has argued that Steyerl's works 'dismantle the term's common association with a somewhat truthful representation.'³¹ (This disassociation, as I will argue, has become a common trope in the era of 'post-truth'). Earlier, in her essay 'The Empire of Senses' of 2007,

²⁷ Fredric Jameson, *Signatures of the Visible* (London: Routledge, 1992), 162.

²⁸ Alberto Toscano has noted the impossibility of 'seeing' capital – whether in the factory or the marketplace. Alberto Toscano, "Seeing Socialism: On the Aesthetics of the Economy, Production and the Plan," in *ECONOMY: Art Production and the Subject in the 21st Century* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015), 106.

²⁹ The pavilion's curator Florian Ebner reconceived the display space as a factory and articulated the dominant themes of the group show as – once again – 'work', migration' and 'revolt'.

³⁰ Lanka Tattersall, "What Is Contemporary? A Conversation with Hito Steyerl," 21 Feb 2016, Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, accessed 10 Aug 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sNW1PP-034Q>.

³¹ Kerstin Stakemeier, "Minor Findings and Major Tendencies," *Afterall* 19 (2008): 56.

Steyerl returned to the New Realism of Kazimir Malevich, proposing that we follow his lead in *Red Square: Visual Realism of a Peasant Woman in Two Dimensions* (1915) to interpret the red of the now-permanent terror alerts as a realist portrait of the trafficked sex workers of the early twenty-first century. This, she contends, is the only realist strategy available to visualise unrepresentable dilemmas encountered, for example, by women driven to brutal violence after being transported across oceans and forced into prostitution.³² The same notion of performing an extreme reduction to the level of affect finds another manifestation in her monochrome video triptych *Red Alert* (2007) which dispenses with representation in favour of the abstraction of 'pure feeling'. In consciously updating and re-enacting Alexander Rodchenko's three canvases *Pure Red Colour*, *Pure Yellow Colour* and *Pure Blue Colour* produced in 1921, she invites a consideration of the distinctions between two historical moments (revolutionary Russia and the context of what I call biopolitical globalisation) while enacting – and, moreover, highlighting – a significant transition from painting to the lens.³³

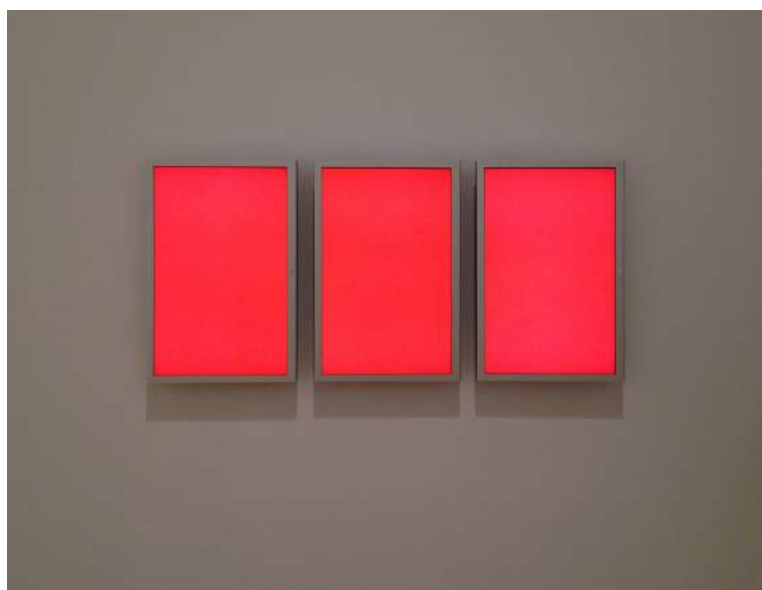


Figure 55: Hito Steyerl, *Red Alert* (exhibition view) 2007

³² Hito Steyerl, "The Empire of Senses: Police as Art and the Crisis of Representation," *eipcp* (2006), accessed May 15, 2016, <http://eipcp.net/transversal/1007/steyerl/en>. It is surely significant that Boris Groys also made recourse to the work of Malevich in his discussion of the document in the biopolitical age. See Groys, "Art in the Age of Biopolitics," 53-65. The invocation of Malevich draws out the contentious relationships between realism and the avant-garde as well as realism and abstraction. In 1953 Alfred Barr advanced a polemic against figurative art and for abstraction, claiming that Realism and Totalitarianism belong together. See Alfred Barr, "Is Modern Art Communistic?," in *Defining Modern Art: Selected Writings of Alfred H. Barr* ed. Irving Sandler and Amy Newman (New York: Abrams, 1986): 214-219.

³³ This same transition is repeated in other works that can be said to 'thematise realism' as I will discuss later in this chapter.

From all this, then, the question that inevitably arises is whether a realism updated for contemporary times must indeed abandon the document and documentary modes in order to adequately address current conditions. I use the verb ‘address’ here deliberately, as it speaks to a crucial, and as yet unresolved issue, namely; what is demanded of realism in the early twenty-first century? To represent (whether mimetically or by incorporating a political perspective)? To reveal? To intervene? Or even, to transform? Given the social document’s *traversal* of the two dominant trends in contemporary art practice – those of technological mediation and the situational immediacy of encounter-based work – I argue that these are precisely the trenchant questions that its analysis is equipped to negotiate.

8.3 Reflections and the love of reality

It should be clear by now that I am not invested in a conceptualisation of realism as a formalist paradigm or ‘style’, nor am I convinced by claims that seek to sever realism’s ties with actual politics. A recent proponent of the latter position is Devin Fore who asserted that it is possible to disconnect an analysis of realism from what he calls ‘political allegiance’.³⁴ In contrast, I hold that a concern with mediation and social and/or political impact has been of central concern to the realist enterprise. I align myself, then, with those positions that assert realism to be more than just an aesthetic project, when the ‘aesthetic’ is supposed to deliver a self-contained register. If the impossibility of a wholesale transposition of historical debates on realism to the present day is plain enough, their critical navigation remains useful, even urgent.

In what follows I move through an analysis of a selection of perspectives on realism which I contend hold relevance to the theorisation of the social document. I consider the treatment of the concept in contemporary art theory as well as historical positions, using a particular case to test the ‘realist potential’ of the social document: an example produced by Pilvi Takala, a Finnish artist who records her interventions into a variety of work contexts. I set out to ‘turn’ this case study through the debates, examining how it exemplifies or aligns with – as well as departs from – significant tendencies and positions. Through this process I aim to both unlock a more in-depth analysis of the social document’s potential as a realist formation and to offer a new perspective on its *structure*

³⁴ Fore, *Realism after Modernism*, 14.

and features. This latter task will expand upon the discussion advanced in Chapter 4. As will become apparent, in testing this final hypothesis I aim to connect with Marxist debates on the meanings and potential of realism. Ultimately, I propose that a new vision of documentary realism suited to the era of biopolitical globalisation is not only required but is underway in the formation of the social document.

To begin with a few words of orientation; Jameson notes that the emergence of realism is ‘contemporaneous with the secularization of the world under capitalism.’³⁵ The first recorded usage of the term ‘realism’ is from French art criticism in 1826 and its rise is closely associated with the mid-nineteenth century, usually with reference to its reclamation by the painter Gustave Courbet following a derisive review of his retrospective exhibition in 1855 in which he was attacked as a ‘realist’.³⁶ What Roberts described as Courbet’s ‘explicit alignment of the painting of history with the experiences of the dominated’ passed into action when he participated in the Paris Commune of 1871.³⁷ His effort to ‘turn the movement into his material’ during the insurrection has been described by Gavin Grindon as ‘a kind of prefiguration of 20th century German artist Joseph Beuy’s [sic] notions of social sculpture’ – an early *direct* connection with politics and intervention that, as I will demonstrate, is of relevance to a contemporary formulation of realism.³⁸ My ambition in this chapter is to hold on to, and elaborate upon, the questions and tensions that are so intriguingly proposed in this historical instance, specifically as they relate to the social document.

It should be emphasised that in recent times realism has not only received intermittent attention but that attempts that engage it have often displayed what can principally be described as a marked reticence, either reducing and narrowing the term to its most limited meaning in order to dismiss it, or deploying it lightly without any sense of a sustained interrogation appropriate to its historical weight or complexity. While there are of course exceptions, as well as a few compelling lines of enquiry (such as those outlined in the previous section), it is important to note this distinct lack of momentum, or indeed a sense of urgency that would be appropriate to current circumstances. The

³⁵ Jameson, “Reflections in Conclusion,” 198.

³⁶ For a full discussion see T.J. Clark, *Image of the People: Gustave Courbet and the 1848 Revolution* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973).

³⁷ Roberts, *The Art of Interruption*, 14.

³⁸ Gavin Grindon, “Art and Activism in the age of the Anthropocene,” in Victoria and Albert Museum Blog (2014), accessed Apr 2, 2016, <http://www.vam.ac.uk/blog/disobedient-objects/art-and-activism-in-the-age-of-the-anthropocene>.

scarcity of discussions that relate realism to art that engages with the social sphere through participation and encounter is perhaps particularly surprising given the former's enduring association with a desire to achieve an ever more proximate connection with – and thereby *impact on* – social relations or realities. It is referred to only passingly in the now canonical accounts of Claire Bishop and Grant Kester. And yet particular commonalities can be discerned between the early preoccupations of certain kinds of cinematic realism and more recent theorisations relating to art in the social field, such as the desire to evade mediation and a commitment to durational engagements – think, for example, of the film theorist André Bazin and the realist tactic of the 'long take'.³⁹

Two accounts that do afford the topic further attention are therefore worth mention; notably, both are concerned with artists who reframe 'non-art' labour as part of their artistic labour and function within the 'real field of the production of goods and services'.⁴⁰ While Nicolas Bourriaud's criterion for the 'operative realism' he cites as a core strand of relational aesthetics is that 'the work proposes a functional model and not a maquette', Julia Bryan-Wilson later defined 'occupational realism' as instances where the realms of wage-labour and art *collapse to the point of indistinction*.⁴¹ The writers' reasoning behind their respective recourse to the 'realism' label is, however, varied bordering on superficial. For Bryan-Wilson, not only does the term speak to the *pragmatism* and prudence of the artists (who are seeking strategies that will allow them to sustain both their practices and themselves) as well as attempt to nullify any charges of mere play acting to instead fully 'occupy' the positions they take up, it also places her examples within a rich lineage of realist works from the history of art that engage the thematic of *labour*. Referencing Courbet she argues for his contemporary import in terms

³⁹ Bazin championed the 'long take' over montage as a means of deepening the viewer's involvement in the reality of the film. His claims for the ability of realist techniques to deliver an unmediated perception of physical reality are now untenable. For him, cinema's realism was founded upon the ontology of the photographic image – its ability to transfer 'the reality from the thing to its reproduction'. André Bazin, *What is Cinema? Vol. 2*, trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 14.

⁴⁰ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, 35. Bourriaud has also sought to connect contemporary practice to a realist mode of conceiving art in Nicolas Bourriaud, "The Realist Project," *The Exform*, trans. Erik Butler (London; New York; Verso, 2016): 75-97.

⁴¹ Ibid., 112; Julia Bryan-Wilson, "Occupational Realism," *The Drama Review* 56, no. 4 (2012): 32-48. Bourriaud's use of the term 'operative' calls to mind the playwright and futurist Sergei Tretyakov's notion of the 'operative writer' cited by Walter Benjamin in his influential essay "The Author as Producer". Benjamin states: 'Tretyakov distinguishes the operative writer from one who gives information. *His mission is not to report, but to struggle*; he does not play the role of spectator, but actively intervenes. He defines his task through the statements he makes about his activity [emphasis added].' Walter Benjamin, "The Author as Producer," *New Left Review* 1, no. 62 (1970).

of placing his own artistic labour in a relative position to that of everyday peasant labour.⁴² The redefinition of social relations under post-Fordist capitalism constitutes a central concern of Bryan-Wilson's enquiry as she posits that 'artists engaged in occupational realism prefigure [...] the collapsing categories of work, performance, and art in precarious times.'⁴³ At the same time, it is notable that critiques of Bourriaud's thesis frequently take as their target his claims for the overcoming of social alienation through art.⁴⁴ In doing so they resonate with Paul Wood's analysis of the historic failure and 'hollowness' of many past realisms. Wood states: 'The story they [past realisms] tell is frequently more of a longing for sociality than its actual existence.'⁴⁵ As my analysis of the chronicles of care produced by Dani Marti and WochenKlausur in Chapter 7 suggests, these issues are frequently brought into sharp focus and *amplified* by the production of social documents that respond to the prevalent appetite for *visions* of sociality and care in the gallery context.

Significantly, in the cases of both Bourriaud and Bryan-Wilson it is not the associated lens-generated outputs that are designated realist, rather, it is the *interventions* that attain the label, which, it is also emphasised, are *useful*. Put another way, these realist works attempt to go beyond mimesis and representation to become the thing itself – an aim that can parenthetically be related to Productivism's avant-garde negotiations of reality as well as questions of realism in 1920s Soviet Russia – I will return to this point later.⁴⁶ Bryan-Wilson's and Bourriaud's conspicuous avoidance of a serious discussion of any associated photographic or moving image materials that arise through such 'full-scale' or '1:1' works would appear to constitute a concerted effort to reorient the term away from those 'old' and distasteful questions of documentary realism. I argue that vital perspectives on the artworks themselves are thereby missed and moreover, that while pointing in some interesting directions, their 'light touch' (to say the least) approach to realism's histories and discourses ultimately stops well short of drawing any meaningful connections and conclusions vis-à-vis the history of art as a political document in its own right.

⁴² Bryan-Wilson, "Occupational Realism," 43. Here Bryan-Wilson is presumably referring to paintings such as Courbet's *The Stonebreakers* of 1849.

⁴³ Bryan-Wilson, "Occupational Realism," 45.

⁴⁴ For a cogent and illuminating discussion see Martin, "Critique of Relational Aesthetics."

⁴⁵ Paul Wood, "Realisms and Realities," in *Realism, Rationalism, Surrealism: Art Between the Wars*, eds. Bryony Fer, David Batchelor, and Paul Wood (New Haven; London: Yale and The Open University, 1993), 255.

⁴⁶ Once again any associated photographic or moving image materials barely receive mention regardless of – as I have argued in Part I of this thesis – the vital role they play in the production of the artwork as such.

While realism's history is thoroughly interdisciplinary – taking in literature, theatre, film as well as the 'visual' arts – I am particularly interested in its connection to the lens. In addition to its parallel emergence and popularisation with the 'new' technology of photography, subsequent confrontations with the lens have held considerable influence in shaping theorisations of realism. In the preceding chapters I have touched upon a number of aspects of these encounters, particularly as they have played out in 'socially informed' art history on the left, including the debates as they evolved in 1970s, the repudiation of realism associated with critical deconstructionism in the photographic theory of the 1980s, and Jameson's conception of 'cognitive mapping' which I framed as a realist strategy. Yet the specific absence of an advanced discussion on realism in recent literature examining the use of documentary modes in contemporary art must be acknowledged – an omission all the more also striking given the central position the topic occupies in the documentary field.⁴⁷ While Mark Nash predicted that 'artists' work with documentary has the potential to inject a new realism into contemporary art,' T.J. Demos refers to it only in the negative, relying upon the 'classic' definition as a claim to transparency or objectivity and, as such, positioned beyond articulation.⁴⁸

In an article published in *Screen* in 1974 Colin MacCabe frames the classic realist text as something which merely allows reality to appear and therefore 'cannot deal with the real as contradictory' while also 'ensur[ing] the position of the subject in a relation of dominant specular[ity].'⁴⁹ Under such a definition the lens is frequently afforded a privileged position – particularly in its analogue phase – due to its capacity to get closer to reality not only by means of mimesis but through its direct physical connection afforded by its dependence upon an indexical relation. In this way its results have been said to carry 'a certificate of realism as part of [their] fundamental ontology.'⁵⁰ Demos's adherence to this classic interpretation misses a significant opportunity to connect with those debates on realism – particularly Brecht's work on mediation – that would have

⁴⁷ Ian Aitkin states that 'how ever the matter is addressed, documentary film cannot evade the question of realism'. Ian Aitkin, "Realism. Philosophy, and the Documentary Film," in *Encyclopedia of Documentary Film, Volume 3*, ed. Ian Aitkin (New York; Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), 1097. As noted in the introduction, John Grierson and Robert Flaherty both anchored documentary to a realist tradition.

⁴⁸ Nash, "Reality in the Age of Aesthetics," unpaginated. Demos, *The Migrant Image*.

⁴⁹ In other words, to grasp the real one must simply 'look and see what *Things* there are (emphasis in original.' Colin MacCabe, "Realism and the Cinema: Notes on Some Brechtian Theses," *Screen* 15, no. 2 (1974): 12.

⁵⁰ Mitchell calls this existence as both index and icon 'a kind of double entry bookkeeping of the real.' W.J.T. Mitchell, "Realism and the Digital Image," in *Critical Realism in Contemporary Art*, eds. Jan Baetens and Hilde Van Gelder (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2010), 13.

problematised his bold claims for the engendering of political engagement through art viewership, as discussed in Chapters 3 and 4. However, it is this narrow interpretation that allows him to commend Ahlam Shibli's photography for its 'deconstruction of the ideology of realism', a perspective that draws from now well-rehearsed critiques of these classic understandings that point to the smoothing and concealing operations that underpin surface representations.⁵¹ These are perhaps best known from feminist film theory. Claire Johnston has argued: 'What the camera in fact grasps is the "natural" world of the dominant ideology [...], the "truth" of our oppression cannot be "captured" on celluloid with the "innocence" of the camera: it has to be constructed.'⁵² The realist position is once again, then, tethered to positivism and held to naturalise conditions as well as delimit the potential for social transformation.

Nevertheless, the classic position cannot be dismissed wholesale, for the lens appears to retain something of its special purchase on the real. This can be seen in the continued *legibility* of the visual codes of documentary as an articulation of reality. Indeed, this notion of 'recognition' constitutes a fundamental attribute of both realism and the documentary genre.⁵³ It can also be witnessed in the deployment of the lens in scientific contexts where it is used to generate images of territories previously unknown to the human eye, whether in medical or extraterrestrial contexts.⁵⁴ Despite its known susceptibility to manipulation, digitalisation has reinforced the connection between the lens and the referent, *expanding* its potential for use and knowledge production. Such advances in digital technology constitute part of the relentless updating of 'the photographic' that has seen it continuously regenerate and reclaim its quality of newness. Indeed, the commitment to ever-higher levels of reproductive fidelity – in

⁵¹ Demos, *The Migrant Image*, 141. His interpretation of the term follows that of many of his mentors – Rosalind Krauss, Hal Foster et al. – who, in their critical deconstructionism, did not differentiate between realism and positivism.

⁵² Claire Johnston: *Women's Cinema as Countercinema*, in *Feminist Film Theory*, ed. Sue Thornham (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 37. Other examples include Ruby Rich who asserted that 'the tradition of realism in the cinema has never done well by women. Indeed, extolling realism to women is rather like praising the criminal to the victim, so thoroughly have women been falsified under its banner.' B. Ruby Rich, *Chick Flicks: Theories and Memories of the Feminist Film Movement* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1998).

⁵³ As Bill Nicols has observed, resemblance is a central aspect of documentary aesthetics. Bill Nicols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1991), 28. I will return to the importance of 'recognition' shortly.

⁵⁴ W.J.T. Mitchell, "Realism and the Digital Image," 16. As Esther Leslie has pointed out, 'the word "lens" in various European languages is some form of the Latin word *objectus* – in German, *Objektive*, in French, *objectif*, in Italian, *obiettivo*.' Esther Leslie, "Interrupted Dialogues of Realism and Modernism: 'The fact of new forms of life, already born and active'," in *Adventures in Realism Realism* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2007), 128.

science and domestic devices – affirms capitalism’s conspicuous interest and investment in this process. Echoing the arguments advanced in Chapter 4 of this thesis, the novelist Will Self humorously discussed the immanent prospect of televisions that display images of a higher resolution than the human eye is capable of perceiving, pointing to a future that passes from verisimilitude into full integration and augmentation.⁵⁵ While W.J.T. Mitchell is correct in noting that the lens-based products of scientific instruments are not referred to as realist, video games that aim precisely for this high (surface-) level mimesis often do so through a ‘realism’ setting.⁵⁶

To be clear however, I am not arguing that conceptions of realism in the documentary field have always followed linear understandings of transparency or direct mimesis. To a certain extent Grierson’s own resistance to ‘documentary naturalism’ chimes with one important current described by Williams in his *Keywords* volume under the ‘realism’ entry: ‘Reality is here seen not as static *appearance* but as the movement of psychological or social or physical forces; realism is then a conscious commitment to understanding and describing these. It then may or may not include realistic description or *representation* of particular features.’⁵⁷ The issues such an understanding presents for any conception of the ‘realist lens’ are plain. The strong Marxist history in acknowledging the deficiencies of the documentary image has been well noted; from the charges levelled by Lukács of ‘fetishising facts’ and bolstering humanist values to Louis Althusser’s impact on photographic theory in the 1970s.⁵⁸ While Lukács took issue with the critical potential of immediacy and the use of reportage as a creative device, it is Brecht’s maxim on the *limitations* of photographic realism (via the Marxist sociologist Fritz Sternberg) that is the most frequently cited.⁵⁹ Similarly concerned with the workings of ideology Brecht remarked that, under capitalist conditions, a photograph of the exterior of a factory

⁵⁵ Will Self, “Our Digital Lives and the Chaos Beneath,” *Guardian*, Aug 6, 2016, accessed Aug 6, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/aug/06/will-self-digital-lives-chaos-box-set>. This theme has been taken up with regard to animated documentaries. In her doctoral thesis examining this topic Nea Ehrlich focused on the ‘virtualisation’ of culture, arguing that animation’s impact on the relation between visual signification and believability necessitates a reconsideration of what shapes a sense of realism in documentaries. Ehrlich, *Animated Realities*.

⁵⁶ W.J.T. Mitchell, “Realism and the Digital Image,” 16.

⁵⁷ Williams, *Keywords*, 261. For a brief summary of Grierson’s position see also Aitkin, “Realism. Philosophy, and the Documentary Film,” 1097.

⁵⁸ Paul Wood, “Realisms and Realities,” 320. For Althusser’s impact see Tagg, *The Burden of Representation*.

⁵⁹ Georg Lukács, “Reportage or Portrayal?” *Essays on Realism* ed. Rodney Livingstone, trans. David Fernbach (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1980).

reveals nothing about the exploitative social relations therein.⁶⁰ Yet if his assertion that any attempt to do so would require construction and artifice again finds resonance with the science fictional artworks cited above, he did not dispense with documentary modes altogether. Another text, 'Über Photographie' (1928) asserted his interest in the apparently privileged relationship that the photograph has to truth and reality, maintaining that they show what things do, if not necessarily what they are.⁶¹ In addition, Brecht's *Kriegsfibel* (*War Primer*), published in 1955, comprised of 'photo-epigrams' overlaid his own short verses onto newspaper and magazine clippings of conflict. Collected over the course of 30 years this book was intended to offer both a critique of warfare and introduce readers to what he called 'complex seeing'.⁶²

In a similar vein yet in a different historical moment, the artist and theorist Allan Sekula described his own dependence upon processes of construction in his search for a critical (as distinct from optical) realism 'of everyday experience in and against the grip of advanced capitalism.'⁶³ Construction in Sekula's case took the form of composing documentary imagery into 'epic' or essayistic narratives as can be seen in works such as *Waiting for Tear Gas* (1999-2000) or *Fish Story* (1989-1995) which, in its examination of commodity production and distribution, insisted on the slow, heaving materiality of globalisation. Both Sekula and Brecht registered a pressing urgency for intelligibility and truthfulness to social reality, precisely in order to underscore its capacity to be shaped and transformed. As Marx stressed: 'The materialist doctrine that men are products of circumstances and upbringing ... forgets that it is men who change circumstances.'⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Bertolt Brecht, "No Insight through Photography," in *Brecht on Film and Radio*, ed. Marc Silberman (London: Methuen, 2000), 144. As a provocative aside he noted that the sociologist was far more likely to be taken seriously than the creative.

⁶¹ Cited and translated by Kristopher Imbrigotta, "History and the Challenge of Photography in Bertolt Brecht's *Kriegsfibel*," *Radical History Review* 106 (2010): 29.

⁶² For a detailed examination of this work see Ibid. Once again, Brecht's renewed popular appeal can be seen in the reworking of *War Primer* by the artists Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin, this time using images trawled from the internet produced since 9/11. Their *War Primer 2* (2011) won the 2013 Deutsche Börse photography prize.

⁶³ Allan Sekula, *Allan Sekula: Photography Against the Grain: Essays and Photoworks 1973-1983*, ed. Benjamin Buchloh, (Halifax: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1984), ix. The term 'critical realism' itself is one that is more readily associated with Lukács. The essay form is related to the influential discussions around realism that took place in the 1930s – See T.W. Adorno "The Essay as Form," *New German Critique* 32 (1984): 151-171. Kerstin Stakemeier also cites these debates in "Minor Findings and Major Tendencies," 55. Here again Demos's simplistic understanding of realism is again shown to be problematic when he moves to define it against the complexities of reconstructive essayist approaches (such of those of Ursula Biemann or Hito Steyerl).

⁶⁴ Karl Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach," in *The German Ideology*, Karl Marx with Friedrich Engels (New York: Prometheus Books, 1988), 572-573.

The social document cuts a course through the complexities that beset this topic. It problematises any perceived *binary* divide between relational and representational artistic practice. An assertion of its links to a realist enterprise must therefore depart from Paul Wood's definition of realism as suggesting 'an orientation on, rather direct connection with, reality', for, under my definition, the social document and the artwork of which it is a part achieves both.⁶⁵ As an *effect produced through and as part of* the reconfigured artwork, the social document, by definition, *depends* upon this 'direct connection', recording artistic actions and manipulations that take place *within* social relations. It asserts that a unique process or event *happened*, enacting an embrace of reality as external to the text-image. If, by extension, it can be claimed that documentary modes have reasserted their traction with respect to realist motives, unpacking the '*problematic usefulness*' of realism must be central to an analysis of the social document.⁶⁶

Connecting the social document with the rich legacy of realist concerns and methods serves to identify crucial shared attributes that link its various formations. Discussing the nineteenth-century realist novel Simon Dentith has claimed that it functioned as a 'powerful exploratory device, which allowed societies to explain themselves to themselves in flexible and comprehensive way.'⁶⁷ The social document continues with this realist commitment to timeliness, political relevance, and knowledge production; to the promotion of a deeper understanding of the concrete social relations of its era of production. As Jameson notes: '[t]he originality of the very concept of realism ... lies in its claim to cognitive as well as aesthetic status.'⁶⁸ Furthermore, across the spectrum of approaches that give rise to the social document there can be identified a shared *drive towards overcoming* – whether the overcoming the reification of consciousness produced by capitalism or alienation. The range of works discussed over the course of this thesis illustrate this drive can be expressed, on the one hand, through the spirit of negation that Day has noted imbues Brecht's critique of photographic realism as well as much of art's practice and theory (particularly on the left), and, on the other, through the communication of a social pragmatism or affirmation (even, in some cases, utopianism). While the latter might tend to invest in relatively passive 'long takes' or slow, cumulative

⁶⁵ Paul Wood, "Realisms and Realities," 254.

⁶⁶ Here I quote Angela Dimitrakaki in her discussion on feminist debates in film and art. Dimitrakaki, *Gender, ArtWork and the Global Imperative*, 172.

⁶⁷ Simon Dentith, "Realist Synthesis in the Nineteenth-Century Novel: 'That unity which lies in the selection of our keenest consciousness'," in *Adventures in Realism*, ed. Matthew Beaumont (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 41.

⁶⁸ Jameson, "Reflections in Conclusion," 198.

engagements, others privilege metaphors of *excavation* – from Brecht’s and Lukács’s respective discussions of attempts to delve beneath the immediacy of surface experiences, right through to Jameson’s proposed cognitive maps and identification of a demand for ‘archaeologies of the future’.⁶⁹ Still others appear to aim for a striking moment of insight or ‘unmasking’.⁷⁰ From this perspective the social document can be framed not only as party to a new form of realism but as *a struggle over realism*.

8.4 Be realistic! Living labour and the petrified world of dead work⁷¹

*The strike of the conceptual artists is romantic. Realism would be the strike of their assistants.*⁷²

*The real fault-line today is not between capital and labour. It is between capital and life.*⁷³

Comprised of artists, writers, filmmakers and activists, the Russian workgroup Chto Delat? describe their practice as a ‘collective reconsideration of critical realism’.⁷⁴ Their video *Builders* (2004) takes its inspiration from the painting that bookends its content: *The Builders of Bratsk* (1961) by the Soviet Realist Viktor Popkov. In it four men and one woman are presented against a black ground neither labouring nor fully at leisure but rather during an active moment of pause and (possibly) reflection: as they stare out they appear to have successfully overcome the division of mental and manual labour that, according to Marx, is core to capital’s exploitation of labour. The main body of *Builders* comprises a series of still images that document the group’s attempt to restage the painting this time using a night sky to reference its dark background. The accompanying soundtrack carries their informal discussion reflecting on the slideshow’s production, using it as a vehicle to broach topics ranging from questions of community to how to

⁶⁹ Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity* (London; New York: Verso, 2002), 215.

⁷⁰ As noted, Kester has critiqued the focus on the shocking renewal of perception as it is positioned as a central tenant of the historic avant-garde – including realism. He contrasts this with the refusal of immediacy in dialogic projects’ durational encounters arguing that they prompt a redefinition of aesthetic experience. Kester, *Conversation Pieces*, 13; 27.

⁷¹ Cederstrom and Fleming, *Dead Man Working*, 8.

⁷² Realism Working Group, “Historical Fiction as Realism – Interview with Claire Fontaine,” *Realism! Online Magazine*, (2008), accessed Aug 11, 2015, <https://realismworkinggroup.org/interview-with-claire-fontaine/>.

⁷³ Cederstrom and Fleming, *Dead Man Working*, 7.

⁷⁴ David Riff, “Criticality or Truth?,” *eipcp* (2008), accessed Aug 30, 2016, <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0806/riff/en>

produce revolutionary art. While the title of the original painting refers to the new city that the subjects have presumably built, the setting for its re-enactment is a derelict strip of land; strongly-lit, secure and monumental poses have been replaced by the unforgiving glare of a flash bulb and a sequence of gestures suggestive of (mildly inebriated) disport.



Figure 56 (left): Viktor Popkov, *Builders of Bratsk* (oil on canvas) 1961

Figure 57 (right): Chto Delat?, *Builders* (video still) 2004

The transition that *Builders* articulates from painting to the lens finds powerful resonance in a parallel move registered by the piece first towards and then away from the certainties of State communism. Yet this is not, as one critic-curator suggested, a 'straightforward homage to a work of post-Stalinist propaganda.'⁷⁵ Rather it is a work produced in what Boris Buden has called the former East's 'desert of the Left': in this hostile post-communist space 'there is no fresh water, no means of life whatsoever for new left-wing initiatives' – anything that does exist, he claims, has been imported from the West.⁷⁶ In *Builders*, then, there is an attempt to return to and (literally) animate the themes of the original from a radically different standpoint while deploying mimetic procedures in order to clarify and test the link.⁷⁷ Yet from another perspective, the movement afforded by the technology (the lens) matches a movement in time (the future of the painting) that signifies no-progress, entropy, collapse, loss. For the theorist Bojana Kunst, the central question posed by *Builders* is: 'how can working together be possible amid the ruins of community?'⁷⁸ In the video soundtrack the protagonists discuss their

⁷⁵ Nicholas Cullinan, "Slavs and Tatars and Chto Delat," *Artforum* (February, 2011), 170.

⁷⁶ Boris Buden, "Re-Reading Benjamin's "Author as Producer" in the Post-Communist East," *eipcp* (2004) accessed 30 August 2016, <http://eipcp.net/transversal/1204/buden/en>. Therborn supports this view, noting the remarkable speed with which Communist tradition evaporated in Russia to be replaced by conservative nationalism. Therborn, "Class in the 21st Century," 9; 23

⁷⁷ Nicholas Cullinan, "Group Think" *Artforum* 49, February 2011, 162-171

⁷⁸ Bojana Kunst, *Artist at Work: Proximity of Art and Capitalism* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2015), 94.

mutual search for something new and, referring to the figures in the original painting, they assert: 'It turns out that the place at which they stand and look to the future has been vacated. And we have the same right to look to the future and hope.'

Of particular interest to the present discussion is another striking substitution, this time of an emphasis on *material* labour with an undefined 'immaterial' *artistic* labour premised on discourse. Group member David Riff has proposed that Chto Delat? together with other similar self-organising 'research and education' initiatives such as Prelom in Belgrade and 16Beaver in New York (and, I would add, *unitednationsplaza* in Berlin) constitute a basis for new critical realisms insofar as they break with accepted modes and help to prepare the grounds for political transition.⁷⁹ Just as *A Crime Against Art* (2007) performatively documented the activities of *unitednationsplaza*, *Builders* is framed within the piece itself as a means for the workgroup to, as they state in the video, 'make a piece about our community.'

While a contemporary critic cited Popkov's thematisation of 'the resurgence of life' in the *The Builders of Bratsk*, Takala's *The Trainee* (2008), by contrast, deals with the everyday world of 'dead work'.⁸⁰ The associated video begins with a text credit noting the date and the title of the first intervention: 'A Day at Consulting'. Over the course of three vignettes that span a total of just 13 minutes we watch the artist-protagonist 'Johanna' Takala disrupt the everyday working environment of employees of the global professional services firm Deloitte using only the slightest of methods – friendly refusal. Gradually giving up working during her month-long placement, she captured the responses of colleagues in three different divisions through hidden cameras and their communications with her supervisor who was aware of the project. Documentary filmmakers have often deployed the 'day in the life' trope to analyse the working practices and conditions in a range of settings, from hunting grounds to biscuit factories.⁸¹ Yet the episodes presented by Takala are not merely observational, nor do they document her disappearance into the contours of her profession (to paraphrase

⁷⁹ Riff, "Criticality or Truth?," unpaginated. Riff's call for a collective reconsideration of 'critical realism' connects back to Lukács's work. See Georg Lukács, "Critical Realism and Socialist Realism," in *Twentieth Century Literary Theory: A Reader*, ed. K.M Newton (London: Macmillan Education, 1988): 89-92.

⁸⁰ The website also states that the work was realised by three members of the group: Tsaplya [Olga Egorova], Nikolay Oleinikov and Dmitry Vilensky. See "Builders," Chto Delat, accessed Jul 7, 2016, <https://chtodelat.org/b8-newspapers/12-66/video-film-builders/>.

⁸¹ For a recent example see Jerome Everson's *Park Lanes* (2015), a film documenting the daily routine of a factory over precisely eight hours.

Bryan-Wilson); rather her 'occupation' of both her role and the building takes the form of small acts of apparent resistance.⁸²



Figure 58: Pilvi Takala, *The Trainee* (video still) 2008

Once again, the artwork here is dispersed across a number of sites, materials and moments. The edited and subtitled documentation is freely available via the artist's website, with gallery presentations incorporating additional materials such as the clothing worn during the intervention.⁸³ The full-scale installation places the video documentation in a white-cube gallery refashioned as a corporate office space where the viewer encounters the familiar accoutrements of the contemporary workplace, including meeting table and chairs, laptop and PowerPoint display (this time all on loan from Deloitte) as well as a vitrine holding Takala's lanyard, ID and welcome letter. The exhibition visitor is thereby cast as the witness to the evidence of the intervention.⁸⁴

⁸² Bryan-Wilson, "Occupational Realism," 44.

⁸³ See CCA Glasgow's exhibition *Pilvi Takala*, 8 April – 15 May 2016. In this retrospective, Takala's filmic documents were presented on identical ceiling-mounted monitors each accompanied by two chairs and featured props – usually workwear. Of this material Takala has said: 'They are not art objects and the way the costumes are shown points to where the art is: it is not about producing that costume, but the wearing of it there, at that time, like that.' Catherine Spencer, "Open Access: Interview with Pivli Takala," *Art Monthly* 397, June, 2016, 3.

⁸⁴ In addition to the dispersal, there is a pervading sense that De Duve's 'mayonnaise' (described in Chapter 5) may, at any moment, unfold back into its constituent ingredients as the displayed materials



Figure 59: Pilvi Takala, *The Trainee* (exhibition view, Kiasma) 2008

The awkward angles and indistinct edges of the video documentation evoke basic surveillance material. While Takala's manipulation of the 'live' situation is plainly apparent, the poor quality of this footage emphasises its automated source and elevates its evidential value – a de-skilling that gives a different spin to Steve Edwards' contention that '[b]ad photography has long been central to the claims of critical realism.'⁸⁵ The long take captured from a single perspective on the generic open-plan office is edited using basic cuts and by speeding through passages to focus attention on Takala's exchanges with her co-workers. After the usual greetings and introductions, they eventually begin to politely query her lack of activity, to which she replies that she is doing 'brain work', giving similar responses to puzzled enquires when she rides the company's glass

relinquish their status as part of an artwork and are returned to their ordinary useful lives or a dark corner of YouTube. Indeed when *The Trainee* was acquired into Kiasma's collection the purchase did not include the furniture or equipment but instructions that detailed the type that would be required for future exhibitions. The artist consented for all items other than the video itself to be reproduced or sources and borrowed from elsewhere. Pilvi Takala, e-mail correspondence with author, Aug 1, 2016.

⁸⁵ In addition to the association with the 'evidential' vision of CCTV, Gemma Sieff asks: 'Why is it that images we trust are now most often the lowest resolution or blurred images, so-called poor images? Perhaps it's because there seems to be a trade-off inherent in these images: a compromise on quality (resolution, composition, focus) for speed and authenticity.' Gemma Sieff, "Bertolt Brecht and the Media Today," *frieze* 148, April 2012, 31. Edwards, "Commons and Crowds," 455.

elevator for hours or sits in the tax library 'looking out the window with eyes glazed' as one complainant's email put it.

The palpable discomfort Takala's presence elicits is partly due to her identification with and appropriation of a type of creative and cognitive labour that management textbooks ostensibly encourage across the workforce but is actually reserved for a particular cadre of individuals who attract far higher pay grades. In doing so she calls attention to the respective expectations of the 'privileged' worker and the rest of the workforce. It is this wilful misapprehension and crossing, as well as the absence of any prop or device that might either translate her 'immaterial' working into something more tangibly productive (or else politely disguise her inactivity) that proves so disturbing – frightening even – to her co-workers.⁸⁶ If this is, by contrast, comic to us the viewers of the documentation, more disquieting is the observation that her disruptive body's gestures and positions are nevertheless not dissimilar to those around her. Discussing the post-Fordist economy Sven Lütticken has argued that labour has become 'general performance', making it increasingly difficult to distinguish 'between working hours and free time – between performance and life', while Hito Steyerl has argued that it becomes the opposite of work, as merely another occupation – here understood as just a way to pass time and keep busy.⁸⁷ As Marina Vishmidt has observed, *The Trainee* 'tries to represent the changes to the experience and expectations of work in recent times – which can be summed up as its *unrepresentability*, its loss of definition.'⁸⁸ And this returns us to another question posed by the social document: how does one represent facts and determine 'what is real' when there is very little in the way of material evidence available? As a formation is the social document capable of joining the dots and making the connections between material and immaterial processes, thereby foregrounding that there is also an objectivity to the immaterial?

⁸⁶ In their emails reporting Takala's behaviour many of her colleagues stated that they found her behaviour 'scary'.

⁸⁷ If these accounts of what Lütticken still calls 'new' labour describe an anxiety-ridden, despair-inducing present, it is nevertheless worth remembering that the intangible aspect of such work is precisely what makes it broadly desirable and it that sense it's 'nothingness' has become a useful fiction. Sven Lütticken, "General Performance," *e-flux journal* 31 (2012), accessed Jul 29, 2016, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/general-performance/>. Hito Steyerl, "Art as Occupation: Claims for an Autonomy of Life," *e-flux journal* 30 (2011), accessed Jul 29, 2016, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/art-as-occupation-claims-for-an-autonomy-of-life-12/>

⁸⁸ Vishmidt, "Indifferent Agent," 78.

If Takala's piece highlights the extent to which this kind of labour, or occupation, has become intangible, it also implies that it is not necessarily held within the workplace. Instead the bland office architecture appears here as a site of 'water cooler politics' where individuals are subject to the peer-policing of a bored yet perennially anxious workforce.⁸⁹ Any lingering sense of solidarity has been replaced by an affable informant culture. This is what Cederstom and Fleming have referred to as the 'horizontalization' of the hierarchies of regulation in an echo of Gilles Deleuze's contention that those disciplinary institutions of enclosure discussed by Foucault – the prison, the factory, the family – have been replaced by the dispersed corporation, an environment predicated on the pitting of individuals against one another.⁹⁰ In the society of control Deleuze describes, the corporation is 'a spirit, a gas' that holds the marketing department as its dark 'soul'.⁹¹ Through her depiction of the sheer tedium of the office Takala documents what so many theorists have been trying to approach poetically; the suffocating everyday 'hyper-hopelessness' of capitalist realism.⁹² At the same time, her actions – amusingly, as a marketing trainee – threateningly play on the 'control society's' key vulnerabilities, articulated by Deleuze as 'the passive danger of entropy and the active danger of sabotage.'⁹³

Takala's 'passive jamming' can also be framed as an attempt to construct an understanding of abstract social relations through an act of overidentification. In place of the *excavation* tactics discussed earlier, *The Trainee* appears to stage an updated version of what Fore has called 'supercharged mimesis'. In his account of the interwar products of German culture, Fore argues that the realist aspiration was 'not to strip down reality but to outstrip it.'⁹⁴ Takala appropriates the established realist tactic of exaggeration in the situational immediacy of the live encounter in order to deploy others

⁸⁹ An article published in the online magazine *Plan C* suggested that each phase of capitalism is marked by a dominant affect. The global north, they argue, has broadly speaking overcome the misery and boredom associated with the pre and post war capitalist realities, replacing it with anxiety as 'the linchpin of subordination'. In a passage which speaks to Takala's experience they assert: 'In this increasingly securitised and visible field, we are commanded to communicate. The incommunicable is excluded. Since everyone is disposable, the system holds the threat of forcibly delinking anyone at any time.' See Institute for Precarious Consciousness, "We Are All Very Anxious: Six Theses on Anxiety and Why It is Effectively Preventing Militancy, and One Possible Strategy for Overcoming It," *Plan C* (2014), accessed Jun 12, 2016, <http://www.weareplanc.org/blog/we-are-all-very-anxious/>

⁹⁰ Cederstom and Flemming, "Dead Man Working," 13; Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control," *October* 59 (1992): 5.

⁹¹ Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control," 4; 6.

⁹² See, for example, Berardi, *The Soul at Work*; Cederstom and Flemming, "Dead Man Working". The latter refer to the 'sheer pointlessness of our daily endeavours'.

⁹³ Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control," 6.

⁹⁴ Fore, *Realism after Modernism*, 229.

– namely, satire and humour – elsewhere, via the social document. In each ‘site’, her broaching of everyday reality’s limits estranges it and pushes some of its contours to become visible, or, without privileging visibility, available for apprehension. Yet such strategies of overidentification are also open to charges of naturalism – another ‘difficult word’ in the view of Williams. While he defined it as the *reproduction* of social relations via detailed descriptions that place great store in the determining impact of environment on character and action, Lukács, derided it as a superficial exercise concerned only with the recording of immediate experience.⁹⁵ From this perspective Takala’s social experiment can be connected to Tanja Ostojić’s *Looking for a Husband with EU Passport* (2000-05) discussed in Chapter 4. Both artworks can be read in relation to Johannes Raether and Kerstin Stakemeier’s cogent remarks on the challenges inherent in capturing the ‘Real of the abstract form of capitalism.’ Though they are concerned with the issues that beset the single image, their argument can be extended to Takala’s and Ostojić’s outputs, which stand in danger of getting ‘trapped in character masks that do not uncover productive starting points, but remain in representation. Eventually, they do nothing more than *reproduce the clearness of its [capitalism’s] violence* [emphasis added].’⁹⁶ Put another way, works like *The Trainee* and *Looking for a Husband...* encapsulate the paradoxical (or even contradictory) mix of entrepreneurial self-management and passivity that characterise a hegemonic form of labour under biopolitical globalisation.

8.5 Narrative, reportage, totality

The artwork of which the social document is a part (or, alternatively, the social document of which the artwork is a part) is complex, distributed and borderless: its limits cannot be delineated. While documentation steps out of what Groys calls ‘the “here and now” of the material flow’, capturing and distilling certain aspects, reality itself becomes temporarily implicated as art. Consider the experiences of Deloitte’s workers or the fate of items of their office furniture, temporarily claimed and then released back into the current. This split and variable structure of the artwork invites an analysis that touches on Ernst Bloch’s fragmentary realism; or that draws from Brecht’s output, specifically

⁹⁵ Williams, *Keywords*, 216-219.

⁹⁶ Johannes Raether and Kerstin Stakemeier, “The Art of Falling Apart – On the Realism of Romanticism,” *Realism! Online Magazine*, (2008), accessed Aug 11, 2016, <https://realismworkinggroup.org/the-art-of-falling-apart/>.

his interest in montage and experimental strategies that integrated a mixture of genres in a single work. Indeed, Brecht's contention that popular art and realism are 'natural allies' speaks directly to deliberately humorous works like *The Trainee* which, aiming to be comprehensible and digestible, adopt formats and durations familiar from popular culture – specifically 'reality' genres including reality television shows or YouTube channels hosting prank-comedy material.⁹⁷ To paraphrase Brecht's maxim, she doesn't start with 'the good old things but the bad new ones.'⁹⁸ Lukács, by contrast, took a dim view of the experimental techniques championed by Bloch and Brecht: while acknowledging that photomontage, for example, could be initially striking – even persuasive – he held that it was premised on the same structure and effect as that of a good joke and therefore ultimately one-dimensional (like naturalism).⁹⁹ Added to this, Lukács is known for his focus on the novel form – specifically that of the nineteenth century – privileging, as Gerardo Mosquera has remarked, the literary at the expense of the visual.¹⁰⁰ Yet though he has been marginalised in recent times, here I want to return to Lukács's defence of realism in order to make use of the tools it offers in terms of developing a more precise understanding of the place and function of narrative and evidence in the operations of the social document.¹⁰¹

Chapter 1 outlined Jeff Wall's account of the appearance and (mistaken, in my view) disappearance of the reportage function in conceptual art and its successors. In 2009 Alfredo Cramerotti's *Aesthetic Journalism* then went on to propose an alignment in his take on artists who adopt journalistic methods and tools. Written over seven decades before, Lukács's essay 'Reportage or Portrayal?' derided attempts in the literary field to deploy reportage as part of a creative methodology.¹⁰² He held that such attempts to

⁹⁷ Brecht, "Against George Lukács," 80. See jenniCAM (1996-2003) discussed in Chapter 4 and the reality television show *Big Brother*, in which clips apparently produced using conventional CCTV are edited together with higher quality footage.

⁹⁸ Walter Benjamin, "Conversations with Brecht," in *Aesthetics and Politics*, Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Ernst Bloch, Bertolt Brecht, George Lukács (London: NLB, 1977), 99.

⁹⁹ Georg Lukács, "Realism in the Balance," in *Aesthetics and Politics*, Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Ernst Bloch, Bertolt Brecht, George Lukács (London: NLB, 1977), 43.

¹⁰⁰ Cited and translated by Craven, "Realism Revisited and Re-theorised in 'Pan-American' Terms," 309.

¹⁰¹ Space does not permit a full account of the reasons behind this marginalisation during the 1980s and 1990s. For a compelling introduction to the challenges see Timothy Bewes and Timothy Hall, "Fundamental Dissonance," in *George Lukács: The Fundamental Dissonance and Existence* (London; New York: Continuum, 2011): 1-13.

¹⁰² He was at pains, however, to emphasise his objection to its use specifically in creative literature: 'Reportage is an absolutely legitimate and indispensable form of journalism. At its best, it makes the right connection between the general and the particular, the necessary and the contingent, that is appropriate to its particular purpose. Genuine reportage is in no way content simply to depict the facts; its descriptions always present a connection, disclose causes and propose consequences.' Lukács, "Reportage or

renew the novel and thereby produce a ‘radically’ new art were misguided and led to pseudo-science on the one hand and pseudo-art on the other. The slew of issues that he claims result bear a marked resemblance to those trenchant critiques of documentary ethics subsequently put forward by Martha Rosler: when reportage is used as a creative method people are cast as lifeless, impotent and incapable of resistance while the truth is distorted and ‘dialectical surface appearance hardens into an illusory reality.’¹⁰³ For him, realism’s privileged status and progressive potential instead lay in *portrayal* – a literary method distinguished by its ability to penetrate and reveal ‘the driving forces’ of history and their interconnections.¹⁰⁴ While, offering a fictional reproduction of reality, it places an emphasis not on objectivity but on *involvement*. In a statement that strongly resonates with discussions of social practice in the visual arts he asserts: ‘*Portrayal gives us the thing itself – it doesn’t just speak of it* [emphasis added].’¹⁰⁵ Elsewhere Lukács evokes a similar opposition in creative method, this time counterposing *description* ‘from the standpoint of an observer’, to *narration* ‘from the perspective of a participant.’¹⁰⁶ While the former is mired in the scrutiny of social facts and representations of the results of social processes, the latter deals with – and offers the reader – *experience*.

Considering the social document in the light of the dichotomies set out by Lukács underscores the core significance of narrative to its operations. One of its key functions is to help to weave an open event or situation into a story through image and text, producing the artwork and, furthermore, *making it meaningful in a historically specific way*. At the same time, however, the social document collapses the sharp distinctions he delineates. Discussing the restrictive ties that pin reportage to adduced facts that ‘agree in every detail with the actual situation’ Lukács contends that portrayal is necessary given the sheer improbability that the required ‘individual features’ will emerge in empirical reality in a such a way that renders palpable the driving forces and overall processes.¹⁰⁷ However, the dramatisations presented by the social document report a situation that has *already been consciously shaped* by the artist – or else form an active

Portrayal?,” 49. Yet despite these initial protestations Lukács frequently returns to a negative interpretation of the reportage function.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 54-55.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 65.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 58.

¹⁰⁶ Lukács, “Narrate or Describe?,” in *Lukács: Writer and Critic*, ed. Arthur Kahn (London: Merlin Press, 1978), 111.

¹⁰⁷ Lukács, “Reportage or Portrayal?,” 51-52.

part of that intervention.¹⁰⁸ Returning to the example of *The Trainee*, while Lukács takes as his case studies literary works that address the justice system, Takala attends to the living interrelations between herself and the corporation, embedding herself within a particular context and historical situation, and engineering her interactions before editing the proceedings. The respective experiences of her colleagues and the exhibition viewers underscores the divide between immediacy and cognition, with the narrative documentation affording an opportunity for the latter by providing an alternative perspective and reflective space.

To be clear, I am not arguing that the social document adheres to a Lukácsian definition of realism – ‘Joanna’ Takala hardly constitutes a good example of the fully-rounded ‘typical character’ he demanded. Though she does operate in a recognisable and everyday context, she presents a moment of disruption.¹⁰⁹ Nor is the social document always consciously and deliberately engaged in revealing underlying connections or capital’s permeation of the ‘spatio-temporal character of phenomena’: the social document as a formation must be seen as a *continuum* within which artists are impelled by a range of motives.¹¹⁰ What its analysis in the light of the fervent debates on realism from the 1920s and 1930s *does* bring is a means to help grasp the complex structure and operation of the social document, particularly the precise ways in which it engages, integrates and goes beyond reportage or evidential force to incorporate *both* experience and observation. It also provides tools and concepts with which to critically interrogate its various calibrations as they manifest/unfold along this continuum and a way to think afresh questions, for example, of standpoint or, even more pressingly, of totality and fragmentation as they emerge in the twenty-first century.

In Chapter 4 I noted that the fear of totality (and indeed of truth) has been overcome, as it once again becomes an urgent concern in the era of biopolitical globalisation. This finds one expression in the prevalence of the theme of ‘crisis’ across newspapers and theory as well as the field of art (as well as featuring in the title of Demos’s monograph, it constituted one of the seven keywords of the ECONOMY curatorial project). As Maurizio Lazzarato contends, lurching from one financial crisis to the next ‘we have now entered

¹⁰⁸ Here I am referring back to my earlier account of works like *Tucuman Arde* or *If You Lived Here...* presented in Chapter 1 and Chapter 6.

¹⁰⁹ Though not, as I will discuss, when her labour is understood as artistic labour.

¹¹⁰ Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Merlin Press, 1971), 23.

a period of permanent crisis, which we shall call “catastrophe”.¹¹¹ Notably this does not necessarily take ‘spectacular’ form. Roberts views the attenuated crises that have followed the capitalist expansion of the 1970s as ‘a symptom of a chronic long-term inertia in which the aggressive expansion of abstract labour is an expression of the continuing over-accumulation of capital; indeed, one presupposes the other.’¹¹² As I noted in the introduction to this chapter, realism makes its return at moments of transition and crisis when there is an urgent need to apprehend structural relations and ‘driving forces’.

In his essay ‘Realism in the Balance’ Lukács responded to Bloch’s accusation that he conceived of reality as ‘closed and integrated’. Clarifying his conception of the particular conditions of contemporary capitalism not as ‘seamless’ and static but rather as an underlying yet open and flexible unity, he asserted that ‘the totality, all of whose parts are objectively interrelated, manifests itself most strikingly in the face of crisis.’¹¹³

Every Marxist knows that the basic economic categories of capitalism are always reflected in the minds of men, directly, but always back to front. Applied to our present argument this means that in periods when capitalism functions in a so-called normal manner, and its various processes appear autonomous, people living within capitalist society think and experience it as unitary, whereas in periods of crisis, when autonomous elements are drawn together in unity, they experience it as disintegration. With the general crisis of the capitalist system, the experience of disintegration becomes firmly entrenched over long periods of time in broad sectors of the population which normally experience the various manifestations of capitalism in a very immediate way.¹¹⁴

Offering a detailed summary of the development of Lukács’s conceptualisation of totality Day concludes that: ‘it simply demands that we consider the interrelations and interactions between different phenomena, that we relate the parts to the whole – and that we conceive these parts – the whole and all their relations – as mutable, as both materially constraining and subject to human actions.’¹¹⁵ Relating this to the *partial* perspectives presented in recent documentary artworks, she contends that they hold out

¹¹¹ Lazzarato, *The Making of the Indebted Man*, 123-124.

¹¹² John Roberts, *Revolutionary Time and the Avant-Garde* (London; New York: Verso, 2015), 254.

¹¹³ Lukács, “Realism in the Balance,” 32.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Day, “Realism, Totality and the Militant *Citoyen*,” 209.

the potential – as articulated by Lukács – of addressing the question of totality through *intensive* means, i.e. through the analysis of ‘a particular segment of life.’¹¹⁶

To this three further observations can be added with regards to the specificities of the ‘created reality’ of the social document and its structure. First, that her proposals are borne out by a shift in descriptive terminology that can be discerned whereby adjectives like ‘plot’, ‘trace’, ‘track’ and ‘map’ have risen to prominence in accounts of artworks that deal with social realities – a development that acknowledges an impetus to address ‘interrelations and interactions’. Second, that the relational structure of the reconfigured artwork, within which each element is dependent upon another, responds to a perceived *insufficiency* of the single static image as well as a resistance to any notion of a ‘unified’ artwork. Third, that the partial perspective and ‘slice of life’ offered by the social document are frequently set alongside others, whether within the artists’ own body of work – as in Takala’s recent retrospective at the Centre for Contemporary Arts in Glasgow which gathered together documentations of no less than eleven interventions into a range of contexts from Disneyland to a department store – or through an *overarching curatorial narrative* that is unambiguously prioritised over the account offered by the ‘singular’ artwork.¹¹⁷ This was certainly a core device within the ECONOMY project where our curatorial efforts sought to connect artistic accounts of bowling centre managers, wealthy children, activist feminist collectives and miners precisely in order to point the proliferation of economic others under global capitalism.

The serious attendance to questions of creative method – and indeed mediation – that indelibly marked the debates between Lukács et al. extended to an emphasis on the *standpoint* of the artist, most notably in the work of Benjamin whose ‘author as producer’ question continues to motor developments and critiques alike.¹¹⁸ Yet rather than inhabiting the postmodern paradigm of Hal Foster’s ‘artist as ethnographer’ the practitioners discussed in this thesis attempt to variously frame (and of course document) the artist as producer of social knowledge and information, of care, of empowerment and of critique.¹¹⁹ This move is far from a straightforward one as further reflection on Takala’s project will show.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 210. Here Day cites Georg Lukács, *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, trans. John and Necke Mander (London: Merlin, 1963), 100.

¹¹⁷ Lukács, “Realism in the Balance,” 33-34. I am using the term ‘singular’ broadly here.

¹¹⁸ Benjamin, “The Author as Producer.”

¹¹⁹ Foster, “The Artist as Ethnographer.”

8.6 Corporate rebel

*our task is to find ourselves a place in real life... the artist can go into industry. There is a definite place for him.*¹²⁰

Contributing to the preoccupation with zombies and vampires in recent left theory (inspired no doubt by Marx's own Gothic descriptions of capital), Cederstrom and Fleming have conceptualised the office as a petrified site for 'dead work'. Their account of the new wave of increasingly outlandish motivational techniques designed to increase productivity by counteracting the dehumanising tendencies inherent to capitalism offers some darkly hilarious examples of demands for employees to bring their 'authentic selves' to the workplace, including humiliating call centre sing-alongs and 'the dreaded pyjama day'.¹²¹ Office labour, apparently, isn't working. This is also the declared position of new venture 'Corporate Rebels' that aims to accrue case studies of pioneering managers (heroes) whose practices counter high levels of employee disengagement by 'sharing happiness and making work more fun.'¹²² It is also the logic underpinning the growing number of corporations which employ 'happiness officers' as a means to increase productivity, or indeed of University departments which procure consultants to lead Myers Briggs group therapy sessions for worn-out academics.¹²³ Rather than the displacement of non-work and play – real living – into the stultified workplace, such (coercive) activities demonstrate that they need 'to be staged, manufactured, scripted and ultimately *imitated* in the office.'¹²⁴ This, we can say, is another instance of attempts to overcome the division between work and life as part of the pursuit of economic value discussed in Chapter 4.

Viewed from this perspective, *The Trainee* can be seen as a descendent of a venture categorised by Bourriaud as an early proponent of 'operative realism' – the interventions staged by the U.K.'s Artist Placement Group (APG) founded by John Latham and Barbara Steveni. Between 1966 and 1989 APG undertook 'open-brief' residencies of varying durations in industry and government departments, re-conceiving the artist as an

¹²⁰ The artist Varvava Stepanova. Cited in Gough, *The Artist as Producer*, 104.

¹²¹ Cederstrom and Fleming, *Dead Man Working*, 15.

¹²² "The Purpose," Corporate Rebels, accessed Aug 4, 2016, <http://www.corporate-rebels.com/index.html>.

¹²³ See William Davies, *The Happiness Industry: How the Government and Big Business Sold Us Well-Being* (London and New York: Verso, 2016). Apparently a cheerful worker is 12% more productive.

¹²⁴ Cederstrom and Fleming, *Dead Man Working*, 15.

‘incidental person’ in an attempt to underscore their peripheral yet potentially insightful and positive role within the host company.¹²⁵ Their attempts to professionalise what Vishmidt calls ‘artistic indeterminacy’ intersect in complex ways with *The Trainee*’s documentation of the artist herself as an economic subject.¹²⁶ It plays with *both* her association with creative and autonomous ‘free labour’ – foregrounded by her apparent licence to refuse and, moreover, be paid for it – as well as recalling the everyday experiences of low-paid ‘supplementary’ positions that the art world’s ‘dark matter’ of invisible and inferior creative workers can expect to form part of a jigsaw of income sources.¹²⁷

Another connection between APG and Takala’s interventions (despite the latter’s air of subversion) is their dependency upon the assent and complicity of the host organisation (what Stuart Brisley scathingly called APG’s ‘connivance with management’).¹²⁸ In the materials associated with *The Trainee* Deloitte is named as a collaborator and the firm subsequently purchased an edition of the piece for the broker institution, the Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art in Helsinki.¹²⁹ Though they cite their support as one of their ‘Socially Responsible Acts’ in their 2008 annual report, it is easy to see how Takala’s project is able to brilliantly combine for the firm social action, the prestige associated with involvement in contemporary art and an innovative take on the requirement for perpetual workplace training and community building exercises. According to the artist, the project was indeed viewed as a ‘staff development’ opportunity and the entire office was invited to attend the ‘reveal’ event jointly introduced by Deloitte’s Finnish CEO and Takala herself (via videolink) as well as the opening at Kiasma. Responses to the deception amongst her unwitting audience of co-workers who had been ‘participated’ by the firm’s senior management were reported to be universally positive. Though the artist

¹²⁵ For an introduction to the APG’s activities see Peter Eleey, “Context is Half the Work,” *frieze* 111, November 2007, accessed Aug 4, 2016, <https://frieze.com/article/context-half-work>; Claire Bishop, “Incidental People: APG and Community Arts,” in *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*. (London; New York: Verso, 2012): 163-192.

¹²⁶ See Vishmidt, “Indifferent Agent,” 81.

¹²⁷ Gregory Sholette, *Dark Matter: Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture* (London: Pluto Press, 2011).

¹²⁸ Stuart Brisley, “No, it is not on,” *Studio International* 183, no. 942 (1972): 95-6. For a detailed discussion of APG see Marina Vishmidt, “Speculation as a Mode of Production in Art and Capital,” (Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, Queen Mary University, 2012).

¹²⁹ The acquisition consisted of the video files (from an edition of 4 +1), the original key card (which can be reproduced for exhibitions) and installation instructions. The furniture for the first installation was loaned from Deloitte but then returned. Pilvi Takala, e-mail correspondence with author, Aug 1, 2016.

claims to be skeptical of these accounts, rather than feeling humiliated or expressing annoyance at the trick, their primary reaction was said to be one of relief.¹³⁰

While classing her work as ‘narrative fiction’ Takala frequently positions it in relation to the discipline of sociology and the participant-observer model of knowledge production, noting a particular interest in ‘breaching experiments’ whereby social rules are deliberately transgressed in order to record the results.¹³¹ A similar fascination with the tools and methodologies associated with the social sciences can be seen in the projects realised by APG; yet when one of their artists, George Leventis, secured a placement with the shipping company Ocean Trading and Transport Ltd, then failed to deliver the expected watercolour classes, the frustrated official declared ‘[i]f we had wanted some kind of sociologist aboard, I’d have hired a sociologist.’¹³² That the affirmative efforts of APG were met with such exasperation marks the distance that the corporation has travelled: aware that Deloitte was also showing her piece to clients, Takala recognised that the company valued her demonstration of the firm’s ability to take risks and critically reflect on its own patterns of operation.¹³³ The question must therefore be asked: what, precisely, is the artist producing in this instance? And whose interests does the contemporary realist enterprise serve? Any answer to the former – and in line with the discussion advanced in Chapters 3 and 4 of this thesis – must include one ‘product’ that the artist must be sure to produce, and indeed reproduce: *herself, the artist, as an artist*, and always ready for the next project.

Direct artistic engagements with the workplace (though not in its service) have also driven the production of two early social documents discussed in Chapter 1; notably, *Women and Work* and *Tucuman Arde* also deployed sociological techniques in support of factory workers’ struggles. Here though I want to briefly return to elaborate upon the points of connection with the negotiations of realism undertaken in Constructivism and Productivism during the 1920s in the Soviet Union when the question of the artist’s role in the revolution was so forcefully posed and concerted efforts were made to move beyond representation (the focus of nineteenth-century realism) to instead use the work

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Laine Kristbergá “Awkwardness and Social Paradigms in Ethnographic Observations: Conversation with Video Artists Julika Rudelius and Pilvi Takala,” *Studija* 79, 2011, 59; Spencer, “Open Access,” 2.

¹³² Cited in Eleey, “Context is Half the Work”, unpaginated.

¹³³ Spencer, “Open Access,” 4. As the Slovenian collective IRWIN contended ‘critical’ and ‘political’ art is as necessary to neoliberalism as socialist realism became to the Soviet regime. Cited in Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 363.

of art to intervene directly in reality. As Esther Leslie has contended, 'it is in the explorations of the Russian avant-garde, after the revolution, that realism is most thoroughly reinvented.'¹³⁴ In her compelling account the art historian Maria Gough details how the radical break that emerged in November 1921 led to the emergence of a second strain of Constructivism 'articulated in terms of a totalizing shift from the realm of the "aesthetic" to that of "the real".'¹³⁵ On the one hand this manifested through recourse to photography (Aleksander Rodchenko et al.), while on the other a move into the territories of industrial production itself.¹³⁶ She describes the – admittedly unusual yet fascinating – case of the Latvian artist Karl Ioganson who was employed at the Moscow metal work factory Krasnyi Prokatchik between 1923 and 1926. Primarily interested in the *processes* of production (rather than its objects) he conceived his role as that of an inventor and then 'organiser'.

The tensions and resonances between this historical instance and *The Trainee* as two attempts to get inside the labour process, 'on the shop floor' as it were, are instructive. Ioganson's privileging of art's use value finds connection with a similar tendency in more recent practices as described in Chapter 3 of this thesis, which place their focus on the paradigm of usership.¹³⁷ Yet while he was dedicated to 'raising the productivity of labour' (he claimed that one of his systems led to a 150% increase) and pragmatically engaging with the Constructivist desire to transform labourers into non-alienated *creative* workers for the new, revolutionary society, Takala's enterprise operates under markedly different conditions.¹³⁸ Despite her disruption's apparently critical standpoint predicated on her overt *lack* of productivity, Deloitte nevertheless encounters little difficulty in *making use* of her negation on the corporation's own terms, somewhat

¹³⁴ In her discussion of the exchanges and dialogues between realism and modernism Esther Leslie has insisted that in Constructivism, Productivism and Suprematism constituted not an abandonment of realism but rather its redefinition. Leslie, "Interrupted Dialogues of Realism and Modernism," 139.

¹³⁵ Maria Gough, *The Artist as Producer: Russian Constructivism in Revolution* (Berkeley; Los Angeles: California University Press, 2005), 8-9. Gough equates 'aesthetic' with easelism. She cites the 24th of November as the watershed moment when the Constructivists shifted to a Productivist platform when the declaration of the new direction of the INKhUK was made and signed. Ibid., 101-2.

¹³⁶ For an account of the former see Benjamin Buchloh, "From Faktura to Factography," *October*, 30 (1984): 83-118.

¹³⁷ John Roberts goes so far as to claim that a 'secondary Productivism' can be identified across multiple forms in art since 1960 that remains committed to usefulness. See John Roberts, "Productivism and its Contradictions," *Third Text* 23, no. 5 (2009): 530.

¹³⁸ Ioganson's phrase cited by Gough, *The Artist as Producer*, 168. On the Constructivist commitment to the dissolution of the division of labour Gough refers to V. Khrakovskii's response to an INKhUK lecture in December 1921 when he stated that 'Constructivism sprang from the desire to make workers into artists who actively create their product, to turn the mechanistically working human, the working force, into creative workers.' Ibid., 154.

ironically realising the ambitions of what Gough calls ‘the Constructivist pursuit of an “art of production”’ in the decidedly non-revolutionary context of advanced capitalism.¹³⁹ Yet this is not to claim that Ioganson’s tenure at Krasnyi Prokatchik was unmarked by failure – still less that it somehow evaded contradiction; as Gough notes, he at once subscribed to the Marxist imperative to overcome the division and alienation of labour and submitted to controversial Bolshevik policies of rationalisation and accelerated productivity that repackaged western scientific management approaches such as those advanced by F.W. Taylor.¹⁴⁰ Ioganson’s various ‘worker initiatives’ attempted to overcome the division between mental and manual labour in order to realise the intensification of labour – and here we can circle forward to Deloitte’s artistic engagements.

The delimited conditions under which Takala’s experiment takes place accord with what John Roberts has called a ‘post-Thermidorean reality’.¹⁴¹ Acknowledging that ‘there is no Constructivism and Productivism without the revolutionary transformations which they are a response to, and product of’, Roberts nevertheless argues that the avant-garde has constructed an afterlife for itself from the 1960s onwards – notably, under conditions when art’s critiques and transgressions are easily tolerated and absorbed. He contends that: ‘it is precisely because of the far-reaching questions it asks of itself that the Russian avant-garde remains the overarching model of all avant-garde practice, irrespective of whether new art is directly indebted to it or not.’¹⁴² In a paper presented at the Tenth Annual Historical Materialism conference in 2013 Robert Burghardt attested to this continuing resonance, proposing that contemporary realism (this time for architecture) be rethought through Productivism.¹⁴³ Part of a broader revival of interest, what appears to attract historians, theorists and activists alike is Productivism’s political forays into non-artistic collaborations and processes.¹⁴⁴ That questions posed in the 1920s and

¹³⁹ Ibid., 16

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 157; 176; 188.

¹⁴¹ John Roberts, *Revolutionary Time and the Avant-Garde*, 15.

¹⁴² John Roberts, “Revolutionary Pathos, Negation, and the Suspensive Avant-Garde,” *New Literary History*, 41 (2010): 719.

¹⁴³ Robert Burghardt, “For a New Realism in Architecture” (paper, Tenth Annual Historical Materialism Conference London, November 8, 2013).

¹⁴⁴ See Roberts, “Productivism and its Contradictions”; Roberts, “Revolutionary Pathos, Negation, and the Suspensive Avant-Garde”; Burghardt, “For a New Realism in Architecture”; Gough, *The Artist as Producer*. Parenthetically, in the case of Gough’s efforts to pull Ioganson as a marginalised figure from the periphery to the centre, the recovery was a difficult operation, reliant upon research in archives made available following the collapse of the Soviet Union and, apparently, entirely unaided by ‘art documentation’. In its absence Gough relies heavily upon personal correspondence, official minutes and lecture transcripts to piece together a partial account of Ioganson’s avant-garde entry into industrial production.

1930s continue to retain their traction today, and indeed are experiencing something of a resurgence, is indicative of a broader displacement of the theoretical approaches that addressed the turn towards the moving image in the early 1990s.¹⁴⁵ Instead, the discourses around realism offer a means to unpack the social document's vexed connections with both evidence and use – in other words, pragmatic forms of knowledge and truth.

8.7 Conclusion

At the beginning of this chapter I discussed prophetic (and indeed pessimistic) 'sci-fi' artworks that sought to stage vivid critiques of capitalist reality. Possibly a better descriptor for such examples would be 'critical *irrealism*' – a term coined by Michael Löwy in order to attend to creative works neglected by those who adopt a rigid definition of critical realism (Lukács prime among them) and yet that can be cast as their counterparts. With reference to Franz Kafka's writing Löwy discusses as irrealist works that

do not follow the rules governing the "accurate representation of life as it really is" but that are nevertheless critical of social reality. The critical viewpoint of these works of art is often related to the dream of another, imaginary world, either idealized or terrifying, one opposed to the gray, prosaic, disenchanted reality of modern, meaning capitalist, society.¹⁴⁶

This he contrasts with definitions of critical realism offered in Marx and Engels' own writing, which he summarises as the perceptive *documentation* of the reality of bourgeois society.¹⁴⁷ I argue that the social documents examined in this thesis attempt the invention of a new form of realism along the latter lines, this time pertaining to capitalist society more broadly. Here, realism is not a trait of the art-product itself but an *effect produced* through the social document and the artwork of which it is a part. This new form's characteristics can be summarised as: 1) a commitment to the production of evidence and the involvement of *actually existing subjects*; 2) a fusion of reportage and narrative (even positional) portrayal – while anchored to its 'here and now' the social document is not a form reducible to an aesthetic of information and administration; 3) An exploratory yet affirmative approach to 'truth' and the negotiation of social truths

¹⁴⁵ Here, I am thinking of experimentations with the Lacanian notion of the Real. See, for example, Ewa Lajer-Burchard, "Real Bodies: Video in the 1990s," *Art History* 20, no. 2 (1997): 185-213.

¹⁴⁶ Michael Löwy, "The Current of Critical Irrealism: "A moonlit enchanted night"," in *Adventures in Realism* (Oxford, Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2007), 196.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 193.

and of an expanding pool of truths that can be characterised as social (diminishing the import of any term, such as 'private', that could stand in opposition to the 'social').

It is this latter point that I would now like to turn to and address in more depth for it constitutes a core finding of this thesis. My contention is that the social document points to a move beyond the interpretative framework divided into subjective and objective truths, enabling the pursuit of a more nuanced position. Put another way, it rejects both crude conceptions of realism that see truth as an object to be shown or uncovered *as well as* the transcendence (or radical contingency) of truth proposed by post-structuralism (and postmodernism). In the latter case, as examined in Chapter 2, it became easy – indeed fashionable – to contest the notion of truth in art, while, by the same token, *positional*, subjective truths took on a new importance and energy. If postmodernism became mired in textual truths and free-floating fragments, this is precisely what the social document both emerges from and seeks to overcome. The remarkable ascendancy of the social document can be seen to indicate a pressing need for a *political* defence of truth.

I have argued that, at the outset of the twenty-first century, just as in the 1930s and at recurrent moments since, *realism constitutes a key issue for art*. Indeed, through an attendance to the complexities of social document a different trajectory of art history passes into view, namely one that posits realism as a concern of the modern artwork from Courbet, through Logan, to Takala. If, in one sense, this implies that any sharp distinction between the modern and the contemporary must be commuted, I am not proposing that a transhistorical definition of realism is possible (or indeed desired). Notably, these three examples (as well as many others addressed in over the course of this thesis) privilege figurations of, and engagements with, 'the worker'. It is, however, illuminating to attend to the distinctions among them; for when considering the drivers behind this latest demand for a renewed realism, the contemporary absence of a direct *connection* to revolutionary politics, workers' struggles or social movements is striking.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁸ A few exceptions can be identified such as Oliver Ressler's work with communities involved in the Bolivarian Process in Venezuela or Jonas Staal's long-term links with the communist Kurdish movement. However, more generally, the gulf between articulations of realism pursued, for example, by contemporary artists and those of the international workers' movement and made accessible in publications like the *AIZ* in Germany or the *Workers Illustrated News* in Britain during the 1920s and early 1930s must be registered. In the latter, sequences of pictures and words were dedicated to showing how certain social phenomena, unrelated in bourgeois culture, were in fact deeply connected when seen through the prism of

Describing the twentieth century as the ‘age of the working class,’ Göran Therborn has argued that the workers entered the new millennium largely *defeated, disillusioned and disenchanted*. This echoes the position set out in 1982 by the economist and social theorist André Gorz wherein he noted the disappearances of the traditional worker and, with him, the revolutionary potential of the working class.¹⁴⁹ If the 1970s saw the high point of the labour movement, the extent to which its power was bound to the success of capitalist industrialisation was underscored by its subsequent fall as the heavy weight of industrial production was relocated to East Asia.¹⁵⁰ Appraising the global situation Therborn asserts that ‘[n]o forward march of labour in the classical sense is discernible in today’s world.’¹⁵¹ This accords with Bo Stråth’s viewpoint:

The outcomes of the shop floor protests were not the classless society, as prophesied by Marx, but the new neoliberal language emphasizing values like proximity and flexibility, and a growing role for the individual worker in a friendly relationship with the employer as opposed to the old class-based antagonism. The old *Arbeiter* became the *Mitarbeiter*, the worker became the co-worker.¹⁵²

Following the subsequent reconfiguration of the identity of the worker, the left’s struggles of the twenty-first century tend not to privilege this figure; nor is their locus of activity European or North American workplaces – as Takala’s portrayal makes so plain. The women’s movement can similarly be argued to have undergone a defeat over the same period as it was either dispersed into so many *feminisms* (plural) or even relegated to the past tense under so-called ‘post-feminism’.

While it is not yet clear what label the left-wing struggles associated with the new century will attain, it can be observed that the protests of various movements have so far been animated both by issues pertaining to crises in social reproduction and an attempt

class consciousness. While the debt (conscious or otherwise) is apparent, the circumstances of production and reach of the materials are radically different. This was an argument advanced by Owen Logan and myself in our exhibition *The King’s Peace: Realism and War*. See Appendix D. The long exhibition essay can be found at <http://www.stills.org/exhibition/past/king%E2%80%99s-peace-realism-and-war>.

¹⁴⁹ André Gorz, *Farewell to the Working Class: An Essay on Post-Industrial Socialism*, trans. Mike Sonenscher (London: Pluto Press, 1982). Similar ideas were espoused by others, including (as noted above) Foucault in his later works. See Zamora, “Foucault and the Excluded.”

¹⁵⁰ Therborn, “Class in the 21st Century,” 12.

¹⁵¹ Ibid. Though Therborn observes that worker organisation was slow to gain traction in these new industrial centres the picture he describes is far from entirely bleak – he presents evidence that struggle does indeed follow the industrial base.

¹⁵² Stråth, “1968: From Co-determination to Co-worker,” 65.

to grapple with a vast and largely uncharted totality – capitalist globalisation. However, in 2016 this was met by efforts, fuelled by a populist right, to *withdraw* from globalisation, seen in both ‘Brexit’ (the U.K.’s marginally asserted decision to leave the European Union) and the election of Donald Trump as U.S. president (partly possible because of the function of institutions, such as the Electoral College, mediating and regulating ‘representational democracy’). Both campaigns were premised on anti-intellectualism and marked a move from ‘truthiness’ to ‘post-truth’. Oxford Dictionaries’ word of the year for 2016, ‘post-truth’ is used to denote ‘circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.’¹⁵³ William Davies has framed this as shift from a society of facts to a society of ‘big’ data where changes in public sentiment can be captured instantaneously and politics enters a disturbing new era.¹⁵⁴

What is clear, then, is that, with democracy as a crucial issue in the coming years, (independent) knowledge and (critical) pedagogy will be key political battlegrounds. Driven by an impulse to plot the contours of biopolitical globalisation – more specifically, to capture and present *aspects* of (social) reality and its processes – the social document will have a role to play, if knowledge predicated on realism can be seen to help formulate strategies of resistance grounded in such knowledge. Remaining alive, however, to the pitfalls of a return to the ‘issue-based’ art and micropolitics of the 1970s and 1980s, what recommends it as a formation must be understood as the interrelations – the *magnetic pull* I have sought to articulate throughout this thesis – between social documents.¹⁵⁵ It is through the connection of particular aspects of reality that social documents will be able to contribute to countering this withdrawal (from both truth and globalisation) and contribute to addressing what Cinzia Arruzza describes as the pressing need for *large* social coalitions and movements, as well as the construction of radical and credible alternatives.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵³ Alison Flood, “‘Post-Truth’ Named Word of the Year by Oxford Dictionaries,” *Guardian*, Nov 15, 2016, accessed Nov 15, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/nov/15/post-truth-named-word-of-the-year-by-oxford-dictionaries>.

¹⁵⁴ William Davies, “The Age of Post-Truth Politics,” *New York Times*, Aug 24, 2016, accessed Nov, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/24/opinion/campaign-stops/the-age-of-post-truth-politics.html?ref=opinion&r=2>.

¹⁵⁵ Jon Bird and Michel Newman referred to ‘issue-based art’ in their introduction to *Rewriting Conceptual Art*, eds. Michael Newman and Jon Bird (London: Reaktion Books, 1999), 8.

¹⁵⁶ Cinzia Arruzza, “Lessons from Italy: the Dangers of Anti-Trumpism,” Verso Blog, Nov 21, 2016, accessed Nov 22, 2016, <http://www.versobooks.com/blogs/2956-lessons-from-italy-the-dangers-of-anti-trumpism>.

CONCLUSION

9.1 Notes on the key questions

This thesis has identified a significant yet overlooked tendency in contemporary art: the generation, circulation and legitimisation of the ‘social document’. While this is not a term that currently has traction in the discipline’s literature, I have made a case for its rehabilitation and theoretical elaboration in order to better account for a particular set of approaches in practice that engage with the situational immediacy of the encounter while also depending upon lens-based representation. As my discussion indicates the sheer mass and range of activity in this vein is notable. The experimental social document constitutes a revealing object of study, and indeed several surprising elements have been observed over the course of this examination. Before going on to look at directions for future research I will summarise these and synthesise my main arguments with reference to the key questions I set out in the Introduction to this thesis and that have guided my research. These were:

1. What is a social document and what questions does it raise vis-à-vis ‘the artwork’ as such, the infrastructures of the art field and the relationship between art and society?
2. Why has the demand for the social document increased in parallel with the shifting political, cultural and economic realities induced and accelerated by what has come to be termed ‘globalisation’?
3. What new dimensions and insights can the social document’s analysis bring to prevailing themes or tendencies within contemporary art practice and theory?
4. When it is *also* an art document, is the social document at heart a conservative and contingent device that returns the artwork to the institution, or does it maintain a tension by challenging the containment and self-awareness of art *as art*?
5. Does the social document represent a new approach to political realism in art?

To begin with a definition, I have argued that the social document constitutes a vital component *within* the artwork, arising *through* it and signalling the latter’s

reconfiguration or splitting across a number of different sites and moments. It is therefore unique yet open and non-autonomous. While the social document's appearance in art has undoubtedly burgeoned over the course of the past 25 years or so, I have shown that it is by no means a new phenomenon. The selective survey I offered in Part I reached back to earlier manifestations in art history in order to both attend to the social document's roots and to identify salient features and themes that would go on to influence its direction. And so, while Julian Stallabrass has described the incredulity that would have met any claim in the early 1990s that lens-based documentary modes would come to occupy a rich and prominent seam in contemporary art, from the perspective of the early 1970s this would certainly not have been the case. In other words, attending to the social document in art history necessitates an expansion of the temporal brackets.¹ If the vogue for identifying 'turns' in art since 1989 has now become the primary mechanism through which to chart, analyse and market developments in contemporary practice, my interrogation of the 'document trend' has explicitly set out to disrupt the relentless search for new cultural paradigm shifts.² The same reasoning contributed to the foregrounding of realism as a major current within my research. I have argued that realism as a 'category' of political aesthetics affords new perspectives not only on the social document but on the history of art, problematising any sharp divide or break between the 'modern' and the 'contemporary'.

To be clear, this is not to argue that the social document is static or in any way fixed. On the contrary, it is demonstrably a *heterogeneous* formation that has changed precisely through its engagement with those social forces that have shaped its 'presents' through the decades. In order to explicate these shifts, I have sought to establish a history that acknowledges and plots the evolution of conceptualisations of the document itself, attending to the ways in which transformations undergone in production (and social reproduction) have impacted upon its development, features and characteristics. It should be obvious that the document of the nineteenth century is *not* the same as the document of the twenty-first. At the same time, I have troubled accepted definitions and lineages by, for example, foregrounding the interwoven roots of lens-based documentary modes that draw together the 'instrumental realism' of police photography and colonial

¹ Julian Stallabrass, ed., "Introduction," in *Documentary* (London: Whitechapel Gallery and MIT Press, 2013): 12-21.

² For a fuller critique of this tendency see Lars Bang Larsen, "Turn! Turn! Turn!," *Mousse*, no. 35 (2012), accessed May 28, 2013, <http://moussemagazine.it/articolo.mm?id=879>.

ideology with pornography – a connection which holds considerable relevance for the integration of evidential and affective force in later instances. Furthermore, it is worth emphasising that, just as the document is never neutral, so too the social document in art does not possess an inherently ‘radical’ valance – indeed, it is an *ambivalent* formation that can just as easily encapsulate an extractive or conservative impulse (even when this runs contrary to the intentions of the artist as in the case of WochenKlausur’s *Participatory Economics*).

Following these points, the framework of biopolitics offers an invaluable theoretical toolkit for unpacking the evolution of the document from industrialisation to globalisation in general and the priorities of the social document in particular. With regards to the post-1989 context, it has been necessary to advance an understanding of globalisation as a specifically *biopolitical reality* as a means, first, to attend to the sense of *scale* that both terms – ‘globalisation’ and ‘biopolitics’ – imply; second, to consider the conditions under which the need to document has apparently become so widespread – evidenced everywhere, from the quotidian self-documentation coursing through social media channels, to ever-more sophisticated surveillance technologies and on to the unparalleled ascendancy of the social document in art; and third, to address the demand for the social document to map and record *economic* realities and relations not just in terms of geographies but in terms of *lives and subjectivities*.

In Part II I expanded on these points through analyses of particular case studies including social documents produced by Anton Vidokle, Martha Rosler, WochenKlausur, Dani Marti and Pilvi Takala. Diverse though these examples are, they nevertheless all participate in the documentation of (new or configured) economic subjects and relations. Their selection was guided, in part, from the impetus to address a gap in the literature that has, to date, placed an emphasis on the cartographies of misery and the ‘necropolitics’ of extractive neoliberalism, produced under what T.J. Demos has termed ‘crisis globalisation’.³ By orientating attention instead towards ‘*biopolitical* globalisation’, other vital perspectives emerge into view – not least the document’s engagement with the other side of the coin: the management and optimisation of ‘life’. This enables, for example, the critical assessment of ‘care’ and ‘social reproduction’ as significant thematics so far inadequately dealt with in the history of art. The result is that

³ Demos, *The Migrant Image*, xiii. Here Demos relies heavily on the important work on necropolitics undertaken by Mbembe. See Achille Mbembe, “Necropolitics,” *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (2003): 32-51.

a more rounded picture can emerge of what exactly the document in art is called upon to *do* and *address* at the turn of the millennium.

Part II also addressed the social document's position within a transformed art world, arguing that its prevalence cannot be divorced from the production conditions and priorities of the latter. Most obviously perhaps, the social document possesses the unusual capacity to bridge two competing (or even apparently antithetical) requirements: finding new ways to negotiate ever-closer connections between art and life while also facilitating and *perpetuating* existing structures, not least the hegemony of the group exhibition. In Chapters 5 and 6, I analysed how the social document is both implicated in, and precipitated through, curatorial production, discussing it in terms of the generation of social knowledge, the prominence of discursive formats and their inherent affinity with mediatory and mapping processes. It is from this latter perspective that I want to draw out what I regard to be a crucial attribute of the social document: its condition as part or fragment. Though it permits a range of calibrations, the social document is tasked with narrating particular encounters or relations and 'evidencing' specific aspects of material flows and realities. An overview of the remarkable quantities of these 'documentations of details' in art reveals a pervading desire to attend to, portray – and thereby better comprehend – the present. In addition, as a form that mediation assumes, the social document can be described as *predisposed* to curatorial processes.

A prioritisation of relationships over fragmentation is a marker of biopolitical globalisation. The model of the network has become commonplace in terms of conceiving anything from labour conditions and communications through to the economy.⁴ At the same time, art has engaged in a broader fascination with cartography, more specifically with bringing to light the hidden connections underpinning capitalism's social phenomena.⁵ In Chapter 6, I elaborated on Fredric Jameson's notion of cognitive mapping – specifically as a potentially *realist* approach – through the prism of feminist conceptualisations of social reproduction. Here, I sought to differentiate the free-floating fragment of postmodernism from its later *connected and relational* variants, arguing that the social document is best conceived along these latter lines. Alberto

⁴ Castells, *The Network Society*.

⁵ See Gail Day and Steve Edwards, "Global Dissensus: Art and Contemporary Capitalism," in *Art and Visual Culture, 1850-2010: Modernity to Globalisation*, eds. Steve Edwards and Paul Wood (London: Tate Publishing, 2012): 285-315.

Toscano and Jeff Kinkle have since also stressed the cognitive map's outstanding relevance to the enduring problem of the figurability or representability of capitalism, particularly in the 'age of empire'.⁶ In their words: 'The absence of a practice of orientation that would be able to connect the abstractions of capital to the sense-data of everyday perception is identified as an impediment to any socialist project.'⁷ From this perspective, anchored not in textuality but in materiality, the *situational representations* afforded through the social document can be read as coordinates. At the same time, the oscillating zoom and retraction advocated by Toscano and Kinkle, can, in some cases, be set in motion through various means including editorial or curatorial gestures and narratives.

Three important interlinking themes can be identified through the points above summarised as: 1) the return to materiality, content and truth; 2) a re-engagement with the notion of totality; 3) the realist enterprise. Committed to the production of evidence and predicated on the involvement of actually existing subjects, truth is something that the social document does not dismiss but rather grapples with through its embeddedness in material social realities. Yet rather than following straightforward or naïve notions of truth as an object to be shown or revealed through a grand gesture, the era of biopolitical globalisation speaks to a pressing need for its *extraction* and subsequent re-articulation. The forces and factors informing this re-articulation can vary contextually, but their work is rendered more visible and it is certainly, in the first instance, acknowledged. By the same token, mediation itself has come under fire. In his short film *The Rise and Fall of the TV Journalist* (2007), Adam Curtis charts the trajectory of the decline in 'public service' investigative reporting from the golden age of the Watergate exposure to the unforeseen collapse of the Soviet Union. The latter, he argues, led to a loss of confidence in the profession and journalists' turn to the viewer as a source of authentic knowledge and experience.⁸ Furthermore, Curtis holds that 'participatory' news-making was not a response to the interactivity of the Internet but instead acted as a substitute for critical analysis. Nearly a decade later, following the Brexit vote and the election of Donald Trump as U.S. President, Jan-Werner Müller addressed the rise of populism, linking it to social media's encouragement of a sense of 'direct democracy' and

⁶ Toscano and Kinkle, *Cartographies of the Absolute*, 15. For a discussion of 'Empire' see Chapter 4 of this thesis.

⁷ Ibid., 7.

⁸ This move can be seen particularly clearly in Harun Farocki and Andre Ujica's *Videograms of a Revolution* discussed in Chapter 3.

a more general demand that all intermediary powers be cut out: 'mediation, in the eyes of populists and their followers, is distortion.'⁹ In the context of 'post-truth' anti-intellectualism, mediation is rejected in favour of a perception of direct connection – primarily forged via the planetary nervous system of the Internet. As observed in the conclusion to Chapter 8, the social document thereby ascends to prominence at a point when knowledge, truth and mediation have become key sites of struggle.

Over the course of this thesis I have attempted to move the critical focus from themes of crisis-induced *disintegration* towards the address to totality, making recourse to the work of Georg Lukács who claimed that it is precisely in the experience of such moments that autonomous elements are drawn together in unity – despite experience to the contrary 'on the ground'. More specifically, I discussed the divide Lukács institutes between reportage and narrative portrayal, arguing that in recording and shaping, describing and involving, the social document is capable of collapsing the distinction to make an important contribution to the realist imperative coursing through art history. What, then, is the role and place of *visual representation in this address to totality*? In my view, this is a question that must be thought through realism as a critical political commitment and practice.

It should come as no surprise that under such circumstances social reproduction has emerged as an urgent area of both action and enquiry. In Meg Luxton's words, social reproduction offers 'a class analysis that shows how the production of goods and services and the production of life are part of one integrated process' allowing for the *explanation* of structures, relationships, and intersections.¹⁰ The social document has an established history in engaging with processes of both production and reproduction, as well as, in a number of exemplary cases, articulating the connections between them. This, then, is one answer to the question of precisely what the social document captures under the adjective 'social'. Likening it to an 'inscription device' I have also argued that it has demonstrably been committed to the *visual depiction of economic subjects*. Under such circumstances, the salience of the return to class specifically 'as an ever-more powerful determinant of inequality' must be emphasised – as Göran Therborn notes:

⁹ Jan-Werner Müller, "Capitalism in One Family," *London Review of Books* 38, no. 23 (December 2016), accessed Dec 2, 2016, <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v38/n23/jan-werner-muller/capitalism-in-one-family>.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 37.

This trend was established in the 1990s, a time when China's income gap soared in tandem with that of post-Soviet Russia, while the modest tendency towards equalization in rural India was sent into reverse. In Latin America, Mexico and Argentina endured the shocks of neoliberalism. An IMF study has shown that on a global scale, the only group which increased its income share in the 1990s was the richest national quintile, in both high- and low-income countries.¹¹

As I have discussed with reference to the case of WochenKlausur's *Participatory Economics* the complexities of class and inequality over this period must not be underestimated; through the social documents that form part of this artwork (and many others like it) we can witness what it now means for workers to manage their own alienation.¹² *Participatory Economics* not only reinforced the primacy of social reproduction as an issue of urgency (in Malcolm Bull's words 'how to extract from the global economy the means to stay alive, healthy and relatively autonomous'), but it also registered a reconfiguration of the identity of the worker.¹³ Set against examples of social documents produced during the high point of the labour movement – for example, the *Women and Work* (1973-75) exhibition project – it served to reaffirm what Therborn plots as the subsequent course of the workers' defeat.¹⁴ Interpreted at the macro level, the 'mass observation' achieved through the proliferation of social documents in art since 1989 has coincided with, and effectively charted, this decline. However, while Therborn emphasises the growing importance of inequality and class over the same period, he finds that the 'relevance' of gender is diminishing.¹⁵ In this thesis, I have taken the opposite position, analysing the social document's attention to the *gendered* worker or working class.

In sum, the evolutions and priorities of biopolitical globalisation *inhabit* the social document. This is true across the range of its calibrations, each of which engages in the shaping of life itself. To be clear, I am not arguing that each and every iteration of the social document is directly and consciously invested in the representation or interrogation of the complexities and contradictions of capitalism in this era – still less that they are all involved in oppositional struggle or the envisioning of alternatives. Rather, I am suggesting that what can be facilitated through art historical analysis reveals

¹¹ Therborn, "Class in the 21st Century," 13.

¹² Here I am paraphrasing Manfredo Tafuri, "Realised Socialism and the Crisis of the Avant-gardes," cited in Toscano and Kinkle, *Cartographies of the Absolute*, 91.

¹³ Bull, "Globalization and Biopolitics," 1.

¹⁴ Therborn, "Class in the 21st Century."

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

dominant themes and priorities as well as drives that underpin and influence its development. Most important among these perhaps is that the appetite for the social document is indicative of a broad and urgent demand to attend to the intimately personal while setting it in relation to the globally consequential – a demand that connects the priorities of capital, struggle and art.

9.2 Limitations and overcomings

Particular impasses and limitations encountered in the analysis of the social document undertaken in this thesis, as well as potential avenues for future research. The first concerns issues of recognition and visibility. What is at stake in the contention that a dominant formation of artistic production in the twenty-first century is both *visual* and narrative? In the era of biopolitical globalisation, questions relating to the former are undoubtedly urgent. That the social document is positioned as a vexed site of both threat and potential is underscored by the Invisible Committee's provocative call to 'flee visibility' as a political strategy. In their words: 'The longer we avoid visibility, the stronger we'll be when it catches up with us. And once we become visible our days will be numbered.'¹⁶ How, then, to square the need to expand representation in order to incorporate those marginalised with the economic imperative to promote visibility as a core part of biosecurity and self-management under neoliberal capitalism? The social document is caught in the crosshairs of this very question, encouraging attention (in ways that frequently reproduce the identity of the victim in particular) in an era when elaborate technologies have been developed precisely to render visible, record and pay attention to the whole of life.

The second is the ascription of artistic status to the social document, specifically in terms of the constraints of 'the artwork' as such and the exhibition form. These structures are not only orientated towards the containment of art within its own territories, they also effectively conceal the central position of a spectator who consumes art in her leisure time as a leisure activity. The social document has the capacity to both affirm and 'pass over' these structures, in some cases showing how light, and indeed tactical, the hold on the attribution 'art' can be in instances when a priority is to gain traction and relevance in life and struggle. A productive area of enquiry would therefore be to plot the impact

¹⁶ The Invisible Committee, *The Coming Insurrection* (Los Angeles, Semiotext(e), 2009), 114.

of different *regimes of biopolitics* on art. Just as the curator Jorge Ribalta framed his project on the workers' photography movement as looking back to the 1930s through the lens of 1968, I see considerable potential in looking from a post-2008 viewpoint to other 'moments' of economic transition at least back to practices from the 1970s onwards and even the capitalist era as it has unfolded since industrialisation. Potentially leading to an alternative reading of modern art, the intention would be to capture aspects of art as social practice that currently remain unarticulated. For, in my view, the analysis of the social document introduces a new chapter in the social history of art, and, in doing so, opens up new perspectives on both the past and possibilities for the future.

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APPENDICES

— APPENDIX A

Social Documents

THE ETHICS OF ENCOUNTER

Stills (Edinburgh)

Part 1: 7 — 28 November 2010 | Part 2: 11 December 2010 — 6 March 2011



Renzo Martens
Artur Żmijewski
Frederick Wiseman
The Atlas Group

François Bucher
Dani Marti
Artur Żmijewski
Daniel Rutter

When artists site their practice within the fabric of social relations, documentary modes often play a central role in mediating events and experiences. Though the resulting material often bears a close resemblance to ethnographic mapping, investigative journalism or even community work, in contrast to the strict ethical codes to which these disciplines adhere many of today's artists operate in somewhat murkier waters. Working outside – or even deliberately corrupting – accepted conventions and frameworks, the artists participating in this two-part exhibition find alternative means to engage with social realities in situations of war, sex and political urgency.

A series of three week-long presentations of documentary films that interrogate the operations and effects of power launched *The Ethics of Encounter* programme. Returning to the format of a group exhibition, Part 2 includes photography and video works by five artists who place storytelling at the heart of their practice. Re-imagining the format of the first person interview, they move from the grainy hostage-tape aesthetic adopted by The Atlas Group to Dani Marti's intimate post-coital portraits, creating captivating, and occasionally deeply disturbing, narratives. Whether folding fact into fiction or constructing complex games and experiments, these reality driven practices produce new types of knowledge and challenge the coordinates by which we live.

EVENTS PROGRAMME

20 January

Film Lounge preview event — 'Ethics, Nationalism and the Theatrics of Documentation

10 February

Dis[h]course with Dani Marti at Spoon

16 February

Artist Talk & Screening — Dani Marti

2 March

Artist talk & Screening — François Bucher

3 March

The Ethics of Encounter Research Workshop Roundtable

4 March

The Ethics of Encounter Research Workshop



THE ETHICS OF ENCOUNTER RESEARCH WORKSHOP

As an increasing number of artists site their practice within the social fabric of everyday life, the encounter has been placed at the heart of a newly defined aesthetic experience. Participatory, collaborative, community-based and documentary methodologies which engage directly with interpersonal relations and social realities now proliferate both within and beyond the institution. This move away from traditional forms of representation into the territories of use and action has endowed art's latest 'social turn' with a renewed and expanded ethical significance. In parallel with these developments, it is claimed that ethics has triumphed in the public debate to reign over culture and displace politics.

This research workshop will examine the complex interfaces which have emerged between aesthetics, politics and ethics in the 21st century. Taking into account their historical imbrications in art discourse together with the so-called 'ethical turn' of contemporary politics, we aim to develop a critical understanding of their most recent forms and configurations across the diverse terrains of socially-engaged art. The ethical valence of artworks has dominated debates to date – whether interventions into the social fabric can be considered productively 'good' or transgressive, 'bad' and yet, ultimately, revealing. If the ethical is now a common route for artists seeking to broach the political and provide a site for critique, is it possible to move beyond this dichotomy and map the potential and limits of ethical engagements in art?

Speakers and interlocutors include Carla Cruz (Goldsmiths University of London), Gail Day (University of Leeds), Angela Dimitrakaki (The University of Edinburgh), Anthony Downey (Sotheby's Institute of Art), Alana Jelinek (University of Cambridge), Kirsten Lloyd (Stills / The University of Edinburgh), Tracy Mackenna (Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design) & Ken Neil (Glasgow School of Art), Mark Miller (Tate Britain) & Victoria Walsh (Tate Britain), Dominic Paterson (University of Glasgow), Michaela Ross (Chelsea College of Art and Design), Harry Weeks (The University of Edinburgh) and Stephen Wright (European School of Visual Arts)

Organised by Kirsten Lloyd and Harry Weeks.

Presented by The University of Edinburgh's History of Art Department and Stills.

Supported by the AHRC.



— APPENDIX B

Social Documents

ALLAN SEKULA: TOPOGRAPHIES OF GLOBALISATION



Part 1: Film Retrospective | 12 November 2011 — 18 December 2011

Part 2: Ship of Fools | 23 January 2012 — 18 March 2012

Photographer Allan Sekula explores economic crisis, protest and the forces of globalisation.

Stills' *Social Documents* programme continues with Allan Sekula's rich photographic and filmic mappings of modern life. For this exhibition he presents his most recent series of photographs *Ship of Fools* alongside his award-winning documentary film *The Forgotten Space*. Together, they examine the sea as a space of trade, work, exploitation, activism and the sublime.

Ship of Fools directly follows Stills' retrospective of Allan Sekula's moving image works which presented a selection of his films and videos spanning thirty years of his practice.

THE GLOBAL MARINER

Ship of Fools documents the voyage of the Global Mariner, a reconditioned cargo vessel carrying in its converted holds a remarkable exhibition which examined working conditions at sea. Over twenty months between 1998 until 2000 the ship circumnavigated the globe, calling at 78 port cities from Valparaíso to Bangkok, Santos, Hong Kong and Istanbul.

The voyage of the Global Mariner was sponsored by the International Transport Workers Federation, a London-based umbrella organisation bringing together 779 unions and representing over 4 million transport workers from across the globe. The primary target of the project was 'flag of convenience' shipping, a system that allows wealthy ship owners to avoid national regulations in the ship's country of origin (including basic safety standards, a minimum wage and union representation) by registering their vessels in countries where these regulations are weak or do not apply. Its travelling exhibition focused on the life of both dockers and seafarers, documenting the effects of exposure to unregulated labour markets and the risks attached to their trade through film and audio presentations.

Along the way, the ship and its multi-national crew also joined local protests against Chilean port privatisation, the working conditions of shipyard workers in New Orleans and the political situation in Burma. In August 2000 the ship was rammed and sunk at the mouth of the Orinoco River in Venezuela.

Ship of Fools documents this journey through portraits of the Global Mariner's crew, dockworkers at the port of Santos in Brazil and images of the ship itself. The accompanying *Dockers Museum* contains 'objects of interest' relating to the cultures of seafaring and ports and the collection continues to expand. The latest additions include a Japanese foghorn and a bronze statue of a stevedore from the port of Antwerp.

ALLAN SEKULA

Born in 1951 in Pennsylvania, Allan Sekula was taught by the activist photographer Fred Lonidier at The University of San Diego during a time of great social upheaval. Informed by conceptual art and the history of social documentary photography Sekula's 'critical realist' approach, together with his influential writings, have made a significant contribution to the reinvigoration of documentary modes. Developing 'cycles' of work over long periods of time he documents labour conditions, the material flow of goods across the world's oceans and protest movements as part of



his sustained analysis of the impact of our capitalist economic system on life across the globe.

Throughout his practice Sekula has frequently returned to the theme of the sea. His last exhibition in Scotland was the epic photographic series *Fish Story* presented at Tramway in 1995. Other interrelated books and exhibitions have examined maritime space as have a number of the moving image works which were presented as part of Stills' Film Retrospective in Winter 2011. *The Lottery of the Sea* (2006) focused on the transformational impact of containerisation on the world's material economy which allowed goods to be manufactured where labour costs were cheapest and then transported cheaply by sea, train and truck in standardised boxes. *Tsukiji* (2006) followed a day in the life of the world's largest fish market located in the heart of Tokyo.

The title of the film *The Lottery of the Sea* was taken from Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), a book based on a series of lectures he delivered in Edinburgh during the Scottish Enlightenment. Born in Kirkcaldy in 1723, the Scottish social philosopher and political economist is buried only ten minutes away from Stills in the Canongate Kirkyard. In an early telephone conversation about his upcoming exhibition at Stills, Allan Sekula wondered aloud by what route Smith would have journeyed into the heart of Edinburgh's Old Town. Would he have made a regular trip across the Firth of Forth, through the port and up Leith Walk? Such questions reflect the artist's long-held fascination with the impact of Smith's coastal origins on the development of his thinking, specifically his concern with risk. In an earlier interview for an art magazine in 2002 he said:

'Smith introduces the concept of risk entirely through examples drawn from seafaring and sea trade: the sailor who risks all for meagre pay, incommensurate with his skills; the wealthy ship owner who "insures himself" against risk by funding a fleet large enough to offset the inevitable loss of individual vessels. The concept of risk emerges with a measure of human sympathy and understanding, based no doubt on Smith's own life-world at the edge of the North Sea, that is completely absent from the musings of our contemporary apostles of the free market.'

As the current global economic crisis surges on through its third year, the social impact of a system based on speculation and risk is at the forefront of public debate and, all too often, personal experience. In the midst of global economic crisis, anti-capitalist protest and the emergence of many other forms of resistance against exploitation and repression, it seems a fitting historical juncture to present Allan Sekula's photographic and filmic critiques of the political, social and cultural changes wrought by globalisation.

Though Sekula is primarily known for his photographic output, there has always been a close connection between his use of still and moving images, not only in terms of subject matter but also in terms of the methodology he employs. In each, he attempts to counter the social documentary genre's tendencies to 'aim the camera downwards' and hunt for edifying images of victims. At the same time, his ongoing commitment to documentary modes has led him to challenge the assumptions of much postmodern thinking: 'The old myth that photographs tell the truth', he says, 'has succumbed to the new myth that they don't.' For Sekula, there is



still considerable political potential in using the lens to document social realities.

Connections between his photography videos can also be found in the production methods he employs together with the structure of his projects. His commitment to pursuing an investigative approach based on long-term observation produces works that are driven by narrative: the 'decisive moment' usually associated with photography is replaced by essayistic material that demands to be read rather than absorbed. Sekula has often said that he feels that his photographic work is informed more by literature and cinema than the static arts of painting and sculpture.

Over the course of his extensive career Sekula has exhibited at *Documenta 11* and the 2010 São Paulo Biennial as well as through numerous solo exhibitions at institutions including the Generali Foundation in Vienna and The Renaissance Society, Chicago. His epic photographic series *Fish Story* was shown over sixteen years ago at Tramway in Glasgow in 1995. Like many of his projects this work was also published in book form and an example can be found in the reading area alongside exhibition readers which reprint key texts about Sekula's practice together with his own essays including 'Dismantling Modernism: Reinventing Documentary' (1976/78) and 'Photography Against the Grain' (1984).

EVENTS PROGRAMME

The Ship of Fools events programme includes special screenings of Allan Sekula and Noël Burch's award winning documentary film *The Forgotten Space*; a series of lectures by photographers and visual culture specialists exploring art and the effects of globalisation as well as a new reading group where we will read and discuss Karl Marx's *Capital*.

THE FORGOTTEN SPACE

The sea is forgotten until disaster strikes, but perhaps the biggest seagoing disaster is the global supply chain which leads the world economy into the abyss. Allan Sekula and Noël Burch's award-winning film essay offers a lucid and lyrical document of worker's conditions, the inhuman scale of containerised sea trade and the secret lives of port cities.

17 February

Glasgow Film Festival, Glasgow Film Theatre

Presented as part of The Glasgow School of Art's Friday Event lecture programme and screened in collaboration with Glasgow Film Festival.

5 March

The Filmhouse, Edinburgh

THE GLOBALISATION AND ART LECTURES

For this lecture series art historians, photographers, artists and visual culture specialists have been invited to examine the intersections between art and the social realities produced by globalisation.

15 February 2012

Gail Day: Social Transitivity in Allan Sekula's The Lottery of the Sea

Focusing on Allan Sekula's video essay *The Lottery of the Sea* (2006), Gail Day considers the longstanding, but recently revived, problem of realism. Her talk explores the representational strategies used to negotiate a critical cognition of contemporary capitalism.

Gail Day is Senior Lecturer in the School of Fine Art, History of Art & Cultural Studies at the University of Leeds. Her book *Dialectical Passions: Negation in Postwar Art Theory* was published by Columbia University Press in 2010.

Steve Edwards: Some Brechtian Moments

Taking the re-evaluation of Bertolt Brecht's legacy as a starting point, Steve Edwards will use the radical aesthetics of the 1970s as a frame for thinking about Allan Sekula's photo-text works.

Steve Edwards teaches art history at the Open University. Books include: *The Making of English Photography, Allegories* (2006) and *Photography : A Very Short Introduction* (2006). His book *Martha Rosler's The Bowery in Two Inadequate Descriptive Systems* will be published by Afterall early in 2012. He is an editor of *Historical Materialism* and of *Oxford Art Journal*.

23 February 2012

Anu Pennanen, Gaze Value

Finish artist Anu Pennanen's work in film and photography deals with urban public space. Presented as a five-screen installation, her film *The Ruins of the Gaze* is set in Europe's largest transportation and shopping hub: Les Halles in Paris. Produced over a period of three years, the film is structured around a number of vignettes which follow the daily lives of several individuals within this architectural complex and through them, traces the connections with the city's outskirts. For this talk, Pennanen will borrow from the Marxist concepts of 'exchange value' and 'use value' to discuss her concept of 'gaze value'. Anu Pennanen will exhibit her work in the final instalment of the Social Documents series in 2013

29 February 2012

Owen Logan: Globalising the Spiritual Aristocracy:

Refelections on Class, Art, and Gods

For the final instalment of Stills' Social Documents series, Owen Logan is producing a photographic work entitled 'Where Pathos Rules', examining the visual representation and cultural economy of resource related conflicts. The exhibition *ECONOMY* will open in January 2013.

In his talk on February 29th this year, Logan focuses on the arts and globalisation, touching on socially engaged projects that involve photography. Socially engaged arts projects are increasingly carried out with a missionary zeal that goes beyond the desire to inform social change through realist forms of representation, and

instead they set out to implement social change among groups and communities on the basis of transforming the lives of individuals. Drawing on the writings of Robert Hobson, Augusto Boal, Mary Barnes and Abraham Maslow, Logan argues that the idea of 'saving the world' one person at a time ought to be taken more seriously and subjected to appropriate critique.

Owen Logan is a documentary photographer and a researcher in the field of socioeconomics and culture. He is a contributing editor to Variant magazine and co-editor of the book 'Flammable Societies – studies on the socio-economics of oil and gas', recently published by Pluto Press. Logan's photo-essay projects have concentrated on cultural, economic and political fracturing, seen in life in Morocco, published as *Al Maghrib* (1989); in the history of Italian emigration, *Bloodlines/Vite allo Specchio* (1994); in post-colonial Nigerian society, *A Home of Signs and Wonders* (1997) and in other ongoing projects.

14 March 2012

Antigoni Memou: Contesting Globalisation:

Allan Sekula's Waiting for Tear Gas

Antigoni Memou will discuss Allan Sekula's project *Waiting for Tear Gas* (2000), a series of photographs that has been exhibited widely as well as appearing in the collective publication *Five Days that Shook the World: Seattle and Beyond*. Taken during the anti-globalisation protests in Seattle in 1999, the images document the resistance to the limits of globalisation. Memou will place the series in opposition to other practices, including documentary photography, street photography and photojournalism, and in particular in relation with other contemporary photographic projects that engaged with the counterforce of neoliberal globalisation.

Antigoni Memou teaches history and theory of art at the University of East London. She co-organises the 'Marxism in Culture' research seminar and reading group held at the Institute of Historical Research, University of London, and she is an associated researcher in the 'European Protest Movements' Network.' She recently completed her PhD thesis *From the Globalisation of the Movement (1968) to the Movement Against Globalisation (2001): Social Movements, Photography, Representation in the Late Twentieth Century*.

READING CAPITAL WITH DAVID HARVEY

Geographer and social theorist David Harvey has been teaching Karl Marx's *Capital* Volume 1 for over 40 years. His lectures are now available online and provide a lively and accessible means of approaching one of the most essential and relevant political, economic and theoretical texts of modern times.

In collaboration with Stills, The History of Art department at The University of Edinburgh will host a series of open discussion sessions based around these video lectures. Participants will read the relevant section of the book in advance before watching Harvey's lecture together and discussing the material.

<http://davidharvey.org/reading-capital/>

FOCUS SPACE

Richard Williams: United States

12 November 2011 — 18 March 2012

Staying with the theme of the sea, Richard Williams will exhibit a series of photographs and artefacts that examine the past, present and future of the once glamorous ship, the SS United States. The last – and fastest – ocean liner built by the US, its decaying 990-foot structure is now moored opposite an IKEA store at Pier 82 in the great port of Philadelphia, a place full of ruins from the industrial age.

— APPENDIX C

Social Documents

ECONOMY

Stills (Edinburgh): 19 January — 21 April 2013

CCA (Glasgow): 26 January — 23 March 2013



David Aronowitsch & Hanna Heilborn
Ursula Biemann
Pauline Boudry & Renate Lorenz
Jeremy Deller & Mike Figgis
Tracey Emin
Yevgeniy Fiks, Olga Kopenkina
& Alexandra Lerman
Andrea Fraser
Claire Fontaine
Christos Georgiou
Melanie Gilligan
Johan Grimmonprez
Andreas Gursky
Francesco Jodice
Kai Kaljo
Ernest Larsen & Sherrie Milner
Owen Logan

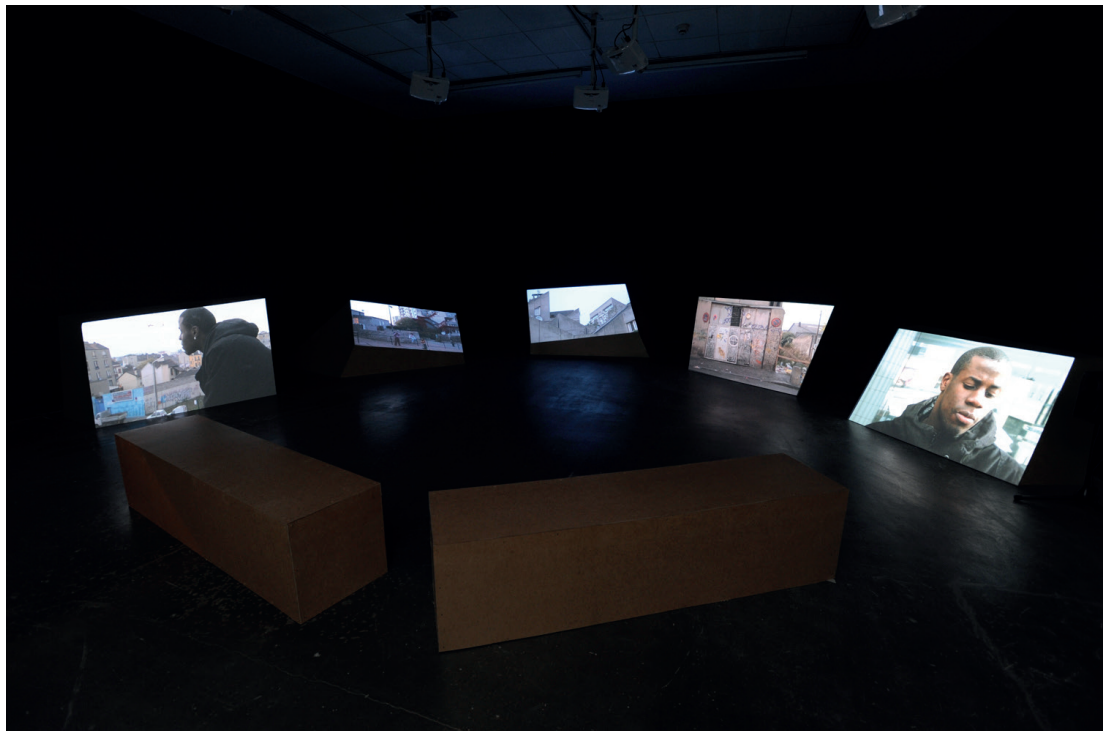
Rick Lowe
Angela Melitopoulos
Jenny Marketou
Dani Marti
Marge Monko
Tanja Ostojic
Anu Pennanen
Raqs Media Collective
Oliver Ressler & Dario Azzellini
Martha Rosler
Maria Ruido
Hito Steyerl
Mitra Tabrizian
Nuria Vila & Marcelo Expósito
WochenKlausur
Paolo Woods
Yorgos Zois

Curated by Angela Dimitrakaki and Kirsten Lloyd

In the 21st century, does the economy provide the ground zero of our sense of self? And what does this experience of a life dominated by economic relations feel or even look like? Presented at Stills in Edinburgh and CCA in Glasgow two parallel exhibitions make the core of ECONOMY. Accompanied by film screenings, public forums and online debate, the project examines the heightened interest of art today in revealing the economy as an inescapable social truth. The artworks on show experiment with the imaginative documentation of social life to address issues ranging from climate change, labour conditions, sexuality, migration and the crisis of democracy to the quest for alternative futures.

A programme of screenings, public forums, talks and performances will accompany the exhibition. In addition, ECONOMY includes two new residency-based commissions by Edinburgh-based photographer Owen Logan and the Austrian collective Wochenklausur.

What does economy mean to you? Visit the independent ECONOMY website to upload your own photographs to the Image Archive, contribute to the ongoing discussions and consult the material in the Reading Room:
www.economyexhibition.net



EVENTS PROGRAMME

18 January

Artist Talk — Johan Grimonprez Friday

Edinburgh College of Art

The director of the iconic *Dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y* (1997) introduces recent and ongoing projects, including *On Radical Ecology: A WeTube-o-theque* (2011 to date) as part of the ECONOMY exhibitions. Following the lecture, the artist will be joined by the ECONOMY curators for a discussion with the audience.

26 January

Public Forum — Oil & Water: Resource, Environment, Conflict

A pioneer of contemporary art's documentary turn, award-winning video essayist Ursula Biemann from Switzerland, and Edinburgh-based photographer, researcher and writer Owen Logan join an interdisciplinary panel to discuss the global environmental crisis, its connection with economic imperatives and art's response.

9 February

Public Reading Group — Sex, Desire and Economic Subjects

Stills

Led by Vicky Horne (University of Edinburgh), the reading group provides a friendly environment for guided study of groundbreaking texts addressing the multiple connections between economy and sex.

22 February

Film Premiere & Artist Talk — Staande! Debout! (2013)

Anu Pennanen & Stéphane Querrec

Glasgow Film Theatre

The world premiere of *Staande! Debout!*, an imaginative and sensitive exploration of the forced obsolescence that capital has imposed on the skilled working class of Western Europe. Presented in collaboration with The GSA's Friday Event programme and Glasgow Film Festival's Crossing the Line strand, a platform for daring and alternative approaches to cinema.

28 February

Film Lounge Part 1 — Work & Spectres

CCA

The curators will introduce the screening of selected films from the Film Lounge relating to the exhibition keywords Work and Spectres.

2 March

Public Forum — Socially Engaged Practice: Ethics, Aesthetics, Politics or Economics?

CCA

Led by the renowned Vienna-based collective WochenKlausur, this event brings together artists, theorists, curators and activists to discuss one of contemporary art's hottest and most widely debated trends: the rise of participatory art practices that seek to solve social problems – or are they economic ones? Early booking is highly recommended.

14 March:

Artist Talk / Performance — *Art & Economics Quarterly Forum*, Tanja Ostojić, Dmytri Kleiner and Heath Bunting
CCA

Tanja Ostojić, Dmytri Kleiner and Heath Bunting from the Berlin-based collective Art & Economics present a talk about their work and auction a special edition of art bonds. Initiated in Berlin, The Art & Economics Quarterly Forum is a performative event incorporating rituals relating to art and political economy.

15 March

Artist Talk — *Tanja Ostojić*
Edinburgh College of Art

One of Europe's most radical artists of the past decade, Tanja Ostojić discusses her projects concerning the sexualisation of borders and Europe as a post-socialist space. Following the lecture, the artist will be joined by the ECONOMY curators for a discussion with the audience.

21 March

Film Lounge Part 2 — *Crisis & Exodus*
CCA

A screening event focusing on works which deal with the conspicuous issue of crisis – particularly the entanglement of economic crisis and a crisis of democracy – and the possibility of freedom from capitalism as an economy of oppression. Introduced by the curators.

5 April

Public Forum — *The Art World Economy: Free Labour, Use Value and Mass Poverty*
CCA

The contemporary art world relies extensively upon free and underpaid labour. 'Entrepreneurship' has become the watchword as recent graduates move from voluntary position to internship while the vast majority of artists and entry-level arts professionals, including curators and educators, receive shockingly low recompense for their work – when, that is, they are not forced to 'freelance' and be 'creative' as public funding for the creation of jobs dwindles. This public debate addresses the ideological context and material impact of these tendencies, paying particular attention to the situation in Scotland.



— APPENDIX D

THE KING'S PEACE REALISM AND WAR

Stills (Edinburgh): 1 August 2014 — 26 October 2014



Adam Broomberg & Oliver Chanarin
Grupo de Artistas de Vanguardia
Nermine Hammam
Eugene Jarecki
Philip Jones Griffiths
Owen Logan

Fred Lonidier
Martha Rosler
Snapcorps with Stuart Platt
Paul Strand & Cesare Zavattini

Curated by Kirsten Lloyd and Owen Logan



How does conflict abroad relate to culture and society at home? What does it mean to oppose warmongering? What would a genuine and democratic peace look like? This exhibition brings together a rich array of artworks, photobooks and archival materials which use realist strategies to offer alternative perspectives on warfare and the civil peace.

Owen Logan's photo-essay *Masquerade: Michael Jackson Alive in Nigeria* (2001–2005) follows the exploits of a costume performer as he travels across the country. The young black soul singer's transformation into the white 'king of pop' is used as an allegory for the conflict-ridden situation in postcolonial Nigeria, a country which has been in a state of ongoing crisis since the civil war of 1967 to 1970. With the author Uzor Maxim Uzoatu, Logan presents a biting satire that critiques the relationship between the Nigerian political elite and foreign business interests. *Masquerade* is shown here in the context of a group exhibition which expands upon its central themes to interrogate the meaning of 'peace' in modern societies. The artworks and materials presented raise important questions about how domestic politics and economics across the globe have been shaped by warfare.

In recent years the 'war on terror' has further eroded the distinction between war and peace. Conventional conflicts between nation states have been replaced with a kind of peace, or 'security', that can also be understood as perpetual warfare. However, a longer view suggests that the distinction between wartime and peacetime has always been artificial. The sociologist Norbert Elias (1897–1990) analysed the formation of the modern state through the monopolisation of physical force under one authority. He argued that the elite's control over internal peace, right down to the terms of 'civilised' behaviour and cultural mores, gave the state a Janus face: internal regulation and pacification went hand in hand with a greater permissiveness when it came to the use of violence against external enemies. This dense socio-political interweaving of international and domestic forces is the starting point for *The King's Peace*.

In *Masquerade* Logan's revitalisation of realist strategies has been heavily influenced by Nigeria's performative and satirical culture. Humour, montage and storytelling are used to describe circumstances and capture connections that straight documentary depictions miss. This approach continues throughout *The King's Peace* exhibition with each contributor assembling words and images in ways that question the illusion of reality so easily achieved with cameras. Rather than capturing the spectacle of combat or the ghostly aftermath of violence these realist photographers and filmmakers have been reluctant to show the human drama of war for fear of making it appear natural or eternal. When shocking battlefield images are used, they are carefully contextualised in order to communicate a more complex message. Martha Rosler's *House Beautiful: Bringing the War Home*, (2004–2008) is a good example. Splicing images of the Iraq war into scenes of Western home interiors, she makes plain the connections between violence abroad and consumer culture at home. Other works presented focus instead on the 'civil peace': 1968 Argentina, recent labour struggles on the Mexico-US border and, closer to home, creative activism in the Wester Hailes district of Edinburgh. In each case, the photographers do not simply record events but offer interpretations or even attempt to intervene as they unfold, creating new opportunities for participation

in political processes. Together they show how realist strategies have evolved since the end of the First World War. Recognising the crucial role that images play in how societies communicate and comprehend conflict, they have articulated the need for a genuine and democratic peace.

EVENTS PROGRAMME

25 September

Artist Talk — Oliver Chanarin *War Primer 2*

26 September

ECA Friday Talk — Oliver Chanarin

1 October

Talk — Fraser MacDonald

‘Paul Strand and the Hebridean Cold War’

25 October

Screening & Discussion — *The Act of Killing*



APPENDIX E

ARTISTS, COLLECTIVES AND PROJECTS

	Primary	Secondary	Country
Chapter 1	Mary Kelly		U.K.
	Grupo de Artistas de Vanguardia		Argentina
	Sanja Iveković		Yugoslavia
		Renzo Martens	Belgium
		Vera Frenkel	Canada
		Margaret Harrison, Mary Kelly and Kay Hunt	U.K.
		Berwick Street Film Collective	U.K.
		Graciela Carnevale	Argentina
		Oscar Bony	Argentina
		Roberto Jacoby	Argentina
		KwieKulik	Poland
Chapter 2	Nan Goldin		U.S.
	Jo Spence		U.K.
		Sherry Levine	U.S.
		Cindy Sherman	U.S.
Chapter 3	Harun Farocki and Andrei Ujica		Germany and Romania
		Ursula Biemann	Switzerland
		Rick Lowe	U.S.
		Women on Waves	The Netherlands
		Ala Plástica	Argentina
		WochenKlausur	Austria
Chapter 4	ECONOMY		Scotland
		Yto Barrada	France/Morocco
		Big Hope (Miklós Ehrhardt and Dominic Hislop)	Hungary
		Marcelo Brodsky	Argentina
		Phil Collins	U.K.
		Tracey Emin	U.K.
		Ana Maria Garcia	Puerto Rico / U.S.
		Emily Jacir	U.S. / Palestine
		Alfredo Jarr	U.S. / Chile

		Khaled Jarrar	Palestine
		Kai Kaljo	Estonia
		Steve McQueen	U.K.
		Jenny Marketou	U.S./Greece
		Angela Melitopoulos	Germany
		NSK (<i>Neue Slowenische Kunst</i>)	Slovenia
		Tanja Ostojic	Serbia / Germany
		Oliver Ressler	Austria
		Allan Sekula	U.S.
		Ruti Sela and Maayan Amir	Israel
		Ahlam Shibli	Palestine
		Emma Sulkowicz	U.S.
		WochenKlausur	Austria
		Artur Zmijewski	Poland
Chapter 5	<i>Documenta 11</i>		Germany
	<i>The Greenroom</i>		U.S.
	Anton Vidokle / e-flux		U.S.
		Rainer Ganahl	Austria
Chapter 6	Martha Rosler		U.S.
Chapter 7	Dani Marti		Australia/Scotland
	Snapcorps		Scotland
	WochenKlausur		Austria
		Renzo Martens	Belgium
		Artur Zmijewski	Poland
Chapter 8	Pilvi Takala		Finland
		Chto Delat?	Russia
		Melanie Gilligan	U.S./U.K.
		Ryan Trecartin	U.S.
		Hito Steyerl	Germany

APPENDIX F

SELECTED ACTIVITIES

In 2011 I received a grant from the AHRC Student-led Initiative Scheme to organise 'The Ethics of Encounter' research workshop and, in the same year, presented a related paper entitled 'The Moral of the Story: Ethical Engagements in Contemporary Documentary' at the Association of Art Historians Annual Conference. In 2015 I presented the paper 'Social Reproduction and The Ethics of Care in WochenKlausur's Participatory Economics' at the College Art Association Annual Conference in New York. In 2012 I convened 'The Globalisation & Art Lectures' at Stills in the context of a presentation of Allan Sekula's work. As part of the same project I organised the 'Reading Capital' reading group with Harry Weeks.

Since 2014 I have worked to galvanise art historical interest in feminist elaborations on 'social reproduction' by founding and leading the reading group 'Social Reproduction in Art, Life and Struggle' with my colleague Victoria Horne. My elaboration on the relevance of this concept to an analysis of the social document (presented in Chapter 6 of this thesis) has been informed by the rich discussions that ensued as well as through those that arose through two conference panels and a research workshop that I co-convened and co-chaired with Angela Dimitrakaki: the 'Social Reproduction in Postwar and Contemporary Art' panel at the 2014 Historical Materialism conference in London, 'The Fabric: Social Reproduction, Women's History and Art' research workshop held at Edinburgh College of Art in 2015 where I also presented the paper 'From Housework to Housing: Art Documents and Curating Care' and the 'Labours of Love, Works of Passion: The social (re)production of art workers from industrialisation to globalisation' panel at the Association of Art Historians conference, Edinburgh in 2016.

I have presented papers on my approach to research-led curating at the 2013 'The Exhibition and its Histories Conference' in Edinburgh (convened by Harry Weeks and Ben Fallon) and in Detroit at the invitation of the Kresge Foundation Art Serve Michigan. In 2010 I co-

organised the 'Radical Complicities: Curating art in the 21st century' with Angela Dimitrakaki at the National Galleries of Scotland where I also presented the paper 'Sleeping Cells and Doubles Agents: Curatorial Tactics within and beyond the Institution'. In 2015 I organised the 'Curating Materiality: Feminism and Contemporary Art History' workshop in collaboration with Catherine Spencer (The University of St Andrews) and Sarah Cook (Dundee University) having secured funding from the Scottish Graduate School for Arts and Humanities.