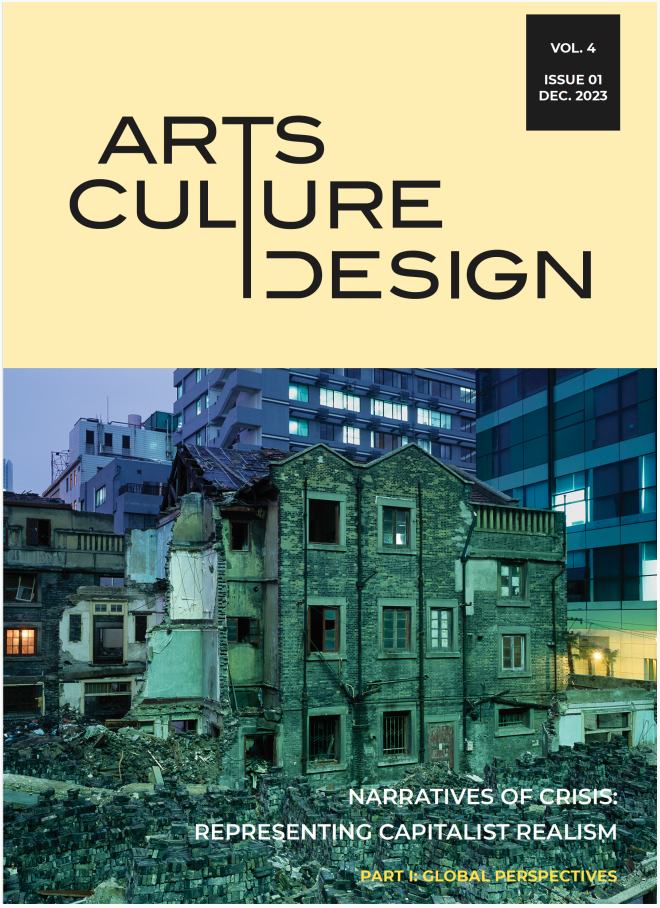
Design/Arts/Culture

Vol 4, No 1 (2023)

Narratives of Crisis: Representing Capitalist Realism



Strawberries in Winter

Freya Najade

doi: 10.12681/dac.35385

To cite this article:

Najade, F. (2023). Strawberries in Winter. *Design/Arts/Culture*, *4*(1), 84–91. https://doi.org/10.12681/dac.35385

STRAWBERRIES IN WINTER

Freya Najade
University of the Arts, London

Keywords:
Art
Photography
Food
Agriculture
Globalization
Capitalist Realism

ABSTRACT

The series *Strawberries in Winter* provides a visual representation of the evolving agricultural landscape, highlighting the impact of modern agricultural practices within the context of capitalism. In the current state of agriculture, where the demands of supermarkets and consumers for year-round availability, consistent quality and low prices have led to significant changes in farming practices. The pressure to produce more on the same land, utilizing advanced technology and scientific advancements, has led to the expansion of farms, increased mechanization, and a shift away from the traditional rhythms of nature.

The imagery of *Strawberries in Winter* symbolizes this dissociation from natural cycles and the disconnection from traditional modes of agriculture. In essence, it depicts a changed agricultural landscape that is shaped by profit-driven practices, consumer demands, a growing population and technological advancements, which collectively contribute to the reimagining of nature and reality to fit within the constraints of a capitalist framework.

FREYA NAJADE holds an MA with Distinction in Photojournalism and Documentary Photography from the University of the Arts London (London College of Communication), 2009. Her recent publications include *The Hackney Marshes* (Hoxton Mini Press, 2022); *Along the Hackney Canal (*Hoxton Mini Press, 2016); *Jazorina Land of Lakes* (Kehrer Verlag, 2016).

STRAWBERRIES IN WINTER

Humans have cultivated the earth since thousands of years. At present about 40 percent of the world is farmland and used for agriculture.

The expectations on agriculture are today high and complex.

Supermarkets and consumers demand increasingly lower prices, a higher quality and a better look of products. Fruits, vegetables and meat are to be of perfect colour, size, shape and taste. They should be available all year long, and ideally, be locally grown.

To remain competitive in a globalized market and to feed a growing population, farmers need to produce more on the same amount of land, without damaging the environment. They are advised to use the newest science and the latest technology. As a result farms become bigger, more technical and highly computerized. Day and night, summer and winter, geographical locations slowly become insignificant. Not just plants, crops, fields and farms continue to change their appearance, but also the landscape of rural areas.

It is said that Agriculture has changed in the last 40 years more than in 400 years. In Strawberries in Winter, I set off to document the emerging landscape.

The various agricultural practices and techniques presented aim to provide a clear illustration of the ways in which modern farming has been transformed by industrialization, technology, and the pursuit of efficiency and increased yield.

The emphasis on controlled environments, such as sterile materials for tomato cultivation, microclimates for mushroom production, and closed systems with LED lights for growing various crops, reflects the detachment from natural rhythms and the reimagining of agricultural processes to fit within controlled, streamlined systems.

The large-scale chicken barns and the use of milking robots further emphasize the industrialized nature of modern farming, where animals and their products are treated as commodities to be efficiently produced.

The integration of technology, such as computer-controlled systems for lettuce cultivation and the monitoring of nutrient compounds through analysis, reflects the ways in which capitalist realism drives innovation and mechanization in agriculture to maximize output and economic gain and attempts to follow the trend of sustainability.

The incorporation of CO2 from a nearby Shell refinery to accelerate plant growth also underscores the interconnectedness of industrial processes and agricultural practices.

Overall, in Strawberries in Winter, we witness how the complex demands on agriculture and the pursuit of profit have led to a detachment from natural cycles and the creation of artificial conditions that allow for continuous production, irrespective of day, night, summer, or winter. Agriculture has been reimagined and the landscape of contemporary farming has been changed forever.

Figure 1: Tomatoes I, 2012

In order to have total control over the nutrients and the irrigation, tomatoes are planted in sterile material such as rock wool and not in soil. By doing so the tomatoes are according to the growers less likely infected by diseases, a smaller amount of pesticides is needed and the yield can be increased.

Figure 2: Mushrooms, 2012

To allow an all-year-round production of mushrooms and to increase the yield, mushrooms are grown in a microclimate inside growing rooms. A stacking system maximizes the production per square meter.

Figure 3: Chicken, 2011

Since the mid 1990s the consumption of chicken has increased by 75 percent worldwide. Chicken are often reared in barns. One chicken barn has the capacity to rear 50.000 chickens.

Figure 4: Berry Field, 2013

Polytunnels protect berries from rain, strong winds and bright sunlight. Temperature, humidity and ventilation can be controlled by equipment fixed in the polytunnels.

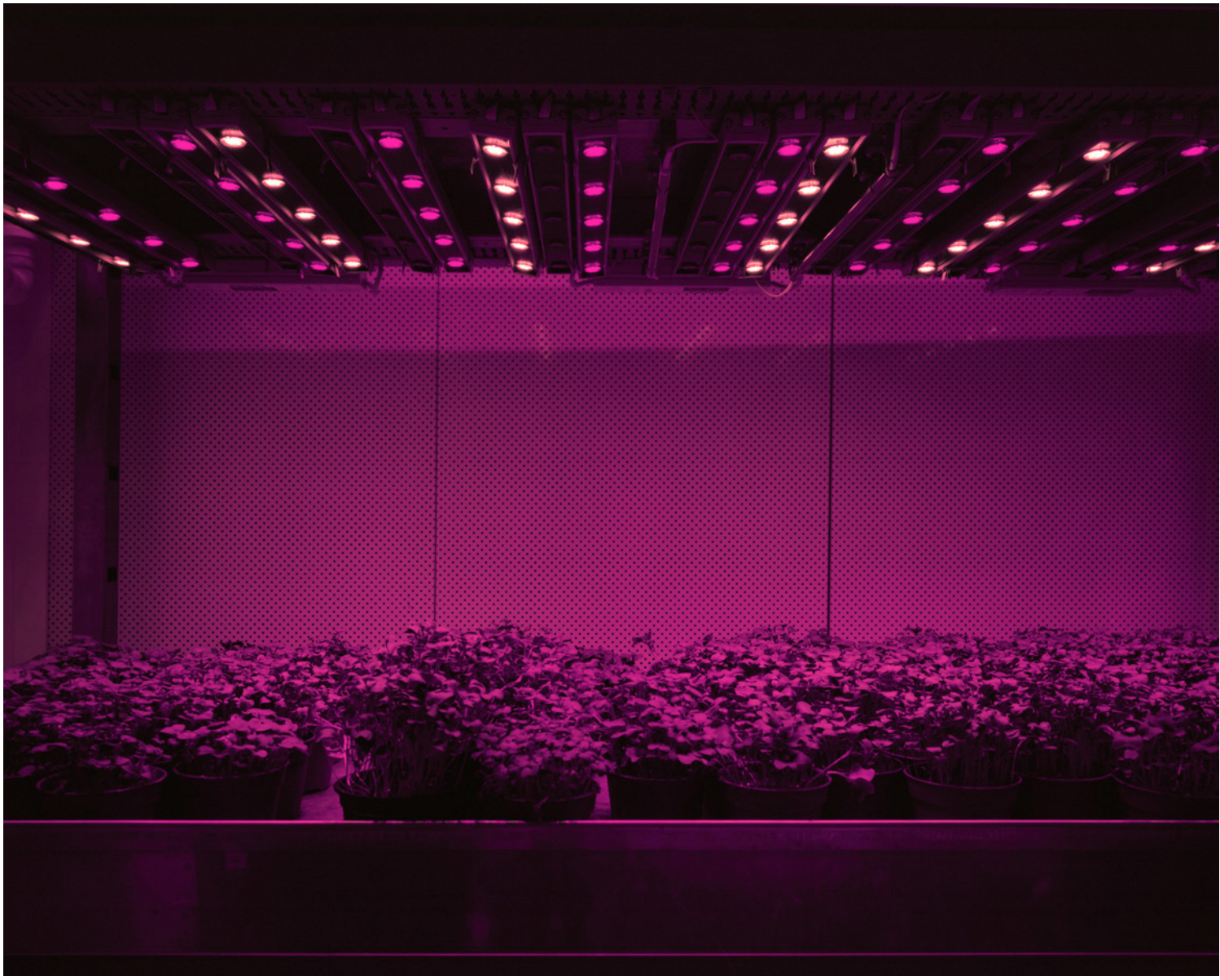


Figure 5: Cress, 2011

Cress, tomatoes, cucumbers, or lettuce are grown in closed systems just with LED lights. There is no sunlight and no direct exchange of air with the outside. Day and night, summer and winter stop existing. Humans are able to determine the shape, taste and colour of plants and fruits. They can be grown anywhere from the desert to inside of restaurants and supermarkets.

Figure 6: Lettuce, 2011

Lettuce is grown in a stacking system to provide a maximum use of space. Plants grow inside of plastic trays without soil. A conveyer belt is moving the plants to ensure they get all round sunlight. The whole growing process is computer controlled. The system currently produces around 112 lettuces per square meter, on a 3m high system.

Figure 7: Raspberry Field, 2012

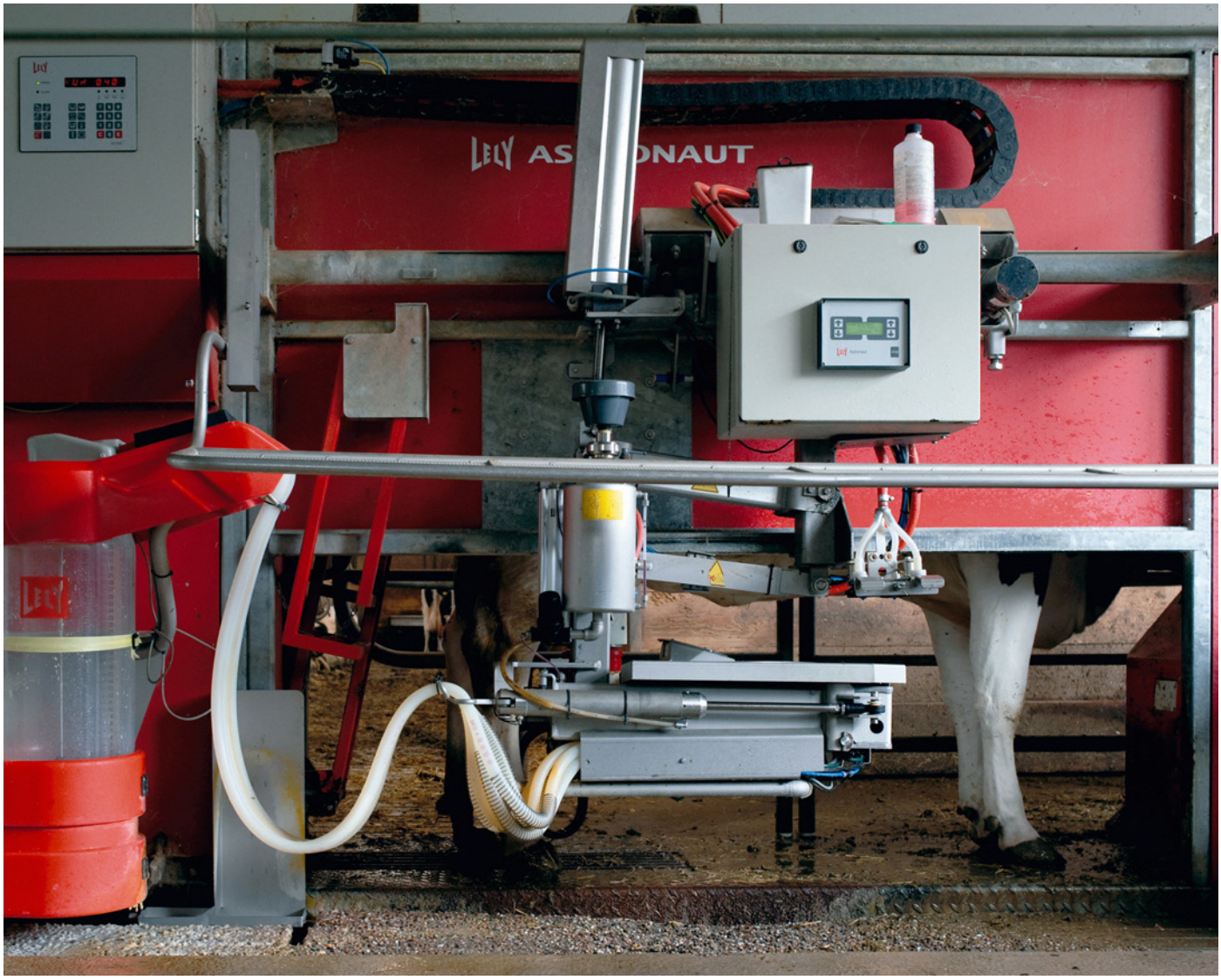


Figure 8: Milking Robot, 2012

One milking robot milks three times per day 60 cows. The cows are in a stable, in which they can move around freely. They can use the robot whenever they need to. No human needs to be present.

Figure 9: Strawberries, 2012

Strawberry crops are grown on tabletop raised beds. The tabletop system makes it easier to pick the fruits and eases the weed and pest control. A leaf and sap analysis determines the nutrient's compound, which is fed with the irrigation water. To accelerate the growth of the plants, growers above add CO2 from a close by Shell refinery.

Figure 10: Tomatoes II, 2012

In order to consume locally grown tomatoes in countries such as the UK or Germany, the tomatoes need to be produced in heated greenhouses. Locally grown tomatoes allow shorter distribution ways. To produce in more sustainable ways and to keep the cost of energy low the green house above is heated by the waste heat from a nearby power station.