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AFFECTIVE REPRESENTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE IN ALLAN SEKULA'S *FISH STORY*, 1989–2017

A THESIS APPROVED FOR THE

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY OF SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, AND MEDICINE

BY THE COMMITTEE CONSISTING OF

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Abstract

In 1989, contemporary American artist Allan Sekula (1951–2013) embarked on a seafaring project to document transnational seaports which would later be published as the iconic *Fish Story* (1989–1995). His personal notebooks during this voyage (among other several materials) would later be acquired by the Getty Research Institute in 2017 and turned into an archive. *Fish Story* would become perhaps Sekula's most influential work. Sekula, a dedicated Marxist with highly influential commentary on globalization and capitalism (most of which arose through the medium of documentary photography and critical writing) directly confronted the mechanisms that allowed ports and sea-faring technologies to conduct profound capitalist processes, ultimately finding the entire system to be dangerously elusive. Sekula's life and work is primarily handled within the fields of contemporary art history and criticism (with particular attention toward his sociocritical and historical work on photographic representation) but because of infrastructure studies' continued integration of visual studies, he deserves more attention within the annals of the history of technology. Within scholarship on the history of technology we can find immediate relevance in his work that engaged with the themes of *containerization* and the methodological framework of *infrastructural inversion*. But, unlike what scholarship has settled for Sekula, it is the aim of this paper to cement his agency within infrastructure studies through an affectual approach. This will be done by surveying Sekula's "sympathetic" documentary tendencies in relation to his experiences with infrastructural networks during the *Fish Story* voyage, the accounts of which are mainly mined from his personal notebooks. For clarity, the analysis splits up the survey of Sekula's interaction with infrastructure into a pair: emotional and biographical narratives and representational and photographic theory and history. Near the end, the paper also incorporates recent scholarship

Sekula's archival practices and methods. Overall, this sort of techno-biographical survey of Sekula will showcase the tremendous relevance of a contemporary artist to the history of technology.

Introduction

Allan Sekula (1951–2013) was a contemporary American photographer and critic, notable for his realistic yet provocative captures of ephemeral capitalist systems at work, underscored by his fervent written critique. In a short and ephemeral portion of Allan Sekula's "Dismal Science: Part 2," within the iconic *Fish Story* (a sort of auto-ethnographic account of Sekula's voyage, spanning between 1989 and 1995, in which he visited various international ports in hopes to visualize the hidden proponents of globalized capitalism), he likens the intermodal shipping container to pop-artist Andy Warhol's *Brillo Box*.[1] While Sekula appreciates Warhol as an artist who understood the facade of postwar American merchandising, he concedes that Warhol was "reaching the warehouse, but no further." Sekula imposes similar critical evaluations upon conceptual artist[2] Dan Graham—he praises Graham's analysis of the uniformity of suburban housing in postwar America but finds him disingenuous in the way he regards the highway, as for Graham, it is "a space of domestic family travel, rather than commercial transport." Similarly, Sekula forms two avenues of disagreement with land-artist Robert Smithson, despite his apparent admiration. First, Smithson's work, though holding an appreciation of "industrial landscapes," is fixated upon "stasis and decay" rather than comprehending the rural and residual as a vast network of progression, movement, and logistics, entirely propped up to serve economic globalization. Second, in direct reference to Smithson's

[1] Sekula would constantly reference the Fish Story voyage throughout his life. He later picked up the topic again but under a different medium and name, *The Forgotten Space* (2010), which was published in collaboration with filmmaker Noël Burch. Though this thesis focuses on *Fish Story*, there are also aspirations towards framing Sekula's lifework in tandem with each other, such as integrating *Ship of Fools* (2010) and *The Docker's Museum* (2010). Scholarship on Sekula does not typically take an encompassing view of his life and work.

[2] This is for the sake of introduction and context. Dan Graham is canonically understood as a minimal and conceptual artist, but he is known for disliking "conceptual" art quite fervently.

Monuments of Passaic, Sekula begins to speculate what Smithson's lasting visual analysis could have been if he "had chosen not to return to the spaces of his childhood, but to Port Elizabeth instead," perhaps, he further comments, on a day when the machines were operating, and vitality could be appreciated. Sekula ends *Dismal Science: Part 2* with a comment on the "vampiric" qualities of capitalism in a hopeful attempt to end these visions of a "seamless" economic process:

> I propose a more provisional funeral. If anything, the appropriate metaphor is found in Marx's notion of the "dead labor" embedded in commodities. If there is a single object that can be said to embody the disavowal implicit in the transnational bourgeoisie's fantasy of a world of wealth without workers, a world of uninhibited flows, it is this: the container, the very coffin of remote labor-power. And like the table In Marx's explanation of commodity fetishism, the coffin has learned to dance.[3]

However interesting, it is not the aim of this paper to make another critical argument on the sociotechnical dimensions of infrastructure, in our case, as showcased and inspired by the visual artistry of Sekula. This level of discourse has already been solidified by Sekula himself, the peers he interacted with during his life, and the community who has seriously engaged with his work after his death. The term "sociotechnical" should not be taken lightly, as it represents the general methodological framework from which infrastructure studies has conducted its research since 1999 with the publication of anthropologist Susan Leigh Star's "The Ethnography of Infrastructure."[4] Instead, we aim to understand Sekula's personal, emotional, representational and methodological responses towards technology and maritime labor during *Fish Story* in an effort to showcase the merit of an infrastructural analysis as conducted by a contemporary American artist.

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[3] Allan Sekula, *Fish Story* (Düsseldorf: Richter Verlag, 1995), 136–137.
[4] Susan Leigh Star, "The Ethnography of Infrastructure." *American Behavioral Scientist* 43, no. 3 (November 1, 1999): 377–91, https://doi.org/10.1177/00027649921955326.

Infrastructure Studies Historiography

Following the interesting etymological progression of the term "infrastructure" as integrated within an English-speaking context (especially, an academic context) will immediately give us some interesting grounding, but more contextualization is needed to understand the term within contemporary scholarship. As it is currently, we will need to investigate how infrastructure has come to be defined as a term which incorporates sociological, technological, and environmental forms of discourse. Immediately, "infrastructure" has reached a somewhat buzzword-like status, especially within the contemporary United States political landscape; infrastructure, as a catch-all term, are technological apparatuses which prop up the economic force of a nation and allow for a "comfortable" quality of life: electricity and power, gas and heating, plumbing and water, roads and cars, trains and public transportation, bridges and connections. Anthropologist Ashley Carse gives us an efficient road-map to follow which traces the progression of infrastructure as a term: first, beginning as a novel French word in the early 20th century which was directly logistical: "initially an organizational and accounting term used to distinguish the construction work that was literally conducted beneath unlaid tracks (roadbeds) or was otherwise organizationally prior to them (surveys, plans, bridges, tunnels, embankments) from the superstructure of roads, train stations, and workshops that was situated above or constructed after the tracks."[5] According to lexicographer John Ayto, the term perfectly mirrored the French's early 20th century advances in both science and technology,[6] leading to

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[5] Ashley Carse, "Keyword: Infrastructure: How a humble French engineering term shaped the modern world," in *Infrastructures and Social Complexity*, eds. Penelope Harvey, Casper Jensen, Atsuro Morita (New York and London: Routledge, 2016), 29.

[6] John Ayto, "Twentieth Century English: An Overview," *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2012, https://public.oed.com/blog/twentieth-century-english-an-overview/.

the adoption of the term within an American-English context for similar reasons.[7] Though, at the beginning, the term was used strictly and limited within the context of engineering:

> Moreover, its use was limited even within the engineering community in the early twentieth century [...] During this period, governments worldwide aimed to develop urban, industrial societies through the construction and management of roads, waterworks, and power grids associated with social progress and the modernist impulse to universalize, systematize, and standardize. At that time, however, such large engineering projects were not categorized as infrastructure but described as systems, networks, or internal improvements.[8]

After World War II the term quickly became further canonized within an American context because of Cold War politics and militarization. Infrastructure was a symbol of modernization, standardization, economic progression, and general nation-building:

> In the post-war era, infrastructure was both an ascendant term and an increasingly abstract concept. Moving beyond engineering, it took on new meanings through the intertwined projects of supranational military coordination and international economic development. Infrastructure was more than a word. It was world-making. Military projects and economic theories were enacted through the coordination of physical installations shaped by specific visions and theories of political and socioeconomic organization.[9]

But, just as the term was rising in popularity in the 1960s and 1970s, morphing into the current *buzzword* status we now understand, it quickly came under heavy criticism as well, which would eventually lead to its integration within social theory as we now know it. The term infrastructure became malleable as a result of attacks upon modernization theory, a core part of developmental economics, a field which frequently utilized the term:

> In the wake of these critiques, development economists began to define infrastructure as more than capital embedded in technical projects; it referred to "intangible assets" like health, education, social attitudes, industrial skills, and administrative experience (Gilpin

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[7] Among other words, such as "garage (1902), limousine (1902), metro (1904), marque (a make of car, 1906), and couchette (railroad car with sleeper berths, 1920)." Julia Schultz, *Twentieth Century Borrowings from French to English: Their Reception and Development* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012), 169-170.
[8] Carse, "Keyword: Infrastructure," 30.
[9] Ibid, 31.

> 1973; Bannock, Baxter, and Rees 1977) [...] Even as the word infrastructure seemed to outgrow its military roots, that legacy bubbled beneath the surface of emerging infrastructural forms of economic organization [...] As the word infrastructure entered common usage, commentators worried about its promiscuity. Was it "losing its conceptual rigor" (Batt 1984: 3) as it was extended from transportation, communication, and other physical installations to health, education, and social organization? Had it become meaningless?

Soon after this, the term infrastructure became integrated within social theory also, as especially prompted by American academia becoming increasingly influenced by French social philosophy and semiotics. And now, gaining initial form and traction within the neoliberal age of the 1980s, infrastructure is back with intense intellectual rigor which, at its best, integrates the history of the term as both intensely materialist and abstract.

So, the question then becomes how the term has become shaped within an academic context. In an overarching view, anthropologist Brian Larkin gives the following definition of infrastructure: “Infrastructures are built networks that facilitate the flow of goods, people, or ideas and allow for their exchange over space. As physical forms they shape the nature of a network, the speed and direction of its movement, its temporalities, and its vulnerability to breakdown. They comprise the architecture for circulation, literally providing the undergirding of modern societies, and they generate the ambient environment of everyday life.”[10] When thinking about urban spatiality, urban geographers Steve Graham and Simon Marvin reframe infrastructure: “the life and flux of cities and urban life can be considered to be what we might call a series of closely related ‘sociotechnical processes’. These are the very essence of modernity: people and institutions enrol [sic] enormously complex technological systems (of

[10] Brian Larkin, “The Politics and Poetics of Infrastructure.” Annual Review of Anthropology 42, no. 1 (2013): 328, https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-anthro-092412-155522.

which they often know very little) to extend unevenly their actions in time and space."[11] Through a technological paradigm, anthropologist Michael Fisch develops our understanding of infrastructure "The idea that the commuter train network thinks disorder draws on a philosophy that understands technology as part of the inherent infrastructure of thought. Technology, by this approach, constitutes a machine assemblage organizing material and immaterial flows meshing with the structure of human thought and experience."[12] And finally, when looking environmentally, historian Thomas Zeller illustrates a co-constructing relationship: "Infrastructures are not simply technological systems that turn natural features into commodities to be consumed by humans—water, air or electricity, for example. Nor are they (and cannot in fact be) completely naturalised. Instead, infrastructures occupy an interstitial and growing space melding environments and technologies. They are manufactured landscapes."[13]

The "networked" and "systemic" materialization of infrastructure should be given deliberate attention. The academic community has long referred to infrastructure within the context of historian Thomas Hughes's large technical systems (LTS). These systematic and networked characteristics of infrastructure interested academics since the blossoming of scholarly inquiry—Susan Leigh Star's definitions allude towards this spatial distribution:

> *Embeddedness*. Infrastructure is sunk into and inside of other structures, social arrangements, and technologies. [...] *Reach or scope*. This may be either spatial or temporal-infrastructure has reach beyond a single event or one-site practice. [...] *Embodiment of standards*. Modified by scope and often by conflicting conventions, infrastructure takes on transparency by plugging into other infrastructures and tools in a standardized fashion. [...] *Built on an installed base*. Infrastructure does not grow de

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[11] Stephen Graham and Simon Marvin, *Splintering Urbanism: Networked Infrastructures, Technological Mobilities and the Urban Condition* (London: New York: Routledge, 2001), 10.
[12] Michael Fisch, "Tokyo's Commuter Train Suicides and the Society of Emergence." Cultural Anthropology 28, no. 2 (2013): 321-322, https://doi.org/10.1111/cuan.12006.
[13] Thomas Zeller, "Aiming for Control, Haunted by Its Failure: Towards an Envirotechnical Understanding of Infrastructures," *Global Environment* 10, no. 1 (2017): 204. http://www.jstor.org/stable/44653441.

> nova; it wrestles with the inertia of the installed base and inherits strengths and limitations from that base. [...] *Is fixed in modular increments, not all at once or globally*. Because infrastructure is big, layered, and complex, and because it means different things locally, it is never changed from above. Changes take time and negotiation, and adjustment with other aspects of the systems are involved.[14]

Infrastructures' embodiment as a networked phenomenon is not the sole characteristic worthy of attention, but it is certainly important. Brian Larkin's prominent article immediately begins with identifying the networked nature of infrastructure: "Yet the duality of infrastructures indicates that when they operate systemically they cannot be theorized in terms of the object alone. What distinguishes infrastructures from technologies is that they are objects that create the grounds on which other objects operate, and when they do so they operate as systems."[15] It is not simply that the interest in systems and networks in relation to infrastructure is purely logistical, but that these features may lead to nuanced sociotechnical encounters. For example, historians Orit Halpern et. al. tackle the embodied experience of actors within Songdo, a South Korean "smart" city which utilizes "advanced" infrastructural technologies, describing an urban experience as muddled by capitalist processes:

> More importantly, this approach to environment, planning, citizens, subjects, and intelligence marks a turn against the faith in liberal subjectivity, denigrates the place of older political processes in decision making over infrastructure as a site of activity, and operates at a level far beneath consciousness. This is a dream of a world that operates through networked nerves that hook the sentiments, feelings, and movements of live bodies into larger circuits of capital and technology, without (at least in the aspirations of the engineers) passing through the filter of representation.[16]

Sekula is particularly salient for a "systems" approach because of his neo conceptualist tendency which aspires towards an all-encompassing cognitive-mapping of global politics. As art historian

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[14] Susan Leigh Star, "The Ethnography of Infrastructure," 381–382.
[15] Brian Larkin, "The Politics and Poetics of Infrastructure," 329.
[16] Orit Halper, Jesse LeCavalier, Nerea Calvillo, and Wolfgang Pietsch, "Test-Bed Urbanism," *Public Culture* 25, no. 2 70 (March 1, 2013): 272–306, https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-2020602.

W.J.T. Mitchell has made clear in his research on madness within visual culture, the apophenic-craze in postwar American art should not be taken lightly.[17]

As alluded to above, this thesis is interested in the discourse surrounding infrastructure as a "system" and "network" with the co-development of systems-thought in postwar American art. Art historian and critic Jack Burnham famously compared the postwar American artistic shift from historically prevailing mediums of representation—such as portrait or landscape paintings and memorial sculptures, towards mediums which are pervasive to critical analysis, such as mixed-media presentations—to historian Thomas Kuhn's theory of the *paradigm shift* from *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962). The reason for these drastic shifts, he argues, "lie within the nature of current technological shifts."[18] Burnham's "System Esthetic" details an environment that is becoming more receptive and cognizant of the processes and systems which go into "making art," especially in contrast to the longstanding glory of the finalized "art product." This phenomenon is summed up well by Burnham in his description of contemporary artist Robert Morris' minimalist sculpture of the 1960s:

> Morris was the first essayist to precisely describe the relation between sculpture style and the progressively more sophisticated use of industry by artists. He has lately focused upon material-forming techniques and the arrangement of these results so that they no longer form specific objects but remain un composed. In such handling of materials the idea of process takes precedence over end results: 'Disengagement with preconceived enduring forms and orders of things is a positive assertion.' Such loose assemblies of materials encompass concerns that resemble the cycles of industrial processing. Here the traditional priority of end results over technique breaks down; in a systems context both

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[17] W.J.T. Mitchell, "Seeing Madness, Insanity, Media, and Visual Culture: 100 Notes, 100 Thoughts: Documenta Series 083," Bilingual edition. Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2012. Mark Lombardi is another neo conceptualist who quite literally (particularly in his later work) creates networked and conspiratorial *spheres* of political scandals. As well, Lombardi shares an interest with Sekula in the history of panoramic visual culture.

[18] Jack Burnham, "Systems Esthetics," *Artforum* 7, no. 1 (September, 1968): 31, https://www.artforum.com/print/196807/systems-esthetics-32466.

may share equal importance, remaining essential parts of the esthetic.[19]

Sekula, in his artistic presentation, was mainly represented through the form of critical writings on a magazine or through photographs in a gallery—here, the "final art product" is somewhat upheld by Sekula's output. It is perhaps not until his later-work as an "archivist" that we can see Sekula pay more attention towards an idea of "process," and see him succumb to apophenia.

Finally, though those who are operating within infrastructure studies are likely to be cognizant of the following point—it should be made apparent that Susan Leigh Star's metric of invisibility is possibly one of the most highly critiqued and debated aspects of their analysis:

> *Becomes visible upon breakdown*. The normally invisible quality of working infrastructure becomes visible when it breaks: the server is down, the bridge washes out, there is a power blackout. Even when there are back-up mechanisms or procedures, their existence further highlights the now-visible infrastructure. One of the flags for our understanding of the importance of infrastructure came with field visits to check the system usability. Respondents would say prior to the visit that they were using the system with no problems-during the site visit, they were unable even to tell us where the system was on their local machines. This breakdown became the basis for a much more detailed understanding of the relational nature of infrastructure.[20]

Though the argument is immediately interesting and reasonable, especially when intermingled with a particularly salient example, once nuanced the dichotomy becomes difficult to support. Scholars of the "Global South" have made highly influential arguments surrounding infrastructures' increased visibility within communities that must frequently encounter disabled forms of infrastructure; for these demographics, infrastructure is not simply taken for granted but constantly dealt with, for better or worse. In our case, Allan Sekula will present a case study for us to analyze a constant transition between visibility and invisibility which nuances this original dichotomy. This survey of Sekula's *Fish Story* epoch adds an almost psychoanalytical dimension

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[19] Jack Burnham, "Systems Esthetics," 32.
[20] Susan Leigh Star, "The Ethnography of Infrastructure," 382.

to infrastructure which can be linked to Freud's theories of *scopophilia* and W.J.T. Mitchell's recent work on *iconomania*, both of which lead to a schizophrenic account of global systems.

Of course, what seems to be the most salient approach towards representing elusive forms of infrastructural technologies is to document them in the most apparent and direct fashion available, which Sekula himself conducted as a photographer. However, Sekula was also a fervent theorist concerned with photographic theory and history, mainly interested in issues to do with perspective and representation. This is apparent in the photographs included within *Fish Story*, some are easily understood while other pictures showcase a more liminal perspective, and in *The Forgotten Space* (2010),[21] in the battle between text, narration, and image. A central argument within this thesis is to embrace the confrontations which Sekula faced as a visual-artist in relation to infrastructure—to move beyond the dichotomous discourse of visible versus invisible. This methodology is not particularly new; scholars such as historian Nicole Starosielski have directly confronted the ambition to move beyond this paradigm:

> In order to understand the construction of our contemporary information sphere and the infrastructure that supports it, we must move beyond conceptualizing it as naturally invisible, or only visible when it is built or disrupted [...] Documenting the production of these visual traces, in accord with a politics of infrastructural visibility, can help us to better see where infrastructures already crisscross our own environment as well as the ways in which we may already be unknowingly entangled with them. As such, they might be a starting point for an alternative engagement of the seemingly imperceptible and immaterial systems supporting our contemporary information sphere.[22]

Allan Sekula himself took up the problem of virtuality and abstraction in the face of infrastructures' intense materiality prominently in 1981 with "The Traffic in Photographs" and

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[21] Sekula co-directed *The Forgotten Space* with Noël Burch. The film is in documentary, or *essay film* format and can be understood as a cinematic extension of *Fish Story*—both projects share interests in maritime space, ports and harbors, and containerization.

[22] Nicole Starosielski, "Warning: Do Not Dig': Negotiating the Visibility of Critical Infrastructures," *Journal of Visual Culture* 11, no. 1 (April 1, 2012): 54, https://doi.org/10.1177/1470412911430465.

later in 2002 with "Between the Net and the Deep Blue Sea (Rethinking the Traffic in Photographs)." And importantly, though Sekula's work is path blazing, original, inspired, and highly influential, it is not without precedent. Quite an incredible piece we can consult is German-born American photographer Otto Hagel (1909-1973) and American labor organizer Louis Goldblatt's (1935-1977) *Men and Machines: A Story about Longshoring on the West Coast Waterfront* (1963). *Men and Machines* mimics Sekula's narrative methodology, from including "documentary" photos to textual narration—the question becomes, as Sekula was certainly aware of this work, why did he no longer find it aesthetically viable to confront the allusive nature of maritime infrastructure? As will be cemented later, I believe Sekula's suspicion of Hagel and Goldblatt's "documentary" technique is as a result of his postmodern status, an era in which photographers are generally suspicious about the "truth" of documentary images.

Infrastructure and Visual Studies

Speaking less generally, scholarship which has directly influenced this analytical framework which unites the disciplines of contemporary art history and infrastructure studies is few and far between. However, art historian Jaimey Hamilton Faris has recently illustrated the value this symbiotic framework:

> As our infrastructures begin to crack and collapse under the pressures of economic, political, and environmental transitions (and pandemics), so infrastructure art will become more prominent and vital, not just in creating visibility for the mundanity (and often, perversity) of the world's automated systems, but also in reimagining and reconfiguring what systems and infrastructures are, can be, and—most important—for whom they operate.[23]

[23] Jaimey Hamilton Faris, "Toward Infrastructure Art: Containerization, Black Box Logistics, and New Distribution Complexes," In *Nervous Systems: Art, Systems, and Politics since the 1960s*, 255-256. Duke University Press, 2021. https://doi.org/10.1515/9781478022053-013.

But the interaction between *visual studies* and infrastructure studies is not new. In fact, this collaboration can be considered somewhat institutionalized now within infrastructure studies. What seems to be evidently common within these collaborations, however, is a sentiment that the analysis is "experimental" or not entirely "natural." This is entirely fair, as the scholar may not have been originally trained in visual studies or art history, but there is something unresolved here. In a constant battle of reassurance that visual analysis is "worthy" within the history of technology, the analysis itself is diminished. This is to say, I hope to encourage further interactions with art history and visual studies within infrastructure studies, but I will not be making a particular "call-to-arms" argument; it is time for scholars to recognize the crucial need to understand technology through the means of visual culture and art history. For example, historian Max Hirsh clearly initiates a need to blend the visual with the infrastructural to better represent our interactions with such "hidden" systems:

> Images produced for mass consumption—subway plans, architectural renderings, tourist maps—necessarily represent sanitized visions of how cities and their infrastructure systems are 'supposed' to work. Yet they provide scant information about how they operate in practice; or about how infrastructure systems, once built, are subsequently appropriated by their users and reconfigured to meet shifting political and economic demands. It is this gap between intention and reality in representations of urban infrastructure systems that led a generation of postwar scholars and designers—one thinks here of Paul-Henry Chombart de Lauwe, Donald Appleyard, Kevin Lynch, Yona Friedman, and William H. Whyte—to counter the rationalizing abstraction of technocratic diagrams (and the wishful thinking of PR campaigns) with images that emphasize the agency and diversity of individual city dwellers. Combining interviews, photographs, and maps, these scholars generated new forms of evidence that drew attention to paradigmatic shifts in urban mobility patterns—and to their broader implications for the design, use, and perception of the built environment.[24]

[24] Max Hirsh, "What's missing from this picture? Using visual materials in infrastructure studies," *History and Technology*, Vol. 27, No. 3, (September 2011): 384–385, https://doi.org/10.1080/07341512.2011.604180.

Nicole Starosielski reserves similar representative arguments in their analysis of underground transoceanic communication pipelines, aiming to disturb the invisible nature of our conceptualization surrounding telecommunication technologies by "surfacing" the pipelines (a good example of an unsurfaced infrastructure being the internet "cloud"), as well as using transmission narratives to not merely analyze the start and end nodes of these communication infrastructures, but rather their progressions along these plots, the travel between these nodes, and the muddled context behind their implementation: "Although narratives of transmission follow cable technologies, they almost always do so to reflect on the human dimensions and embodied experiences of these systems."[25] Art historians Carrie Cushman and Nicholas Risteen primarily utilize visual imagery to understand infrastructural ruination in postwar Japan: "In the images that follow, not only do infrastructures appear in roles unintended or unforeseen by their original creators—obsolete, broken, or repurposed—but their existence in this context as images also reveals the potential of infrastructure to serve as a rhetorical device in ongoing dialogues and critiques of the human relationship to urban space and landscape in Japan."[26] Art historian Karin Zitzewitz builds a solid connection between the circulatory and systematic needs of artistic endeavors, termed *art infrastructure*, in their analysis of Triangle Network workshops in South Asia:

> Art infrastructure, as defined here, is a network built from human and non-human entities. That network is assembled from infrastructures of shipping and communication, as well as ideas about art materials or friendships between artists. All acknowledge how it shapes the circulation of art objects. But the activities of the South Asian chapters of Triangle Network, engaged as they have been with moving across deliberately high barriers to exchange, show how infrastructure also shapes the form taken by art and, to a

[25] Nicole Starosielski, *The Undersea Network* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2015), 92.
[26] Carrie Cushman and Nicholas Risteen, "The Efficient Ruin of Infrastructure," *Verge: Studies in Global Asias* 6, no. 2 (2020): 2, https://muse.jhu.edu/article/807262.

> greater extent than is typically admitted, by the artists who make it."[27]

Historian Andrew Denning analyzed propagandic imagery of road construction in Italian colonial East Africa during the 1930s to understand the propensity of infrastructural visualization as a form of authoritarian extension:

> as they pursued these epic construction projects, they reflexively and consciously documented their heroic undertaking in an exhaustive collection of images, re-presenting it in the metropole to build support for the regime and to definitively claim Italy's status as a great power on the global stage. Roads did more than exhibit or extend the power of the Italian colonial state in East Africa. They catalyzed the formation of that very state and defined its socio-geographic and administrative dynamics at the birth of the short-lived Italian empire.[28]

Architects' Marc Angélil and Cary Siress persuasively utilize Jean Luc Godard's early and late cinematic works to foreground the absurdist implications of an infrastructurally-dependent society:

> Other Godard films of the same period such as *Alphaville* from 1964, *2 ou 3 choses que je sais d'elle* from 1967, or *Week-end* from 1967, likewise implicate infrastructure as an agent in steering the course of lives in their respective stories—the omnipotent computer in *Alphaville*, the subway connecting or separating the banlieue from the center of Paris in *2 ou 3 choses que je sais d'elle*, and the road as the scene of a major car crash in *Week-end*. Such works put forth a critical stance vis-à-vis an unquestioned faith in the ubiquitous signs of progress of a technologically advanced society, showing instead how society is shot through with precarious conditions of its own making that undermine the image of a perfectly functioning world.[29]

In essence, visual imagery is not merely a medium from which to extract information, in our case, to expand infrastructural thought and scholarship. It's also not simply an "answer" towards

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[27] Karin Zitzewitz, "Infrastructure as Form: Cross-Border Networks and the Materialities of 'South Asia' in Contemporary Art," *Third Text* 31, no. 2–3 (May 4, 2017): 357, https://doi.org/10.1080/09528822.2017.1380984.

[28] Andrew Denning, "Infrastructural Propaganda: The Visual Culture of Colonial Roads and the Domestication of Nature in Italian East Africa," *Environmental History* 24, no. 2 (April 2019): 367, https://doi.org/10.1093/envhis/emy151.

[29] Marc Angélil and Cary Siress, "Infrastructure Takes Command: Coming out of the Background," in *Infrastructure Space*, eds. Ilka Ruby and Andreas Ruby (Berlin: Ruby Press, 2017), 17–18.

helping make infrastructure "visible," nor only a methodological tool to confront *infrastructural inversion*, as I hope will be nuanced by our discussion on Sekula. Instead, we should think of visual images as actors with alluring agency in-themselves. Image thinking is incredibly particular and nuanced to maneuver, especially within a contemporary scope. We can see prominent scholars struggle with the advent of contemporary visual studies in October's 1996 "Visual Culture Questionnaire." Art historian Svetlana Alpers, in recounting her methodology when studying Dutch painting, says the following: "When, some years back, I put it that I was not studying the history of Dutch painting, but painting as part of Dutch visual culture, I intended something specific. It was to focus on notions about vision (the mechanism of the eye), on image-making devices (the microscope, the camera obscura), and on visual skills (map-making, but also experimenting) as cultural resources related to the practice of painting."[30] Art historian Jonathan Crary, in further retrospection into his research which aimed to understand the co-creation of subjectivity and vision, describes the following: "any critical enterprise or new academic precinct (regardless of its label) that privileges the category of visuality is misguided unless it is relentlessly critical of the very processes of specialization, separation, and abstraction that have allowed the notion of visuality to become the intellectually available concept that it is today."[31] In the end, I believe that this interaction between visual studies and infrastructure can be nuanced and strengthened by W.J.T. Mitchell's critique of the so-called "power of images." Mitchell argues that, because of the relative political indifference[32] which visual critique *truly*

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[30] Svetlana Alpers, "Visual Culture Questionnaire," *October* 77 (1996): 26, https://doi.org/10.2307/778959.

[31] Jonathan Crary, "Visual Culture Questionnaire," *October* 77 (1996): 33, https://doi.org/10.2307/778959.

[32] Indifference here is not a direct critique that image-thinking and its resulting political implications have no agency, but rather that because of the contemporary state of globalization and postmodern thought, image-thinking is rather schizophrenic and disjointed. This resulting

has, that it is better to move towards a sort of "subaltern" framework, to ask instead what pictures *want* instead of what they *do*:

> It's not so much that this idea of visual culture is wrong or fruitless. On the contrary, it has produced a remarkable transformation in the sleepy confines of academic art history. But is that all we want? Or (more to the point) is that all that pictures want? The most far-reaching shift signaled by the search for an adequate concept of visual culture is its emphasis on the social field of the visual, the everyday processes of looking at others and being looked at. This complex field of visual reciprocity is not merely a by-product of social reality but actively constitutive of it. Vision is as important as language in mediating social relations, and it is not reducible to language, to the "sign," or to discourse. Pictures want equal rights with language, not to be turned into language. They want neither to be leveled into a "history of images" nor elevated into a "history of art" but to be seen as complex individuals occupying multiple subject positions and identities.[33]

This deliberate intersection between contemporary art history and infrastructure studies is an ambition towards each discipline not taking the other for granted.

Infrastructure, Affect, and *Sympathetic Materialism*

As is immediately understood by an engagement with visual studies and infrastructure, photographic and representational discourse is of particular interest, but this level of scholarship has already been solidified. Instead, this paper attempts to develop a particular perspective on Sekula, perhaps even a narrative, which utilizes his systematic techniques of technological representation to develop the dimension of *affect* in relation to infrastructure. It's crucial to state that this analysis is not claiming to be the most "important" approach, but rather that these approaches *can* and *should* proceed to happen. This attention towards affect has been central or prominent in some scholarship, but in general the study of affect within infrastructure is

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state should be analyzed further. I believe this can also be seen in Mitchell's later interest into the connection between globality, madness, and visuality.

[33] W. J. T. Mitchell, "What Do Pictures 'Really' Want?," *October* 77 (1996): 71–82, https://doi.org/10.2307/778960.

fledgling. For example, we may return again to Angelil and Siress' study of Godard's infrastructural imagination: "he enacted through such works what could be termed an 'infrastructural mirror stage,' revealing stubborn gaps between narratives of 'progress' that were supposed to suffice as the world's unifying plot and the ever more schizophrenic realities inhabited and produced."[34] Further, anthropologist Ara Wilson applies the analytical term *intimacy*, as primarily common to scholars within feminist and queer studies, to understand the agency of infrastructure within mediating social and relational life. Their case study into the sociotechnical dimensions of bathrooms is particularly interesting:

> But do we know the relationship of the cultural meanings and effects of sex-segregated bathrooms to the infrastructural level itself (e.g., plumbing, lighting, partitions, porcelain, regulations, blueprints)? This relation of meaning to infrastructure is assumed: that is, the effects of separate bathrooms, which reveal them to be sites of power, also explain why and how that segregated form exists [...] Exploring the design, installation, and operation of the bathroom likely does not contradict these symptomatic readings; rather, I suggest that they expand and relocate the relays of power.[35]

Susan Leigh Star's original comments within "The Ethnography of Infrastructure" which describe infrastructure as "boring," as well as anthropologist Nikhil Anand's remark on their "banality," are also interesting and direct forays into the disciplinary origin of affect studies: literary theory. For example, literary critic Sianne Ngai has already tackled the affect properties of the "boring," of course, among many other common emotions: "By pointing to what obstructs critical response, however, astonishment and boredom ask us to ask what ways of responding our culture makes available to us, and under what conditions. As "dispositions" which result in a fundamental displacement from secure critical positions, the shocking and the boring usefully

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[34] Marc Angélil and Cary Siress, "Infrastructure Takes Command: Coming out of the Background," 18.

[35] Ara Wilson, "The Infrastructure of Intimacy," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 41, no. 2 (January 2016): 247–80, https://doi.org/10.1086/682919.

prompt us to look for new strategies of engagement and to extend the circumstances under which engagement becomes possible."[36]

This paper then aspires towards incorporating recent movements within the field that call attention to the connection between affect and infrastructure in a direct fashion. The term "direct" is necessary as, though there have been a variety of analyses which point towards this connection, there are certain projects which are pivotal and act as signs of blossoming interest within this niche connection. Historian Peter Soppelsa has narrowed down these interactions into four different categories. The first, titled "Infrastructure as Structures of Feeling," has to do with conceptualizing infrastructure within critical theorist Raymond Williams' theory of the "structures of feeling." Here, infrastructure gives guidance and structure to reality by creating the material environment which our experiences inhabit—this structure itself and its resulting affective implications must be analyzed. The second approach, titled "Phenomenologies of Infrastructure," attends to the manners in which infrastructure can shape perception by mediating the surrounding environment. The third approach, titled "Infrastructure and Embodiment," focuses on how infrastructure acts as an extension of our physicality upon the environment, contextualizing how technology has made us "cyborg" in our spatial interactions. The last approach, titled "Infrastructure and Emotion," has less to do with affect theory and more to do with the interrogation of the emotive responses that may arise in our interaction with infrastructure.[37] Though all approaches are incredibly interesting, there is particular emphasis

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[36] Sianne Ngai, "Stuplimity: Shock and Boredom in Twentieth-Century Aesthetics," *Postmodern Culture* 10, no. 2 (2000), https://doi.org/10.1353/pmc.2000.0013.

[37] Peter Soppelsa, "Theorizing Infrastructure and Affect," in *Urban Infrastructure: Historical and Social Dimensions of an Interconnected World*, eds. Zimmerman, Rae, Jonathan Soffer, and Joseph Heathcott (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press: 207–222, https://muse.jhu.edu/pub/49/edited_volume/book/103775.

within the paper on *Infrastructure as Structures of Feeling* and *Emotion of Infrastructure*, both of which seem particularly salient when discussing the life and work of Allan Sekula.[38] Later on, in the development of Sekula's *Fish Story* voyage through an analysis of his notebooks, the paper will be utilizing the artists' own ethical guidelines surrounding documentation, a term which he-himself constantly arose in his writings: *Sympathetic Materialism*. The term and its methodological procedures are obviously concerned with the affectual, and simply put, refers to an aspiration by Sekula to never undermine laborers and their woes when representing them through photographic and critical means. Art historian Benjamin Young offers a more professional synopsis of the term: "This documentary ethic can be described as what Sekula called "sympathetic materialism," an ethico-political orientation of sensitivity, receptivity, or exposure to bodily vulnerability and suffering that goes beyond the iconography of labor and Marxian politics with which he is commonly associated."[39]

Allan Sekula

Allan Sekula's acclaim and subsequent scholarly inquiry became primarily prominent during his later lifetime and has seemingly erupted after his unfortunately early passing from cancer in 2013. Though, this might only be in retrospect, and we must give credit where it is due, as he led a particularly successful career. Sekula authored nine books, directed two films, published countless critical and influential essays in prominent journals such as *October* and

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[38] Sekula himself could be considered an artist who paid particular attention to all these affective approaches. For example, he shared similar interests with Paul Virilio in his study of how warfare technology has mediated a warped sense of perspective as a result of abstraction and speed. Virilio has directly referenced Sekula's 1975 *Artforum* article: "The Instrumental Image: Steichen at War."

[39] Benjamin James Young, "Sympathetic Materialism: Allan Sekula's Photo-Works, 1971–2000" (Ph.D. diss., UC Berkeley, 2018), 1, https://escholarship.org/uc/item/8fx7j2mw.

Grey Room, was granted countless fellowships, such as those from the National Endowment for the Arts, the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, and the Getty Research Institute,[40] he has been exhibited countlessly around the globe, such as at Documenta XI and XII and the Whitney, and his work is being collected by such institutions as the Pompidou Centre, the Museum of Modern Art, and the Tate Modern. Sekula launched many profound and influential ambitions throughout his lifetime, so it's hard to definitively encompass the entirety of his work beyond identifying some obvious trends, such as his interest in both photographic and Marxist history and theory. Though, for the sake of the scope of this particular thesis, Sekula's ambition is summed up efficiently by a quote of his own: "Perhaps the fundamental question to be asked is this: can traditional photographic representation, whether symbolist or realist in its dominant formal rhetoric, transcend the pervasive logic of the commodity form, the exchange abstraction that haunts the culture of capitalism."[41] In essence, Sekula found maritime space and its residual labor to be emblematic of the perverse and abstract nature which late-capitalism operated within. He worked tirelessly to foreground sea workers and their labor. He also constantly theorized about how "fine art," as a discipline, could extend their agency to better represent labor and capitalism.[42]

> *Fish Story* is dedicated to overcoming the 'cognitive blindness' that removes the sea and seafaring from the popular consciousness, insisting, against 'postmodern' prophets of the 'information age,' that the sheer materiality of transporting cargo by sea is at the center of recent capitalist globalization [...] Sekula's lens reminds us that people manufacture commodities and move them [...] This requires muscle power, strained sinews, and sheer effort; it comes up against resistant masses and forces; not so much digital flows, as

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[40] Ironically, Sekula's 1995 application for the Getty's *Perspectives on Los Angeles* project, in which he proposed his work on *Fish Story*, was denied by the Getty Research Institute, the same institution which now houses his extensive archive.

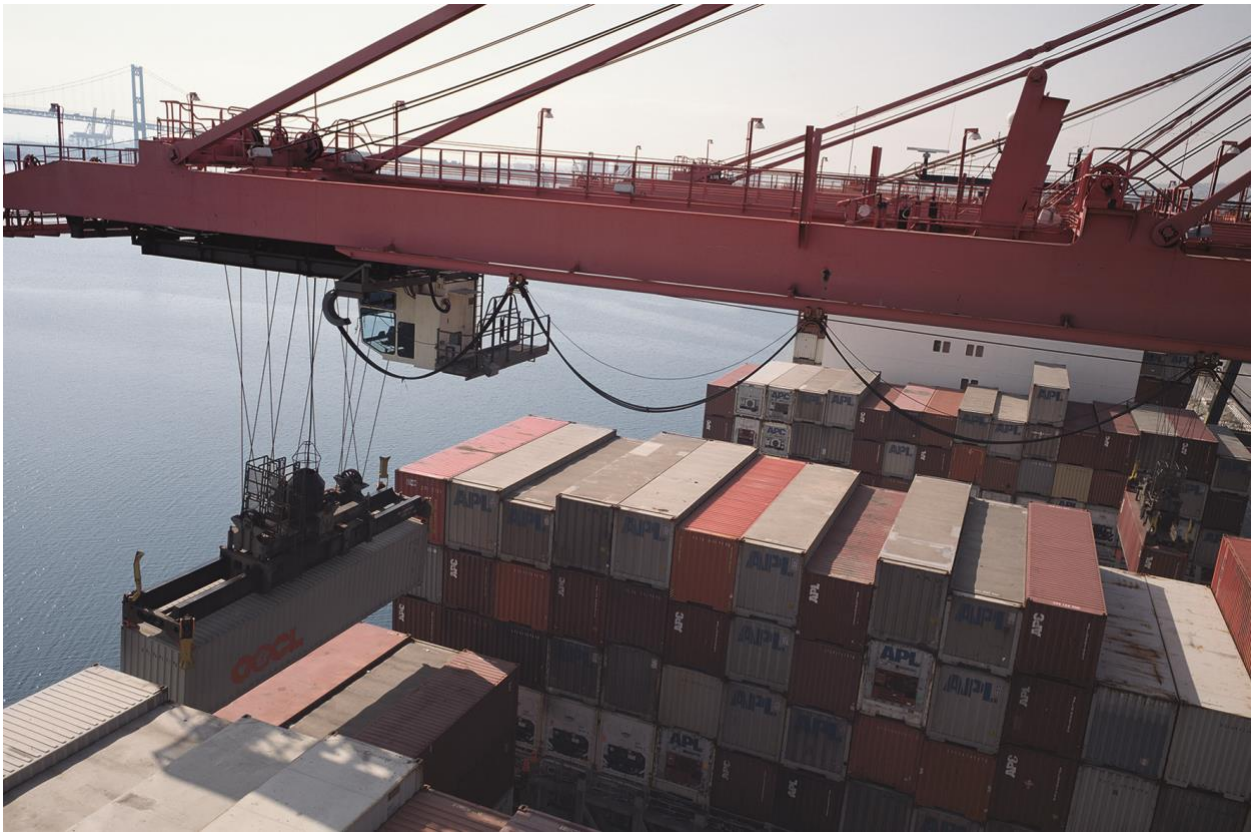
[41] Allan Sekula, "The Traffic in Photographs," *Art Journal* 41, no. 1 (1981): 16, https://doi.org/10.2307/776511.

[42] At times, Sekula's work was referred to as "Visual Economics."

swells.[43]

But, the question then becomes, why does Sekula's photographic output, though categorized as "critical realist," not seem purely documentary? There are odes towards liminalism, abstraction, and absurdity. If abstraction is the exact thing which Sekula aims to uncover, why does he play by "its" rules? Again, we return to the question posed earlier when comparing Sekula's work to *Men and Machines* by Hagel and Goldblatt: did Sekula believe that their work did not go deeply enough? We can take the two following *Fish Story* images (fig. 1 and fig. 2) as examples.

[43] Steve Edwards, "Allan Sekula's Chronotopes: Uneven & Combined Capitalism," in Allan Sekula: Ship of Fools / the Dockers' Museum, eds. Hilde Van Gelder (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2015), 36–37.


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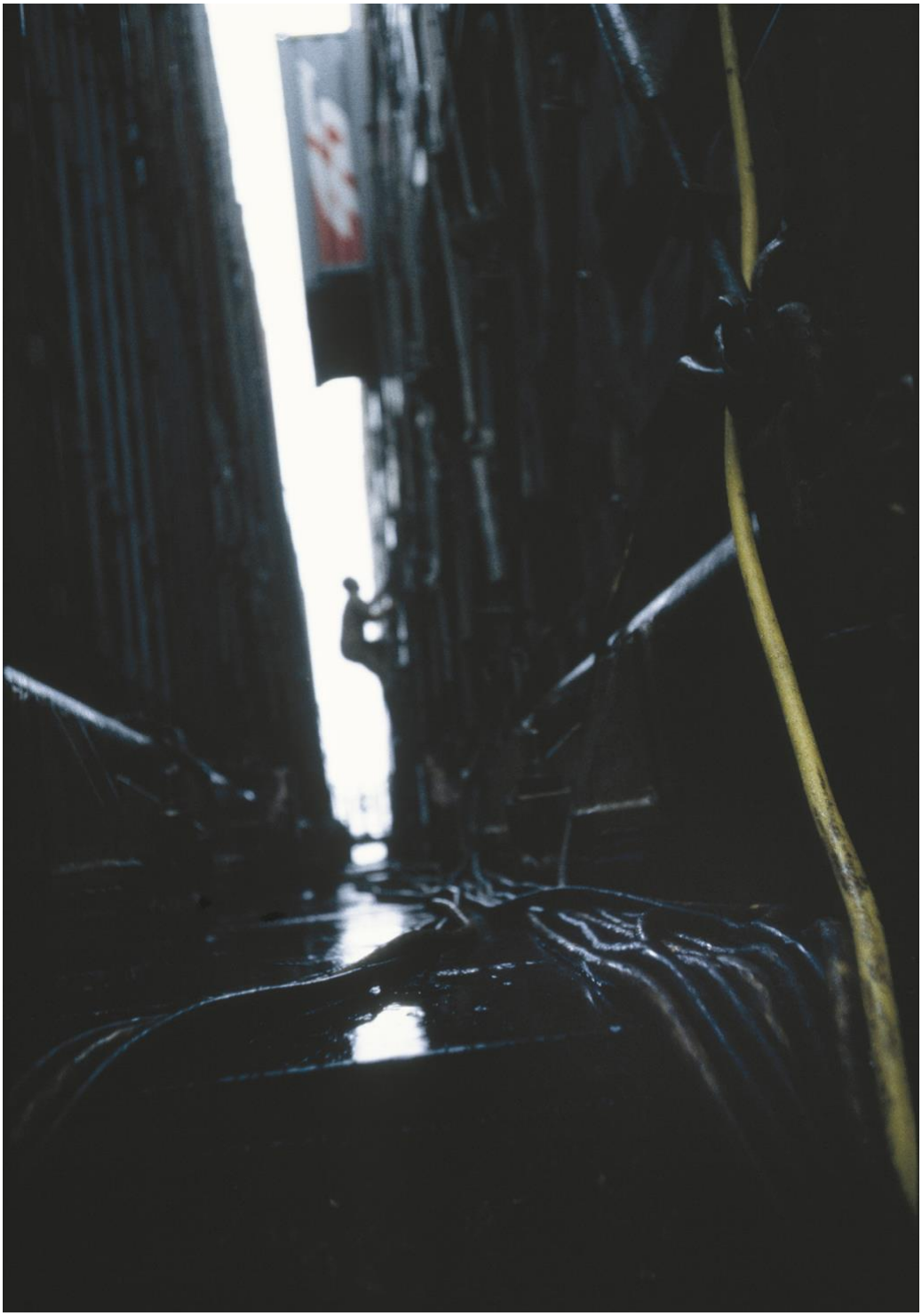


Figure 2: Chief mate checking temperatures of refrigerated containers. Mid-Atlantic. From Allan Sekula's series Fish Story, 1989-1995. Courtesy of the Allan Sekula Studio.

Though surely Sekula's boundless critique will appear throughout this paper, its negation is purposeful, as it is my attempt to get infrastructure studies to interact with both affect and contemporary art, two avenues which are undeveloped within this niche field. As already discussed, this "critical inquiry" into the "nature" of infrastructure is academically canonized as a "socio-technical" approach. This attention to the social, economic, and cultural dimensions of infrastructure is not forgotten, rather there is an aspiration to extend the methodological opportunities of the field to interesting and progressive avenues, as is made possible through the interaction with a contemporary American visual artist and their residual ambitions. Sekula is canonized as a "critical realist" both in his photographic and writing output. This is, of course, an entirely fair characterization, especially given that Sekula integrates and is inspired by Marxist theory and history in almost all his works. Even further, his work is seen as "documentary," again, an entirely fair characterization, especially given his use of the photographic medium within *Fish Story* and *The Forgotten Space*. As well, there is something to say about this institutionalization of Sekula as a *critical realist*, which can be most saliently tied to art historian Benjamin H.D. Buchloh's early scholarship and relationship with Allan Sekula.[44] But, perhaps because we are now living within the legacy of Sekula and the opportunity is now afforded to us, what should be immediately nuanced is this definition of Sekula as solely documentary. As explained earlier, the tenet which Sekula within infrastructure studies is the invisibility versus visibility debate. The constant transitioning between "visible" and "invisible" states in relation to documentary technique perfectly encapsulates the visual dogma of Allan Sekula's infrastructural mindset; Sekula both combats infrastructure as an elusive and spectacle-like built environment,

[44] Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, "Allan Sekula: Photography between Discourse and Document," in Allan Sekula, *Fish Story* (Düsseldorf: Richter Verlag, 1995), 191.

but also as an object with violent materiality, absurdity, contradictions, and real-world agency. This mainly materializes within Sekula's constant battle between image and text, and secondly, within his practice as an archivist. As an implication, these bipolar shifts lead to a schizophrenic-account of infrastructure, which as will be displayed later, is conceptualized by scholars such as W.J.T. Mitchell as a form of *planetary madness*. Though Sekula never seemingly reflected upon his work as apophenic, he understood its appearance as "atlas-like," or at least the amount of dedication needed to interact with his work: "An archive, but not an atlas: the point here is not to take the world upon one's shoulders, but to crouch down to the earth, and dig."[45]

Chapter Breakdown

The two chapters aim to interrogate three separate metrics which are central to understanding Sekula's interaction with infrastructure: emotional and biographical narratives; representational and photographic theory and history; and finally, archival methods, apophenia, and practice. The chapters receive their data mainly from Sekula's notebooks but also reflect upon recent academic scholarship. Chapter one, *Port life*, aims to understand Sekula's affectual attachment to infrastructural technology through a techno-biographical account of his life and work. Here, we start out by trying to understand possible early influences during his childhood in Erie, Pennsylvania (a somewhat Oedipal-affair), ending with his adult life within the geographical scope and "art scene" of Los Angeles, California. Chapter two, *The Blur of Labor*, aims to understand Sekula's methodological stake in relation to photographic representation and documentation. This discourse unravels a relationship between affect and representation when

[45] Allan Sekula, "Photography and the Limits of National Identity," *Grey Room*, no. 55 (April 1, 2014): 32,. https://doi.org/10.1162/GREY_a_00143.

trying to justly represent infrastructural networks and maritime labor. The analysis ends with an analysis of recent scholarship which has developed Sekula's apophenic tendencies as an archivist.

Chapter One: Port Life

From East to West Coast

Though Sekula seems immediately fervent, passionate, and invested, most spectators, of course, do not immediately realize that Sekula's interrogation into maritime space and technology is quite personal. Personal, as a term, is used here beyond the stereotypical connotations of artists as immediately more connected to the creative or emotional aspects of society. At times, his attachment edges onto deserving of a psychoanalysis. Sekula was born in Eerie, Pennsylvania[46]—a port city—to a working-class family, went to university in La Jolla, San Diego (near the bay) and lived the rest of his adult and professional-life mainly in Los Angeles, another port city.[47] It is hard to detach most of his photography from his writing, as it is incredibly emotionally charged, and coming from a place of resolve. Therefore, it is important to take seriously the affective attachment that Sekula confronted when thinking about infrastructural technologies and globalization. This chapter aims to unravel this discourse through a chronological survey of his *Fish Story* notebooks, presenting salient commentary which displays Sekula's dedication to the *sympathetic materialist* approach.

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[46] Though it might be important to note that Sekula has stated that he did not live there for long, as his family seemingly moved sporadically in the chase of blue-collar jobs. Oral history interview with Allan Sekula, 2011 August 20-2012 February 14. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

[47] Sekula critiqued Reyner Banham's iconic analysis of *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies* for "skipping over" the Los Angeles port, a vital component of Los Angeles which he feels often gets left out of the city's narrative.

To begin, Sekula's *Fish Story* era notebooks, though perhaps minimally, underscore the artists' reflection upon his own childhood in tandem with his ambitions. In September, 1989 Sekula wrote that "Growing up in a harbor predisposes one (who is this one?) to economism. That is, if one is encouraged—as boys (and as I was by my mother) often are—to observe and take pleasure in observation, what one sees is the concrete movement of goods [...] The experience of the harbor couples economism with empiricism. The movement of goods seems inexplicable in its globality in visual terms."[48] Here we not only receive commentary upon his childhood, a life manipulated and influenced by proximity to sea and various ports, but also about his mother, which will come up later as well but under a different context; as well, we gain a bit of personal reflection upon his representational outlook.[49] Again, in September 1989, underneath a section titled "The Uncanny (Freud Quote)," Sekula jots down some thoughts about his mothers' attempted suicide in April, 1951 at the Allegheny River, near Pittsburgh. This incident occurred about four months after his birth. Sekula recalls learning about the event through his mother but also through the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, a local newspaper. His mother described the experience as well as her depression, noting the extreme cold and in being saved by the beams of light being filtered through the water which convinced her to withdraw from the decision. Sekula wonders about the particulars, such as, what if it had been an overcast day, or could her withdrawal have been motivated by his mothers' recent conversion to Catholicism, the

[48] Geography Lesson: Fish Story Notes, 1989 July-1990 March, 1989 by Allan Sekula, 2016.M.22, box 5, folder 4, image 7, Allan Sekula papers, 1960-2013, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

[49] Sekula is not alone in this contemporary connection to the sea. Richard Serra is another obvious connection but under completely different ambitions. Serra recalls obvious inspiration from his trip to the shipyard where his father worked as a pipefitter in San Francisco and being astounded by a boat launch at the age of four. David Seidner, "Richard Serra," BOMB Magazine, January 1, 1993, https://bombmagazine.org/articles/richard-serra/.

latter of which the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette seemed to center upon. He then describes his fathers' perspective on the situation, apparently being incredibly distraught by both his squealing child and his "renegade" wife, as well as hating the water in general because of a riptide he experienced while in the Air Force. His mother was helped by a local fisherman who happened upon the situation and remained forever allured, unlike his father, towards the water. This narrative remained close to Sekula, especially in his move to San Pedro (Southern California) in 1959 where a portion of the Los Angeles Port is located.[50]

It is immediately interesting to note that Sekula initially planned to attend UC San Diego for a bachelor's degree in biology but switched to visual arts (he stayed at UC San Diego for his MFA degree), a fact which should be investigated further. Sekula alluded to the notion that this interest in science can be attributed to both political and personal causes; honestly speaking, he did consider himself a "science geek," but also reflected upon the pedagogical environment of postwar Los Angeles which, to Sekula, was seemingly an industrialized preparatory program for the Cold War political agenda:

> But I was also sort of a science geek, you know. And at that time the Los Angeles city schools had majors. So you were tracked. You were—you were given an IQ test, and usually in grade school and that would follow—your Stanford—Binet quotient, which you weren't supposed to know, would follow you. And then that would track you into either, say, business math or college prep math. And of course it was also Sputnik. So at that time the L.A. city schools, at least my high school, somehow got selected out for Harvard based physics program, which was quite rigorous. But the—given the post-Sputnik emphasis it was pretty common to get tracked into science/math.[51]

[50] Geography Lesson: Fish Story Notes, 1989 July-1990 March, 1989 by Allan Sekula, 2016.M.22, box 5, folder 4, images 28, 29, 30, Allan Sekula papers, 1960-2013, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

[51] Oral history interview with Allan Sekula, 2011 August 20-2012 February 14. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Sekula continued this interest into the sciences when choosing his college, very obviously refraining from attending UCLA despite its close proximity (in hopes to distance himself from his family) and instead opting for UC San Diego because of his fascination with La Jolla, the nearby sea, and their oceanographic research institute. Sekula quickly became disillusioned with the sciences, especially with an early introductory lecture by the biochemist and then-provost Paul Saltman in which "hardcore" molecular biology was made central (Sekula was more interested in marine biology). Sekula always had an attachment to art, and he even declared a minor within the discipline, but his interest became intensely agitated by the pedagogical environment of late 1960s San Diego. For example, just in his first semester, Sekula took courses with both Herbert Marcuse and John Baldessari. As detailed earlier, Sekula's personal attachment towards science is somewhat psychoanalytic, as Sekula was constantly pushed by his father (who worked for Lockheed Martin) thesis to enter a career in industrial chemistry, "actually working in these technical industries and seeing one, how corrupt they were in terms of faking data to get contracts, and I mean to the point of danger, you know. And just, I mean they were toxic, and poisonous, and callous, and cynical, all these things you know, just ample evidence."[52] This eventually led to a particularly distraught rejection of his father: "But he was being authoritarian and it wasn't something at which he was very good. And I basically said, "That's it. I'm leaving," [...] I mean the oedipal drama here is just too much."[53] As well, Sekula's later Marxist influence would have been completely disapproved of by his father, who was apparently a "classic Polish Catholic anticommunist" who sympathized with figures such as Joseph McCarthy.

[52] Oral history interview with Allan Sekula, 2011 August 20-2012 February 14. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.
[53] Ibid.

Bicoastal Arrogance

The concept of an "art scene" is one that can be understood and appreciated intuitively, but in our case study of Sekula it is deserving of more attention. Society acknowledges that art can become skewed based on geographical context. These geographies can either be tiny or grand. For example, Tulsa remains an icon for the arts within the context of Oklahoma, and when speaking largely, Americans may also recognize the East and West coasts as important geographical divisions; when speaking globally, perhaps the most prominent "art scene" is New York City, which rose in popularity in the postwar era. Art from New York permeates postwar American culture and, despite public disillusionment with modern art, is perhaps even a sense of pride for many Americans—perhaps nowhere else could the art of figures such as Andy Warhol or Keith Haring take form.[54] This attentiveness towards New York remains fervent even within the confines of scholarship and academia. The absence of art-historical research removed from the regional focus of New York is a recent avenue of burgeoning discourse and critique, especially when conducting research from the standpoint of Los Angeles. Thankfully, this gap-in-knowledge has been alleviated by recent scholarship, but it could be argued that (especially before the Getty's ambition towards documenting Southern California art) Peter Plagens' *Sunshine Muse: Art on the West Coast, 1945-1970* (originally published in 1974) was the only source of knowledge which focused on the West Coast for a considerable amount of time. As stated above, the burst in interest and subsequent research can be understood as somewhat institutionalized. The Getty Foundation (based in Los Angeles) has supported and commissioned

[54] It is intentional that these two artists be closely associated with the pop-art movement.

research into postwar Southern Californian art, primarily taking form in their *Pacific Standard Time: Art in L.A. 1945–1980* project.[55]

Of course, Allan Sekula is pertinent within this discussion because of his status as an artist primarily based within Los Angeles; this is not a simple characterization, Sekula himself clearly states his influences from this region in his notebooks. In October, 1991 Sekula recalled a trip to the Los Angeles County Museum (LACMA) with his father in 1971—they visited the Art and Technology exhibit; his father was unemployed at the time and gave his catalog to Sekula. Sekula, on the same page, jotted down a proto-Institutional Critique of Maurice Tuchman (first curator of twentieth-century art at the LACMA) and some pressing news scandals such as the Lockheed Scandal and Watergate, the Kitty Hawk mutiny, and the F-104 fighter-bomber planted upon Frank Gehry's California Aerospace Museum.[56] He also wanted to find a connection between Ansel Adams' *Fiat Lux* project with the LACMA's Art and Technology effort.[57] In 1997 Sekula proposed a research project which depicts 1990s Los Angeles as a

[55] Other respectable projects (some of which received funding from the Getty Fund) include *Rebels in Paradise* by Hunter Drohojowska-Philp; *California Cool: Art in Los Angeles 1960s-1970s* by Kinsman, et. al; *Under the Big Black Sun: California Art 1974-1981* by Lisa Gabrielle Mark and Paul Schimmel; *Waiting for Los Angeles* by Anthony Hernandez; *Everything Loose Will Land: 1970s Art and Architecture in Los Angeles* by Sylvia Lavin and Kimberli Meyer; *The Ferus Gallery: A Place to Begin* by Kristine McKenna; *Out of Sight: The Los Angeles Art Scene of the Sixtie*s by William Hackman; *Catalog L.A.: Birth of an Art Capital 1955-1985* by Catherine Grenier; *State of Mind: New California Art circa 1970* by Lewallen et. al. Sekula, one-way-or-another, usually makes an appearance in these manuscripts.

[56] FS Notebook #2 (Fish Story Notebook #2), 1991 July-1992 May by Allan Sekula, 2016.M.22, box 5, folder 6, image 34, Allan Sekula papers, 1960-2013, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

[57] Ibid, image 66.

"claustrophobic"[58] space in contrast to the "openness" of 1960s Los Angeles as set forth by the Light and Space movement; he refers to the "horror of emptiness" as a motivating force.[59]

This discussion is certainly salient to Sekula's artistic biography, but its discussion within a discourse on the history of technology may seem irrelevant. However, we claim here that it is beneficial to gain an understanding of Sekula's operation within the grander scheme of a blossoming art scene. This is because Sekula's environment certainly influenced his perception of the real-world value of art in the pursuit of his more conceptual and artistic ambitions, especially in the constant battle he faced in trying to remedy the relationship between image and text.[60] As stated earlier, the dichotomy between image and text brings into question the nature of the documentation. Sekula was forever determined to extend the boundaries of realist representation; this would later lead to a harsh rejection of documentary processes which he deemed unfit, such as the artistic procedures of Hans Haacke. A central facet of Sekula's interaction with the postwar Los Angeles scene is, as is typically canonized within the art historical canon, a neoconceptualist attitude; he states this attitude is itself nuanced by the bicoastal dichotomy, "Well, I think there was a kind of west coast variant of conceptualism that had manifestations in Vancouver, in San Francisco, in Los Angeles, and San Diego in the early '70s that were—had certain commonalities and perhaps were different from the conceptualism that emerged in New York around the same time. There may have been more emphasis on

[58] Sekula shares an interest with Paul Virilio in the depiction of cityscapes as claustrophobic.
[59] [Film screening notes, miscellaneous notes], 1997 December 5-1998 June 23 by Allan Sekula, 2016.M.22, box 7, folder 6, image 9, Allan Sekula papers, 1960-2013, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.
[60] Sekula's integration of text and writing into his artistic practice was also recognized by his community. For example, in 1998 he was invited by Rubén Gallo to the International Forum on Contemporary Art Theory (FITAC) conference, hosted in Guadalajara, as a guest speaker. The conference focused on "Art's Textuality."

narrativity out here in the work of some artists."[61] However, it is certainly important to note that despite Sekula's almost "highly regarded" categorization as a Los Angeles based artist, he also operated quite frequently in New York City and can be seen as heavily influenced by the East Coast scene as well. Sekula read New York poets Diane Wakoski and Jackson Mac Low and came into contact with Allen Ginsberg; he followed Martha Rosler, his girlfriend at the time, back to New York in 1974[62] shortly after finishing graduate school; he began to read *Art and Language* and met some of their New York group in 1977: people such as Ian Burn,[63] Mel Ramsden, Carole Condé, and Karl Beveridge; he intermingled with the local music scene during the Velvet Underground era; he became closer to *Artforum* and the College Art Association, speaking with figures such as Rosalind Krauss and Hal Foster. This bicoastal experience seemingly became acknowledged when Sekula made the trek towards Columbus, Ohio in 1980 and was met with an unwelcoming comment from a senior faculty member that he needed to: "get rid of your bi-coastal arrogance."[64]

The San Diego Group

A short discussion on the San Diego group is useful to further nuance the geographical influences of Sekula. As has been stated above, Sekula is institutionalized as a Southern

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[61] Oral history interview with Allan Sekula, 2011 August 20–2012 February 14. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.
[62] Sekula apparently arrived extremely sick and subsequently skinny to New York. Nevertheless, he started working on his famous 1975 Artforum piece on Steichen and aerial photography around the same time.
[63] Sekula and Ian Burn became long-term friends and colleagues. In May, 1998 Sekula gave a lecture (titled Dismal Science: Imaginary economies at the late modern system of the arts) at the Art Gallery of Western Australia in Perth to memorialize Burn after his passing.
[64] Oral history interview with Allan Sekula, 2011 August 20-2012 February 14. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Californian artist, and even more specifically an artist who operated mainly within Los Angeles. However, recent research has begun to pay more attention to another art center of Southern California: San Diego. Sekula is undoubtedly a figure within this geographical scope (the most notable work he completed during this time is perhaps *Aerospace Folktales*), among other prominent artists (who all, in some way, knew one another) such as Martha Rosler, Fred Lonidier, Eleanor Antin, Phel Steinmetz, and so on. This group is cohesive not only in terms of geographical location but also in aesthetic and conceptual ambition, most importantly in their experiments with photography and investigation of the relationship between image and text.[65] It's also somewhat of an institutional grouping, as these figures all center around UC San Diego and their pedagogical environment, underneath the mentorship of Allan Kaprow, John Baldessari, and David Antin. Sekula held onto these connections for his entire life, especially the relationships he built with Fred Lonidier and Martha Rosler—Rosler in particular (as visually echoed in her politically engaged photomontages) highly influenced Sekula's outlook towards representational theory, mainly in the form of cementing theatricality and montage (see fig. 3. for an example of the work produced by the San Diego group, obviously salient for Rosler's depiction of the intermodal shipping container. *Cargo Cult* is a visual comment on Western standards-of-beauty and marketing quite literally being "shipped out" and imposed on a global scale).

[65] Robert Pincus, "In 1970s San Diego, These Groundbreaking Artists Pushed the Boundaries of Photography," KCET, October 11, 2016, https://www.kcet.org/shows/artbound/in-1970s-san-diego-these-groundbreaking-artists-pushed-the-boundaries-of-photography.

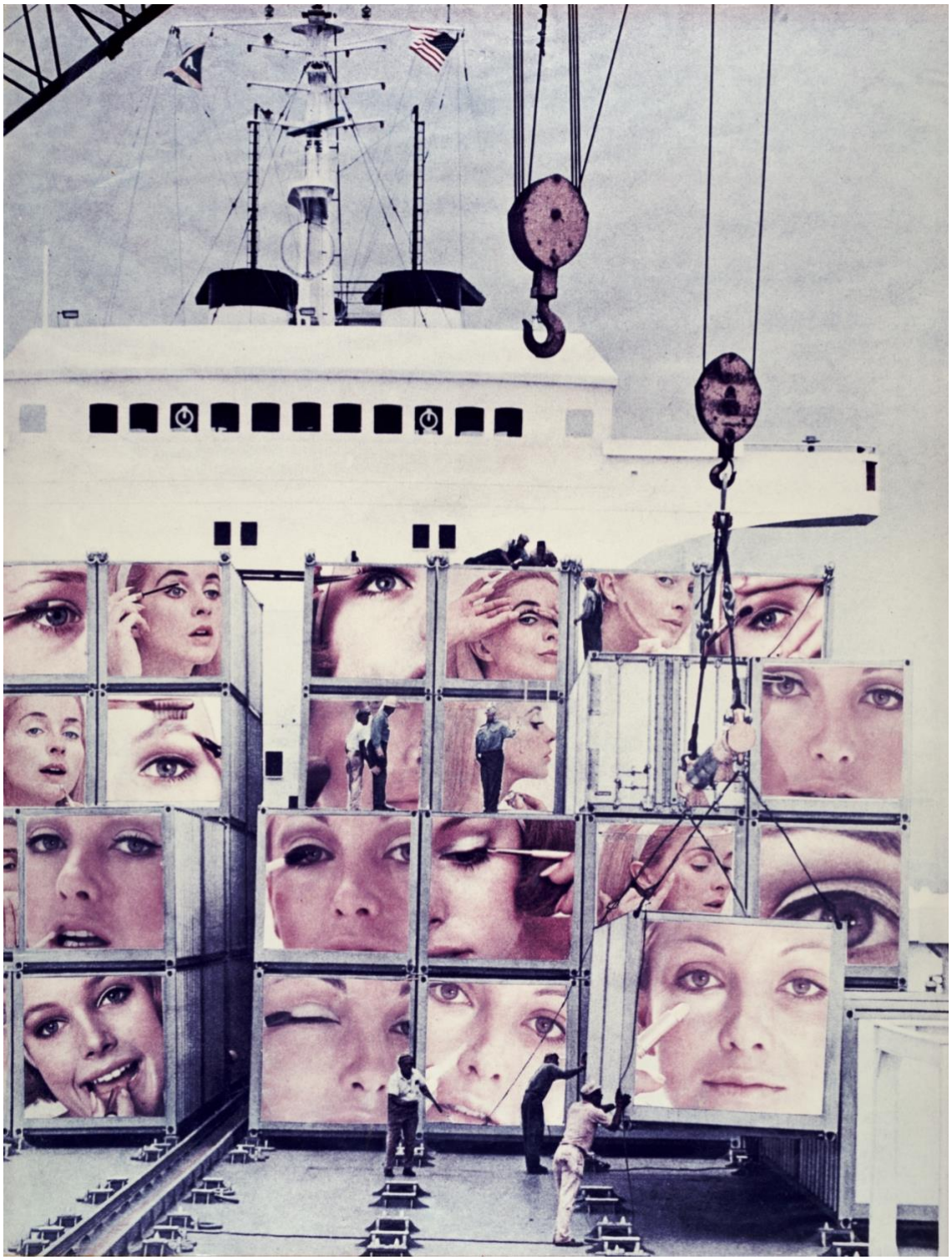


Figure 3: Martha Rosler, Cargo Cult, 1967-1972, photomontage printed as photograph. 39 1/2 x 30 1/4 in., Schwartz Art Collection, Harvard Business School, 1998.22.

The *Fish Story* Voyage

All of this biographical and methodological surveying can help us better understand Sekula's aspirations and ambitions in the unraveling of the *Fish Story* voyage—in particular, we may be able to better understand the context of the narratives and concepts constructed in his *Fish Story* notebooks. We begin in September, 1989 during the onset of the embarkment—Sekula is reflecting on Marxist economic theory, in particular, the commodity economy being represented by the "circuit" of M-C-M—Sekula instead believes that the economics of the harbor is better represented in the older relationship, C-M-C. To Sekula, this relationship is the exact reason for the antique and "mercantilist" charm of the harbor which sets itself apart from the abstracted and metronomic abstraction of the stock market (M-C-M dependent). However, the more abstracted and regularized by way of containerization,[66] the more the harbor resembles the stock market. He believes that another crucial point here has to do with phenomenology, in particular, the suppression of smell.[67] Around this same time he boards a boat called the Hagfish,

[66] Another interesting and prominent figure who was interested in late-stage capitalism and Marxist critical theory is Mark Fisher. Fisher similarly echoes agitations surrounding the abstracted and alienated landscape of British harbors: "There's an eerie sense of silence about the port that has nothing to do with actual noise levels. The port is full of the inorganic clangs and clanks that issue from ships as they are loaded and unloaded; what's missing, at least for the spectator watching the port from a vantage point outside, are any traces of language and sociability. Watching the container lorries and the ships do their work, or surveying the containers themselves, [...] one seldom has any sense of human presence. The humans remain out of sight, in cabs, in cranes, in offices [...] The contrast between the container port, in which humans are invisible connectors between automated systems, and the clamor of the old London docks, which the port of Felixstowe effectively replaced, tells us a great deal about the shifts of capital and labour in the last forty years. The port is a sign of the triumph of finance capital' it is part of the heavy material infrastructure that facilitates the illusion of a "dematerialised" capitalism. It is the eerie underside of contemporary capital's mundane gloss. Mark Fisher, *The Weird and the Eerie* (London: Repeater, 2017): 76–77.

[67] Geography lesson: Fish Story notes, 1989 July-1990 March by Allan Sekula, 2016.M.22, box 5, folder 4, image 8, Allan Sekula papers, 1960–2013, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

in which a man with a Chicago accent immediately tells him that the boat "has problems." Later, Sekula finds out that the crew is ethnically Mexican and that the crew-captain is Korean. The Chicano from earlier is the only crew-member that can speak both English and Spanish fluently; they have spent three weeks out-at-sea and have not been paid—the Chicano threatens to inform the labor board, but eventually just abandons the boat.[68] Sekula arrives in New Orleans on November 3, 1989, and made a trip to their public library to chase down a news scandal he read about in the New York times. The story had to do with the stopping of a container ship, the Zim Venezia (he believes it to be Israeli-owned), by an American boarding either "to-or-from" the port of Iraq; whatever his conspiracy may be, he confirms it to be "true" based on his research at the library. He also visits the Aquarium of the Americas in which he notes an illuminated sign which dictates that The Gulf of Mexico is brought to us by "Shell and Exxon."[69]

We pick back up in July, 1991—Sekula has just finished watching *La Terra Trema*, a 1948 Italian neorealist film in which the general plot concerns the economic toils of Sicilian fishermen. He jotted down notes while watching the film, primarily concerning the cinematography, seemingly inspired by a continuous shot which documents "haggling" and "gesticulating" fisherman and fish merchants, the camera moving leftwards towards the bailing of the boats—he believes this shot expresses futility and exploitation, as especially echoed by the narrator.[70] On August 1st, 1991 Sekula boarded the San Vincente and notes a conversation he had with Bill Pratt, the ship-engineer. Bill worked on ships for about twelve-years and was

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[68] Geography lesson: Fish Story notes, 1989 July-1990 March by Allan Sekula, 2016.M.22, box 5, folder 4, images 25-26, Allan Sekula papers, 1960–2013, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.
[69] Ibid, image 114.
[70] FS Notebook #2 (Fish Story Notebook #2), 1991 July-1992 May by Allan Sekula, 2016.M.22, box 5, folder 6, image 16, Allan Sekula papers, 1960-2013, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

worried about being characterized as an "old timer." He also told Sekula about his stationing on the Kitty Hawk aircraft carrier and a mutiny that occurred by Black sailors that seized a midship, including the galleys, stormed the bridge, and eventually were drawn back into a standoff where they "sandbagged" into position with a 50-caliber machine-gun aimed down towards the bridge-door and some of Bill's fellow officers.[71] On August 16th, 1991 Sekula boarded the Via Maria and began noting the demographics of the ship; thirteen people had already been laid-off and a general sentiment of the industry only having "two-years left" was rising. The crane-driver is Mexican and recently changed industries to "get away from the fumes" of his National Steel and Shipbuilding Company (NASSCO) position; the welder in the hold was a graphic artist and football player, quitting school after two years to become a pipe-fitter—he made a comparison to Sekula that ship-building was a lot like photography and that he would eventually like to become an artist again; he meets Mario, the ship steward, who is fervently against drugs, environmentalism, and doesn't understand Sekula's theory of claustrophobia; Joe, the yard manager, complains to Sekula that kids in school are taught globalism instead of patriotism and about George Bush's connection to the Trilateral Commission.[72] On October 5th, 1991 Sekula notes a scene, almost a spectacle (he titles the event "Fishermen's Fiesta"), of a commercial boat bringing in a fifteen-foot long female white great shark. The shark is resting (no, he scratches out this verb and instead writes "rotting"), on a bed of ice, among other fishes and trash in some form of "pervasive cornucopia." Children, mainly boys, apparently taunt the corpse because of its demonized status—they have no respect for the shark and enjoy its humiliation, an apparent

[71] FS Notebook #2 (Fish Story Notebook #2), 1991 July-1992 May by Allan Sekula, 2016.M.22, box 5, folder 6, image 18, Allan Sekula papers, 1960-2013, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.
[72] Ibid, image 24.

"species triumph" for the onlookers. Below this story he noted ports that had been specifically recommended to him: Yokohama by the photographer Ute Eskildsen, Lisbon and Algiers by director Billy Woodberry, Belfast by urban theorist Mike Davis, and Dakar by the geographer Michael Watts. On November 3rd, 1991 Sekula visited another aquarium, this time in Baltimore. He jotted down a comment he heard from a young woman that the aquarium: "is so cool, just like real life." He then began to critically develop the "aquaria" as a labyrinth: the simulation of an underwater environment, good creatures (dolphins) versus bad creatures (sharks), Manichean marine biology, dolphin assisted Olympics, the Guggenheim reef, random cinema of fish locomotion, the rainforest as summit and utopia-at-risk… The connections draw on. To Sekula, people are afraid of water, of being splashed, and are repulsed by the smell of fish.[73] On November 22nd, 1991 Sekula wrote down a proto-argument with Benjamin Buchloh because of an incident during the Sekula's post-lecture dialogue at the Whitney Program—Sekula referred to an essay on Dan Graham from Buchloh and mentioned the date of its publishing as 1977, to which Buchloh immediately interjected "1967." Sekula was too flustered to think-on-the-spot and immediately assumed this interjection to be true, but he found out later that the paper did indeed become published in 1977. To this, Sekula unravels an unrelenting critique upon Buchloh, ultimately tracing Buchloh's passive-aggressive remark upon a variety of fronts. To begin, Sekula believed that Buchloh had a general stake in the genealogy of minimalist and pop-art movements. Second, Sekula's attention to patriarchal authority (which he believes central to his own work) had seemingly always been a problem for Buchloh to address. Thirdly, Buchloh apparently held a consistent resistance against Sekula's work on the basis of structural limitation

[73] FS Notebook #2 (Fish Story Notebook #2), 1991 July-1992 May by Allan Sekula, 2016.M.22, box 5, folder 6, images 47-48, Allan Sekula papers, 1960-2013, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

and work readability. Finally, Sekula believed that Buchloh was defensive and patronized in reaction to Sekula's choice of photography as a medium.[74]

Now, in May of 1992, Sekula is at a fish auction at Berbes, confused by the labeling of fish with the seller's name—he jots down "the political economy of fish."[75] On May 26th, 1992 Sekula began a somewhat troublesome voyage, beginning at 8am when he was accompanied by a local, Manuel and Xose Luis, to beg his way onto a sardine boat. All of the sailors direct them to the largest boat on the pier (the name of the boat is Mi Nombre Cuatro), informing Sekula that he would have "no problem" hitching a ride on the Mi Nombre Cuatro. This boat, to Sekula's dismay, is the last to leave and the captain is reluctant to let him board, but Manuel and Xose persuade the captain. The captain speaks about the matter with this son and informs Sekula that he can be "taken out" for three hours, after which they will need to depart and get some real work done in the rough Portuguese waters—Sekula believes that, in their eyes, he is only a liability (and, that no one wants a seasick passenger on board). This deal is fine with Sekula, believing that he can come back in time for the union meeting at the Friere Shipyard in Bouzas—however, he quickly realizes that the entire ordeal would be less straight-forward. He starts to bond with the crew members by cracking jokes in his broken Spanish and through coastal geography lessons. Eventually, he is offered a lower bunk in the galley cabin where some crew members are watching dubbed American television. He falls asleep by accident and wakes up in total darkness four hours later with the boat bustling away further into the rolling seas. He is

[74] FS Notebook #2 (Fish Story Notebook #2), 1991 July-1992 May by Allan Sekula, 2016.M.22, box 5, folder 6, images 58, Allan Sekula papers, 1960-2013, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.
[75] FS Notebook #3 (Fish Story Notebook #3), 1992 May-1993 May by Allan Sekula, 2016.M.22, box 5, folder 7, image 13, Allan Sekula papers, 1960-2013, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

barely able to see that their reel has caught something and this sets off an alarm which wakes up several crew members, eventually only six or seven of them recover the net, unleashing a pitiful amount of sardines and causing an obvious annoyance among them. They work to reel in the other nets with an obvious sense of rhythm that Sekula rushes to photograph, though he is intermittently delayed from nausea; once the crewmates complete their work, Sekula goes back to sleep and awakens three hours later, the entire "catch" only accumulating 40 boxes of sardines whereas the day before had produced 300 boxes. To Sekula, it is now no wonder that people refer to fishing as "gambling."[76] On November 8th, 1992 Sekula had a conversation with Tony Salcido, a crane-driver who moves around intermodal shipping containers. Tony compares his work to that of any other driver and reaffirms Sekula's theories on the need for a systematized aerial perspective while moving containers: clear views, wind-angle shots, and the chance for a view into the hold. Sekula enters the control room and begins to unravel a diagram of the hold: computer displays of container content and clerk people coordinating the flow. He has another conversation with Tony on the disappearance of the "ship" as a discrete object and Tony echoes his sentiments, stating that "they're really big warehouses, big moving warehouses, and the containers are warehouses too." This gives Sekula the vision of a nestling of boxes within boxes, the proliferation of warehouses down to the "circuit" level, a phenomenon that almost becomes "molecular."[77]

Moving onto July 20th, 1993 Sekula bluntly stated that shipping companies are the first transnational corporations, based on the "simple" fact that ships fly the country of their original

[76] FS Notebook #3 (Fish Story Notebook #3), 1992 May-1993 May by Allan Sekula, 2016.M.22, box 5, folder 7, images 22, 23, 24, Allan Sekula papers, 1960-2013, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.
[77] Ibid, image 110.

registry, but also in the contradiction that original registry and ownership nationality are not necessarily identical.[78] Shortly thereafter Sekula began to document a crane operator study, presumably prompted by his notification of a recent accident involving a straddle crane driver who was seriously injured. The particular crane that the driver was operating, to the interest of Sekula, is taller than normal and can double-stack, which leads to a comparison between the crane brands of Nelcon and Mitsubishi. Nelcon-cranes are smoother and roomier to Sekula, which he dictates towards the physiological capabilities of the "typical Dutch working-class body-type." He also notes that the Mitsubishi-crane viewing angle allows for a vertical top-down view to the container, whereas the Nelcon-cranes are slightly curved downward. Sekula meets Ge Beckman, stating that he shares similar interests in photographing "complex transport machinery and structures."[79] Sekula began to document the cockpit of the cranes, noting that the Dutch crane-cabs "have a transparent plastic bag which holds the gym-bag of the drivers," which to him is consistent with "Dutch see-through front-to-back home design." The positions which are forced upon them by their job are obviously "unnatural and unhealthy."[80] This crane-operator study ended on July 29th, 1993 on Sekula's route from Brussels towards Los Angeles—he began to theorize the connection between containers and the Aqua-Lung. Sekula is cognizant of who invented the Aqua-Lung, Jacque Cousteau in 1943 Nice, France (at least, he thinks)—but Sekula is confused: who invented the container? Sekula finds Jacques Cousteau questionable, was he a "renegade unconcerned with the occupation, or a Vichyite?" Sekula is eager to know if the

[78] FS Notebook #4 (Fish Story Notebook #4), 1993 May-1994 May by Allan Sekula, 2016.M.22, box 6, folder 1, image 24, Allan Sekula papers, 1960-2013, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.
[79] FS Notebook #4 (Fish Story Notebook #4), 1993 May-1994 May by Allan Sekula, 2016.M.22, box 6, folder 1, image 40, Allan Sekula papers, 1960-2013, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.
[80] Ibid, image 41.

Germans made any use of the early Aqua-Lung, or if the Aqua-Lung was an existential invention, like "Being and Nothingness," equating Sartre to Cousteau. He ends the paragraph, "I want to be a fish: Einstein-Disney-Mr. Limpet-Cousteau." Sekula is critical about our anxious yet triumphant relationship to the sea, a challenge which is "altered by the depths." He believes that the anxieties of sinking and drowning permeate our fear of the sea, and that devices which directly prevent drowning or sinking (such as the Aqua-Lung) obviously serve to "solve" this problem. He offers the following visions, ideas not really upheld by anything concrete: "How long can you hold your breath? How long would you like to hold your breath? Only so much air, sloth buys time underwater. An economy of air, container-scale and human scale: the "doorway" of the container [...] A container is packed: thus the equivalent of those nightmarish homes of recluses who save everything. Sheer constipated, acquisitive retentiveness."[81] By September 2nd, 1993 Sekula is in Hong Kong, reminiscing about the Star Ferry for its "Stieglitzian possibilities." He notes the ramps, the various levels, the harbor being rough, and a clear class-division between where the passengers are seated; late into the night he enters the marketplace and is fascinated by the diversity of product, merchants selling everything from "pagers to dildoes," and an elderly woman offers him opium.[82] Sekula is quick to declare that Hong Kong is "the place where the relationship between containerization and shipping is most clearly manifested." He goes further, signifying Hong Kong as the "great capital of free trade" for its "capitalist image of openness," of which he believes is directly tied to the process of manufactured goods flowing through the port and being directly passed into the hands of private consumers.[83] Circa September 18th, 1993

[81] FS Notebook #4 (Fish Story Notebook #4), 1993 May-1994 May by Allan Sekula, 2016.M.22, box 6, folder 1, image 43, Allan Sekula papers, 1960-2013, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.
[82] Ibid, image 51.
[83] Ibid, image 52.

Sekula reflected cultural image of the "fisherman," judging that they are isolated on political, social, and cultural dimensions—they're an "alienated" community.[84] On November 7th, 1993 Sekula was in Norfolk, Virginia and shared a cab with Keith Brooks (a second mate working in Merchant Marine) on their way to the Charleston Portside Development. Sekula notes that Keith has two children and immediately comments upon the pain of "missing birthdays, little league, recitals [...] people don't know what I do for a living. They think I'm in the navy: 'when do you get out?' Or they think I work on Love Boat, with epilogues and shorts."[85] Presumably from this conversation with Keith, Sekula is moved to make the statement that "sailors understand the international division of labor than any other workers," jotting down his reasoning based on Keith's statement that: "I'm no communist, but those people are being exploited," a remark from another sailor, Dave, about tea bags being used "thirty times," Keith's further comments on "foreign owned ships abandoned by their embargoed owners, left to rot at anchor in Chesapeake bay."[86] All of these narratives seemingly come to a head circa late November, 1993 when Sekula states that he is mortified by the fact that he "failed to photograph the captain and chief mate against the sunset at the funeral service," his anxiety peaking when he chokes on a piece of steak at dinner, slipping into an "Oedipal-drama" on the ship as "abetted by Melville, no doubt."[87]

Jumping back to July 5th, 1994 Sekula returned to the Los Angeles port (Berth 145) in order to take some photographs, an act which seizes upon the paranoia of the nearby guards, who

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[84] FS Notebook #4 (Fish Story Notebook #4), 1993 May-1994 May by Allan Sekula, 2016.M.22, box 6, folder 1, image 78, Allan Sekula papers, 1960-2013, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.
[85] Ibid, image 116.
[86] FS Notebook #4 (Fish Story Notebook #4), 1993 May-1994 May by Allan Sekula, 2016.M.22, box 6, folder 1, image 117, Allan Sekula papers, 1960-2013, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.
[87] Ibid, image 130.

tell him to "leave the site."[88] Shortly thereafter he reflects upon the "sea story," which he believed to be "an allegory of authenticity." Sekula also believed that "the ship is one of the last bastions of absolutism, regardless of the political system behind the flag that flies from the stern."[89] Around this time he also began to reflect on Lothar-Günther Buchheim, in particular, his narratives which involved the sea and shipmates. Here, in his critique of Buchheim, we can perhaps see the most obvious reflection of Sekula's *sympathetic materialism*, where he detests Buchheim for the "clear superiority" he imposes upon his own narrative in contrast to the narrative as dictated by his shipmates, the latter of which only serve to "provide vulgar but entertaining" counterpoints. What is maintained here, for Sekula, is the superiority of "book-writing" to "story-telling." Further, both of these to Sekula are: "fascist and bad for women," but which is worse? The page does not end with a decision, but seemingly Buchheim's approach is atrocious to Sekula in both regards.[90] Shortly after, Sekula speaks to his old graduate school advisor, David Antin. The discussion, probably initiated by Sekula, has to do with his theories on New York's decline as a maritime city, entailing "both a loss of material function and a diminishing imaginary resonance of the port." Sekula conveys a form of annoyance in Antin's response (which is apparently typical of Antin) which is monologic and generally uninterested, instead shifting the conversation into a reminiscent trip to the Hudson River docks. Nevertheless, Sekula takes this reminiscent and nostalgic response as emblematic of seaport narratives.[91]

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[88] FS Notebook #5 (Fish Story Notebook #5), 1994 May-1995 February by Allan Sekula, 2016.M.22, box 6, folder 4, image 17, Allan Sekula papers, 1960-2013, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.
[89] Ibid, image 61.
[90] FS Notebook #5 (Fish Story Notebook #5), 1994 May-1995 February by Allan Sekula, 2016.M.22, box 6, folder 4, image 118, Allan Sekula papers, 1960-2013, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.
[91] Ibid, image 120.

In conclusion, chapter one is a curated presentation of Sekula's *Fish Story* notebooks where we have "mined" his writings for narratives which connect affect, maritime space, and infrastructural technology. These connections are evident in his writing, no matter how novel or disorganized. However, we perhaps may never be able to truly organize and conceptualize the entirety of the thoughts and ambitions as "jotted down" in Sekula's notebooks, especially seeing as there are a multitude of notebooks which were produced outside of the *Fish Story* epoch which may provide further illumination of the project. Sekula's 1994 critique of Buchheim's literary prose, as seen in Fish Story Notebook #5, has proven to be the most emblematic narrative for which to understand his connection to affect and maritime infrastructural technology. Sekula's critique of Buchheim showcases a developing turmoil which puts into dialogue the history and theory of photographic representation (as theorized upon by Sekula from the standpoint of both an artist and academic) in relation to providing poetic justice for the labor and woes of the seafarer. All-in-all, these notebooks represent a movement away from "book-writing" to "story-telling."

Chapter Two: The Blur of Labor

Hans Haacke, Copyright Artist

This chapter, though still beginning with a survey of the *Fish Story* notebooks, will aim to move towards understanding Sekula's stake in photograph representation in relation to maritime labor and infrastructural technology. As was echoed in the introduction, it's an attempt to begin moving towards an aesthetically nuanced discourse surrounding the invisibility and visibility debate within infrastructure studies—what occurs when, despite being canonized as a "critical realist," Sekula's approach towards documentary is not strictly blunt and "realist," but

instead eerie and abstracted? If (as was settled in the first chapter's biographical narrative) Sekula is interested in moving towards a narrative that dethrones himself as the "beacon" of strides towards better representing maritime labor—and instead opting for a *sympathetic materialist* attitude which puts-to-center the plights of seafarers—why is his photography at times so aestheticized? What is the lasting implication upon Sekula, both as an artist and individual, in regard to his constant battle between the hidden and visible?

To begin, we will "dig" through Sekula's *Fish Story* notebooks in search of entryways into his thoughts surrounding photographic representation. Interestingly, as was made evident during archival-work at the Getty Research Institute, Sekula had a particular disdain for both the personality and work of contemporary artist Hans Haacke (born 1936). Haacke is prominent within the canonization of contemporary art, particularly within the avenues of systems art, conceptual art, and perhaps even more prominently, institutional critique. He is German-born but he operates mainly within the scope of New York City. Haacke and Sekula can be understood as generally similar in terms of artistic ambition. They both integrate photography and writing into their projects and launch substantial critical analysis upon capitalist systems.[92] It's also quite typical to see them intertwined within an analysis (for example, within an academic manuscript or an art magazine), especially seeing as they were contemporaries and interacted quite frequently. Nevertheless, Sekula remained bitterly opposed to the methodological toolbelt and artistic approach which Haacke wielded—these oppositions then provide us an interesting framework for which to understand Sekula's ambitions in relation to representing capitalist systems (not only through photography, but through other means as well, such as writing).

[92] Going back to FITAC in 1998, a conference on "Art's Textuality," it is interesting to note that Hans Haacke was also invited to be a guest speaker. They both ended up interacting at the "Photography and Text" round table.

Sekula's unrelenting critique of Haacke stretches as far back as 1977, about three years after his graduation from UC San Diego with an MFA degree. Seemingly, he jotted down the following notes in tandem with a seminar class he was taking. He first begins to imagine a more "mass-mediated" society which entails a closer relationship between the "managers of mass culture" and the "marginal independent elite cultural producer." He believes this relationship is clear with Haacke, a "petty-bourgeois with a vengeance." Some disorganized thoughts follow: "The irony of copyright, Allied Chemicals 1976 and Hans Haacke 1976. The mimicry of layout. The bogus-ad. The Anti-Ad."[93] He continues three pages down, wanting to compare "Haacke on Mobil with Fortune on Mobil" and the role of glamor within each, referring to Haacke as a "snide glamorizer." He believes Haacke to be extremely cautious (to the point of turning invisible) yet having a "perverse pleasure in calculated acts of vengeance," in his behind-the-scenes investigative acts and in "playing dumb." Thankfully, he believes Haacke is in the process of being "smoked out."[94] Jumping to May 24th, 1997 Sekula reflects upon a conversation he directly had with Haacke, again holding contempt. He notes Haacke's usual conservative and cautious prose, as prompted by Haacke's comment that "You can only go so far… There are limits… You can't make a revolution, but only small incremental change." Sekula is jaded from the interaction, referring to Haacke as "such a Bernsteinian socialist" and hating the fact that Haacke always feels the need to "caution me."[95]

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[93] Criticism Notes, 1977 January by Allan Sekula, 2016.M.22, box 2, folder 8, image 7, Allan Sekula papers, 1960-2013, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.
[94] Ibid, image 11.
[95] Mexico notebook, Insite 97, 1997 March 29 by Allan Sekula, 2016.M.22, box 7, folder 5, image 117, Allan Sekula papers, 1960-2013, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

Montages of Reality

The Blur of Labor is directly referenced from Sekula, a title which I believe perfectly encapsulates his plights in organizing a respectable method of photographic representation, especially in relation to capturing images of maritime labor and infrastructural technology—his stake in this matter was sternly clarified in his unrelenting critique of the methodology which Hans Haacke utilized. He first used the evocative section title (at least, in his notebooks) on November 25th, 1991, underneath the grander title of "Photograph and Dismal Science," which was seemingly an essay film project he was conjuring.[96] In a general sense, *The Blur of Labor* evokes a form of representation and perspective which is critical and suspicious about the documentary and "realist" process. For Sekula, reality has become much too complex, abstracted, and nuanced under the threatening spectacle of globalization and capitalism. Within the grasp of this allusive society, representational technique must subvert the documentary process—it may seem oxymoronic, but Sekula certainly believes that "realism" can no longer "truly" capture the phenomenology of a postmodern capitalist society. Sekula's nuanced approach to representation is both a testament to general shifting postwar trends in documentary practice, as well as personal experiences and influence: "I guess when I say realism I'm taking—I'm taking caricature and the grotesque into account, you know. So I wouldn't, you know, someone like [James] Ensor becomes important, I think, for me."[97] Further, the subtitle "Montages of Reality" is taken from Sekula's notebooks as well. He was immensely interested in collage, film, photography and time, and montage, mainly conveyed through his lifelong love of

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[96] FS Notebook #2 (Fish Story Notebook #2), 1991 July-1992 May by Allan Sekula, 2016.M.22, box 5, folder 6, image 61, Allan Sekula papers, 1960-2013, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

[97] Oral history interview with Allan Sekula, 2011 August 20-2012 February 14. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Battleship Potemkin (1925). He would constantly use Sergei Eisenstein's film to convey how the visual culture of maritime space has shifted from its earlier romanticized depictions. To Sekula, *Battleship Potemkin* signified not only the homoerotic dimensions of mutiny, but also a newfound representation of maritime space which was "claustrophobic." These two elements dissolved earlier romantic representations which dignified the harbor as "spacious," especially echoed by the use of panoramic perspective. Further, as already explain, Sekula differs from the photographic methodology of such as projects as *Man and Machines* in his repeated concern with montage and the ephemeral—Sekula's *Fish Story* images are almost not supposed to be viewed statically, but instead as a constantly reeling film. If we think within his contemporary geographical scope, *Fish Story* is similar to Edward Ruscha's *Every Building on the Sunset Strip* (1966).

We begin in 1989, Sekula is explaining the topographical detailing of San Pedro to a student, sketching a section-map of the hills, Point Fermin, the harbor, the flats, and his house, making sure to leave out the environmental impact of the shipyards in order to make a statement. He then redraws the map, this time with a deep slit for the shipyards, and places great importance on their presence to the student.[98] Shortly after, Sekula begins to theorize on the importance of photography in postwar art underneath a section titled "On the art of fixing a shadow." He gives an overarching account, "Some looked to art to provide the foundation for a new, more ordered and rational society. As artists sought to strip away the excess of the past to reveal a pure structure, the very medium itself sometimes became the subject [...] they explored disorienting points of view to demonstrate the camera's ability to distant, confuse or flatten space or its ability

[98] Geography Lesson: Fish Story Notes, 1989 July-1990 March, 1989 by Allan Sekula, 2016.M.22, box 5, folder 4, image 106, Allan Sekula papers, 1960-2013, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

to reveal abstract patterns.[99] Jumping to August, 1991 Sekula is in conversation with Stan Weir[100] (1921–2001), a leftist academic with a dedication to providing support to laborers through unionization—the entry is short (though Weir and Sekula seemingly interacted frequently), Weir describes the harbor as "Kafkaesque," which immediately intrigues Sekula and he pursues the point, to which Weir qualifies the statement by stating that the harbor has "no quilt."[101] A bit after this conversation with Weir, Sekula is at Ellis Island where he is weeping "repeatedly and unpredictably." Underneath this comment is the title: "Distant Viewing/The Uncanny," where he jotted down a passing comment by a young Puerto Rican woman who is peering through a telescope, spotting a ship, and states that it "looks like a warehouse on the horizon."[102] On November 25th, 1991 Sekula noted a small exchange between him and a young Korean woman. The young woman confronts Sekula, who is taking photographs of the car wash (and her employees) she owns. Sekula assures the woman that he is only an artist, to which she is sympathetic towards, but nevertheless tells Sekula to stop. Sekula believes this to be "paranoid paternalism," but also confides with the woman, stating that he could have easily been "an agent of the INS, posing as a deficient art photographer." This perhaps, though novel, may be interesting within the recent characterization of Sekula as apophenic. On March 19th, 1992 Sekula returned to his theories on how postmodern capitalist forces have turned the shipyard into a "stock market." Underneath a section titled "Ship in a Bottle," he delivers the following

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[99] Geography Lesson: Fish Story Notes, 1989 July-1990 March, 1989 by Allan Sekula, 2016.M.22, box 5, folder 134, image 106, Allan Sekula papers, 1960-2013, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.
[100] Sekula and Stan Weir were lifelong colleagues and friends, they even body-surfed together when younger.
[101] FS Notebook #2 (Fish Story Notebook #2), 1991 July-1992 May by Allan Sekula, 2016.M.22, box 5, folder 6, image 22, Allan Sekula papers, 1960-2013, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.
[102] Ibid, image 50.

statements: “a framed photograph is like a ship in a bottle. A slide show is like a ship being loaded by a hammerhead crane, the slides themselves dropping like containers. A ship is no longer a solitary machine, but a device that shuttle within a larger machine ensemble. Dock-ship-dock. Ship-dock-ship. As in, M-C-M and C-M-C (Marx).[103]

Later on (most likely sometime at the start of February, 1993) Sekula reflected upon the “landscape panel” he was on. In particular, he is interested in contemporary Canadian artist Jeff Wall’s comment that “landscape is a utopian, and thus idealist, genre, suggests the model of montage is materialist, anti-utopian, and lacking in an idea of freedom.” Sekula offers a rebuttal in defense of himself, claiming that the pictures he showcased at the panel are meant to “register an idea, not so much of freedom, but of justice.”[104] On February 20th, 1993 (notably, on route from Albuquerque to New York), Sekula jotted down some obviously salient commentary upon his approach to photographic representation within the scope of *Fish Story*:

> What I’m trying to avoid are the conspicuous markers of “photo-based” contemporary art: that is, the markers of a “metalinguistic” stance in relation to photograph [...] consider the key texts here: Crimp “Pictures,” Rosler “Notes on Quotes” [...] The semantic markers of an “intelligent” photography: seriality, captioning, appropriation, radical decontextualization, “theoretical” bracketing. These depend for their value on an implicit lexicon of idiocies: markers of “naive” realism, of essentialism, of traditional esthetics.[105]

We jump to November 10th, 2002. Sekula has jotted down a Walker Evans quote which he would like to present to his documentary photography class on their first meeting: “A documentary photograph is a police report or a dead body… But the style of detachment and

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[103] FS Notebook #2 (Fish Story Notebook #2), 1991 July-1992 May by Allan Sekula, 2016.M.22, box 5, folder 6, image 101, Allan Sekula papers, 1960-2013, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.
[104] FS Notebook #3 (Fish Story Notebook #3), 1992 May-1993 May by Allan Sekula, 2016.M.22, box 5, folder 7, image 143, Allan Sekula papers, 1960-2013, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.
[105] Ibid, image 153.

record is another matter. That applied to the world around us is what I do with the camera."[106] Overall, as echoed by his contemporary Martha Rosler,[107] Sekula is a "documentary photographer" as inspired by the technological foregrounding of Jean-Luc Godard, and the theatricality of Bertolt Brecht. Infrastructure, as a built-environment to be documented and "revealed," is an elusive object and requires nuanced techniques of representation.

Conclusion

The French Lithograph

To conclude, we return to a conference organized by KU Leuven titled "Disassembled Images: Contemporary Art After Allan Sekula," hosted in Antwerp from March 2nd to March 4th, 2017.[108] Figure 4 showcases a poster from the event, almost Rauschenbergian in efforts to resemble a collage or montage. This is, of course, a salient aesthetic trajectory in reference to the "goal" of the conference, which attempted to reconstruct a particular image that Sekula described in "Polonia and other Fables 2007-2009," an image which never came to light, but thought to have been constructed during his *Fish Story* (1985-1995) epoch:

> I go back to a portrait made back in 1994. A Greek ship is carrying parts of a disassembled American steel mill to China. The electrician aboard, Mark, a Pole from Warsaw, shares his profession with the then-president of Poland, hero of the Gdansk shipyard. Marek has no clue where the ship is going after the stop in China, since it is an unscheduled tramp steamer, picking up cargo charters as opportunities arise. He is very curious about the exchange rate for the dollar, a curiosity he no doubt shares with the

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[106] [Fish Story; Panama seminar; miscellaneous notes], 2000 April 22-2002 December 29 by Allan Sekula 2016.M.22, box 10, folder 4, image 114, Allan Sekula papers, 1960-2013, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

[107] Martha Rosler, *Positions in the Life World* (Birmingham, England: Vienna, Austria: Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 1998).

[108] For complete transparency the entire ordeal was organized by the Lieven Gevaert Research Centre for Photography, Art and Visual Culture (KU Leuven-Université catholique de Louvain) in collaboration with M HKA, Museum of Contemporary Art, Antwerp.

> ship's owners.[109]

To the conference participants, or at least within Alexander Streitberger and Hilde Van Gelder's introduction to conference, this quote is emblematic of a particular dimension of Sekula (one which is primarily concerned with the later position of artistic output) which they believe to be underdeveloped, detached from the typical discourse which surrounds the artist, such as his work on photographic representation or the sociotechnical aspects of globalization. Instead, the conference attempts to reconstruct this lost image through an analysis of Sekula's particular practices as an archivist: "Central to his body of work, we believe, is the idea of dissembling items or elements in order to reassemble some of them in a varied or alternative constellation."[110] That is, to put it somewhat lightly, the participants had to battle with making sense out of Allan Sekula's last project, *Ship of Fools | The Docker's Museum* (2010-2013), an exhibition made central to the entire project which stages and prompts a reconsideration of Sekula's archival practices in tandem with his interest in globalization.

> When he died in the summer of 2013 he was leaving behind this vast "disassembled" set of images and objects all focusing on the lifeworld of dockworkers and seafarers. The project was his final contribution to a lifelong search for imaging possible forms of solidarity in a globalized economy evermore confronted with its own limitations.[111]

Sekula understood the extent and lunacy to the entire ordeal (*Ship of Fools | The Docker's Museum* numbered some 1250 objects), Sekula himself sarcastically jotted down an ambition to

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[109] Allan Sekula, *Polonia and Other Fables* (Chicago and Warsaw: The Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago and Zacheta National Gallery of Art, 2009), 62.
[110] Alexander Streitberger and Hilde Van Gelder, eds. *"Disassembled" Images: Allan Sekula and Contemporary Art* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2019), 9.
[111] Streitberger and Van Gelder, "Disassembled" Images: Allan Sekula and Contemporary Art, 11.

furiously "throw a lot out!"[112] in his March, 2011 Madrid notebook—a seemingly horrified retrospective thought about the insane collection he had amassed over the years.

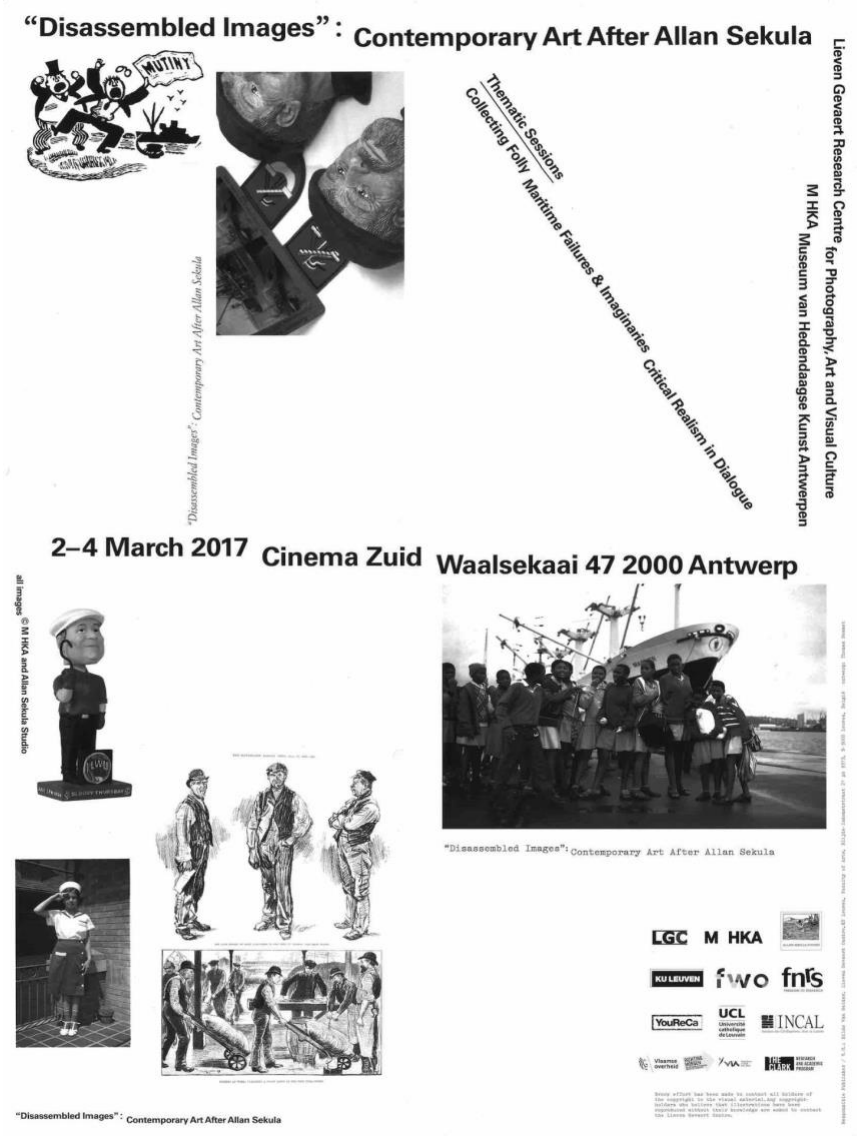


Figure 4: Image 1. Conference poster "Disassembled Images": Contemporary Art After Allan Sekula, Antwerp, 2-4 March 2017. Page design Thomas Desmet. © Allan Sekula Studio. Courtesy M HKA, Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst Antwerpen. Courtesy Lieven Gevaert Research Centre for Photography, Art and Visual Culture.

[112] Exit Book, Madrid 2011 March 3 by Allan Sekula, 2016.M.22, box 16, folder 2, image 10, Allan Sekula papers, 1960-2013, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

Whether or not Sekula would have been satisfied with this reception towards his collection, which the editors deem as boiled down to the following sentiment, W.J.T. Mitchell certainly gives ground to the project's objective in his keynote essay, "Planetary Madness: Globalizing the Ship of Fools."

> As an artist, Sekula challenged his audience to make a major investment in order really to [sic] engage with his work. One among many possible explanations for his fondness of playing the hide-and-seek game with his public is that he felt this to be the only way to make them feel the absurdity of how on a worldwide scale human life became organized in the post-Cold War era.[113]

In a way, Mitchell's essay is the nexus for this thesis as well, as he provides a serious and historical attempt to understand Sekula's exhibition not only in-itself, but also as a residual product of Sekula's antics as an archivist, person, and visual artist. Mitchell is prime to battle with the "lunacy"[114] of Sekula's *Ship of Fools* because of his dedicated attention to the connection between madness and visual culture. Mitchell immediately concedes, as has been stated already in this article as well, that his particular take on the *Ship of Fools* dilemma is a narrative, a story, but one which seems certainly poignant. Instead of launching the inquiry from the typical avenues from which Sekula (and his surrounding scholarship which surrounds him)

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[113] Streitberger and Van Gelder, "Disassembled" Images: Allan Sekula and Contemporary Art, 10.

[114] Mitchell states the following on his use of this term: "I use 'lunatic' in the technical, not the pejorative sense. A lunatic is an *episodic* madman, constantly changing (as the term suggests) with the phases of the moon. He is a person who can sound reasonable one moment, but then give easily to delusions, lies, and illogic accompanied by impulsive emotional outbreak. Therefore he can be extremely 'high functioning' in any clinical sense of the world." W.J.T. Mitchell, "Planetary Madness: Globalizing the Ship of Fools," in "Disassembled" Images: Allan Sekula and Contemporary Art, eds. Alexander Streitberger and Hilde Van Gelder (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2019), 22. It is also not my argument that Allan Sekula should literally be considered a schizophrenic in the clinical sense, but we rather use the term "schizophrenia" in the spirit of Deleuze and Guattari's schizoanalysis. To quote them, "desire is part of the infrastructure." Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (New York, NY: Penguin Classics, 2009), 104.

was concerned with: "I should say, however, that I don't think this was exactly the direction that Allan himself was heading. He was a hard-headed Marxist materialist, and as an artist-photographer committed to documenting the material conditions of labor."[115] Mitchell instead utilizes the framework of the conference's original objective to develop Sekula's exhibition as a form of *planetary madness*:

> We could then see another side to the issue, one that might be called 'iconomania', the effort to create a total meta-picture of an event, a situation, or body of knowledge. This is a form of 'seeing madness' (or at least 'seeing mania') in which the emphasis is on the first word of the phrase, which becomes a participle describing forms of madness closely related to scopophilia, voyeurism, and a kind of obsession with total surveillance. We might call it 'atlas fever', a syndrome closely related to what Jacques Derrida called 'archive fever'. Atlas fever focuses our attention, not so much on the archive, as on the interface that provides access to the archive—the index, search engine, or (above all) the visual array or atlas that provides the impression that we are able to see and comprehend a complex totality at a glance.[116]

This titling of Sekula's particular form of image-madness as "planetary," I believe, stems from Sekula's attention to globalization, story-telling narratives, and capitalist process, as well as being inspired by Mitchell's own visual analysis of image display and *iconomania*, as quoted above, which spans from an attention to the extreme effort of Aby Warburg's historical methodology to something as common as an array of pictures hanging upon the stereotypical American refrigerator. According to Mitchell, Sekula is not the "poster child" of iconomania, but rather a pertinent victim through which to understand its process. By 1995, Sekula was

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[115] W.J.T. Mitchell, "Planetary Madness: Globalizing the Ship of Fools," 25.
[116] W.J.T. Mitchell, "Method, Madness, and Montage," In *Dynamis of the Image: Moving Images in a Global World*, eds. Emmanuel Alloa and Chiara Cappelletto (De Gruyter, 2020), 104. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110530544-006.

theorizing about possibilities of "universalizing the schiz [sic]" for its subversive yet potentially dangerous possibilities.[117]

We end the conclusion with an empowering symbol (see fig. 5.), a 19th-century French lithograph, artist unknown, that was collected and hung-up in Sekula's home by his significant other, art historian Sally Stein. According to Stein, Sekula never paid much attention to the image despite its presence within their home and its uncanny resemblance to the life and work of Sekula. The French dockworker/seafarer sits precariously upon the globe, looking downwards in an intent and dismal fashion upon the landscape. The receding hairline of the dockworker, according to Stein, even resembles that of Sekula. The dockworker's hat is being blown away in the wind, but he could be less interested in this fact—his immediate backdrop is filled with images of industrialization and the common worker, nature and the sea, and emerging technologies. Until the very end, Sekula fought against the abstraction of maritime space and labor through a nuanced approach which incorporated a rigid and structured theoretical and aesthetic backdrop. His life and work enriches the discourse surrounding the supposed invisibility of infrastructural networks. The "banality" of infrastructure should be subverted, or questioned at the very least, in an attempt to find procedures which better illuminate infrastructures' capacity to dehumanize and to "hide" intensely physical labor. This was done not only through photographic means, but through writing, and we must constantly treasure Sekula's movement away from "book-writing" to "story-telling" when dealing with our interaction with infrastructure. The process of "documentation" should not be attacked solely through an interaction with the academy but through an aesthetic process which critically reflects upon our

[117] [Fish Story notes; lecture notes; Canadian Notes], 1995 April-1995 May by Allan Sekula, 2016.M.22, box 6, folder 5, image 50, Allan Sekula papers, 1960-2013, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

visual culture—only then can we refrain from reinstating the spectacle of infrastructure as prominent within our contemporary society.



Figure 5: Anon. (probably French artist), Untitled chine-collé lithograph, ca. 1870s, 16.2 x 11.5cm. © Photo: Maray Reinsch Sackett. Collection of Sally Stein.

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