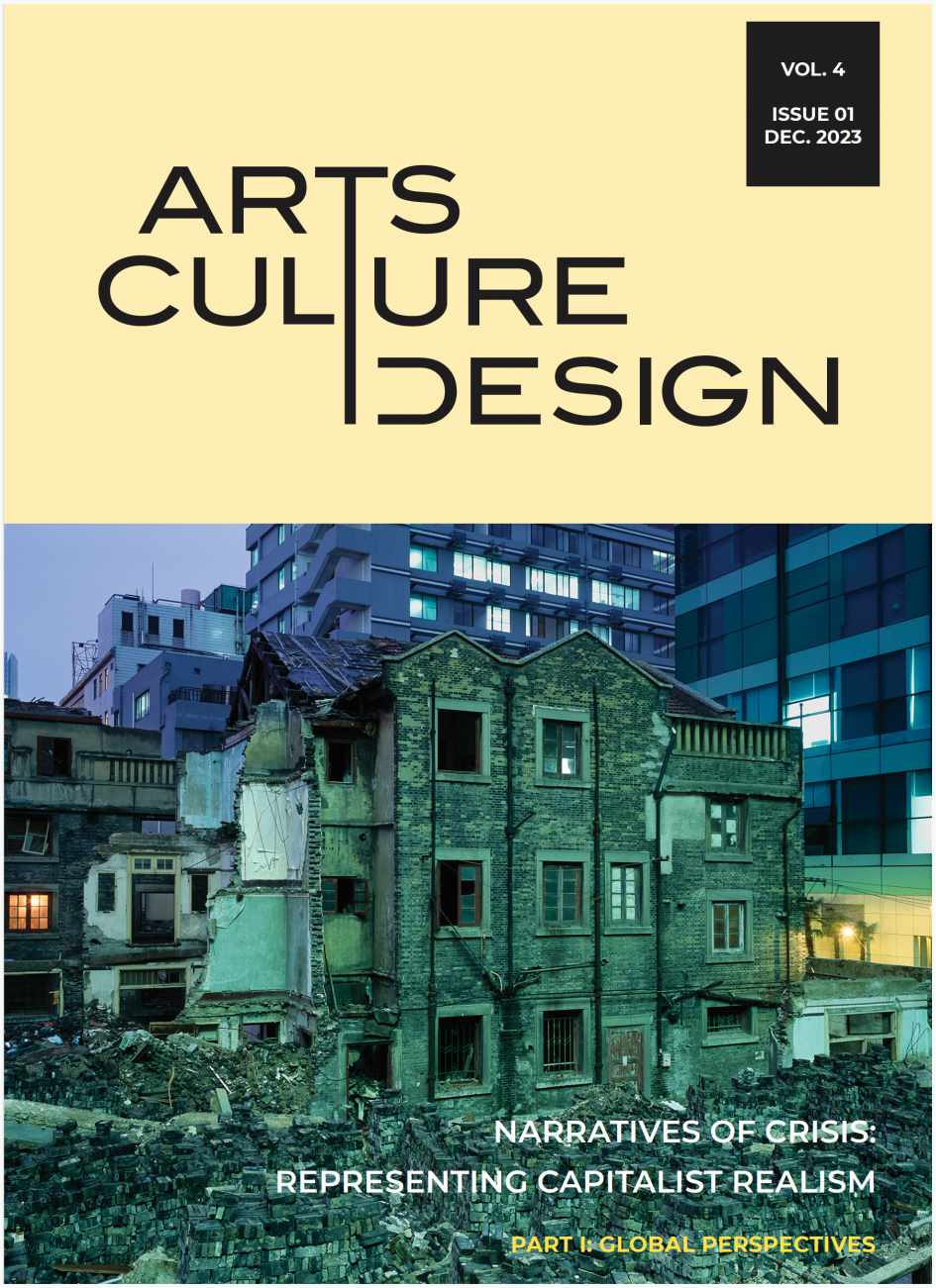
Design/Arts/Culture

Vol 4, No 1 (2023)

Narratives of Crisis: Representing Capitalist Realism



VOL. 4

ISSUE 01
DEC. 2023

ARTS CULTURE DESIGN

NARRATIVES OF CRISIS: REPRESENTING CAPITALIST REALISM

PART I: GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES

NARRATIVES OF CRISIS: REPRESENTING CAPITALIST REALISM

Guest editor: Dr Penelope Petsini

PART I: GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES

CONTENT

ARTICLES

The journal accepts submissions of original research articles including all the topics described below, but not limited to them, as: Aesthetics, Semantics, History, Continuity of cultural heritage, Methodological approaches, Social-Cultural Aspects of Design, Visual Studies Culture, Design and Material Culture, Identity and Heritage, Criticism, Creativity, Innovation, Arts, Audiovisual sequences, Sustainability, Learning strategies and pedagogy, Expertise in design, Visual techniques in the design process, Design tools and Experiential approaches concerning Interior Architecture, Furniture Design, Product Design, Graphic Design, Illustration, Animation, Visual Communication Design, Photography, New Media and Digital Imaging, Preservation of Cultural Heritage, Conservation and restoration, Technologies in Art and Design, Creative and Innovative Media Arts Concepts. All submissions are double peer reviewed.

PORTFOLIO & PROJECT SUBMISSIONS

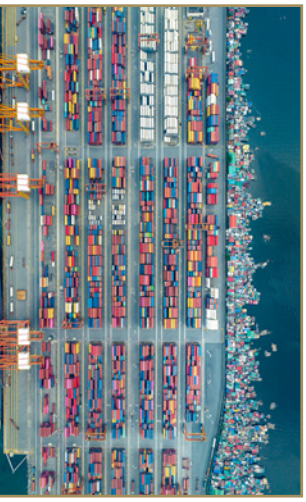
The journal accepts submissions of artist's portfolios and project presentations primarily related but not limited to painting, drawing, printmaking, typography, sculpture, architectural design, photography, graphic design, graffiti, animation, art installations, public art and audiovisual media.We are mainly interested in artwork that addresses the broad concept of space, both as a cultural convention and as encapsulating physical environment and the formative role of the art media and processes within. All submissions are double-blind peer reviewed.

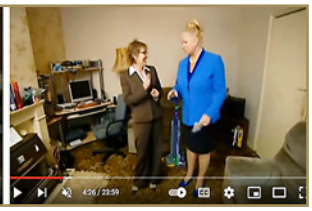
BOOK REVIEWS

The journal also dedicates a permanent section of the journal's content on book reviews and criticism. Consistent to common academic practices, these book reviews will not have the form of a simple informative and/or promotional report on new publications that are relevant to the scientific, artistic and academic community. Instead, this section will attempt to become another integral part of the dialogue and reflective thinking fostered in this journal – in a sense, a parallel methodological tool for exploring aesthetic, theoretical, and ideological themes that are related to design, art and culture within a broader sense.
Therefore, the featured articles will be texts of critical analysis, they will have a scientific framework and they will attempt to introduce a theoretical framework related to the current thematic of the journal.

STUDENT WORKS

The journal accepts submissions of student works, such as essays and final projects, including portfolios related but not limited to the fields and topics covered by the journal's scope and content. All submissions are double-blind peer reviewed.



COLOPHON

GUEST EDITOR
DR. PENELOPE PETSINI, PPETSINI@UNIWA.GR

CHIEF EDITOR
DR. ZOE GEORGIADOU, ZOEGEO@UNIWA.GR

PUBLICATION COMMITTEE
DR. ROSSETOS METZITAKOS
DR. PENELOPE PETSINI

GRAPHIC DESIGNER
MARIA PAPADOMANOLAKI
PRODROMOS MANOU

PUBLISHED BY
INTERIOR ARCHITECTURE AND AUDIOVISUAL DOCUMENTATION LAB
FACULTY OF APPLIED ARTS AND CULTURE, DESIGN,
UNIVERSITY OF WEST ATTICA,
CAMPUS 1,
AG. SPYRIDONOS 28, EGALEO, ATHENS, GREECE, PC 12241.
artsculturedesign.uniwa.gr/

ARTS CULTURE DESIGN

PubCapo International

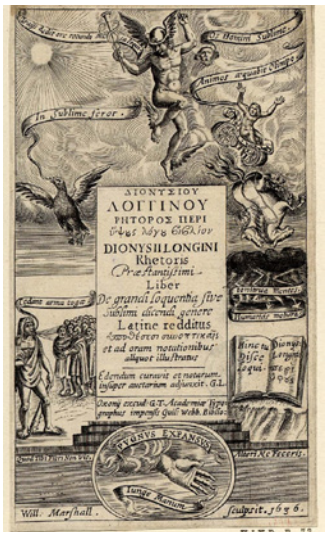
EBSCO

Cover: Greg Girard, Neighborhood Demolition, Wulumuqi Lu, 2005, from the series *Phantom Shanghai*.

Photograph page 2: Manolis Baboussis, *Secrets*, 2001.

Photograph page 3: Paolo Woods – Gabriele Galimberti, Marina Bay Sands Hotel, Singapore, from the series *The Heavens*, 2015. A man floats in the 57th- floor swimming pool of the Marina Bay Sands Hotel, with the skyline of "Central," the Singapore financial district, behind him.

SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE



Dr. Penelope PETSINI
Post-doc, School of Political Studies and History, Panteion University
Adjunct lecturer, University of West Attica

Dr. Iro KATSARIDOU
Director, MOMus-Museum of Photography, Thessaloniki
Adjunct lecturer, Hellenic Open University

Dr. Christos TRIANTAFYLLOU
Adjunct lecturer, Department of Archival, Library and Information Studies,
University of West Attica

Dr. Zoe GEORGIADOU
Professor - Department of Interior Architecture, University of West Attica

Dr. Dragos GHEORGHIU
Professor and Director of Doctoral Studies
National University of Arts, Bucharest, Romania

Dr. Marina THEODORESCU
Associate Professor- Department of Design
National University of Arts, Bucharest, Romania

Dr. Cătălin BALESKU
Rector, Professor Doctoral Studies
National University of Arts, Bucharest, Romania

Dr. Eugen GUSTEA
Vice- Rector, Professor Doctoral Studies
National University of Arts, Bucharest, Romania

Dr. Marta VARZIM MIRANDA
Professor – Arts Department, ESAD School of Arts and Design of Portugal

Dr. Joao LEMOS
Professor - ESAD School of Arts and Design of Portugal

Dr. Margarida AZEVEDO
Professor - Design Communication , ESAD School of Arts and Design of Portugal

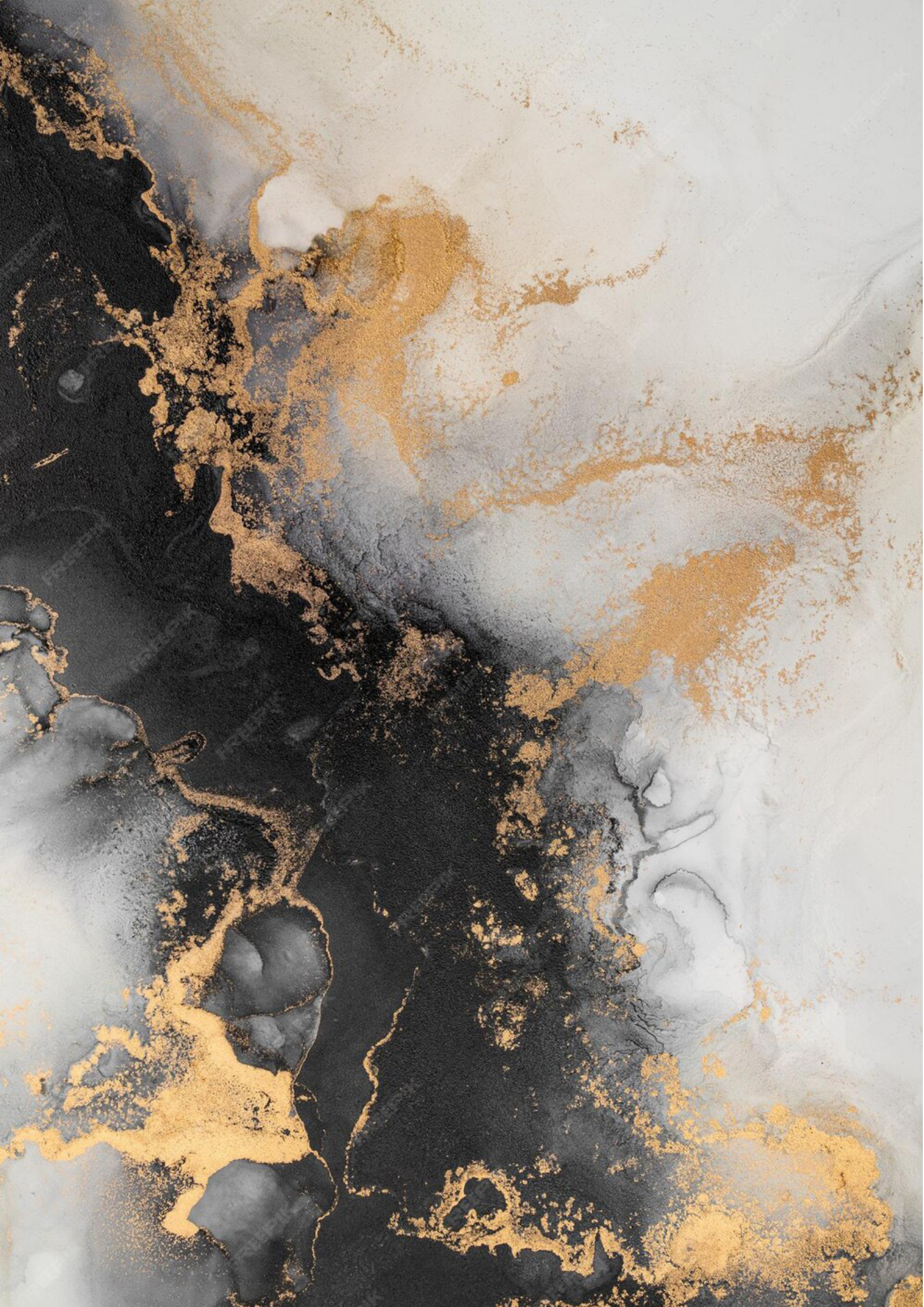
Dr. Ana RAINHA
Professor - Department of Design, ESAD School of Arts and Design of Portugal

Dr. Anna EFSTATHIOU
Associate Professor- Department of Architecture
University of Nicosia, Cyprus

Dr. Kika IOANNOU KAZAMIA
Associate Professor- Department of Architecture
University of Nicosia, Cyprus

Ms. Angela PETROU
Associate Professor- Department of Architecture
University of Nicosia, Cyprus

Dr. Niki SIOKI
Associate Professor- Department of Design and Multimedia
University of Nicosia, Cyprus



CONTENTS

NARRATIVES OF CRISIS: REPRESENTING CAPITALIST REALISM

PART I: GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES

Penelope Petsini
1. Panteion University
2. University of West Attica

"It is the old world that deserves the bile and the satire, this new one is merely its own self-effacement [...] Someone once said that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism. We can now revise that and witness the attempt to imagine capitalism by way of imagining the end of the world." [1]

Frederic Jameson

Two gentlemen dressed in suits are seated within a petite bourgeois living room permeated with the aroma of pine air freshener. The room's furniture rests upon elevated platforms, resembling art installations. One of the men is engrossed in a mystery novel while a television in the background broadcasts news of Konrad Adenauer's resignation as the Chancellor of the German Federal Republic, a recent announcement. Notably, they are not situated in a home environment; rather, they occupy the Möbelhaus Berges furniture store in Düsseldorf. Among the furnishings is a tea trolley displaying a vase of flowers and the literary works of Winston Churchill, alongside a wardrobe containing a felt suit that belongs to Joseph Beuys. These individuals are not alone; they are Konrad Lueg and Gerhard Richter, two of the four Düsseldorf-based artists — the other pair being Sigmar Polke and Manfred Kuttner — who have united as representatives of a new artistic movement in contrast to the dominant abstract art of the time. This moment unfolds on the 11th of October in 1963.

Under the guise of a public relations opportunity, the artists managed to persuade the store owner to provide them with space. An advertisement promoting the event invited attendees to witness "what is hailed in America as the greatest breakthrough in art since Cubism," a direct commentary on the swift rise of Pop Art. The event followed a predetermined sequence: Each visitor received a numbered token and was directed to a waiting room, awaiting their turn as indicated by a loudspeaker announcement. Upon entering, guests encountered papier-mâché depictions of J. F. Kennedy — who had visited Germany earlier that year — and the renowned gallery owner

Alfred Schmela. Decor included deer antlers (belonging to Richter's father-in-law), lifestyle magazines, and copies of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine* newspaper. Music played through the loudspeakers, periodically summoning groups of attendees by number into the main exhibition area where Richter and Lueg showcased themselves. The evening concluded with an upset shop owner, incensed by several pieces of damaged furniture, threatening to involve the police. Witnesses also noted the prevalent consumption of beer during the event.

This performance was titled "Living with Pop: A Demonstration for Capitalist Realism" and has since left a lasting impact, as it's considered a pivotal moment in the emergence of Capitalist Realism, a West German version of American Pop Art. While the term "capitalist realism" had been used earlier when the four artists exhibited their works in an abandoned butcher's shop, it was the "Living with Pop" performance that achieved legendary status. This artistic movement, characterized by its ironic yet programmatic name, combined an attraction to mass media and advertising with criticism of the consumer culture prevalent in post-war West German society during the "Economic Miracle." Within the back-

Figure 1: Guillaume Bression - Carlos Ayesta, from the series *Retrace our steps*, 2011-2016. Bression and Ayesta invited former residents from the Fukushima region to accompany them inside the no-go zone. The subjects were photographed engaging in normal activities against the backdrop of the historic nuclear accident.

Figure 2: Anna Skladmann, Jacob Shooting at Ballerinas, Moscow 2009, from the series *Little Adults*.. Skladmann depicts the emerging society of the "Nouveau Riche" in Russia, where children are groomed to become the "Elite."

Figure 3: Greg Girard, Neighborhood Demolition, Wulumuqi Lu, 2005, from the series *Phantom Shanghai*.

drop of the Cold War, Capitalist Realism emerged as a Western counterpart to Socialist Realism. Despite not initially aiming for overt political or social critique, it managed to spotlight middle-class values and the suppressive mechanisms of the post-war era. Echoing Capitalist Realism's influence, various critical movements emerged in the following years, shifting from abstract forms of expression to scrutinizing or satirizing consumer and celebrity culture.

The term resurfaced briefly about two decades later in Michael Schudson's 1984 work "Advertising, The Uneasy Persuasion,"[2] where it described advertising's capacity to assimilate existing capitalist values and present them to the public, portraying the sponsor as a patron of shared ideals. Schudson viewed advertising as a form of capitalist realism, an art that reshapes the world to align with the system's marketing needs. He argued that capitalist realist art, akin to other pervasive symbolic systems, often flattens rather than enriches experiences, fostering belief in capitalist institutions and values, especially when alternative expressions of values are relatively scarce in the cultural landscape. In essence, it's capitalism's self-affirmation, a way of saying "I love you" to itself.[3]

The term saw a resurgence over twenty-five years later, this time through the influential work of British theorist Mark Fisher.[4] In *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?*, Fisher's concept of the term expands beyond art or advertising's quasi-propagandistic role: in order to shed light on the evolution from "postmodernism" to "capitalist realism", he emphasizes the entrenchment of capitalism's dominance and the transformation of cultural dynamics. Fisher describes Capitalist Realism as "a pervasive atmosphere" that not only shapes cultural production but also regulates work and education, functioning as "an invisible barrier that confines both thought and action".[5]

In line with Frederic Jameson's widely known assertion that postmodernism has functioned as the cultural framework of late capitalism[6], today's interpretation of Capitalist Realism could be likened to the cultural underpinning of TINA – the prophetic declaration by Margaret Thatcher that "There Is No Alternative." This statement became an emblematic motto for the contemporary capitalist system, encapsulating its essence in the most concise form imaginable. Dwelling in a perpetual "eternal present," our ability to envision a future distinct from the present seems to have waned. Within this context, Capitalist Realism encapsulates the prevalent notion that not only is capitalism the sole feasible political and economic structure, but it has also become nearly inconceivable to imagine a coherent alternative.

Fisher discusses three key reasons for favoring the term "capitalist realism" over "postmodernism." Firstly, the 1980s marked a shift from the era of postmodernism to a deeper sense of exhaustion and cultural sterility. The existence of political alternatives to capitalism was still acknowledged in the 1980s, but by

the present time, this exhaustion has become more pervasive. The collapse of "Really Existing Socialism" and events like the Miners' Strike in Britain contributed to the establishment of capitalist realism, where the ideology of no alternatives became entrenched. Secondly, postmodernism involved a relationship with modernism, where modernist motifs were absorbed into popular culture. However, capitalist realism no longer engages in this confrontation with modernism. Instead, modernism is periodically revived as a frozen aesthetic style rather than an ideal for living. Thirdly, the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the passage of a generation have led to a situation where capitalism is so ingrained that the lack of alternatives is taken for granted. Capitalism has colonized both conscious and unconscious aspects of life. The struggle between subversion and incorporation has transformed into a situation of "precorporation," where desires and hopes are preemptively shaped by capitalist culture. The example of Kurt Cobain and Nirvana illustrates this deadlock. Cobain's wearied expression of despondency reflected a generation after history, trapped in a world where stylistic innovation seemed impossible. Cobain's realization that he was part of a predetermined spectacle mirrors Jameson's observation that postmodern culture exists in a world where imitation of dead styles dominates. However, the era of high existential angst embodied by Nirvana has given way to pastiche-rock, which reproduces forms of the past without the anxiety of innovation.

Capitalist Realism, therefore, serves as an ideological framework for perceiving capitalism's impact on politics, economics, and collective consciousness – encompassing both the spheres of economy and culture. Consequently, it possesses a critical capability to elucidate ideological constructs and cultural manifestations, detailing both the deepening strategies of global capitalism's accumulation and their modes of representation. This explanatory capacity, as recent scholars assert[7], accounts for the term's pertinence to social and cultural evolutions in recent years, leading to its resurgence in contemporary political and critical theory.

PART I: GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES

Bringing together researchers, theorists and visual artists, this special issue aims to provide a platform for discussions and research, which consider various aspects of the visual and its implication to both ideological formations and cultural forms related albeit not limited to the notion of crisis. The special issue is, in a way, a continuation of previous, relatively recent projects which the guest editor has curated or organised, and most invited contributors have been involved in: The group exhibitions “Capitalist Realism: Future Perfect” and “Capitalist Realism: Past Continuous” (2018-19, held at MOMus-Thessaloniki Museum of Photography and MOMus-Center of Experimental Arts, respectively)[8], as well as the conference “Representing Capitalist Realism: Crisis, Politics and the Visual” (23-24/11/2018, MOMus-Thessaloniki Museum of Photography & Rosa Luxemburg Foundation). Starting from this point, the issue aims to offer a comparative charting of the crisis discourse by adopting an inclusive definition of the term derived from new scholarship and the concept of “capitalist realism” as introduced by Fisher.

In the first essay of Part One, **Christos Mais** discusses the concept of capitalist realism, its impact on our ability to imagine alternatives, and the need for a utopian realism as a counter. Mais presents examples from history and literature to argue that capitalist realism has constrained our capacity to envision change. He then emphasizes the necessity for optimism and the revival of utopian thinking in order to challenge the dominance of capitalist realism and strive for a future that transcends the current dystopic reality. The essay concludes by advocating for a communist realism as an alternative to the prevailing capitalist narrative.

Whilst Mais contends that capitalist realism has stifled our ability to conceive alternative futures, underscoring the imperative for a utopian realism, **Julian Stallabrass'** visual essay of Brexit poignantly exemplifies the disorienting impact of capitalist realism on landscapes, identities, and historical ideals, amplifying the urgency for imaginative, utopian responses to counter prevailing narratives of crisis. Stallabrass engages in a nuanced exploration of the entwined narratives of Brexit and the transformation of Epping Forest, offering a photographic account

Figure 4: Greg Girard, Children on Rooftop, 1989, from the series *Kowloon Walled City*. The Kowloon Walled City was a distinctive phenomenon in Hong Kong: 35,000 people inhabiting over 300 interconnected high-rise buildings, constructed without the involvement of a single architect, densely packed into a city block near the end of the runway at Kai Tak International Airport.

that traverses the intricate socio-political landscape. The Forest, once emblematic of an enchanted natural order, becomes a focal point for examining the disorienting effects of enclosures, environmental degradation, and the broader crises of capitalism. Stallabrass intertwines the forest's historical significance, from its royal hunting origins to the contested commoning struggles, with the contemporary fissures exposed by the Brexit vote. Emblematic of an unsettled national identity, the Forest is presented as a complex space where historical ideals clash with the stark realities of suburbanization and ecological decline. Stallabrass's work transcends mere documentation, embodying the intertwining narratives of national identity, environmental decay, and the disintegration of traditional structures, reflecting the broader discourse of capitalist realism and narratives of crisis within contemporary society.

Johnny Miller's next photographic project documents some the world's most egregious disparities by employing aerial photography. From the vantage point above, cities like Cape Town, Rio de Janeiro, and Mumbai are portrayed as intricately divided landscapes, revealing systematic exclusion inherent in their urban structures. The aerial perspective, reminiscent of satellite imagery, is presented with the vivid colors and stylistic approach typical of a travel portfolio. This visual exploration highlights the unique footprint of each city, inviting viewers to comprehend urban spaces in a distinct manner. Miller's project, which focuses on the extreme dividing lines of inequality, not only offers a striking visual narrative but also serves as a catalyst for discussions on urban planning and equity. By presenting the topic of inequality through the lens of aerial photography, it becomes a potent tool for instigating dialogues on the ongoing crisis of urban inequity, pushing society to confront and address these systemic issues.

John Stathatos' essay, in turn, explores the concept of the "Capitalist Sublime" in visual representation, drawing from art history, philosophy, and contemporary examples. The Sublime here is defined through historical sources like Longinus and Edmund Burke, emphasizing notions of power and awe; the Capitalist Sublime aims to evoke these responses by depicting attributes of capitalism, such as power and consumption, without irony or questioning. The essay explores a range of examples of the Capitalist Sublime imagery, ranging from high-status artworks to commercial advertising, to discuss how objects gain awe-inspiring value through artistic selection or branding. Stathatos analyzes artists like Jeff Koons and photographer Edward Burtynsky, examining their depiction of the sublime within capitalist contexts. He also explores the military and political dimensions of power, notably the "Shock and Awe" doctrine in the Iraq War, while delving into how consumer goods, particularly luxury brands, utilize the sublime in advertising to convey notions of superiority. He concludes by suggesting that capitalism's pursuit of the sublime may result in a subpar imitation rather than an authentic experience.

Stefen Chow and **Huiyi Lin**'s "The Poverty Line" project represents an inquiry into the multifaceted dimensions of global poverty and inequality. Initiated in 2010, the project methodically examines the lived experience of poverty by articulating daily food choices within the confines of a country's poverty line. Over the course of a decade, the artists traversed 36 countries, capturing the intersectionality of economic conditions and culinary choices, thereby challenging preconceptions surrounding poverty and inequality. "The Poverty Line" project underscores the interconnectedness of global systems and the imperative for nuanced, cross-disciplinary engagement to address contemporary crises and foster meaningful social change.

The nuanced approach advocated by Chow and Lin is echoed in **Freya Najade**'s Strawberries in Winter portfolio which underscores the rapid pace of transformation driven by capitalist realist ideals. The series likely portrays large-scale, industrialized agricultural operations that prioritize efficiency and standardized appearance over local and sustainable practices. This visual documentation of the changing agricultural landscape serves as a critique of the capitalist realist mindset that prioritizes profit and consumption at the expense of environmental and societal well-being. From the intricate daily food choices of those living at the poverty line, as explored in Chow and Lin's project, to the visual critique of industrialized agriculture in "Strawberries in Winter," food serves as a powerful medium for understanding and addressing complex societal challenges.

Evangelia Ntarara's "Minimal Landscape", turns to the contemporary urban and

natural environment, particularly focusing on the impact of artificial lighting and light pollution. The essay discusses a collection of photographic works - from diverse genres like astrophotography, artistic documentary, and satellite photography - that highlight the intrusion of modern lighting into the dark background of space and how this phenomenon has transformed spatial experiences. In other words, it explores how technology, urbanization, and capitalist production have shaped the environment and emphasizes the consequences of light pollution on human health, ecosystems, and biodiversity. The article concludes by highlighting the need for an ecological approach to photography that documents and raises awareness about the environmental challenges posed by excessive artificial lighting and its impact on the natural world.

The visual essay "Portraits from Above, Hong Kong's Rooftop Informal Communities" is also about urban environment. It offers a tangible portrayal of a world teetering between hope and despair, enriching our understanding of the complexities within the urban landscape. **Rufina Wu** and **Stefan Canham** examine the phenomenon of unauthorized rooftop dwellings in Hong Kong's central districts. Focused on the makeshift homes created by migrants seeking affordable housing, the project reveals a unique social and architectural history often overlooked at street level. Through a comprehensive approach involving photographs, architectural drawings, and interviews, Wu and Canham unveil a world shaped by personal necessity, characterized by its temporary yet enduring nature. The work, as **Hercules Papaioannou** argues in the text introducing the work, captures the juxtaposition of these informal settlements against the backdrop of sleek skyscrapers, exposing invisible slums within the heart of Hong Kong. Providing a nuanced analytical perspective on the sociocultural pressures of the modern metropolis, the series highlights the resilience of communities existing under the shadow of the law.

In the next essay, **Nina Kotamanidou** explores the portrayal of selfhood in contemporary visual arts within the expanded realm of art as discourse. Centering on Mark Fisher's contention that modern academic discussions often overlook class, resulting in a classless conception of self, her study examines current trends in self-realism. Through analysis of works like Richard Billingham's "Ray's a Laugh" and reality TV shows focused on poverty, the research investigates how self-representation intersects with class representation. The essay employs Billingham's controversial artworks as a lens to explore broader selfhood depictions and their connections to class dynamics, suggesting that these mediated realities often lack class considerations, contributing to a commodified understanding of selfhood. The discussion navigates the complexities of realism in an age where visual narratives intertwine with various forms of representation. Nevertheless, it acknowledges the challenges of representing self and class within a commodified visual landscape while advocating for an exploration of diverse perspectives and desires that defy the confines of late capitalism's limitations. One might add here that, as per Fisher's observations, reality TV grapples with the perpetual challenge of blurring the line between fact and fiction, prompting questions about participants' authenticity and the reliability of audience votes. The catchphrase "You decide" from shows like Big Brother epitomizes a shift in power dynamics, aligning with Baudrillard's concept of control through feedback. In this modern iteration, the audience assumes a position of influence, surpassing Orwellian notions, and extending into various domains, including education and government, where cybernetic feedback systems wield considerable impact.

Finally, **Andrea Stultiens**' contribution, positioned as both an artistic portfolio and an academic visual essay, intricately navigates a speculative dialogue with the late Ugandan chief and intellectual, Ham Mukasa (ca. 1870-1956), to bring to life the complexities of a vague colonial legacy. The intention is to challenge and intricately examine our connection to archival materials, unraveling the intricate web of privilege and precarity that surrounds their compilation and existence. This project seeks to blur the lines between art and academia, employing a speculative conversation with Mukasa as a means to activate historical materials and prompt a reevaluation of our perceptions and understanding of colonial legacies.

The issue concludes with a book review of Verso's 2021 collective volume *Capitalism and the Camera: Essays on Photography and Extraction*, edited by Kevin Coleman and Daniel James.

Figure 5: Richard Misrach, Hazardous Waste Containment Site, Dow Chemical Corporation, Plaquemine, Louisiana, 1998, from the series *Petrochemical America* [courtesy Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco, Pace/MacGill Gallery, New York and Marc Selwyn Fine Art, Los Angeles].

NOTES

[1] Frederic Jameson, «Future City» in *New Left Review* 21, May-June 2003.
[2] Michael Schudson, "Advertising as Capitalist Realism," in *Advertising, Uneasy Persuasion: Its Dubious Impact on American Society*, (New York: Basic Boob, 1984).
[3] Ibid, p. 232.
[4] Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is there no Alternative?* (Winchester; Washington: Zero, 2009).
[5] ibid, p.16.
[6] Jameson argues that the reach of multinational capital has expanded to infiltrate non-capitalist realms such as Nature and the Unconscious, eroding spaces that once allowed for critical resistance. This global condition, characterized as a disheartening phase, embodies the core of postmodernism, according to Jameson. Conversely, the concept of capitalist realism suggests a worsening scenario, emphasizing that, as financialization and commodification progressed, capitalism has strengthened its control over established territories, limiting the possibilities for alternative outcomes. See Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Duke University Press, 1991).
[7] Alison Shonkwiler, Leigh Claire La Berge (eds.), *Reading Capitalist Realism* (University of Iowa Press, 2014).
[8] Penelope Petsini (ed.), *Capitalist Realism: Future Perfect | Past Continuous* (University of Macedonia Press, 2018).
Artists presented in the exhibitions include: Manolis Baboussis, Stefan Chow & Lin Huiyi, Greg Girard, Mishka Henner, Jacqueline Hassink, Nick Hannes, Paula Luttringer, Susan Meiselas, Richard Misrach, Freya Najade, Johnny Miller, Trevor Paglen, Mark Peterson, Paris Petridis, Jannis Psychopedis, Rosângela Rennó, Andrea Stultiens, Anna Skladmann, Ang Song Nian, Carlos Spottorno, Julian Stallabrass, Paolo Woods & Gabriele Galimberti, Rufina Wu & Stefan Canham, Marvin Tang, Woong Soak Teng, Nikolas Ventourakis, Robert Zhao.

REFERENCES

Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is there no Alternative?* (Winchester; Washington: Zero, 2009).
Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Duke University Press, 1991).
Frederic Jameson, «Future City» *in New Left Review 21*, May-June 2003.
Penelope Petsini (ed.), *Capitalist Realism: Future Perfect | Past Continuous* (University of Macedonia Press, 2018).
Michael Schudson, "Advertising as Capitalist Realism," in *Advertising*, *Uneasy Persuasion: Its Dubious Impact on American Society,* (New York: Basic Boob, 1984).
Alison Shonkwiler, Leigh Claire La Berge (eds.), *Reading Capitalist Realism* (University of Iowa Press, 2014).

PENELOPE PETSINI Born in Bucharest, 1973. Studied Photography in Athens and UK (University of London, Goldsmiths College –MA in Image and Communication; University of Derby –PhD) sponsored by the State Scholarship Foundation (I.K.Y.). She is a Doctor of Philosophy in Arts and Humanities, specialized in photography. Her research interests, both in terms of theory and practice, focus on photography and its relation to personal and collective memory, history and politics. She has exhibited and published extensively both in Greece and internationally. She curated a series of photography and visual art exhibitions, the most recent being “Another Life: Human Flows | Unknown Odysseys” (Thessaloniki Museum of Photography, 5-11/2016) and “Sites of Memory” (Benaki Museum, Athens, 6-7/2016). She also curated Photobiennale 2018, that is two international group exhibitions at the Museum of Photography and the Center of Contemporary Art/ MOMus "Capitalist Realism: Future Perfect | Past Continuous" (28/9/2018 - 29/3/2019, Thessaloniki), and the eponymous book (University of Macedonia Press, 2018). Recent publications also include *Sites of Memory: Photography, Collective Memory and History* (Athens: Hellenic Center of Photography & NEON Foundation, 2016); the collective readers *Censorship in Greece* (Athens: Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, 2016) and *Companion of Censorship in Greece: Weak Democracy, Dictatorship, Metapolitefsi* (Athens: Kastaniotis, 2018) co-edited with Dimitris Christopoulos; as well as *Photography and collective identities: Greek Photography Studies I* (Athens: Koukkida 2021)and *Photography and the anthropological turn: Greek Photography Studies II* (Athens: Koukkida 2023) co-edited with John Stathatos. She has had affiliated appointments as lecturer of photography theory and contemporary art since 2004. Since 2018, she is lecturing in the MA course “Censorship: Interdisciplinary approaches” in the Department of Political Science and History, Panteion University, Athens. She is currently teaching at the Department of Photography and Audiovisual Arts, University of West Attica.

CAPITALIST REALITY AND (THE NEED FOR AN) UTOPIAN REALISM

Christos Mais
Department of Culture, Creative Media and Industries, University of Thessaly

Keywords:
Capitalist Realism
Utopia
Dystopia
Communism
Liberal Capitalism

ABSTRACT

Capitalist realism is globally dominant. This article argues that this teleology is closely related with Francis Fukuyama's "end of history" and that this combination prescribes a dystopian present and future. By revisiting "utopian" visions in history, such as in the struggles of Ernesto "Che" Guevara or Mao Zedong, or in literature, as in the works of Jules Verne or Alexander Bogdanov, I propose that we need to revisit utopia in terms of politics as well as in terms of fiction.

CHRISTOS MAIS is a cultural and publishing studies expert based in Thessaloniki, Greece. He is a teaching fellow at the Department of Culture, Creative Media and Industries of the University of Thessaly and since 2019 he is the co-founder and senior advisor of Psifides Publishing. His research interests vary from oral, social and cultural history to publishing and cultural studies. He is currently working on the status of the contemporary publishing sector in Greece and Cyprus with a special interest to publishing in respect to cultural policies and the publishing sector as part of the cultural economy.

1. INTRODUCTION

> *The defeat we suffered at the turn of the twenty-first century, however, must be measured by different criteria. Capitalism has won because it has succeeded in shaping our lives and our mental habitus, because it has succeeded in imposing itself as an anthropological model, a "way of life".*
>
> *Enzo Traverso, Revolution: An Intellectual History*

The article interweaves the different perspectives and angles that have preoccupied my academic and political practice, shaping my identity as a scholar and political subject. Cultural studies, history and politics, academia and activism are the starting points for this essay on capitalism, realism, utopia, dystopia, and the dialectics interlinking them. More specifically, I argue that capitalist realism is a teleology going hand-in-hand with the teleology of the "end of history" and the eternal triumph of liberal (capitalist) modernity. I propose that we need to proceed to the construction of a utopian realism in order to totally deconstruct the above teleology.

I recently revisited the favorite author of my childhood, Jules Verne, whose daring imagining the future of humanity always intrigued me. In his book *Sti Maggelania* (2017) the key character –an idealist, an anarchist– has the choice of either becoming a realist and compromise or committing suicide since, despite his efforts, he cannot escape from the capitalist and colonial reality. And although everything leads to the latter in the end, he chooses the former. He further proceeds to formulate his own take to the various socio-economic systems, either already applied or not. He rejects socialism and anarchy as utopian, as inapplicable, since he believes that humans are greedy and irrational by nature, but he also rejects capitalism that he finds unable to function in a rational and organized manner so that everybody would have their basic needs covered. I suggest that here Verne expressed in the literary field the There Is No Alternative (TINA) theorem a century before Margaret Thatcher. Needless to say, both the historical imagination and the practices of the socio-economic system differ and need to be historicized each time.

At the same time and in contrast to Thatcher, he rejected capitalist reality since he found it appalling. Socialism and anarchism were considered to be imaginary utopias, but capitalism was nothing but a living dystopia. Thus, Verne does not accept the lesser evil position that we have constantly heard and have faced in both Greece and abroad from the early 1990s and especially today. Whenever criticized, governments argue TINA — and, if they are removed from office, their opponents will be much worse. We have had a lot of that in Greece and, despite that fact, they often present themselves as alternatives to their predecessors in the first place. At the same time pro-capitalists argue that nothing lies beyond capitalism except chaos, although there have been shifts within than front. For example, Francis Fukuyama, the scholar who once claimed 'the end of history' and the unquestioned domination of "liberal democracy was recently "enlightened" (1992). He decided that the end of history wasn't really the end, that "the universalization of Western liberal democracy" is not "the final form of human government" and that "socialism ought to come back" (Eaton 2018). My reading of Fukuyama's interview suggests that when capitalism apologetic becomes realistic –as in times of a dire and long capitalist crisis– they seek socialism, although needless to say that the term usually suffers in such hands where socialism merely equals a welfare state.

So, in its essence, regardless the historical period and its specific context, the question remains the same: Can we imagine the end of the current status quo and thus envision the world that would replace the one we are living in? Mark Fisher, the theorist that coined the ter"capitalist realism", titled the opening chapter of his book by the same name: "It's easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism" (2009: 1), a phrase that is attributed to Fredric Jameson (2009: 2).

While writing these lines, I brought to memory Paul Lafargue's *The Right to be Lazy.* Lafargue wrote this pamphlet in 1850. This was just two years after the defeat of the 1848 working-class insurrections that shook Europe (Clark 2023). The French insurrection of 1848 was defeated as the workers did not seize power and the Provisional Government repealed "the law that limited the working day to ten hours" (Marx, 1850). The pamphlet was Lafargue's satirical response to this new situation and at the same

time denoted a political imagination, the right to be lazy, that juxtaposed capitalist reality of the (extended working) time. What triggered the reflection on Lafargue's work were the recent statements of the Greek Minister of Labour, Adonis Georgiadis, proposing that a toiler could work for two employers, meaning a 16-hour working day (Keep Talking Greece, 2023). This was partially refuted, but the Greek government declared its intentions of introducing a "bill... [that] will allow people to legally work two jobs in a single day, but will limit total employment hours to 13" (Kathimerini, 2023). Almost 150 years after Lafargue's pamphlet was published, we see capitalist reality insisting on the expansion of the working day, or, as Lafargue and his father-in-law, Karl Marx, would put it, on intensifying the exploitation of the working class. What seems to differ is the political imagination that would not only question capitalist reality but would be bold enough to counter it with demanding "laziness" instead.

2. THE REALITY OF CAPITALISM

This is the ultimate victory of contemporary capitalism since it managed to deprive "the people" of the utopian vision. This is something even more significant from Marx's assessment in regard to capital ownership of the means of production, depriving it from the wider population. Today,

> [u]topia seems strangely out of place in the age of globalization. In its various forms, incarnations, attitudes, and caricatures over the years, utopian discourse appeared to belong to worlds of hope, of possibility, of undiscovered countries and promising futures. In the utopian imagination, there were supposed to be ideal forms outside of this mundane existence, or hitherto unknown lands to discover, or a promised future that would unfold over time, any of which would disclose a utopian formation unavailable to us in the here and now. Yet, today, such ideals, places, and times seem all but foreclosed, and it is difficult, if not impossible, even to imagine radical alternatives to the status quo (Tally, 2013: vii).

Contemporary capitalism deprives us the ability to imagine our lives beyond itself and it managed to do so by achieving the impossible. This central argument of Mark Fisher –among others– was formulated just before the global financial crisis of 2008. Nevertheless, the continuing financial crisis, the CoVid-19 pandemic (Pabst, 2020), and the climate crisis did not spark new utopias. In contrast, a dystopian present and future seems to be solidifying.

I shall now provide a few examples highlighting the above. In the 1960s, Ernesto "Che" Guevara said, "Be realistic, demand the impossible." During that time, it would be impossible to think that a capitalist would be accepted as a member of the Communist Party of China (Holbig, 2002), that a black person would become president of the USA, and with uprisings in half of the world, that capitalism would ever be considered as the one and only viable socio-economic system without a single alternative. Today capitalism made all the above possible. We often counter not only the skepticism towards the possibility of a radical change, let's say a revolution, but even that of reforms. Apart from the means of production, capitalism seems to have gained a monopoly on imagination and optimism since almost nobody can imagine a world without obeyond capitalism and the adherents of capitalism are confident of this socio-economic system being everlasting. Or, as Frederic Jameson put it, "[s]omeone once said that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism. We can now revise that and witness the attempt to imagine capitalism by way of imagining the end of the world." (Jameson, 2003: 76).

It could be argued that capitalist realism is not presented as an ideological position nor as a theoretical schema. It is rather presented as a fixed and unfeasible reality. In the words of Mark Fisher, who has popularized the term "capitalist realism":

> Capitalist realism doesn't appear in the first instance, then, as a political position. It emerges instead as a pragmatic adjustment – "this is the way thing are now". This sense of resignation, of fatalism, is crucial to the "realism". Here we can distinguish between neoliberalism and capitalist realism. Capitalist realism isn't the direct endorsement of neoliberal doctrine; it's the idea that, whether we like it or not, the world is governed by neoliberal ideas, and that won't change. There's no point fighting the inevitable. (Fisher & Gilbert, 2013: 90)

In reality the terms are far more than what they are presented to be. Jodi Dean has managed to capture the core of the term in just two sentences:

> On the one hand, "capitalist realism" designates a general ideological formation, that of late neoliberalism, wherein all illusions and hopes for equality have been shed. On the other, it is a more specific ideological weapon,an argument wielded against those who might try to challenge capitalist hegemony (Dean & Fisher, 2014: 26).

3. THE NECESSITY FOR OPTIMISM

Thus, if we can understand capitalist realism as the pessimist acceptance of the total and perpetual domination of capitalism, in order to counter it, wouldn't we need to coin a term proposing the optimism for a paradigm shift from a capitalist reality to another one?

But what does it mean to be optimistic for change? Let's go a bit back in history. In 1921, thirteen Chinese men, representing no more than fifty others, met on a boat on South Lake. There they declared the establishment of the Chinese Communist Party with the task to gain power and establish another society in China. The total population of China at the time was 473.673.000; thus, this band of thirteen represented 0.000011% of the total population. Nevertheless, they were really optimistic that change could take place and 28 years later, in 1949, one of them, Mao Zedong, declared the founding of the People's Republic of China. Although I am pretty certain of course that those thirteen communists on a boat had not imagined China as it is today –as it is depicted in the photographs of Greg Girard[2] – and Francis Fukuyama applauding it as being the only plausible rival to liberal democracy[3] – even if the future they envisioned was not materialized, they still had a vision.

Another example is that of Fidel Castro in 1953. After a failed attempt to gain power in Cuba, he made a four-hour speech in court where he concluded by saying "history will absolve me" (Castro, 1953). Three years later, in 1956, he made his second attempt with just 82 men, and in just a couple of days only a dozen were left standing by his side. Three years after that, in 1959, Fidel Castro led the Cuban revolution.

These extreme examples of just a handful of men and women –and there were many more, not only in politics but also in art, until the 1960s– are indicative of the realism of utopia, which we are, nowadays, lacking. From the late 19th century and until the late 1970s, there was a strong belief that there could be an alternative. The struggle for a communist or anarchist future, or even for a countercultural present, seemed to be on the agenda of those times. No more! More than a century later, utopian optimism gave its place to the "no future" pessimism. What seemed to be a warning or even a waking call by the British Punk Band Sex Pistols[4] was gradually becoming an accepted reality.

This lack of optimism for change is what makes capitalist realism seem real, realistic and eternal. As Petsini lays out in the catalogue accompanying this photo exhibition even the term "Capitalist Realism", which was initially coined as some sort of criticism to capitalism, was reframed to have the opposite meaning (Petsini, 2018: 9). Capitalist realism is presented as something objectively rational or rationally objective, something preposterous if one brings to mind the absurdity of capitalism. Nevertheless, capitalism is not presented as real and eternal because this argument is not deconstructed but due to the fact that reality does not disprove it by the provision of a solid alternative.

4. REVISITING UTOPIA

In the times of Jules Verne whose work has paradoxically been influential for this piece, utopia was constantly on the agenda. Utopia characterizes the work of a number of great authors, with some utopias being more realistic, as Chernichevsky's (1989), or more futuristic like H. G. Wells' (1923)[5] or Ivan Yefremov's (2004). Utopia was far from being considered a fiction. It was a realistic fact ready to be made, and the question was when and which one of those utopias envisioned would be materialized. Utopia was reality in the making rather than fantasy being made. Nowadays the dystopic present seems to be continuous and therefore representing the future. There were times that the present what liberalism claims to be the actual. In a world falsified by the spectacular extension of the commodity form into an entire totality, the shards and hints of a diagram for actual social forms and relations might then be what

constitutes the utopian. Wark, 2014)

There cannot be a new utopia if this utopia does not break the chains of a value-dominated mode of production and thus of society.

> As the real of capital, value can never appear without its veil. The dream of an immediate value, undistorted and unconcealed, is precisely the limit of any possible overcoming. [...] But we must recall that communism does not arrive as a revelation but as abolition. Communism is "real" precisely to the extent that it has done away with the value form (this is why Lacan's is a psychoanalysis of capitalism in particular). And this then is our last real, the one that doesn't appear in Capital except as a horizon. Communism achieves its realism by doing away with the real of capital; this is the real movement, die wirkliche Bewegung. Its aesthetic would be what must be called, if only to provoke, communist realism. (Clover, 2014: 245)

While Joshua Clover's above passage might be read as either provocative or wishful thinking, in reality it is a sober – provoking maybe but not provocative – and very insightful conceptualization of the new reality, the only reality that can supersede the old. In a way Clover is applying the concept of contradictions which is a key Maoist philosophical feature.[6] And it is not easy to disregard these conceptualizations of Mao since the "great helmsman" was one of the thirteen communists on that boat, and 28 years later he led the Chinese communists to victory, realizing communist utopia, at least for a period of time. So, if there can be no other alternative to capitalist realism than the communist one, shouldn't we accept communist and utopian realism as being one? Thus, the necessity for utopia is in reality the necessity for a communist realism, the counterpart of the dominant capitalist realism. "Utopia is not a moment of hope against the tyranny of the real; utopia is a moment of the real against the unreality of hope, in an era when hope has been privatized", wrote McKenzie Wark (2014). It reminds us of the striking photographs by Johnny Miller (Petsini, 2018: 76-81) where the trenchtowns worldwide are excluded from hope by wealthy property owners using fences, walls and security guards.[7]

5. UTOPIAN TRANSFORMED TO DYSTOPIAS: FROM BOGDANOV'S *RED STAR* TO WU MING'S *PROLETKULT*

Revisiting utopia does not necessarily lead to new utopias. In contrast, it may lead to dystopias. The Bolshevik Alexander Bogdanov, a man of many hats, one of which was that of a sci-fi novelist, wrote *Red Star* and published it in 1908 in the wake of the Russian Revolution of 1905. *Red Star* was "a novel of revolutionary optimism namely set in a far-distant utopia", i.e., planet Mars (Stites, 1984: 3). His work was in a way a departure from the dystopian Russian present of repression that followed the 1905 Revolution. Bogdanov himself was imprisoned and exiled during this time (White, 2018).
The story is set in Russia in the aftermath of the 1905 Revolution, when the hero, Leonid, a left-wing Social Democrat, is befriended by Menni, a visitor from Mars, who takes him to visit the red planet. The Martians have already estab-

lished a collectivist society, and the description of its features forms the substance of the novel (White, 2018: 200).

At the same time the vision of the Bolshevik author for this communist utopia set in a far distant planet was cultivated and inspired by the potential of a Red Earth. Despite the defeat of the Bolsheviks, optimism for a future victory and thus of materialising the communist vision was still imminent.

The Italian writing collective, Wu Ming, published *Proletkult*,[8] almost a 110 years later. It is a novel set in 1927-1928, two decades after the Red Planet was published and ten years after the October Revolution of 1917. Bogdanov was no longer a Bolshevik, and he was expelled by the Party (at Lenin's initiative) in 1909 and never rejoined (Stites, 1984: 8; White, 2018). Nevertheless, he continued his cultural work, most notably through the cultural organization Proletarskaia Kultura, better known as Proletkult, that he co-founded with Anatoli Lunacharsky, a prominent Bolshevik (White, 2018). After Lenin's opposition to Proletkult, he turned to scientific experiments that had their share in utopia. (Stites, 1984: 8) According to White (2018), he was arrested by the GPU in 1923 and stayed in custody for five weeks, and despite his release he had fallen from Bolshevik grace.

Figure: Victor Bulla, Leningrad 1924.

Wu Ming's novel has 1927, the year before Bogdanov's death, as its starting point. The writing collective provide a retrospective of Bogdanov's life from the pre-revolutionary years of expropriations and bank robberies, to the Red Star, Proletkult, and to his scientific work at the Institute of Haematology and Blood Transfusions, which he proposed, organized and directed until his death, from such a blood transfusion (White, 2018). Wu Ming's Bogdanov is in constant dialogue with the post-revolutionary Russian condition, which is described as a dystopia, but also with the *Red Star*, which was supposedly based on what Bogdanov believed to be hallucinations experienced by one of his comrades, Leonid Volok, who was severely injured by an explosion during an expropriation (Wu Ming 2021: 70-71). Volok described these hallucinations in detail to Bogdanov when the former resurfaced seven months after the explosion. Bogdanov took responsibility, on behalf of the Bolshevik Centre, to investigate what happened (Wu Ming, 2021: 115-127). In 1927, a young woman, Deni, met with Bogdanov and told him that she was Leonid's daughter and that she had come from the planet Nakun, which was the name that Leonid had said to Bogdanov in his descriptions (Wu Ming, 2021: 108-111). The latter used Mars instead in his novel, in which Deni was searching for her father, who Bogdanov had not seen since he had been injured. Bogdanov starts searching for him too. He spends time with Deni and she shows him the differences between Soviet and Nakunian socialism (Wu Ming, 2021: 230). In the end, Bogdanov does not die and instead he boards on a star ship to Nakun, which he reveals as his own return to the planet (Wu Ming, 2021: 347). Bogdanov, like his hero after the defeat of 1905, flees a dystopia to (re)visit a utopia.

CONCLUSION

The collapse of the so-called existing socialist countries in 1989 seemed to be the final nail in the coffin of alternatives to capitalism, marking a temporary end to visions of utopia at the time. The visions apply even to those utopian dreamers, e.g., anarchists, leftists, who were critical, skeptical or even opposed to these regimes. It felt that it was the end of the world as we knew it. Likewise, the anarchist utopia had been buried half a century earlier in the ashes of the Spanish civil war. Capitalism was victorious despite the returning crisis, and countries that tried to go another way through the revolutions that marked the first half of the twentieth century, such as Russia and China, returned to the capitalist womb.

Capitalist realism presents the current status quo as a permanent and irreversible condition. Consequently, it is a highly political position in defense of the current socio-economic and political system. Utopian realism, on the other hand, is not a contradiction in terms nor an empty vessel. Utopian realism is the political and social imaginary of what the world could be/become, and, as such, it is questioning capitalist realism as the first step towards a new world.

In 1987, the American rock band R.E.M. sang, "It's the end of the world as we know it" and they felt fine with it. My thoughts are that we should not feel fine, that neither history nor the world is ending, and the end of the world is not coming before the end of capitalism, although the latter might cause the former (wars, climate change, etc.) at least for some of us. We need our own R.E.M. that will send us back to the future – back to the time when Alvin Lee, singer in British rock band Ten Years After, sang "I would love to change the world / but I don't know what to do", and try imagining a future we would wish to live in, in order to make some baby steps towards what is to be done to move beyond the contemporary dystopia present and towards an utopian, that is, communist, future!

NOTES

[1] I would like to thank Penelope Petsini for the challenge and opportunity to write this essay and Panos Kompatsiaris for his invaluable comments.

[2] See especially Girard's work on Shanghai. A sample of this work is available at http://www.greggirard.com/work/phantom-shanghai-(book)-9. Also see Girard 2018: 128-133.

[3] "The Chinese are arguing openly that it is a superior one because they can guarantee stability and economic growth over the long run in a way that democracy can't..." Eaton (2018).

[4] "There's no future
No future
No future for you"
Sex Pistols, "God Save the Queen", Nevermind the Bollocks (1977).

[5] On the utopian visions of H. G. Wells, see Simon J. James (2012), Maps of Utopia: H. G. Wells, Modernity & the End of Culture, Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press; In particular pp. 125-156.

[6] "We often speak of 'the new superseding the old'. The supersession of the old by the new is a general, eternal and inviolable law of the universe. The transformation of one thing into another, through leaps of different forms in accordance with its essence and external conditions – this is the process of the new superseding the old. In each thing there is contradiction between its new and its old aspects, and this gives rise to a series of struggles with many twists and turns. As a result of these struggles, the new aspect changes from being minor to being major and rises to predominance, while the old aspect changes from being major to being minor and gradually dies out. And the moment the new aspect gains dominance over the old, the old thing changes qualitatively into a new thing. It can thus be seen that the nature of a thing is mainly determined by the principal aspect of the contradiction, the aspect which has gained predominance. When the principal aspect which has gained predominance changes, the nature of a thing changes accordingly". (Mao Zedong, 1937).

[7] See Miller's Unequal Scenes project https://unequalscenes.com.

[8] The book was published in Italian in 2018. For the purposes of this article, I have used the Greek translation: Wu Ming. 2021. *Proletkult*, Anna Griva (trans.). Athens: Ekdoseis ton Synadelfon.

REFERENCES

Castro, F. (1953). History Will Absolve Me. https://www.marxists.org/history/cuba/archive/castro/1953/10/16.htm

Chernichevsky, N. (1989). *What Is to Be Done?*. Ithaca, NY, US: Cornell University Press.

Clark, C. (2023). *Revolutionary Spring: Fighting for a New World 1848-1849*. London: Penguin.

Dean, J. & Fisher, M. (2014). "We Can't Afford to Be Realists: A Conversation". In A. Shonkwiler & L. C. La Berge (eds.), *Reading Capitalist Realism* (pp. 26-38), Iowa City: University of Iowa Press.

Eaton, G. (2018, October 17). Francis Fukuyama interview: "Socialism ought to come back". The New Statesman. https://www.newstatesman.com/culture/observations/2018/10/francis-fukuyama-interview-socialism-ought-come-back.

Fisher, M & Gilbert, J. (2013). Capitalist Realism and Neoliberal Hegemony: A Dialogue. *New Formations*, 80/81, pp. 89-101.

Fisher M. (2009). *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?*. Winchester, UK: Zero Books.

Fukuyama F. (1992). T*he End of History and the Last Man*, New York: Free Press.

Girard, G. (2018). Works, in P. Petsini (ed.), *Capitalist Realism. Future Perfect | Past Continuous* (pp. 128-133)., Thessaloniki: University of Macedonia Press - Thessaloniki Museum of Photography,

Holbig H. (2002). The Party and Private Entrepreneurs in the CPC. *Copenhagen Journal of Asian Studies*, 16, pp. 30-56. https://doi.org/10.22439/cjas.v16i0.4.

James, S. J. (2012). *Maps of Utopia: H. G. Wells, Modernity & the End of Culture*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.

Jameson, F. (2003). 'Future City', *New Left Review*, 21 (May-June), pp. 65-79.

Kathimerini. (2023, August 5). Employment rules in Greece to be tweaked. https://www.ekathimerini.com/economy/1217125/employment-rules-in-greece-to-be-tweaked/.

Keep Talking Greece. (2023, August 4). Labor Nightmare: Greeks Can Work 16H/Day for 2 Different Employers. https://www.keeptalkinggreece.com/2023/08/04/labor-nightmare-greece-employers-16h-work/.

Marx, K. (1850). The Class Struggles in France, 1848 to 1850. Marxists.org. https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1850/class-struggles-france/ch02.htm.

Pabst, A. (2020). Death of Utopia. *Telos*, 191 (Summer), pp. 193-198. doi: 10.3817/0620191193.

Petsini, P. (2018). 'Introduction: Capitalist Realism: The loss of the future and the persistent past'. In P. Petsini (ed.), *Capitalist Realism. Future Perfect | Past Continuous* (pp. 6-18). Thessaloniki: University of Macedonia Press - Thessaloniki Museum of Photography.

Stites, R. (1984). 'Fantasy and Revolution: Alexander Bogdanov and the Origins of Bolshevik Science Fiction'. In L. R. Graham & R. Stites (eds.), Charles Rougle (trans.), *Red Star: The First Bolshevik Utopia* (pp. 1-16), Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Tally, R. T., Jr.. (2013). *Utopia in the Age of Globalization: Space, Representation, and the World-System*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Verne, J. (2017). *Sti Maggelania* [In Maggelania]. Gemeliaris, Christos E. (trans.). Athens: Stasei Ekpiptontes.

Wark, M. (2014, October 28) 'Utopian Realism'. Public Seminar.org. http://www.publicseminar.org/2014/10/utopian-realism/

Wells, H. G. (1923). Men Like Gods. Gutenberg.net. http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks02/0200221h.html.

White, J. D. (2018). *Red Hamlet: The Life and Ideas of Alexander Bogdanov*. Leiden and Boston: Brill.

Wu Ming. (2021). *Proletkul*t, Anna Griva (trans.). Athens: Ekdoseis ton Synadelfon.

Yefremov, I. (2004). *Andromeda: A Space-Age*, Amsterdam: Fredonia Books.

Zedong, M. (1937). On Contradiction. Marxists.org. https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-1/mswv1_17.htm

UNEQUAL SCENES

Johnny Miller
1. Code For Africa,
2. Global Atlantic Fellow for Social and Economic Equity, London School of Economics.

Keywords:
Capitalist Realism
Poverty
Inequality
Photography

ABSTRACT

This photographic project documents some of the world's most extreme dividing lines of inequality using aerial photography. Seen from above, cities as diverse as Cape Town, Rio de Janeiro, Mumbai and more are portrayed as systematically exclusionary, with the urban footprints of their buildings inviting the viewer to understand each city in a unique way. The aerial nature of the photographs is reminiscent of satellite images, but presented with the color and style of a travel portfolio. By presenting such a topic as inequality through aerial photography the hope is to spark discussions on urban planning and equity. pitalist realism is globally dominant.

JOHNNY MILLER is a photographer and multimedia storyteller based in South Africa and the USA. He is currently a Senior Fellow at Code For Africa, and a Global Atlantic Fellow for Social and Economic Equity at the London School of Economics. Johnny is also the co-founder of africanDRONE, a pan-African organization committed to using drones for good.

UNEQUAL SCENES

Severe economic inequality is largely a consequence of human-enacted policies. Tin shacks in Cape Town are separated from mansions with barbed wire and concrete walls. Millionaires in high-rise aeries in Mumbai gaze down on informal settlements, their roofs covered in blue tarps to keep out the monsoon rains. Pollution-spewing highways belch toxins onto playgrounds in underserved areas of New York City.

Walls, highways and other infrastructure usually keep us from seeing the extent of the problem, usually by design. That always bothered me. By using drones and helicopters for this project, I wanted to peek over those walls, and enter into forbidden liminal territory. For the first time in our history, drones and social media are a cost-effective solution for depicting and then disseminating these separations. It's hard not to look straight down on the divisions and not have an unsettling realization that we, the people gazing at these scenes, are also complicit.

The scale and regularity of urban structures constructed to separate people, in many different cities and cultures all across the world, points to the systemic nature of inequality. Evidence shows that high levels of inequality are correlated with worse health outcomes, like lower life expectancy, higher rates of heart failure, and higher levels of infant mortality. More equal societies are happier and more cohesive, and to a large degree more prosperous. Countries that are more equal tend to have far more generous, encompassing and egalitarian social systems.

I see these photos as reflecting an intentional disenfranchisement of poor people, but also a catalog of building practices on the cusp of what may well be the last years of the "informal settlement". Many cities are taking steps to remove informal settlements (or slums, whatever you want to call them, etc), which on the surface seems to be a positive development. The truth is more complicated, as often more "regular" looking homes, at least from above, are a poor indicator of the shape and conditions of the internal units. Moreover, I find a perplexing sense of humanity, and perhaps even resilience, in the "less formal" parts of cities. The struggle to exist near the center of a city, with access to work and transportation and services, and to consider that city "your own", instead of marginalized on the periphery, is also reflected here.

I enjoy the freedom that aerial photography allows, an expansive sense of travel and distance. There is a beauty in the composition and color of the earth as seen through a rectangular frame, much as the pages of atlases and maps captivated me when I was younger. I hope that the discussions around equity, design, and justice are somewhat furthered by this project, as well capturing some essence of strange beauty in our built environment.

Figure 1: The famous Santa Marta favela, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

Brazil is undoubtedly one of the most fascinating countries on the planet. For starters, it's huge: Over 211 million people and the fifth biggest country by area. It's diverse: the racial makeup of the average Brazilian ranges from European to African to Indigenous to Asian (São Paulo actually has the world's largest Japanese population outside of Japan). It's got incredible cultural, religious, and culinary heritage that are both traditional and new. It's instantly recognizable: the Amazon rainforest, the beaches, the Carnival are all here, and they are truly larger than life. Better than those, though, is the warmth and welcoming of Brazilian people. In most countries, this might be said as a platitude without really meaning it, but in Brazil it is absolutely true. The people are really incredible.

Lastly, and most distressingly, Brazil is completely unequal. It's the democratic country with the highest concentration of income in the top 1 per cent. Millions of people live in slums in plain sight of affluent mansions and beaches, or are forgotten altogether. Crime and corruption exist side by side with law and order, and journalists, politicians, and activists are killed defending human and environmental rights. And the problem of inequality in Brazil is getting worse.

Figure 2 (right): Villa 31 and downtown Buenos Aires.

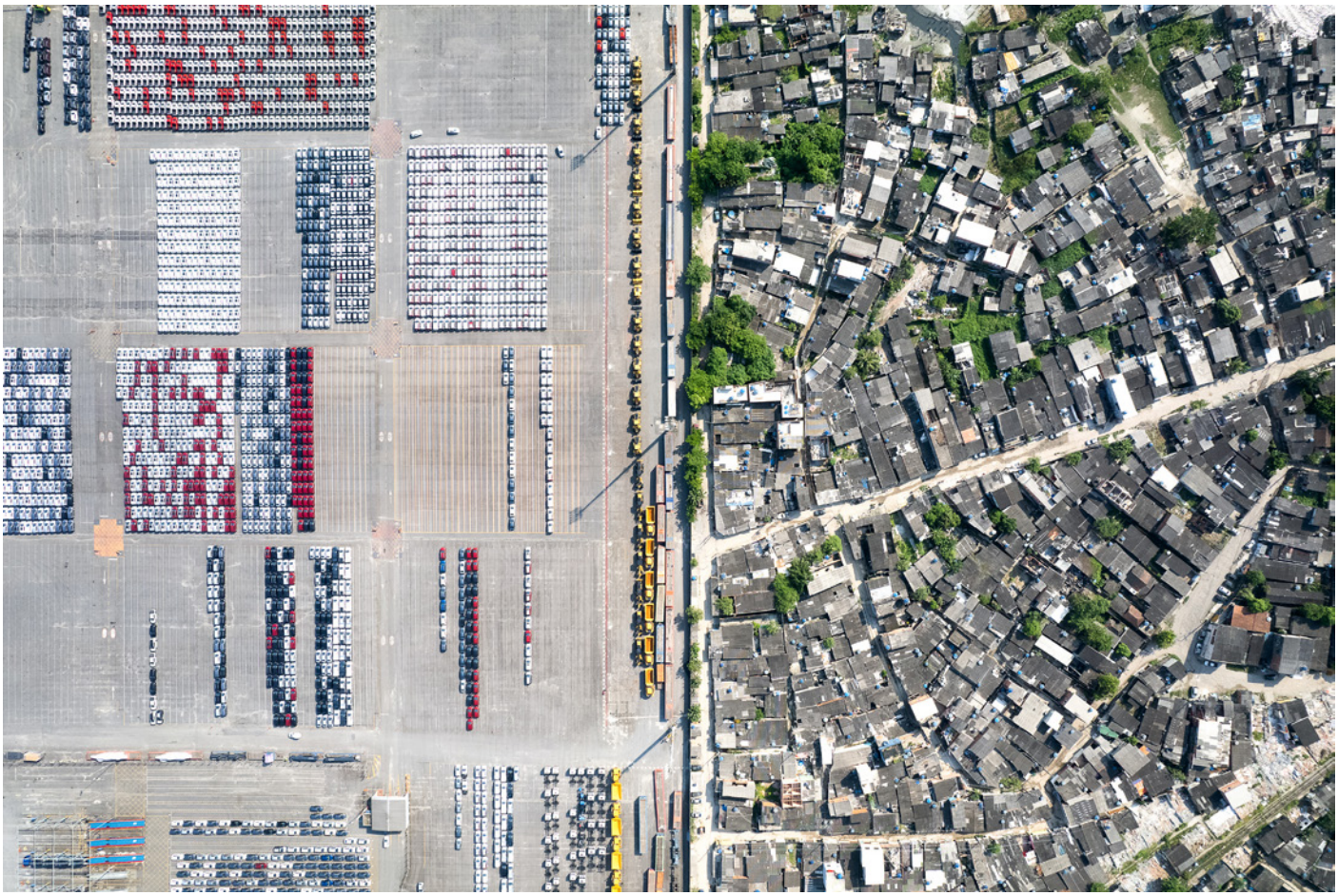


Figure 4: Brazil.

The Port of Santos, Brazil is the largest in Latin America. It's the last stop for products leaving South America and the first stop for everything incoming, and it's surrounded by a large and dangerous slum network which sprawls through the waterways and surrounds many of the container yards completely.

Figure 3 (left): Bali.

Development and speculation abound in hidden copses of trees, ravines and farmland far from the dense bustle of the road network and prying eyes.

Figure 5: Bosque Real Country Club and Lomas del Cadete, Mexico.

Figure 6: Makoko, Lagos.

Makoko is called “The Venice of Slums” as most of the 300,000 residents or so live on stilted homes atop a fetid lagoon, carrying goods via canoe including fresh water. Nigeria is a wealthy country, blessed with abundant resources, but corruption and misallocation of resources mean that 112 million people live in poverty, and investment in health and education are shockingly low. This, as the country is projected to become the world’s third most populous by 2050, with over 420 million people.

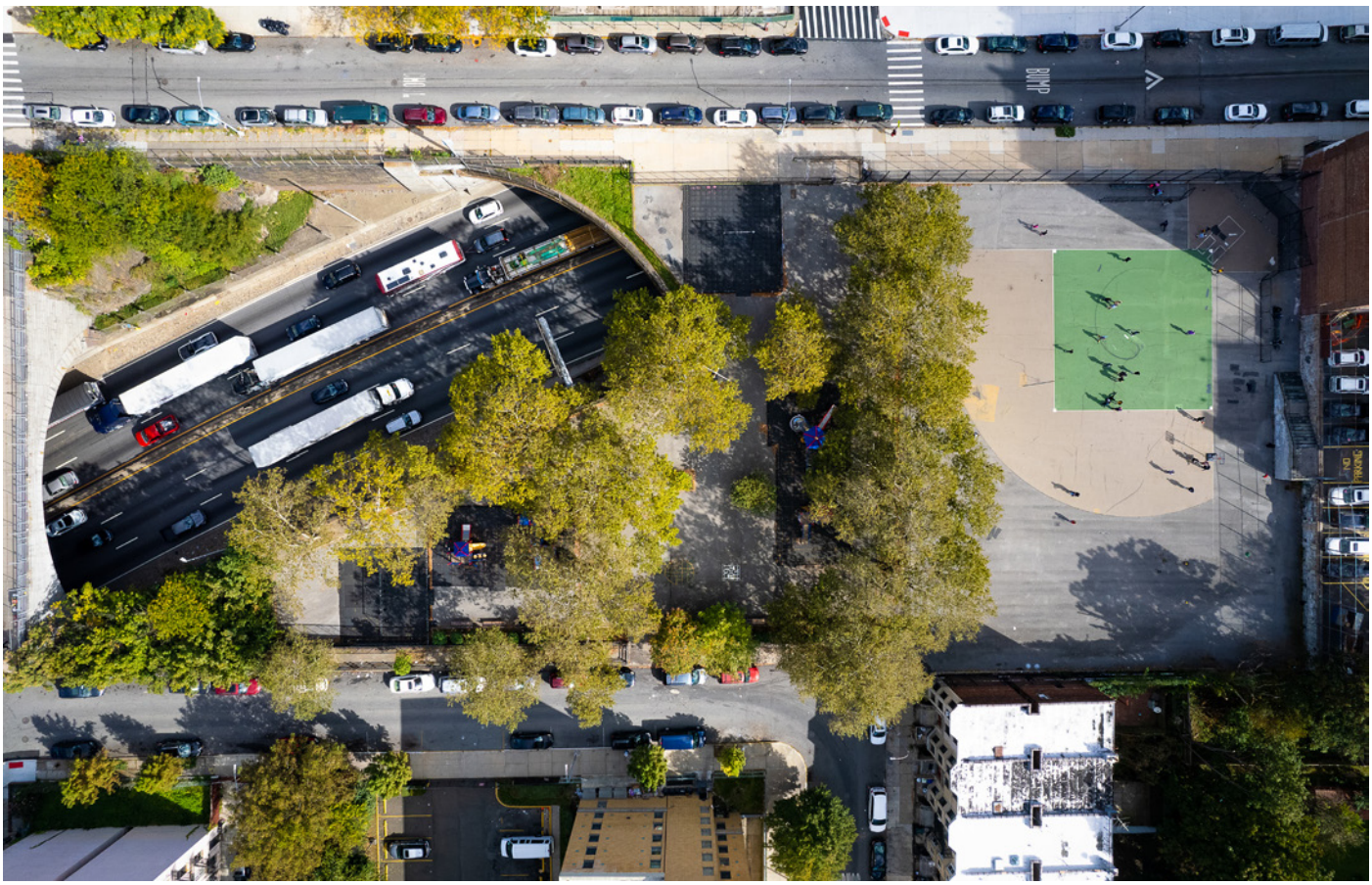


Figure 7: New York City.

The Cross-Bronx Expressway, another controversial Robert Moses project, was routed north of Crotona Park and through the Tremont neighbourhood, severely disrupting the character of the largely Jewish society at the time. Respiratory illnesses along the Cross Bronx run much higher than the average and have added an extra challenge during COVID-19.

Figure 8: "100 Quarters" slum, Islamabad.

The "100 Quarters" slum in the center of Islamabad is predominantly made up of Christians, who live alongside wealthy Muslim households and often perform menial duties such as cleaning and recycling for them. Christians make up less than 5% of the population of Pakistan, however in the capital their obvious slum "colonies" are a thorn in the side of the local government, and many have been dismantled, removed and targeted, although "100 Quarters" remains resilient.

Figure 9: Jakarta, Indonesia.

Danau Sunter Barat, or Sunter West Lake, is one of the prominent lakes in North Jakarta. It plays a crucial role in the local water system, acting as a water reservoir for flood control and irrigation purposes. The lakes are part of Jakarta's strategy to manage its recurring floods, a significant issue faced by the city due to its geography and urban planning challenges.

Figure 10: Extreme wealth inequality in South Jakarta's Pondok Indah neighbourhood.

Figure 11: Mumbai, India

The area surrounding the Bandra Kurla complex is a mixture of extreme wealth and extreme poverty, including the consulate generals of several countries, corporate headquarters, and the National Stock Exchange.

It's estimated that over 7.5 million people – more than 60% of the residents in Mumbai – live in slums like these. The exceedingly sharp contrast from the developed areas is stark. The narrow streets and hustle and bustle is such that it's almost easy to forget these scenes exist, until you fly above them.

Figure 12 (right): Manila, Phillipines. The port. Floating homes next to the container terminal.

Home to over 13 million people, this city is the epitome of contrast, where towering skyscrapers shadow humble shanties, the wealthy minority lives alongside the majority living in poverty, and modern architecture coexists with dilapidated buildings. This dynamic mosaic paints a stark picture of the socioeconomic and environmental inequality that pervades Manila.

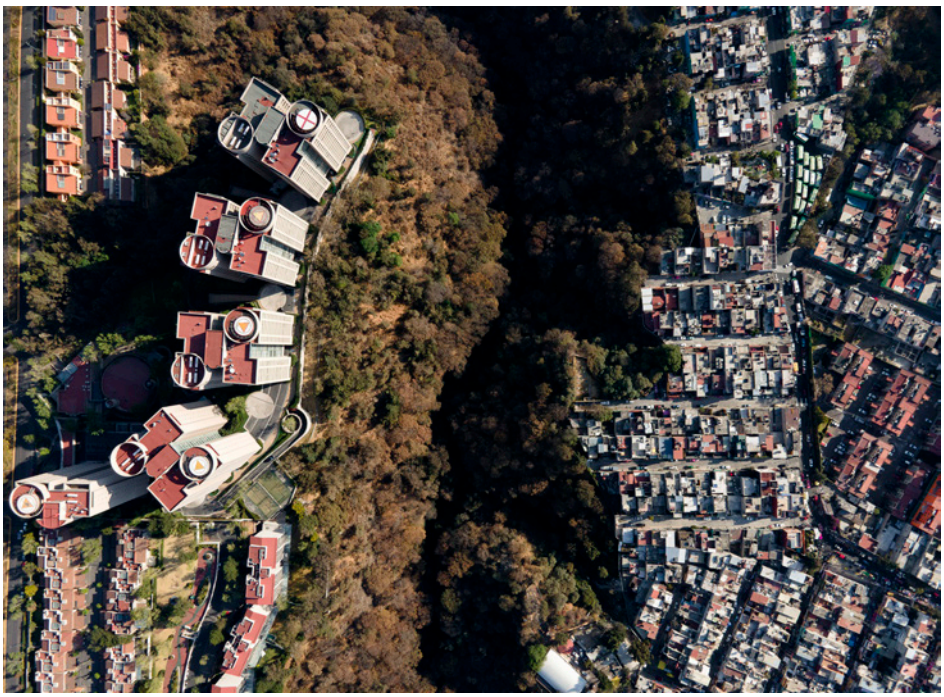


Figure 13: Santa Fe, Mexico.

The wealthier homes in Santa Fe sit atop ridge lines which tower above the surrounding neighborhoods on the outskirts of Mexico City. Until recently this peripheral part of the city, high above the smog-choked center, was filled with garbage dumps and low-income residents, but the construction of glittering new tower blocks and office buildings now make this a powerful location for gentrification and a dividing line between health outcomes, especially during Covid.

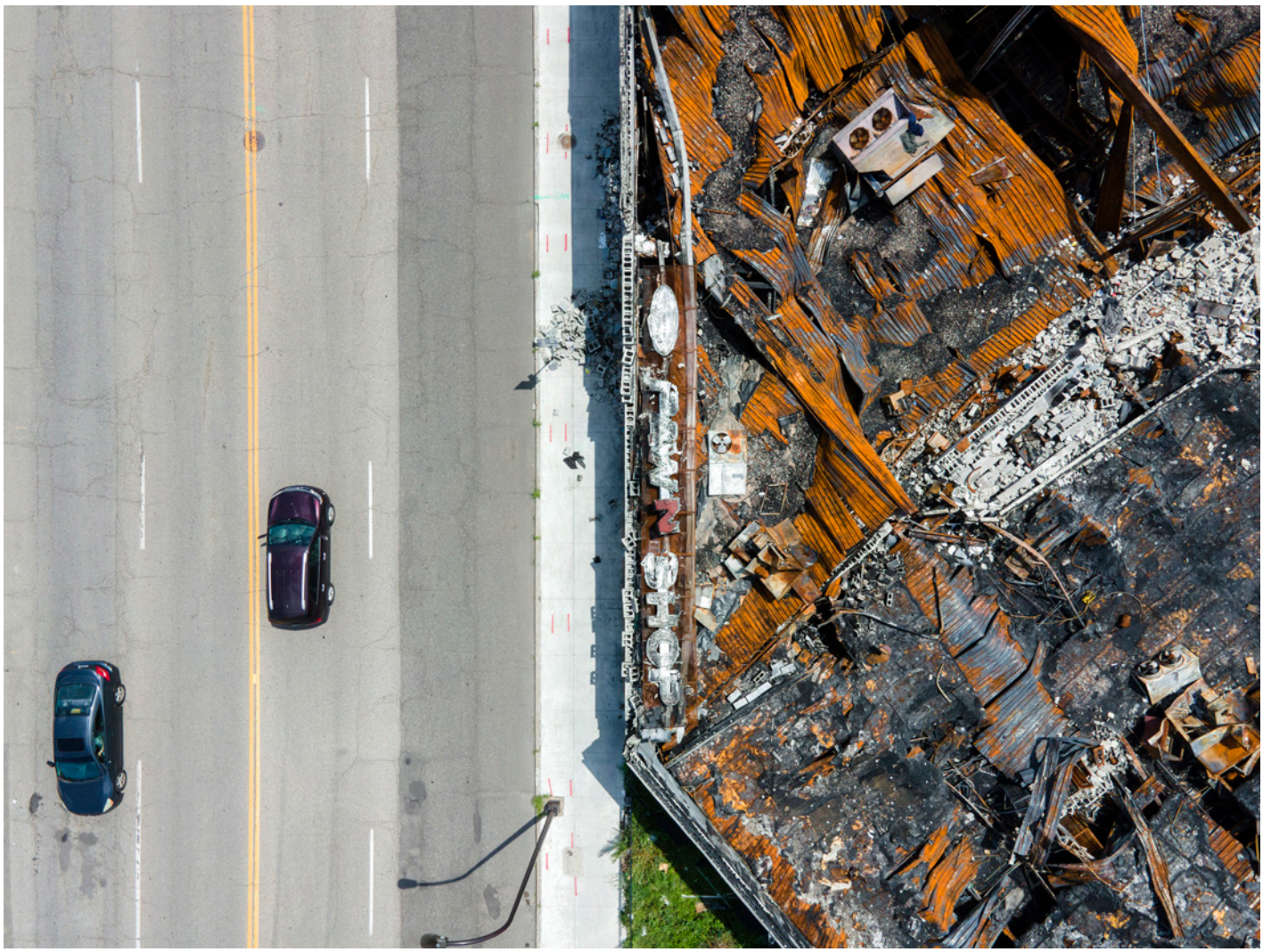


Figure 15: Vehicles drive by a pawn shop gutted in the unrest following the murder of George Floyd. Minneapolis.

The "Twin Cities" of Minneapolis and St. Paul have a reputation as extremely progressive cities - Democratic politics; redistributive tax policies; bike lanes and re-zoning initiatives. It's also an uncommonly beautiful metro area, with many lakes and parks, a pedestrian-friendly downtown and an undeveloped river corridor which courses between the two cities. If you visit in the summer, you might even be forgiven for thinking the weather is perfect, too.

The eruption of unrest following George Floyd's murder in June 2020, however, laid bare the reality that the progressivism celebrated by so many has failed to materially uplift minority households at the same rate as their white counterparts. In fact, the Twin Cities has the highest discrepancy between whites and POC of any of the top 25 metro areas in the USA by population in poverty rates, home ownership, employment, and level of education. According to the Washington Post, black households earn less than half the income of white households, and redistributive tax policies and spending have not changed the reality of physical segregation and racial architecture which continues to hem minorities into clearly defined areas within the city. A series of high-profile police shootings and videotaped killings of unarmed black men only served to reinforce the notion that the city works only for the wealthy white population.

Figure 14 (left): Mukuru slums, Nairobi, Nigeria.

The Mukuru Kwa Njema slums are made up of several informal areas southeast of the city centre, including this one called "Riara". Added together, the slums have a population totaling over 120,000, a vast slum city with poor services, stolen electricity, and mounds of rubbish in the streets. The unerring regularity of long tin roofs, perfectly parallel, belie the squalor underneath, and from the air create incredible striated patterns.

Figure 16: Papwa Sewgolum Golf Course, Durban. South Africa.

Figure 17: Primrose and Makause, unequal neighborhoods in Johannesburg, South Africa.

South Africa has been famously called "The World's Most Unequal Country", and it certainly looks that way from the air. Ask anyone where the nearest "township" is and they will give you an answer; talk of slums, race, and poverty and no one will blink. Inequality is a part of the society here, as second nature to South Africans as any other topic. Inequality in South Africa is economic, cultural, but maybe more here than anywhere else, also overtly racial. Black and other non-white South Africans continue to suffer from much higher rates of every societal ill, have less social mobility, and have dramatically less income and wealth as their white counterparts.

Figure 18: Lima, Peru.

The Wall of Shame has existed for decades in Lima, a kilometers-long barrier of concrete and barbed wire. It exists as a proxy for the failure of an effective state response to informality, inequality, and crime, built along class lines, rather than ethnic or religious lines. The simple fact is that the wall works - San Juan de Miraflores, in the district of Pamplona Alta, is the second least safe neighbourhood in Lima, according to the NGO Ciudad Nuestra. On the other hand, Surco, in the district of Las Casuarinas, is the fourth safest neighbourhood in Lima.

Figure 19: Nungwi, Zanzibar.

The beachfront in Nungwi, on the northern tip of Zanzibar island, is populated with expensive multinational hotel chains which cater to the super-rich and can cost upwards of $7,000 per night. The strain that this puts on the service delivery system in this region (for electricity and water) is massive. Researchers found that, on average, tourists were using 16 times more fresh water a day per head than locals: 93.2 litres of water per day, whereas in the five-star hotels the average daily consumption per room was 3,195 litres.

Figure 20 (next page): Mumbai, India

ENTANGLED IN THE FOREST OF BREXIT

Julian Stallabrass
Independent

Keywords:
Capitalist Realism
Brexit
Photography
Landscape

ABSTRACT

Epping Forest, once a royal hunting ground, known for its ancient oaks (symbols of England) lies on the outskirts of London. Now given over to the public, divided by roads and hemmed in by private property, it is a suburban woodland. Brexit—the vote to leave the European Union—sharply divided remainer London from the neighbouring county of Essex, which voted strongly to leave. The border between the two runs through the forest, sometimes following tracks and streams, and sometimes straying into dense thickets. For this photographic slide display, I followed it as best I could using map and compass, on a meandering and doubtless erratic path, looking for signs of social disaffection on the hinge of English county and global city.

JULIAN STALLABRASS is a writer, photographer and curator. He is the author of *Killing for Show: Photography, War and the Media in Vietnam and Iraq*, Rowman and Littlefield, 2020; *A Very Short Introduction to Contemporary Art,* updated edition, Oxford University Press, 2020; *Internet Art: The Online Clash Between Culture and Commerce*, Tate Publishing 2003; *Paris Pictured*, Royal Academy of Arts, 2002; *High Art Lite: British Art in the 1990s*, Verso 1999 and *Gargantua: Manufactured Mass Culture*, Verso, 1996. He is the co-editor of *Ground Control: Technology and Utopia*, Black Dog Publishing, 1997, *Occupational Hazard: Critical Writing on Recent British Art,* Black Dog Publishing, 1998, *Locus Solus: Technology, Identity and Site in Contemporary Art*, Black Dog Publishing, 1999; and his reader *Documentary* for the MIT/Whitechapel Documents of Contemporary Art, 2013. He has written art criticism regularly for publications which include *The London Review of Books, Artforum* and *The New Statesman*. He curated *Art and Money Online* for Tate Britain in 2001; the 2008 Brighton Photo Biennial, *Memory of Fire: Images of War and the War of Images*; and *Failing Leviathan: Magnum Photographers and Civil War* at the National Civil War Centre, Newark in 2015. In 2013, his edited book based on the Brighton Biennial, *Memory of Fire,* was published by Photoworks. He has also made online TV series about aspects of modern and contemporary art for Tariq Ali TV in the series 'Rear Window'. He recently curated the Thessaloniki Photobiennale (2023), The Spectre of the People, on the theme of political populism.

ENTANGLED IN THE FOREST OF BREXIT

Over many years, photography was for me fundamentally an urban matter: a flaneurish wandering and gleaning in the intricate historical, social and political palimpsest of the city.[1] So a move to suburbia was a difficult adjustment: to the tamer, quieter environment, less crowded with people, features and incidents; with a briefer history, less subject to violent disruptions and juxtapositions. But then—over years of a different wandering—I also explored the forest that bordered this suburbia, Epping Forest—that odd, much used yet often deserted, urban and suburban and in places even rural wood which stretches twelve miles through parts of northeast London into Essex. It is no uninterrupted wild fastness; lying under the Stansted flight paths, it also contains a police helicopter base; it is bisected and bordered by major roads so that traffic can mostly be heard, even when it is far from being seen. But at the same time, it is various, complex and disorienting, with numerous paths (human and more often animal) that circle back on each other or trail off into an impassable tangle. In spite of the best efforts of Victorian improvement—the draining of dangerous swamps, the linked creation of picturesque lakes and ponds,

the laying out of a few broad paths—in a few places it remains unwelcoming to human intrusion. Will Ashon's book on the forest is well named: *Strange Labyrinth*[2].

I became fascinated by its edges, and by the many uses made of it, more or less legitimate or legal: alongside the dog-walkers, hikers, cyclists and horse-riders, one may come across the remnants of crimes (stolen bags flung into hedges or a pried-open safe), fly-tipping, sex and even arson. So when I was commissioned by the curator, Firat Arapoglu, to make a work on the theme of borders for the Mardin Biennial in the Spring of 2018, my thoughts turned to the woods, especially

in the light of an event which was and remains as disorienting as, in some places and seasons, is the Forest.[3]

The basic idea was to trace Brexit and the Forest together, photographically. My explanatory text for the work read:

Epping Forest, once a royal hunting ground, known for its ancient oaks (symbols of England) lies on the outskirts of London. Now given over to the public, divided by roads and hemmed in by private property, it is a suburban woodland. Brexit—the vote to leave the European Union—sharply divided remainer London from the neighbouring county of Essex, which voted strongly to leave.

The border between the two runs through the forest, sometimes following tracks and streams, and sometimes straying into dense thickets. I followed it as best I could using map and compass, on a meandering and doubtless erratic path, looking for signs of social disaffection on the hinge of English county and global city.

Some of the divides of Brexit—urban and suburban, cosmopolitan and English, common goods and private property—bear on the Forest itself, so the association is not incidental. For example, Cuckoo Brook, along which the border runs for a distance, followed upstream leaves the forest at its boundary with a golf

course, and downstream flows into one of those Victorian lakes and then into the Ching, another border marker and one of London's 'lost' rivers, as it makes its way to join the River Lea amid a landscape of pylons, megastores, car parks and the North Circular Road.[4]

Brexit was predominantly supported by English people who lived outside the big urban centres, and especially by the elderly.[5] Over decades since the 1970s, white folk fled the dangerous, dilapidated and darkening East End into the suburbs around the Forest, in flight not just from dire conditions but from non-English cultures and the globalising world.[6] Yet, while for a time the area felt, or wanted to feel, as if it were fixed in aspic, social change did not stop there. New incomers—younger, more diverse, many with mixed-race families, and more socially liberal—overlaid the older emigrants. The divide was dramatised for me by canvassing in the area during the 2019 election, and meeting many people on both sides of the party and Brexit divides who felt unmoored by current politics—confused, alienated, and some of them deeply angry. This was especially because in their disorientation in the face of fearful complexity and crisis, the political class appeared helpless—both deluded and clueless. In all this, there was a sense of deeper changes at work, as capitalism and especially its 'shotgun marriage' with democracy faltered.[7]

Brexit and the forest boundary, then, shared for me a sense of entanglement, of disorientation and complexity against a backdrop of ruination (in the forest of entropic waste and environmental depredation, in austerity Britain of the collapse of many state services once taken for granted). And—not to give too many clues as to the various metaphors and allusions that run through the piece—of fallen and abused oaks as signs of a national sickness.[8]

To reads old books about the forest is sometimes to discover intimations of how dead and denuded the place has become. To take a single example, James Brimble in a photographic appreciation of the forest written in the 1950s, tells of caterpillars hanging by their threads from the trees with such profusion that on certain spring days it was impossible to make one's way through them.[9] I have occasionally brushed past a few strands of these—all that remain. Evidently, the insecticides from the surrounding farmlands and gardens have made their way into the wood's waters, while ever-increasing light pollution also does its deadly work

The Forest is rich in history, from its origins as a Royal hunting ground in which those who had the temerity to assuage their hunger by poaching could be blinded, castrated or executed for their transgression against property and power. But I especially think of the

romantic 'peasant' poet, John Clare, and his time there, committed to an asylum in 1837, though allowed to wander the area. His mind was in part deranged by the founding land grab of industrial capitalism, the enclosures, in which common land was seized and made private property—and in which Clare, among many others, were expelled from their ramblings across open country, which was hedged, fenced and guarded by law. The Forest itself would have met its end this way but for the agitation of commoners who defended their ancient rights to lop trees and gather wood against enclosure.[10]

This is a loss of orientation is of the most overt kind, as paths are blocked and 'trespass' becomes a crime. As exclusive property, the land becomes the disenchanted thing of use and wage labour. So Clare could write of his once most precious attachments to landscape, flower, tree and bird:

> *Strange scenes mere shadows are to me*
>
> *Vague unpersonifying things [...]*
>
> *Here every tree is strange to me*

All foreign things where ere I go [11]

That curious word, 'unpersonifying', is telling: the enchantment by which trees are read as bodies, characters or even people—woven into legends, old and new—is weakened in the mundane world of property and use. The stolen land is made 'foreign' by changes over which one has no say.[12] Clare eventually escaped the asylum in 1841; lame and starving, he walked ninety miles home to Northamptonshire, but could find no return to his rural paradise, and no escape from madness.

All this may lead into a few broader thoughts about Englishness, the rural ideal, the suburbs, the city and class. In a recent book, Dougie Wallace's photographs the social tensions of the East End of London as it continues to be borne up on the rising wave of asset prices.[13] As many commentators have pointed out, London as a multicultural global city is remote in character and concerns from much of the rest of England. Yet even there some of the traits of an English engagement with history are to be found: the antagonism between young and old, rich and poor, workers and tourists, of ethnic groups and urban types is not merely documented but created photographically as Wallace confronts his subjects to produce an acute if cartoonish vision of alienation and of incommensurate worlds clashing. The ironic and dandyish plays with Victorian and Edwardian fashions and facial hair, which Wallace shows among the hipsters, evoke the solidity and grandeur of the imperial age, but can also be seen as acidic asides on the extreme levels of inequality found in the Belle Époque, revivified in the present. They also feed into an all-too-familiar imperial nostalgia, driven by certain historians (prominently, Niall Ferguson), and of course the current crop of Tory politicians.[14]

The long persistence in England of the country house ideal is one way to make sense of some aspects of the flight to the suburbs, Tory sentiment, and the fate of the forest. In broadcast culture, the ideal is present in a tide of costume dramas, in which the Burkean symbols of hierarchy and tradition find expression in the form and function of the great house.[15] There the material, marital and martial orders abide against the various threats that drama must present to it, just as in this nation the royals were only briefly removed and the aristocracy never overturned.[16] Through these living symbols, a core component of national identity, the principles of the natural order and of a genteel country living are set against the banality and outright ugliness of much of the actually existing land.

The suburbs are in part the yearning of the less privileged for a small slice of country life.[17] Tories, suburban and rural, hold onto the idea that hierarchy, tradition, Empire and the English character still pervade the land of motorways, industrial estates and tower blocks. After all, the central Tory contradiction has long been that, in the party's abject service to big business, it tears up the Burkean structures, traditions and mores which it purports to defend: the

great houses of the Forest area have long since fallen or been converted to other uses; the ideal in which suburbs were supposed to be a minor retreat where the rural and the urban would meet in harmonious synthesis have failed in most places to do more than travesty it. And the forest, neither wilderness nor country estate, was beleaguered, enclosed, reduced, tamed, 'developed' and poisoned, becoming—as we have hinted—a ghost of its former self. After the battle over commoning rights, the place was taken over and managed by the Corporation of London: it is public in access, and private in ownership and power (like a privatised city square).

This 'gift' to the public was sealed in typical English fashion with a pompous military ceremony greeting the Queen. One of the prominent chroniclers of the Forest, Sir William Addison, provides a particularly fawning account of Victoria dedicating

the forest (which she did not own) to 'my people', and receiving praise in an address for her 'gracious condescension' in visiting the place, which went on to say that it was only fitting that 'the capital of your Majesty's empire [...] should possess the most extensive pleasure ground.' Addison later offers his own description of the Cockneys who subsequently thronged to the forest on trains and wagons each weekend morning:

> Some of the mums were already smelling of gin and my-dearing everybody as they walked out of the station yard, followed by their bairns like proudly clucking hens with their chickens fluttering along behind them. The men of those days tended to be as stunted as the lopped hornbeams of the Forest itself.[18]

You will find plenty of Tories, still, who look upon the poor as barely human, and they have plenty of servants in the press.

Perhaps it is partly the continual power of those rural ideals, in actuality continually mocked and traduced, and in the pallid power that democracy has over money, and thus over what is done to the environment, that produce the resentments that run through the culture wars: as Hermann Broch put it of a similarly fervid and teetering society: 'on intolerance and lack of understanding the security of life is based.'[19]

Back in the Forest, I was fortunate in my photographic tracings of the borderline: it took me past the dumping of trash and sometimes fly-tipping; the strange haunts of the homeless that sometimes parody suburban living rooms; entanglement,

complexity, and environmental ruination. It also passes by areas of council housing and lavish suburban villas. To my eyes, at least, personification was hard to avoid amid oak, beech, birch and hornbeam, which seem more human than certain neoliberal automata one might mention. In these wanderings, amid many others, the Forest appears as a source of inexhaustible sculptural and compositional creativity, of which the photographer is a mere servant

At the end of the route, in an enclave of the forest (Knighton Wood, once the garden of a stately home), there stands an old border marker, the pulpit oak, so called because you can climb into it and address a throng (it was used as a rallying point for the commoners in their defence against enclosures), and a little way beyond the discovery of the final delusion, the words 'Thine is the Kingdom' written on a severed bough.

>> Entangled in the Forest of Brexit 2018 Selection of images from photographic slide sequence


THE BORDERS
1 - 6


peoplesound SUNDAY EXPRESS


THINE
IS THE
KINGDOM

NOTES

[1] This project has been published in Colin Perry (ed.), *Art and the Rural Imagination, More Than Ponies*, n.p. 2022.
[2] Will Ashon, S*trange Labyrinth: Outlaws, Poets, Mystics, Murderers and a Coward in London's Great Forest*, Granta, London 2017.
[3] 4th International Mardin Biennial, Beyond Words, Mardin, Turkey, May-June 2018.[1]
[4] See Nicholas Barton, *The Lost Rivers of London: A Study of Their Effects Upon London and Londoners, and the Effects of London and Londoners on Them*, Phoenix House, London, 1962
[5] Danny Dorling, *Rule Britannia: Brexit and the End of Empire*, Biteback Publishing, London 2019, pp. 24, 28-33.
[6] It is difficult now to recapture the terrible state of inner city London in the 1970s and beyond. See, for example, Paul Harrison, *Inside the Inner City: Life Under the Cutting Edge*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex 1983. This book focuses on the now safer and far more expensive Borough of Hackney.[1]
[7] On this marriage, see Wolfgang Streeck, *How Will Capitalism End?: Essays on a Failing System*, Verso, London 2016, p. 20.
[8] National associations with trees are hardly unique to England, or images of forests as melancholic registers of the losses caused by imposed modernisation. See, for example, the remarkable work of Bae Bien-u in his photography of the pine forests of South Korea. Sacred Wood, Hatje Cantz, Ostfildern-Ruit 2009.
[9] James A. Brimble, *London's Epping Forest, Country Life*, London 1957, p. 16.
[10] See Sir William Addison, *Portrait of Epping Forest*, Robert Hale, London 1977, chs. II and V. On the ancient association of forests and the commons, see Peter Linebaugh, *The Magna Carta Manifesto: Liberties and Commons for All*, University of California Press, Berkeley 2008, especially ch. 2.
[11] .The Flitting', in John Clare, *Selected Poems*, ed. Geoffrey Summerfield, Penguin Books, London 1990, p. 201.
[12] On Clare, enclosure and the felling of trees, see E.P. Thompson, *Customs in Common: Studies in Traditional Popular Culture,* The New Press, New York 1991, pp. 181-4.
[13] Dougie Wallace, *East Ended*, Dewi Lewis Publishing, Stockport 2020. I wrote a review of this book: 'Irony Error', New Left Review, no. 123, May/ June 2020, pp. 143-9.
[14] Niall Ferguson, *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World*, Allen Lane, London 2003.
[15] See E.P. Thompson, *Witness Against the Beast: William Blake and the Moral Law,* The New Press, New York 1993, pp. 176-8.
[16] This is a reference to the famed Nairn-Anderson thesis on the unique constitution of the British state. For a recent assessment, see Perry Anderson, 'Ukania Perpetua?', *New Left Review*, no. 125, September-October 2020, pp. 35-107. See also Martin J. Wiener, E*nglish Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit, 1850-1980*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, second edition, 2004.
[17] For a defence of the romantic and idyllic aspects of the suburban ideal against elite condescension, J.M. Richards, *The Castles on the Ground: The Anatomy of Suburbia*, illus. John Piper, John Murray Publishers, London 1973.[18]
[18] Sir William Addison, *Portrait of Epping Forest*, Robert Hale, London 1977, pp. 50-3, 102.
[19] Hermann Broch, *The Sleepwalkers: A Trilogy*, trans. Willa Muir/ Edwin Muir, Martin Secker, London 1932, p. 21.

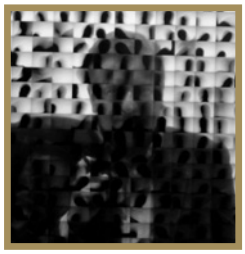
"A SHABY SUBLIMITY": REPRESENTING THE CAPITALIST SUBLIME

John Stathatos
Independent

Keywords:
Capitalist Realism
Brexit
Photography
Landscape

ABSTRACT

This visual essay explores the concept of the "Capitalist Sublime," analyzing how contemporary imagery seeks to invoke feelings of awe and power in relation to capitalism. Drawing from Longinus and Edmund Burke's definitions of the sublime, the essay delves into the allure of power and overwhelming awe that capitalism attempts to evoke through its imagery. Examples range from high-art sculptures like Jeff Koons' "New Hoover Celebrity IV" to vast cityscapes and monumental architecture, such as the Atlantis hotel in Dubai and aircraft carriers. The essay further examines the works of photographer Edward Burtynsky, whose large-scale images of industrial landscapes align with the tradition of the sublime while also reflecting the triumph of capitalism. Advertisements, luxury goods, and celebrity endorsements are scrutinized for their attempts to capture the sublime in promoting brands and consumerism. Ultimately, the essay reflects on how these attempts at the capitalist sublime may often veer into the ridiculous, underscoring the contrast between their intention and true sublimity.



JOHN STATHATOS is a photographer, writer and researcher. His personal work has been shown in numerous European exhibition venues. The survey exhibition *Image & Icon: The New Greek Photography, 1975-1995* which he curated for the Greek Ministry of Culture and the accompanying 300-page catalogue which accompanied it represented the first in-depth critical study of contemporary Greek photography. In 2002 he founded the Photographic Encounters, first held on the island of Kythera and subsequently in Chania, Crete, which he now organises in tandem with Penelope Petsini and Yiorgos Anastasakis. His publications include *The Invention of Landscape: Greek Landscape and Greek Photography, 1870-1995* (Camera Obscure, 1996); *Maria Chrousachi* (National Library, 2000); The photographs of Andreas Embirikos (Agra, 2001); *A Vindication of Tlön: Photography & the Fantastic*, Thessaloniki Museum of Photography (2001); and *Panayotis Fatseas, Faces of Kythera* (Tetarto, 2008) as well as frequent research essays and contributions to symposia.

"A SHABY SUBLIMITY"

The Sublime has long been a subject of abiding interest to both art historians and philosophers. In defining the term for the purposes of this visual essay, I hark back to the some of the earliest sources on the subject, specifically Longinus and Edmund Burke. In Longinus, two notions in particular are relevant to my discourse; the first is his identification of sublimity with "a lofty and elevated style" which, he goes on to remark, all too often lapses into pomposity; the second is his description of the effect of power or force upon an audience: "To believe or not is usually in our own power; but the Sublime, acting with an imperious and irresistible force, sways every reader whether he will or no".

From Burke I borrow the ideas of overwhelming awe and, once again, that of power. In Part 4 of *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, he writes "the highest degree [of the sublime] I call *astonishment*; the subordinate degrees are awe, reverence, and respect"; in Part 2, "I know of nothing sublime, which is not some modification of power. And this branch rises, as naturally as the other two branches, from terror, the common stock of everything that is sublime".

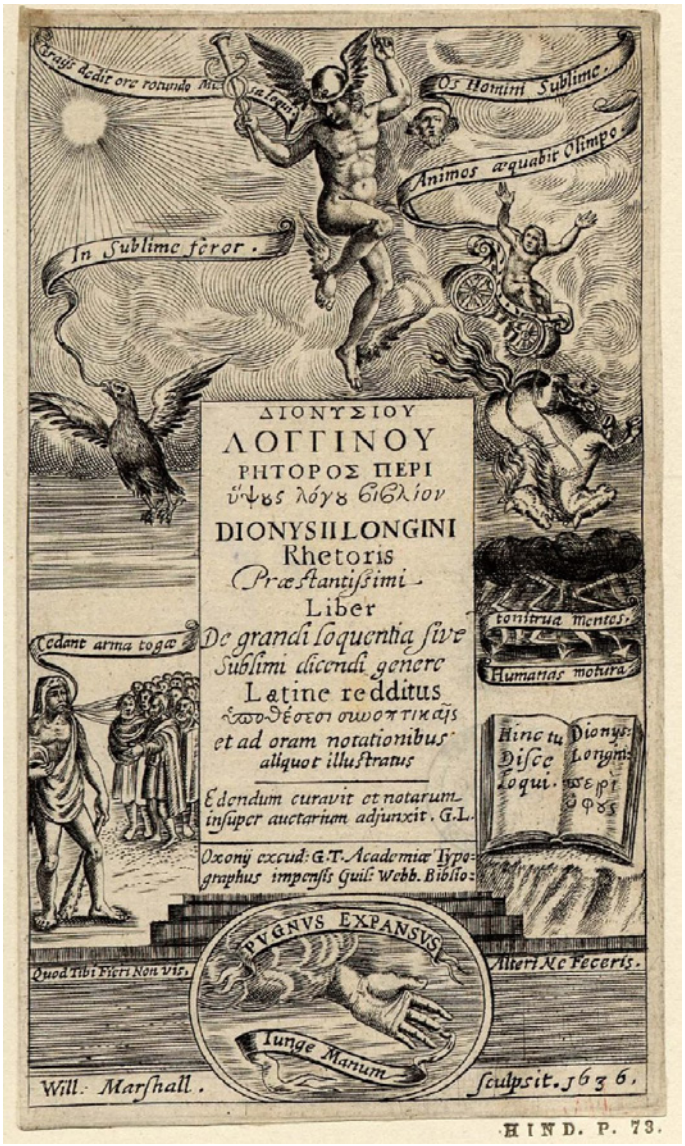


Figure 1: Titlepage to Longinus Rhetoris Liber (Oxford, 1636)
Tate Research Publication, January 2013

Figure 2: John Martin: The Great Day of His Wrath, 1851-53

It is these two responses, Power and Awe, generated by means of an often merely assumed lofty and elevated style, that the Capitalist Sublime most desires to provoke. Its imagery celebrates or promotes two fundamental attributes of capitalism, power and consumption; if both can be accommodated simultaneously, so much the better. Capitalist Sublime imagery runs the gamut from high to low; high when the images are produced by recognized, high-status artists and photographers which aspire to the status of artistic productions, and low when they are produced in the interest of raw commercial activity. In either case, such images must be entirely free of questioning and above all of any trace of irony. Furthermore, in this context it may be useful to take intentionality under consideration, by which I mean that some works of Capitalist Sublime undoubtedly aim at sublimity, even though they may often lapse, as Longinus warns, into the merely bathetic.

Consider *New Hoover Celebrity IV, New Hoover Convertible, New Shelton 5 Gallon Wet/Dry, New Shelton 10 Gallon Wet/Dry Doubledecker*. This is the title of an iconic sculpture by American artist Jeff Koons, executed in the early eighties and consisting of the aforementioned four household appliances in an acrylic case. Eerily illuminated from beneath by fluorescent lighting which gives it a totemic

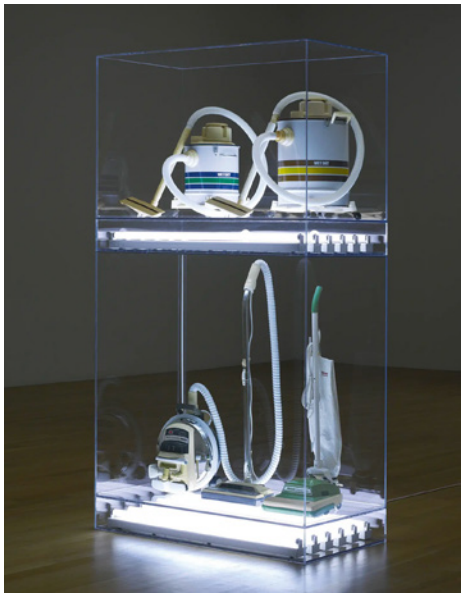


Figure 3: Jeff Koons, New Hoover Celebrity IV, New Hoover Convertible, New Shelton 5 Gallon Wet/Dry, New Shelton 10 Gallon Wet/Dry Doubledecker, 1981-1986

Figure 4: Allard Schager, One World Trade Center, New York, NY

Figure 5: Atlantis, The Palm, Dubai

appearance, the work makes a pitch for sublimity not merely visually but, above all, because it represents a capitalist paradigm: these vacuum cleaners, whose original street value would have been a few hundred dollars, have undergone a literally transcendental transformation by virtue of selection by the artist and subsequent validation by the art establishment. Their surplus value, which is appropriated by the artist and subsequently by dealers and collectors, stems not from labour but from something more intangible – a purely arbitrary sacralization by the art world. They have become objects of awe, and demand our admiration, not because of what they are, but because the markets have proclaimed them worthy of such awe.

The sublime comes naturally to a certain kind of architecture: to the cityscapes of great capitals, of course, and also to individual seats of influence, from palaces and civic buildings to banks. All seek to impress and overawe the viewer, if not with their majesty and power, then at least with sheer size and mass. Nobody has ever done this better than New York City, but nowadays, rivalry has become intense, particularly in the rapidly expanding economies of what was once dismissed as the third world. The rapid development of the Gulf State capitals, for instance, has birthed architectural monstrosities by the score – but of course, monstrosity has always been one facet of the sublime.

In 2009, Mark Fisher could suggest that "environmental catastrophe features in late capitalist culture only as a kind of simulacra, its real implications for capitalism too traumatic to be assimilated into the system". And yet as he points out elsewhere in Capitalist Realism, there is really nothing that capitalism cannot eventually co-opt and commodify. In this context, the work of Canadian photographer Edward Burtynsky is peculiarly relevant. Burtynsky specializes in what, after the title of his best-known body of work, could be called 'Manufactured Landscapes', ranging from aestheticized post-industrial desolation to near-abstract aerial views of anthropogenic landscapes; in line with the Dusseldorf School, whose approach he espouses, he also produces large, impersonal panoramas of contemporary industrial workers on the job. These are, indeed very large prints, of a Gurskian size and quality, and they do very well on the art market; the $60,000 achieved at a Philips sale in October, 2015 by a print of *Deda Chicken Processing Plant, Dehui City, Jilin Province, China* was far from the artist's record.

According to Martha Rosler, "the higher the price that photography can command as a

Figure 6: Edward Burtynsky: Shipbreaking #12, Chittagong, Bangladesh, 2000. Robert Koch Gallery

Figure 7: Lionel Walden, Cardiff Steelworks, 1893-97. National Museum of Wales

Figure 8: Edward Burtynsky, *Oil Bunkering #4*, Niger Delta, Nigeria, 2016. Robert Koch Gallery

commodity in dealerships, the higher the status accorded to it in museums and galleries". There can be little doubt that Burtynsky's work has accordingly achieved truly gratifying status – a status confirmed by the briefest glance at the list of exhibition venues in his CV. The great majority of Burtynsky's images, and particularly the post-industrial landscapes of the "Manufactured Landscapes" and "Industrial Sublime" series are squarely positioned in the line of descent from 18th and 19th century sublime landscape; the vastness of the subject matter and the size of the physical images both contribute to a sense of awe, swiftly followed by the contrasting emotion of terror, as the environmental implications of the scene depicted sink in, thereby neatly validating Burke's prescription of the sublime.

Undeniably sublime, then. But do they also conform to the category of imagery I am proposing, that of 'Capitalist Sublime'? I would argue that they do, since beyond the environmentalist message of these images, what they record – and implicitly celebrate – is the ultimate triumph of capitalism, the seemingly unstoppable and irreversible Gadarene imperative of development at any price; if they contain a barely encoded message, it is *Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!* And of course, that message is present irrespective of the photographer's perhaps ambiguous attitude to his work. Critics and commentators have praised the "palpable humanism" (Diehl 2006: 188-123) of these images, but others have remarked on their emotional remoteness and neutrality.

Raffi Khatchadourian's first-hand account of Burtynsky at work in Nigeria is not without relevance: "In Lagos, Burtynsky never picked up a camera to photograph the human

Figure 9: Lionel Walden, Aircraft from Carrier Air Wing 7 fly over USS Dwight D. Eisenhower, 2012. U.S. Navy photo: Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Julia A. Casper

drama around him. He was seeking to document not the struggles of individual Nigerians but the aggregate effect of those struggles, how they formed a combined image. 'What I am interested in is how to describe large-scale human systems that impress themselves upon the land,' he told me. A term that he often uses to describe his work, 'residual landscapes,'

Figure 10: Stephen Wilkes, F-35A jet at Eglin Air Force Base, VF September 16, 2013

implied an even more remote interest: man-made terrain distinct from people. [...] The moral complications that came with representing a living community—struggling with serious economic and political challenges, on a continent recovering from the legacy of colonialism—differed greatly from shooting abandoned quarries or First World megafarms.

Probably the least ambiguous version of Capitalist Sublime imagery is the depiction of raw military and political power, and what could possibly spell power more effectively than a billion-dollar airplane carrier? In fact, though they are enthused over by Donald Trump, most naval strategists today believe that in a war between major powers, carriers would prove little more than expensive targets. However, like the dreadnaughts of 1900, they are unrivalled as symbols of power; they also remain invaluable for purposes of propaganda or the intimidation of small-to-medium states. Successful photographs of military hardware usually indulge in a form of pathetic fallacy, in which the inanimate carrier, jet ighter or tank is photographed from an angle suggesting 'manly' aggression. The very same masculine virtue, indeed, which political leaders aspire to project, even when nothing in their past experience justifies it."

On March 20th, 2003, President George Bush went on television to inform the citizens of the United States that Operation Iraqi Freedom had been launched the previous day. In concluding a brief four-

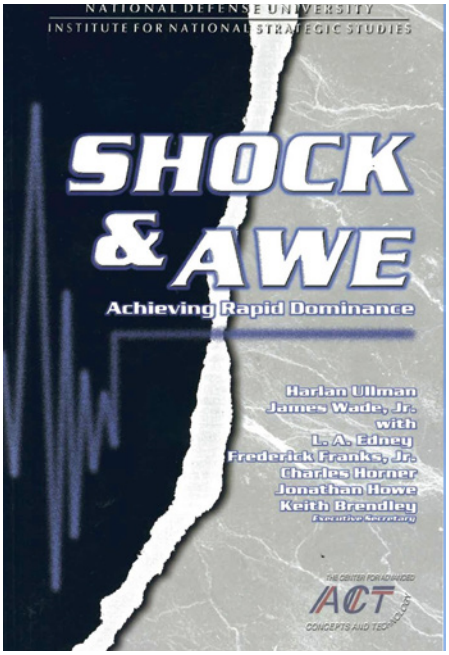


Figure 11: Harlan K. Ullman and James P. Wade, Shock & Awe. U.S. National Defence University, 1996

minute address, he assured his fellow-citizens that "now that conflict has come, the only way to limit its duration is to apply decisive force and I assure you this will not be a campaign of half measures and we will accept no outcome but victory" (Bush

Figure 12: Annie Leibovitz: "War and Destiny". Colin Powell, Dick Cheney & George W. Bush, Vanity Fair, Feb.2002

Figure 13: Kevin Lamarque, Mission Accomplished!, 1 May 2003
Inset: W.G. Read, Rough Riders, 1898 (President Theodore Rossevelt at the Battle of San Juan Hill, Cuba)

2003). This overly sanguine expectation reflected the so-called Doctrine of Rapid Dominance or, as it quickly became known, 'Shock and Awe', which was popular at the time amongst American military planners.

Propounded by Harlan K. Ullman and James P. Wade in a 1996 paper which sought to define the USA's military doctrine for the 21st century, rapid dominance was defined as the use of overwhelming power and massive displays of force with a view to very rapidly destroying an enemy's will to resist. Regrettably, noted the authors, "while there are surely humanitarian considerations that cannot or should not be ignored, the ability to Shock and Awe ultimately rests in the ability to frighten, scare, intimidate, and disarm" (Ullman et al 1996: 34). The purpose of this doctrine, should anyone be unclear about it, was made clear by retired Admiral Bud Edney in the first appendix: "The top priority of Rapid Dominance should be to deter, alter, or affect those actions that are either unacceptable to U.S. national security interests or endanger the democratic community of states and *access to free markets*" (ibid: 103; Italics added).

The doctrine of Rapid Dominance was embraced with enthusiasm by the Bush administration, while the fashionable new jargon was eagerly adopted by the majority of press and media: "It was going to be the first war won by the new doctrine of 'Rapid Dominance', delivering devastating firepower to 'shock and awe' the government and people of an entire nation-state into submission within days" (Sepp 2007: 217).

Annie Leibowitz's now notorious cover photograph of the Bush cabinet on the cover of Vanity Fair, published just a year before the launch of Operation Iraqi Freedom, could be seen as the epitome of Capitalist Sublime: under the banner headline "War and Destiny", with a nod to the long tradition of formal state portraiture, Leibowitz makes the case of George W. Bush, Colin Powell, Dick Cheney, Condoleezza Rice, George Tenet and Donald Rumsfeld for entry into the pantheon of great statesmen and women. Her solo portraits of the ultimately disastrous Iraqi venture's principal military sponsors were very much in the same vein, while a similar triumphalist rhetoric was adopted by the many US Army photographers in the field. There is of course a long tradition of similar glorification of the more bloodthirsty American presidents, though unlike George Bush and his misappropriated air force uniform, Theodore Roosevelt did at least experience combat at first hand.

Capitalism, particularly the currently dominant neoliberal model, is predicated upon infinitely expanding growth, requiring a consistently maintained level of consumption of goods and services.

Figure 14: BMW Group: Jeff Koons and the BMW Art Car at the Tour Eiffel, 2010.
U.S. National Defence University, 1996

Consumption is in turn is created, inspired and maintained at the highest possible level through advertising of all kinds; but whether editorial, televisual or online, advertising demands bold visual imagery. Advertising imagery, particularly for those goods and services considered to be of an inherently superior quality, instinctively grasps for the sublime. Remember Burke: the sublime should generate first astonishment, then "awe, reverence and respect", and are those not precisely the responses any good advertiser seeks to coax from his audience? Astonishment at the ingenuity deployed; awe at the increasingly complex technical proficiency displayed; and of course, the palpable reverence and respect the audience has for such 'iconic brands' as Cartier, Dior, Mercedes or Louis Vuitton.

Jeff Koons can be now be seen as having decayed, or perhaps the correct term might be morphed, into an 'iconic brand' of himself; certainly, his interface with the worlds of fashion and commerce is so seamless, such a natural and even inevitable extension of his art practice that he makes Andy Warhol look like a purist. His relationship with brands such as BMW and Louis Vuitton goes far beyond the now distinctly old-fashioned promotional deal whereby a celebrity publicly endorses a product: for is Koons promoting BMW, or is BMW promoting Koons? However that may be, the post-modern death of irony ensures that one can never be entirely clear of who, between Koons, BMW and their audience is being taken advantage of.

These are all goods whose selling price is deliberately divorced from any consideration of practicality or even outlay, since in most cases the single largest component of their production cost is precisely the cost of advertising. What they are designed to be is indicators of a superior socio-economic status. This does not mean that price is no longer relevant;

Figure 15: Jacob & Co. $20 million Billionaire Timeless Treasure Tourbillon Yellow Diamond watch

on the contrary, in order to confirm their role as guarantors and boosters of social status, such goods must be, and must be seen to be, obscenely expensive. Use, efficiency, practicality, longevity, taste and even, when you come right down to it, elegance (however you define it) are all clearly beside the point in deciding between a $ 75 swatch wristwatch and a $20 million Billionaire "Timeless Treasure Tourbillon" timepiece. There is probably a certain counterbalancing effect in the ownership of such items, however, inasmuch as the flaunting of them could backfire in terms of social status, unless of course your social circle consist largely of leading narcotraffickers.

In some cases, the goods being advertised are so vertiginously beyond the reach of all but a vanishingly minute fraction of the targeted audience that they can only be regarded as a kind of consumerist pornography, to be salivated over in resignation rather than lusted after; after all, the lowliest wage slave may perhaps hope to eventually own a Rolex watch, but he or she is unlikely to aspire to ownership of a private jet. A glossy ad for SeymourPowell, designers of bespoke executive aircraft interiors, goes one better by inserting the onscreen image of a racing sloop into the padded living accommodation of a jet.

Which leads us neatly on to a consideration of what must be one of the priciest private vessels currently on offer (order only), short of your very own airplane carrier: a yacht with icebreaker capability built by a company specialising in military vessels, enticingly described as "a warship that can sail the seven seas with style".

It hardly needs to be said that many if not all such images are very far from representing what most of us would regard as in any way 'sublime'; but then what we are seeking here is intentionality rather than quality, and the image creators undoubtedly intended a shabby sublimity of a sort. And as we know, it is but a short step from the sublime to the ridiculous. Vogue, for example, published a breath-takingly tasteless series of photographs of the actress and model Keira Knightley in Kenya in their June 2007 issue, only *to repe*at the faux-pas five years later in another post-colonial mashup which almost manages to evade the charge of racism thanks to its almost sublime obtuseness.

Figure 16: SeymourPowell aircraft interior design

Perhaps, in the end, we are forced by such slides into the ludicrous to concede that though capitalism undoubtedly has the will and ability to reach for the heights of the Sublime, it is after all no more than a cheap and shabby simulacrum of the true Sublime.

Figure 17: Damen Yachts: SeaXplorer 75

Figure 18: Arthur Elgort, Keira Knightley in Africa, photographed for *Vogue*, 2012

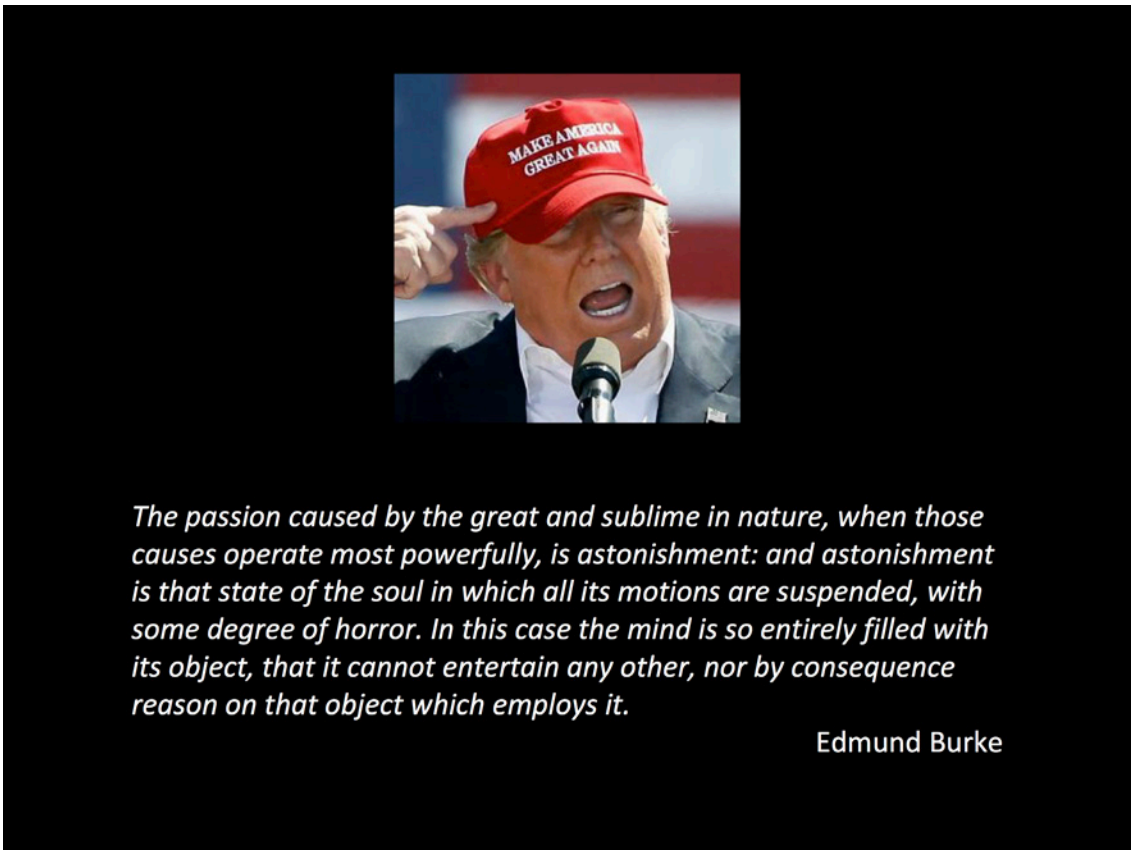


Figure 19: Collage by the author

NOTES

[1] In an essay on Richard Serra published in 2015, Eugenie Shinkle noted perceptively that Serra's gigantic installation East-West/West-East, covering over a kilometer of the Qatari desert, "evokes a kind of capitalist sublime that finds its expression in gargantuan feats of spatial domination".

[2] "The more combat power is packed into a single vessel, the greater the percentage of overall force combat power is lost if it is put out of action [...] the aircraft carrier is indeed uniquely capable, but it cannot tolerate much risk except under the direst strategic stakes." (Rubel, 2015)

REFERENCES

Bush, G. (2003) "George Bush's address on the start of war", *The Guardian*, 20/3/2003. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/mar/20/iraq.georgebush; retrieved 16/11/2018.

Diehl, C. (2006) "The Toxic Sublime" (Edward Burtynsky), *Art in America*, February, pp. 188-123.

Rosler, M. (1981) "In, around, and afterthoughts (On Documentary Photography)", M. Rosler (Ed.), *Decoys and disruptions: Selected writings 1975-2001* (pp. 151-206). Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, p.195.

Rubel, R.C. (2015) "The Emperor's New Clothes: The Self-Delusions of American Naval Power", CSS ETH Zürich, 14/10/2015. Available at: https://isnblog.ethz.ch/uncategorized/the-emperors-new-clothes-the-self-delusions-of-american-naval-power

Sepp, K. I. (2007) "From 'Shock and Awe' to 'Hearts and Minds': the fall and rise of US counterinsurgency capability in Iraq", *Third World Quarterly*, Vol.28, No.2.

Shinkle, E. (2015) "A Capitalist Sublime: Richard Serra", in *ASX*, 8 Sep. 2015. https://americansuburbx.com/2015/09/a-capitalist-sublime-richard-serra.html), retrieved 1/08/23

Ullman, H. K., Wade, J. P. et al (1996) *Shock and Awe: Achieving Rapid Dominance*, Washington: Institute for National Strategic Studies, National Defense University.

EXAMINING GLOBAL PHENOMENA OF POVERTY AND INEQUALITY THROUGH *THE POVERTY LINE* PROJECT

Stefen Chow and Huiyi Lin
[Chow and Lin]

Keywords:
Art
Photography
Poverty
Inequality
Poverty Line
food choices
food systems
Globalization

ABSTRACT

The Poverty Line project started from a question: "What does it mean to be poor?"
In 2010, we began creating art examining the global phenomena of poverty and inequality. From our observations, and our respective backgrounds of economics (Lin) and photography (Chow), we discussed the complexities of the issues in different places we lived in or visited. Our ideas were distilled into representing the daily food choices one would face living at the poverty line of a country. From 2010 to 2020, we traveled 200,000 kilometers to create case studies of 36 countries and territories spanning six continents. We used each country's official poverty definition to derive a per-person, per-day rate. For middle- and high-income economies, the average low-income household food expenditure is taken into account, while for low-income economies, the entire daily income of a poor individual is used. According to the granted sum of money, food is bought in local marketplaces. Each product is photographed on a local newspaper from the day of the shoot. Through the research, we realized and broke down assumptions about poverty and inequality, and gathered ideas about food systems and vulnerabilities.

CHOW AND LIN The crux of Chow and Lin's practice lies in their methodology of statistical, mathematical, and computational techniques to address global issues since 2010. Chow and Lin's projects are driven by the discursive backgrounds in economics, public policy, media, and these are further augmented by enduring exchanges with specialists from those fields. Their projects have been exhibited at Arles Les Rencontres De La Photographie, Art Museum of Guangzhou Academy of Fine Art, Venice Arte Laguna, Houston FotoFest Biennial, National University of Singapore Museum and were invited to present at the United Nations Conference Centre in Bangkok. Their works are in the permanent collections of The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) and China Central Academy of Fine Arts Museum. They are authors of *The Poverty Line* (published by Actes Sud and Lars Muller, 2021). Stefen Chow and Huiyi Lin (b. Malaysia / Singapore) currently reside in Beijing, China.

1. INTRODUCTION

The *Poverty Line* project started from a question: "What does it mean to be poor?" In 2010, we began creating art examining the global phenomena of poverty and inequality. From our observations, and our respective backgrounds of economics (Lin) and photography (Chow), we discussed the complexities of the issues in different places we lived in or visited. Our ideas were distilled into representing the daily food choices one would face living at the poverty line of a country.

At the start of topic exploration, we realized countries have different ways of defining poverty, depending on their political inclinations, social expectations and economic resources. While the World Bank set a widely known international poverty definition (USD 2.15 per person per day using 2017 prices, as of September 2022), this focused on extreme poverty. Broadly countries may use two types of income poverty measurement approaches – absolute poverty and relative poverty. Absolute poverty, which is used by most low-income economies, usually starts from calculating the costs of a local diet which fulfils calorific and other basic needs for a grown person in a day. On the other hand,

Figure 1: China, Beijing, December 2010, CNY 3.28 (EUR 0.37)

Figure 2: France, Paris, September 2015, (EUR 5.99)

Figure 3: India, Delhi, December 2011, INR 32 (EUR 0.46)

Figure 4: Japan, Tokyo, February 2011, JPY 394 (EUR 3.51)

Figure 5: China, Hong Kong, July 2011, HKD 44.96 (EUR 4.01)

relative poverty draws up a relative standard of living. For example, the European Union sets the at-risk of poverty threshold at 60% of the national median equivalised disposable income after social transfers. It is also noted that the World Bank and United Nations Development Programme additionally look at non-monetary deprivations such as access to education and basic infrastructure, to construct a multidimensional poverty measure. Upon setting the definition of poverty, governments formulate poverty alleviation measures for people living below (and for certain cases, also at) the poverty line.

We decided to use each country's official poverty definition to derive a per-person, per-day rate. For middle- and high-income economies, the average low-income household food expenditure is taken into account, while for low-income economies, the entire daily income of a poor individual is used. According to the granted sum of money, food is bought in local marketplaces. We purchase 50 to 100 items for each country, covering every food group: vegetables, fruits, carbohydrates, protein and snacks.

Each product is photographed on a local newspaper from the day of the shoot. The news headlines, graphics and advertisements form an envelope of time and space. Dimensions

and lighting are carefully determined, in order to express identical aesthetics over time and geographical breakdown. This typological method enables a singular interpretation of the picture, while relating details of each one to the rest of the corpus.

Over a period of over 10 years (2010-2020), we traveled 200,000 kilometers to create case studies of 36 countries and territories spanning six continents. Through the research, creation and engagement, we expanded our understanding and questions around the issues.

2. WHO IS POOR?

A key learning point we found is that poverty is not always visible. Poverty is often confused with homelessness, destitution or rural impoverishment, with stereotyped imagery associations. While those groups are part of the poor population, poor people are not necessarily uneducated or jobless especially in developed economies.

We covered Japan in 2011, and found poverty to be a sensitive, at times taboo, topic. Japan publicly released its national poverty rate for the first time in 2009. The level of 15.7% (2006) was considered high amongst developed countries, and countered local assumption of a uniformly middle class population. Most of the poor were "working poor" having low-wage jobs with little or no social security, and the rate of poverty was especially high for single-parent households.

Hong Kong established an official poverty line in 2013. When we undertook the project there in 2011, we had observed the government's multi-dimensional approach and social welfare measures, as well as the poverty threshold monitored by the Hong Kong Council of Social Service (HKCSS) which coordinated local social service organizations. We took the latter as a proxy indicator to understand Hong Kong's poverty situation. Ground reality hit when Chow spoke with a childhood friend. Then in his 30's, he had a college degree, was single and worked two service jobs since being retrenched from a full-time position a few years ago. His daily food budget was similar to what we were

Figure 7: United States of America, New York, October 2011, USD 4.91 (EUR 3.60)

Figure 6: Greece, Thessaloniki, September 2018, (EUR 4.02)

Figure 8: Brazil, Rio de Janeiro, May 2012, BRL 2.33, (EUR 0.93)

Figure 9: Germany, Hamburg, November 2011, (EUR 4.82)

photographing and the struggles were real against an appearance of normalcy. The subject closeness struck us.

When we exhibited in Greece at the Thessaloniki PhotoBiennale in 2018, we took the opportunity to do the project there. Still in a protracted debt crisis that started in 2009, Greece had 20.2% monetary poverty rate and 21.5% unemployment in 2017. Notably, youth unemployment was 43.6%, the highest in the euro area. As we interacted with arts and culture contacts, we found that many in institutional positions (including a museum vice director) were not on full-time status and did not qualify for employment benefits. Job and income security seemed rare

There are poverty situations involving structural unemployment, job instability, high dependency and other factors. The state of poverty is a range which starts at the poverty line and extends all the way down. Such non-apparentness complicates policy measures and societal perception.

3. WHAT SHOULD THE PO-OR EAT?

A common question we encounter, is why the inclusion of chocolates and sweets which seem to be indulgences rather than bare necessities. We have also received audience comments, that the vegetables portrayed are clean and whole, better looking than what a poor person would be able to afford. This seems to imply an assumption of what poor people should eat or buy.

Choice is the core of the project concept. When we looked into spending behavior of people in poverty, we were particularly influenced by the research by economists Sir Angus Deaton, and Abhijeet V. Banerjee and Esther Duflo – who were incidentally all Nobel Prize for Economics awardees at different times. In Banerjee-Duflo's paper "The Economic Lives of the Poor" which was later developed into the book "Poor Economics", they laid out field research that show the poor have a sense of choice and may not choose to spend more on basic calories if there is more money to spend; they may seek out better tasting, more expensive calories or non-food items. We consider the psyche of constrained choices in a system which competes on options, and the rationality and irrationality of human behavior.

Time is an implicit factor that affects food choices. In most developed economies, convenience foods such as ready-to-heat meals and packaged snacks become a solution for households which cannot afford the time to cook due to irregular work schedules and multiple commitments.

Much of these are ultra-processed foods, which use ingredients such as processed sugars, modified oils, protein sources and additives to improve the attractiveness and shelf-life of food products. Ultra-processed foods account for more than half of the energy intake in US and UK populations, and are disproportionately consumed by lower-income individuals. These foods often have high fat, sugar and salt levels, and have been shown to be associated with obesity, poorer

Figure 10: Nepal, Kathmandu, March 2011, NPR 32.88 (EUR 0.32)

Figure 11: Spain, Getxo, October 2018, (EUR 4.74)

diet quality and other serious health problems. At the daily amount, access is a qualifier which may not be taken for granted. We purchase the food items in locally accessible retail channels which include markets, grocery and food shops, and supermarkets. In Brazil's Rio de Janeiro in 2012, the grocery shops in the

Figure 12: South Africa, Cape Town, October 2019, ZAR 27 (EUR 1.75)

favelas charged higher per unit prices than the hypermarkets, but the bus ticket to get to the hypermarket cost a day's income at the poverty line. Common commercial practice of offering cheaper prices for bulk purchases involve a minimum ability to spend. At an open-air market in Addia Ababa, Ethiopia, in 2019, we were unable to purchase chicken meat at the per-person per-day poverty line amount, as sellers only sold whole chickens which were freshly slaughtered. On the other hand, in European supermarkets, chicken parts (breast, drumsticks, wings etc.) are sold in chilled and frozen packs. Infrastructure dictates the set of feasible options.

4. FOOD SYSTEMS AND VULNERABILITIES

As we travelled, ate and photographed across different countries during the creation process, we appreciated the variety of food palates which are keen marks of local culture. Just as we experienced diversity of food, we also found parallels of base ingredients across countries and continents. In most countries, meat comes largely from chicken, pork, beef and fish. Wheat, rice and corn and their related products account for over 40% of calories consumed globally. They form the basis of many countries' staples which may take on different forms and flavors. Such links point to amazing journeys taken by foods and the people who took them along.

Looking into the supply chains behind globally consumed agricultural products, we realized a landscape of hubs which specialize in different crops and animals. Industrialization of agriculture and supply chains to achieve efficiencies led to selection and consolidation of production, processing and distribution resources. When a major node in this ecosystem is disrupted such as during the Ukraine war, the impact is felt in far-reaching places. In the current and longer term, climate change will impact the production and distribution of food with higher temperatures and extreme weather events affecting crop yields, and pest and weed occurrence. Food security has become increasingly important for countries to diversify and protect key food and factor supplies. At the individual level, low-income consumers, who spend a larger part of their expenditure on food than higher income earners, are most vulnerable to food inflation prices.

We also observed the production structure of global modern processed food products. While we did not purchase Coca-Cola for the project (we left out beverages as they could not be photographed unpackaged), it was available in all the locations we were in. We discovered instant noodles and Oreo cookies as food inventions in the past century which transversed their countries of origin to be eaten internationally. Akin to Coca-Cola, their production systems have been reassembled to allow local or regional manufacturing. For instant noodles, the multitude of local flavors they may come in never fails to surprise.

Figure 13a: United States of America, New York, October 2011, USD 4.91 (EUR 3.60)

Figure 13b: Greece, Thessaloniki, September 2018, (EUR 4.02)

Figure 13c: Brunei, Bandar Seri Begawan, May 2015, BND 0.93 (EUR 0.62)

Figure 13d: Ethiopia, Addis Ababa, October 2019, ETB 19.7 (EUR 0.60) (EUR 0.62)

Figure 14a: Myanmar, Yangon, August 2016, MMK 1,030 (EUR 0.80)

Figure 14b: Turkey, Istanbul, October 2019, TRY 6.99 (EUR 1.11)

Figure 14c: Norway, Oslo, October 2014, NOK 65 (EUR 7.95)

Figure 14c: United Arab Emirates, Dubai, September 2014, AED 11.08 (EUR 2.30)

CONCLUSION

"Poverty is the parent of revolution and crime" – Aristotle wrote in a seminal book on politics. Poverty and inequality have existed in societies for millennia. The weakening of the Roman Republic in the 100s B.C. was attributed in part to high economic inequality, with small citizen owners' land being bought out by the wealthy during prolonged distant war efforts. Reform attempts under a representative system were undermined by political violence and civil war later broke out.

In the current context of information access, high levels of poverty and inequality are even more powerful destabilizing forces for societies and economies. Inequality often exists both in income and political status, which may mutually reinforce and perpetuate larger divides. Inequality itself may not be the single factor for social revolution, but it weakens the social compact.

Over the past thirty years, income inequality has increased for most countries around the world. The sense of unequal share of growth and lack of opportunity in the face of globalization has led to the rise of right wing politics and social unrest such as Occupy Wall Street, Arab Spring and Yellow Vest. And while extreme poverty rates fell in most regions pre-pandemic, they remain high especially in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.

Poverty and inequality are not isolated problems, they can potentially become triggers in connected global systems. Poverty, inequality and their underlying causes need to be addressed whether for intrinsic and instrumental reasons. The pandemic has highlighted the unequal access to medical resources, social safety nets, and infrastructure to work and learn. Climate change and technological progress will further pressure income and social divides if the structural issues are not addressed. The solutions for alleviating poverty and inequality will need to change accordingly, and understanding the context is crucial.

Back to our starting question, "What does it mean to be poor?" We did not set out to make a statement, let alone create work that could be considered contemporary art. Diving into this project gave us deeper insight into how the world works in its imperfect ways. Humanity has undoubtedly reached a more advanced stage of civilization than one could imagine. *The Poverty Line* project is a reminder that there is still more to be done. It is a record of our time, an open valve for social perception.

Figure 15: Installation view of *The Poverty Line* at "Capitalist Realism: Future Perfect," Thessaloniki PhotoBiennale 2018, Thessaloniki Museum of Photography, Greece

Figure 16: Installation view of *The Poverty Line* at "Summer of Fireflies: The Poverty Line Solo Exhibition," Arles Les Rencontres De La Photographie 2021, Arles, France. Credit: Gilles Massot

Figure 17: Artist presentation at side-event "Closing the Gaps – Social Protection and Poverty in Asia and the Pacific" during Fifth Session of the Committee on Social Development, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, United Nations Conference Centre Bangkok, 2018, Thailand.

REFERENCES

Aristotle, translated by Benjamin Jowett. (Original written in 350 B.C.) 'Politics'. Accessed online: http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/politics.2.two.html

Banerjee, Abhijit V. and Duflo, Esther. (2006) 'The Economic Lives of the Poor', MIT Department of Economics Working Paper No. 06-29. 2006. Accessed online: https://economics.mit.edu/sites/default/files/publications/The%20Economic%20Lives%20of%20the%20Poor.pdf

Chancel, Lucas; Piketty, Thomas; Saez, Emmanuel; Zucman, Gabriel. (2022) 'World Inequality Report 2022', World Inequality Lab. Accessed online: https://wir2022.wid.world/www-site/uploads/2022/01/Summary_WorldInequalityReport2022_English.pdf

Decerf, Benoit (2022). 'Absolute and Relative Poverty Measurement', World Bank Group Policy Research Working Paper. Accessed online: https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099718004182241161/pdf/IDU00220e87405568049f40b4e405d19302f1978.pdf

Duncan, Mike. (2017) 'The Storm Before the Storm: The Beginning of the End of the Roman Republic', Public Affairs.

Eurostat. (2021) 'Glossary: At-risk-of-poverty rate', Eurostat. Accessed online: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:At-risk-of-poverty_rate

Micklewright, John and Brandolini, Andrea. (2021) 'Poverty: What is it and Why do we care?', University of College London Social Research Institute Quantitative Social Science Working Paper. Accessed online: http://repec.ioe.ac.uk/REPEc/pdf/qsswp2132.pdf

Scheidel, Walter. (2017) 'The Great Leveler: Violence and the History of Inequality from the Stone Age to the Twenty-First Century', Princeton University Press.

World Bank Group (2022). 'Fact Sheet: An Adjustment to Global Poverty Lines', World Bank Group. Accessed online: https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/factsheet/2022/05/02/fact-sheet-an-adjustment-to-global-poverty-lines#2

World Bank Group (2022). 'Poverty and Shared Prosperity', World Bank Group. Accessed online: https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/poverty-and-shared-prosperity

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.

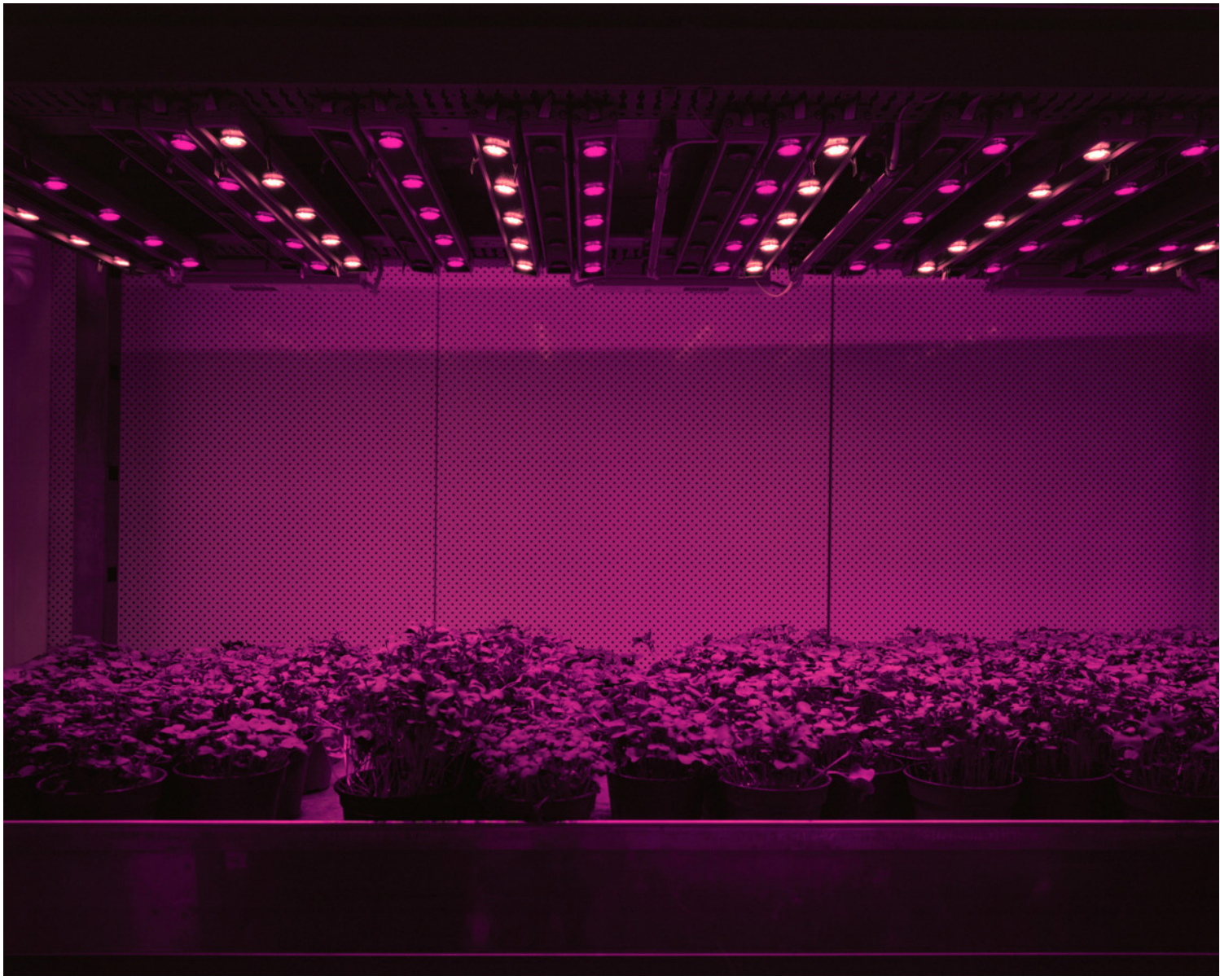


Figure 5: Cress, 2011

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

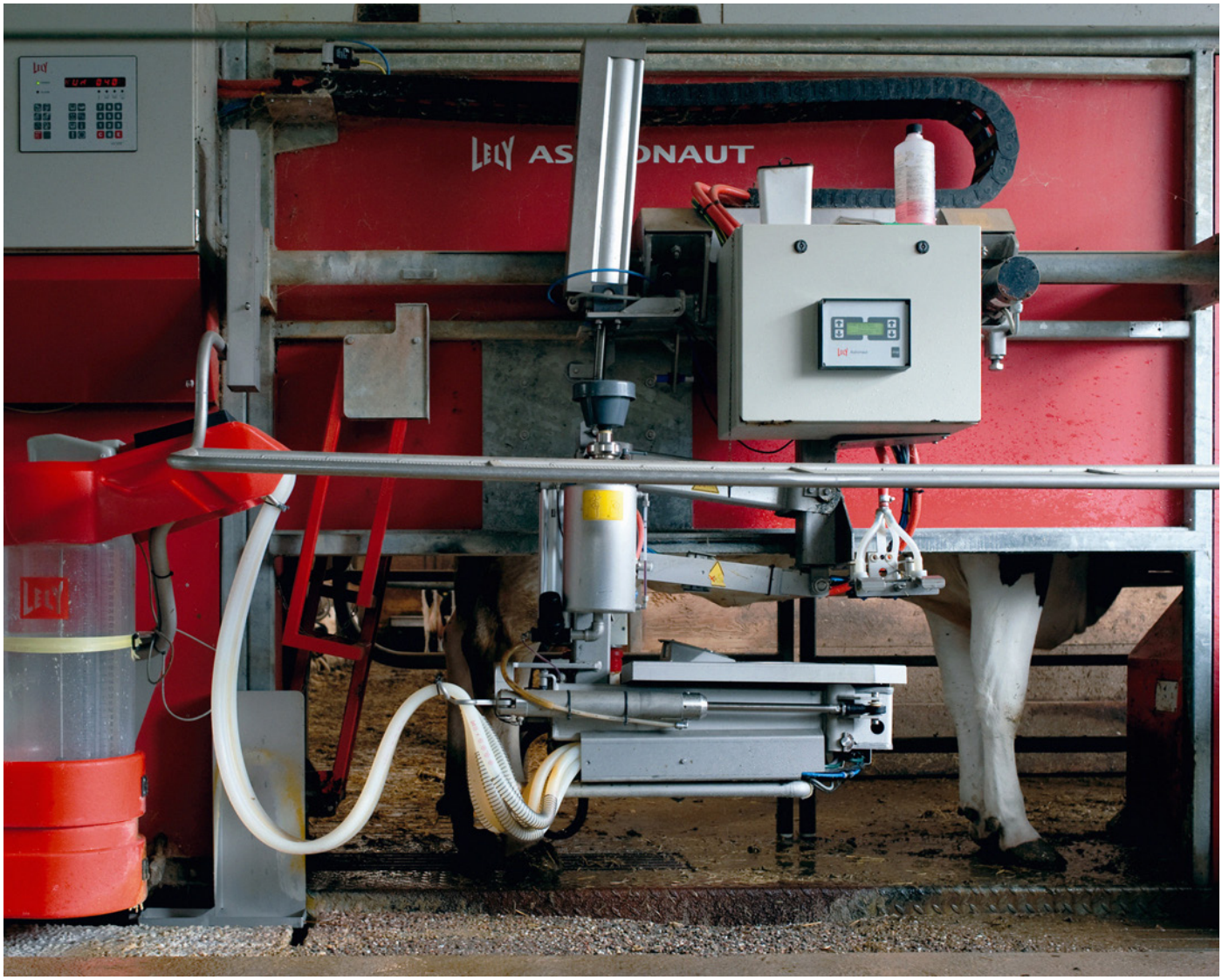


Figure 8: Milking Robot, 2012

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.

THE MINIMAL LANDSCAPE

Evangelia Ntarara
1. Department of Photography and Audiovisual Arts, School of Applied Arts and Culture, University of West Attica
2. School of Applied Arts and Sustainable Design, Hellenic Open University

Keywords:
urban environment
night photography
light pollution
nocturnal landscape
artificial light
ecological approach

ABSTRACT

The article develops an ecological approach (of space or landscape) that is framed by photographic works that capture the dark background of the night sky. The works presented display significant visual information about the environment and belong to heterogeneous photographic genres such as astrophotography or artistic documentary. The various photographic techniques presented through the works visualize visible and invisible radiations that prevail in the dark background of space. Taken as a whole, they broaden the perception of space and highlight the modern phenomenon of light pollution and the invasion of new information into space. The ecological approach is also framed by historical data that connect the evolution of photography and the photographic way of recording space with technological progress, the discovery of new places, the creation of metropolises, and especially the course of urban lighting, which is responsible for the majority of light pollution. Human intervention transforming the urban and natural environment has changed spatial experience, and capitalist organization of production has created a traumatic imprint on the environment. The idea that capitalism can provide the solutions that will reverse the burdened state of the ecosystem is not only not confirmed, but spaces seem to be minimized, shrinking, and landscapes alienated and homogenized. Light pollution now prevails across the planet, and in addition to the loss of the experience of darkness and the energy-intensive state, it threatens human health, flora, and fauna of the ecosystem. The homogenization of modern conditions, as recorded photographically, ultimately emerges as a condition that has arisen from the interventionist approach to the environment.

EVANGELIA NTARARA graduated from the Technological Educational Institute (TEI) of Athens with a degree (BA) in Photography (2001) and she earned her master's degree (MA) in Lighting Design-Multimedia at the Hellenic Open University (2015). She is a PhD Candidate and Teaching Research Staff at the Department of Photography and Audiovisual Arts, School of Applied Arts and Culture, UNIWA. Her ongoing doctorate research is entitled: Phenomenological Interpretation of Urban Space in Greek Artistic Photography from 1975 to 2010. She is also a member of the collaborating teaching staff at the Hellenic Open University, School of Applied Arts and Sustainable Design (2021-2024). As a professional photographer, she has mainly worked in digitization projects for collections, historical archives, and publications (2004-2023). Furthermore, she was assigned architectural photography shoots. Some highlighted collaborations were realized with Giannis Tsarouchis foundation and the National and Cultural Greek Company. All the aforementioned projects, among others, are published in editions and catalogues, such as "Athenian Houses of the Modern Movement" (2013) or the last awarded catalogue "Yannis Tsarouchis: Dancing in Real Life" (2021). Her artistic trajectory involves photography, lighting design, and performance art. In particular, she has exhibited her photographic work both individually and collectively. She has also carried out art projects on ephemeral lighting design in public spaces and site-specific performance. She is interested in the social aspect of lighting design in the urban environment through specific ongoing research.

1. INTRODUCTION

This article deals with the contemporary environment mainly of large cities through the "visibility" of the camera. The photographic way of recording space from the first moment of the appearance of photography links human intervention with the transformation of the urban and natural environment and the new spatial experience as shaped by technology. Photography, beyond the clarity recording of space through the visible spectrum, visualizes invisible radiation "extending vision" with appropriate programming and techniques (Bate, 2009). This expands the perception of space (or the substance of space). Similar modern photographic techniques and approaches to space or landscape record contemporary environmental conditions, highlighting in part a spatial shrinkage. In parallel with photographic approaches, the modern, necessary, and urgent creation of a dialogue for the sustainability of the environment can jointly shape an ecological approach.

In the present study, the ecological approach of the landscape is framed by photographic works that document the modern environmental conditions, regardless of their intention and the genre to which they belong. The study of these works, despite the diversity of the technique and practice used in their production, presents significant visual information about the environment, mainly reflected in the dark background of the night.

Technological progress is interrelated with the expansion of human experience of the environment (space or the world). The way technology was used "highlighted capitalism as a new way of organizing production," as pointed out by Ion Terzoglou (2009). The invention of photography in the mid-19th century coincided with major technological developments such as the railway and the creation of metropolises. The photographic recording of the new landscapes that emerged from the railway network, the metropolises, the panoramas, the aerial photographs, the postcards, and all kinds of mnemonic presences are today the stock of documentation of the new way of life. At the same time, policies for public space, regardless of their ideological background, photographic missions, and institutional practices for assigning photographic projects related to the new spatial experience, contributed decisively to a wide range of recording of the shaping of space.

Urbanization has favored the mass spread of new common and intangible elements, such as the lighting of public spaces (natural, urban and suburban). In the modern environment, there is an extreme and uncontrolled use of public lighting, to some extent a result of its initial use in the public space as a control mechanism in industrial global cities (Paris, London, Berlin, Philadelphia, etc.). The over-dimensioning of lighting, responsible for the phenomenon of light pollution, distorts the night landscape and beyond being responsible for increased energy consumption, has serious effects on humans, flora, and fauna (Longcore, Rich, 2004).

Today, with regards to the use of public lighting, we are going through a transitional period with its contradictions. Addressing light pollution (Falchi et al, 2016) as one of those corrective policies for tackling climate change and ecosystem disruption, as well as the control of lighting distribution through central security systems, are some of the axes of the transition towards smarter, less energy-consuming but increasingly controlled cities (Wathne and Haarstad, 2019). Regarding the external lighting of cities and in an effort to protect the nighttime landscape, regulations are now being imposed to restrict and reverse the phenomenon of light pollution.

Mark Fisher, in the section "Capitalism and the Real", refers to the environment to highlight the distinction between the Real and reality as defined by Lacan. The Real is the traumatic void that lies beneath the reality presented to us by capitalism, and environmental destruction is the Real that emerges from contemporary environmental conditions. However, capitalism presents the fantastic scenario of a planet inexhaustible in resources and also suggests that any problem can be solved by the market. In reality, capitalism is inherently opposed to any notion of sustainability (Fisher, 2022).

Therefore, while the modern problem of light pollution can be reversed by reducing consumption and implementing appropriate measures, its consequences cannot be reversed, leaving their footprint on biodiversity as well as other issues related to health, ecology, and economy, while relevant research is ongoing. The global atlas monitoring the sky glow phenomenon, which is one of the phenomena of light pollution, shows that “more than 80% of the world and more than 99% of the populations of the USA and Europe live under light-polluted skies”, according to Fabio Falchi et al (2016). The measurements refer, for obvious reasons, to the emitted light

radiation from cities. Among other significant elements of the same research, it is reported that few areas on earth remain that do not present the phenomenon. The researchers also report that “the Milky Way is hidden for more than one third of humanity, including 60% of Europeans and nearly 80% of North Americans. Moreover, 23% of the world's lands between 75°N and 60°S, 88% of Europe, and almost half of the USA experience light-polluted nights” (Falchi et al, 2016).

2. PUBLIC LIGHTING AND URBAN STRUCTURE - HISTORICAL DATA ON URBAN LIGHTING

With the installation of gas lighting in the urban environment of the major European cities (Paris, London, Berlin) until the mid-19th century, cities were illuminated in specific central urban areas, especially on major roads, mainly for control and safety purposes. A characteristic example is an OSRAM advertising spot (a cartoon from 1925) which presents lighting as a "watcher" (Schlör, 1998). By 1890, most major cities had gas lighting networks, although not all areas and homes were connected to the network. Later on, the transition to electricity was gradual.

Beyond its enormous importance on a social, economic, productive, and labor level, lighting has transformed the urban landscape in city centers during the night hours, expanding activities. Initially, the use of public lighting had limitations and the police were responsible for enforcing them. Its operating restrictions were based on seasons (from May to August), hours (midnight), and the phase of the moon (full moon), and its operating hours gradually increased. The new spatial experience created by the newly established ambient atmosphere highlighted a new "lifestyle" (Schlör, 1998) while at the same time degrading "the magical light of the moon" into the "miserable darkness of the big city," as noted by Joachim Schlör (1998).

Figure 1: Rau, *Peace Jubilee, Court of Honor, Broad and Sansom Street, Philadelphia* (1898)

The use of urban lighting as a technological innovation was combined with significant urban planning changes in the environment of cities, with the most well-known example being Baron Haussmann's plan for Paris and the conflicting interpretations of his intervention in the city (Harvey, 2015). The radical urban planning interventions of Baron Haussmann destroyed many points of the old city and created urban apartment buildings and large boulevards, reshaping the city. Alongside the interventions, which had as their ultimate goal the control of public space, mainly, however, the increase in the value of properties in existing areas (Harvey, 2015), the gas lamp lighting was also promoted, with the installation of approximately twenty thousand gas lamps and the lighting of cafes on the boulevards. New constructions in public space also supplemented the new conditions that changed the urban experience. Regarding Haussmann's overall intervention, it is also reported that after his resignation from the position of prefect in 1870, the inhabitants of Paris could safely travel at night without the company of armed individuals carrying lanterns (Charles Marville: Photographer of Paris, 2014).

Marville captured the transition of the city to the modern era through photography, having officially undertaken the photography of Paris' urban transformation since 1862 (Charles Marville: Photographer of Paris, 2014). Marville photographed the older densely populated neighborhoods of the city, which according to the new plan were to be demolished, as well as the new city with its emerging amenities. The entirety of Marville's work for Paris constitutes one of the first and most dynamic explorations of large-scale urban transformation, which “established a tradition of documenting condemned urban spaces”, as noted by Stallabrass (2018).

One of the characteristics of urban spaces, regardless of the era and lighting technology, is the lighting of the central streets and the highlighting of monuments. For example, in the United States, Philadelphia was the

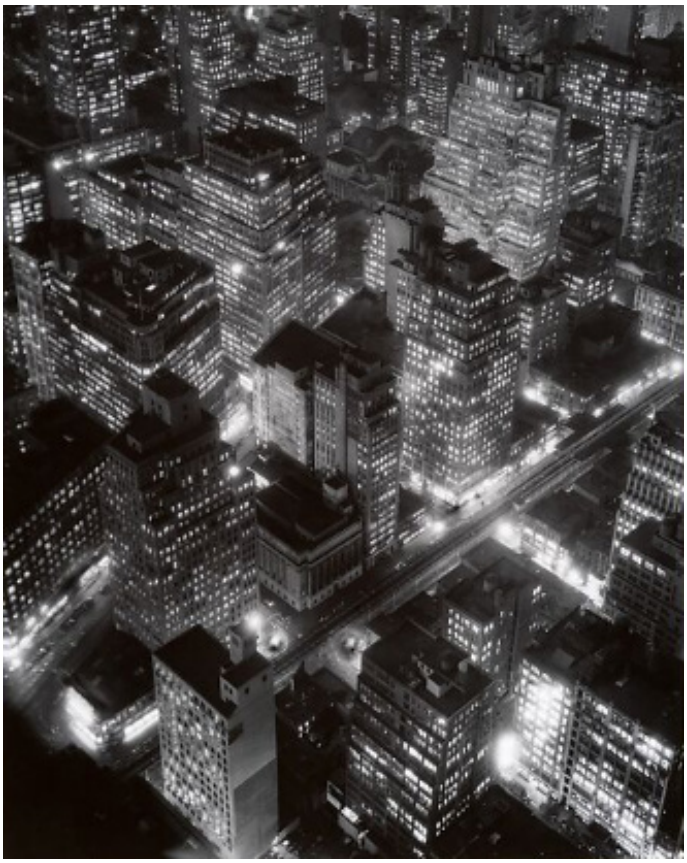


Figure 2: Abbott, *Night view, New York City* (1932)

Figure 3: Brassaï, *(Paris de nuit) La Colonne Morris dans le Brouillard* (1932)

first city to install an oil lamp street lighting system in the 18th century. Similarly, in the era of electric lighting, as we can see in William Rau's photograph (1898), which depicts the illuminated Peace Jubilee, Court of Honor monument, lighting contributed to highlighting the festive image of the city for the end of the Spanish-American War (figure 1).

3. NIGHT PHOTOGRAPHY - THE CITY AND THE LANDSCAPE AT NIGHT

In night photography, the absence of lighting creates conditions similar to the interior of a camera. We could say that the photographer, in a nocturnal environment, is like being inside the same medium. The almost monochromatic light welcomes the landscape, color only emerges from artificial lighting, and the representation of space works almost "positively" as ambient lighting is dim, there are no colored shadows to "refine" the forms, only a few reflections, and light absorption allows only a few intensities to be revealed. The work, in this sense, becomes minimalist.

Night photography offers a way to explore the natural time experienced by the city and analyze the way time is recorded in photography and its relationship with space. At the same time, studying works in this category is related to the evolution of photographic technology. For example, as shutter speeds that allow for the capture of night scenes become faster, clarity and image production increase. The increased sensitivity of modern digital camera sensors reveals bright and clear forms even in environments with low levels of light. While the visual range (the capabilities and limits of the photographic frame) remains constant, the space appears to "change". In addition to the "changes" that are shaped by the highlighting of forms in low light conditions (without the use of additional lighting such as flash), we observe a concentration or rather an invasion of new information due to the increased radiation and light pollution recorded in the urban landscape by specific functions that occur in urban space.

However, beyond the nighttime environment that gives a characteristic form to the photographs, special depictions arise when the camera is combined with other tools

Figure 4: Brandt, *Blackout in London, cresent moon and street lamp, the adelfi* (1932)

or optical systems, allowing for shots under special conditions. Nighttime photography brings together many of the elements that are historically associated with photography and expand the perception of space. For example, the use of a telescope or the recording of images beyond the visible spectrum (e.g. ultraviolet). As David Bate characteristically states: "when photography is combined with other instruments, like microscope or telescope, it has extended the human capacity for sight... Photography becomes a device that adds to the memory of things that the naked human eye cannot see" (Bate,2009).

The first decades after the invention of photography, night photography using ambient light was prohibitive due to the very long exposure times required by photosensitive materials. Of course, there was no expectation of clarity in moving subjects. This was another reason why photographers experimented with city landmarks and the minimal light of the urban environment that came from the moonlight or gas lamps. Night photography developed substantially when photosensitive materials began to allow photography in low light conditions, with short exposure times, and this gradually happened after 1870. In the course of the evolution of techniques and experiments, we encounter Paul Martin, who published the photographic series “London by Gaslight” in 1896 in the Amateur Photographer magazine (Dhaliwal, 2014). Martin's technique influenced Alfred Stieglitz, who later developed the technique, managing to reduce the exposure time considerably in order to capture moving objects with clarity. Characteristic images of this technique are the views of night-time Manhattan in Reflections: Night, New York (1897) (Greenough, 2002). Experimentation continued in the following decades. Berenice Abbott used a high-contrast developer for her iconic photograph "Nightview, New York" (1932) (figure 2), (Schwendener, 2011). This photograph foreshadowed the modern photorealistic urban environment. At the same time, in his book “Paris de nuit” (1933) Brassaï identified with the nocturnal experience of the modern city. The way Brassaï used the particular diffused lighting and reflectivity created by atmospheric conditions such as humidity and rain in the night environment, as well as his photography of the city's diverse night-time social life, constitute groundbreaking work. In his image, “La Colonne Morris dans le Brouillard”, 1932 (figure 3) we observe one of the objects that enriched the urban experience of Paris by Haussmann's intervention. Bill Brandt's “A Night in London” (1938) falls into the same category. Brandt made several night shots by moonlight (figure 4) and during the blackout in the bombing of the city in 1942. Since then, night photography which, in addition to ambient lighting, includes works using flash or other techniques (e.g. infrared) has been definitively integrated into the photographic works of important photographers (Night Vision, 2011).

Several contemporary works relevant to the article's approach include Stephen Tourlentes' "Of Lengths and Measures" (figure 5) and Rut Blees Luxemburg's series "Histories" (1995-2000). Tourlentes' black-and-white work focuses on prisons in the nocturnal landscape of various states in the United States. The majority of the photographs visualize the dramatic change of the rural nighttime landscape due to the over-illuminated installations of the prisons, and as the photographer states, their remote locations keep them at a distance from our conscience (Tourlentes, 2018). The multi-year project was developed over seventeen years and also highlights the way modern lighting is linked to the concepts of security and control, a relationship that is always under exploration in urban planning. Despite the fact that the external views of the installations are captured from a distance, the dominant contrast of brightness conveys a dramatic sense from the overall spatial experience of the imprisoned, as created by excessive

illumination. The way it is recorded in the landscape also homogenizes the experience of imprisonment. On a different vein, Rut Blees Luxemburg's Histories section explored the nocturnal experience of contemporary urban environments in London as it is shaped and recorded by the prevailing color and brightness (Rut Blees Luxembourg, 1995-2000). Her recent “urbannightproject” (circa 2020), a collaboration with other researchers, links lighting technologies to the vertical development of the city in order to make visible the social and aesthetic politics of this mode of development. Furthermore, as Luxemburg states the project is not anthropocentric but addresses the whole spectrum of the night-time urban experience as in this research. (Rut Blees Luxemburg, 2020)

The night sky is the perfect dark background to showcase the way time is recorded in space. In the nocturnal panoramas of cities, sometimes a bright form is captured that contains the time of the image's recording. Ingo Duennebier's photograph "the airplane - the trajectory, Thermaikos Gulf" created in 1997 from the series "Life is Elsewhere" (figure 6) presented in the exhibition “Transphotometafores - Trajectories and Intersections”, present such a version. The curator's text highlights the negative impact of the spread of transportation networks on the natural environment (Papaioannou, 2000).

4. VISIBLE AND INVISIBLE FORMS IN THE ENVIRONMENT

The photographs presented in this section reveal aspects of the contemporary environment, the structure of cities and their transformation. The works record the way in which we coexist in space with all the radiations emitted, mainly with the phenomenon of light pollution, forming an idea of the extent of the phenomenon. Some of the techniques for recording visible and invisible radiation are also highlighted, such as astrophotography, satellite photography, light painting, and artistic documentary. The ecological approach is developed and framed by the use of photography as a document, regardless of the genre to which it belongs. In the present case, works by Kokkinias and Gurski are presented, which belong to the genre of artistic documentary, works that comment on the contemporary way of life and concern the Greek space.

Figure 5: Tourlentes, *Of Lengths and Measures, Blythe, California* (2018)

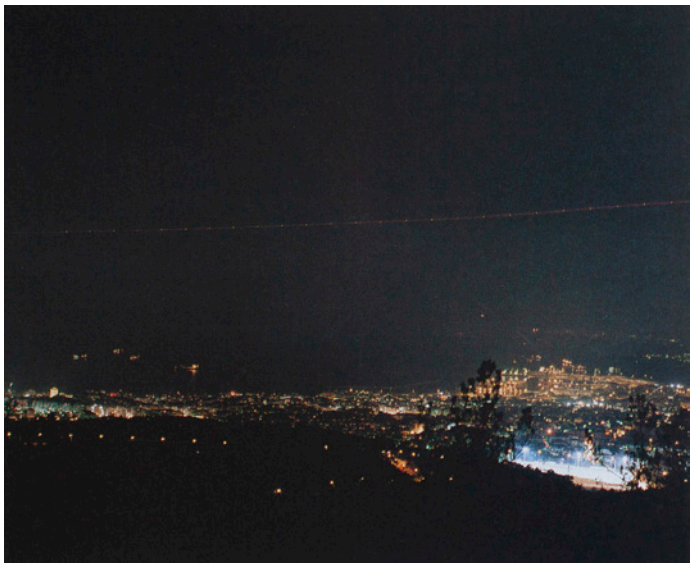


Figure 6: Duennebier, *The airplane - the trajectory, Thermaikos Gulf* (1997)

The Prison of Technology

In modern times, a satellite nighttime image is enough to demonstrate the unlimited use of lighting by geographic location and the energy-intensive behavior of their societies. Light pollution is not only caused by terrestrial lighting installations but also by space satellites, as evidenced in the award-winning photo of the double star Albireo appearing through the orbits of satellites with an exposure time of 2.5 minutes. Rafael Schmall's photo (figure 7), which won the "2020 Astronomy Photographer of the Year" records and visualizes the light pollution caused by satellites. As the astrophotographer grimly points out, in the near future, as more

Figure 7: Scmall, *The Prison of Technology* (2019)

Figure 8: Hadfield, *Photograph of Berlin at night* (2013)

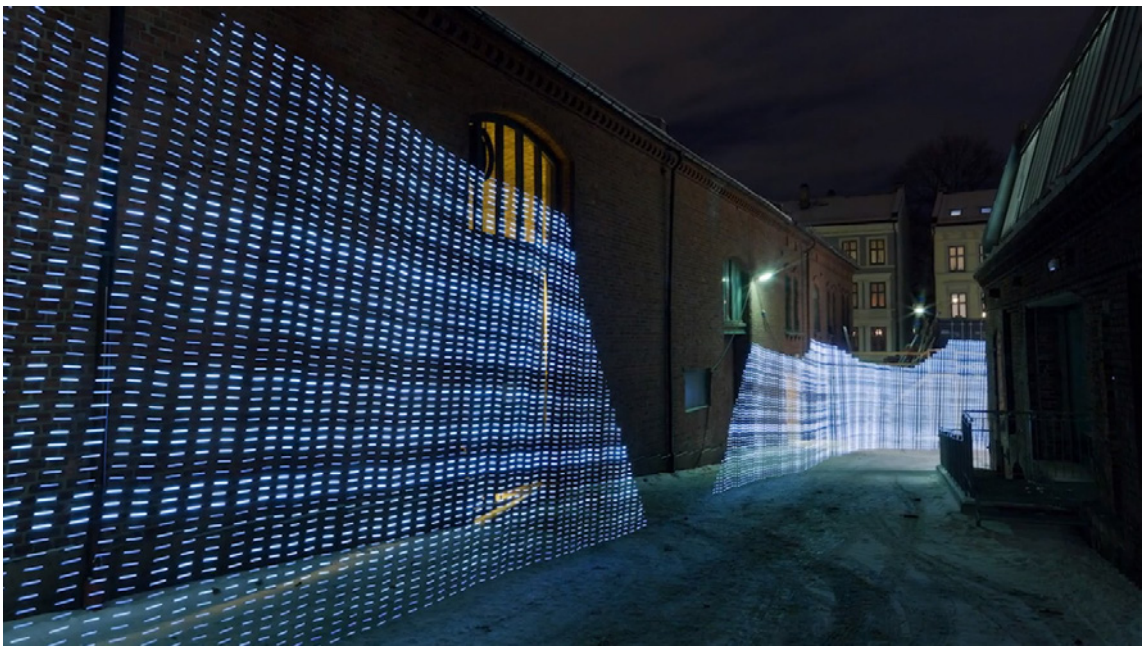


Figure 9: Arnall, Knutsen and Martinussen, *Immaterials: light painting WiFi film* (2021)

and more satellites orbit, it will become even more difficult and precise to position the telescope for astrophotography (Schmall, 2019). The bleak prediction is unlikely to be overturned, as astronomer Samantha Lawler notes that no one is concerned with the orbits near the Earth (low Earth orbit - LEO) because they are not considered legally part of the natural environment (Mortillaro, 2022).

Berlin at night

The satellite photography of Berlin taken by Canadian astronaut Chris Hadfield in 2013 highlights aspects and elements of the city's urban environment (figure 8). As he notes and as we can observe in the photograph, the difference in lighting continued to show the division of the city even 24 years after the fall of the wall (Hartley, 2013). Hadfield's photograph documents the differences in brightness between the over-illuminated western area of Berlin and the illuminated eastern area of the city, as well as the differences in color due to the different lighting technologies used in each area. The mix lighting sources in the western area, including fluorescent lamps, mercury arc lamps, and gas lamps, produces a color closer to white, while the yellowish color of the eastern area's sodium vapor lamps is due to their different technology. As of January 2019, the western area continued to present the same image due to the 30,000 remaining gas lamps that were still in use for various reasons (Pasley, 2019).

Immaterials

The electromagnetic radiation of the wireless network prevailing in the structure of cities is visualized and recorded in defined areas of the urban fabric as presented in the Immaterials project by Timo Arnall, Jørn Knutsen and Einar Sneve Martinussen (figure 9). The project was implemented using the technique of light painting, using a special device with which the photographer moves on the city streets (Martinussen,2011). The device is a four-meter rod that carries LED lights and a typical mobile phone WiFi antenna along its axis and is programmed so that the lights turn on when they detect the wireless network. The photographs in this way visualize a version of the form of the technological fabric of the city's wireless network and its constant immaterial presence in space, ultimately revealing a dense net.

Two works of night landscape featured in this text depict the urban and suburban environment in Attica. These are the photographs of Spata by Panos Kokkinias (2003) - a work from his 2003 series "here we are"- and the photographic diptych by Andreas Gursky, Athens diptych (Gursky, 1995). The photographs, viewed through the prism of ecological approach, are indicated as evidence of the global phenomenon of light pollution and ecosystem disturbance.

Figure 10: Kokkinias, *Spata* (2003)

Spata

Kokkinias' photograph is a landscape with olive trees under the bright, cool light of the advertising panel's spotlights (figure 10). The angle of the photograph suggests that the range of the spotlights is aimed at the ground. The lights of the city are very faintly recorded in the background of the image. The dominance of artificial lighting in the environment is imposing. The field with olive trees stands below the axis of the oversized panel, and the bright blue beam targeted, cool, and symmetrical is recorded in the black of the galaxy and imposes its strong presence and invasion into space. The photographer identifies and records this paradoxical coexistence. Local flora and fauna are forced to coexist under conditions that violently disrupt their circadian rhythm. Today, given the effects of light pollution, we know that changes in spatial and temporal experience through technology affect not only humans but the entire ecosystem. Disruption of nocturnal animals is possibly “the most drastic change that human beings have made to their environment”, as researcher Christopher Kyba notes (IDA, 2018).

The title of the series seems prophetic - "here we are". Although the various interpretations (Petsini, 2009; Moschovi, 2013) of Kokkinia's work probably relate to the specific photograph to a small extent, they encompass this sense of transition and coexistence under conditions of anxiety and impasse, as presented by the non-places of the contemporary urban environment, similar conditions to the present photograph. So here we are - at this moment when very few data about the environment and the sustainability of the ecosystem can be overturned.

Figure 11: Gursky, *Athens, diptych 1995* (2004)

Athens, diptych, 1995

Andreas Gursky's photographic diptych, "Athens diptych", consists of two photographs from vantage points in Athens (figure 11). The panoramic view emerged almost immediately upon the arrival of photography in the mid-19th century as notes David Bate (2009). Gursky heavily relies on visual observation and some diptychs are variations from a partially shifted point of view, a technical characteristic of the photographer (Galassi, 2001).

In this photograph of Athens, in addition to light pollution, the image shows an atmospheric haze - a frequent phenomenon of the previous decades for Athens.

For the diptych panoramic mural (184.8 x 367.7 cm), the interpretation presented in the gallery's text would be described as having a contradictory tone: while it is noted that the ubiquitous use of technology creates a landscape so alienated that it is beyond human perception, the viewer is urged to seek in the hazy atmosphere of the bright image of the city a sensory experience equivalent to that provoked by the works of Jackson Pollock (Andreas Gursky - Athens diptych 1995, 2004)

Gursky's depiction of the city of Athens deviates from the main characteristic of city panoramas. Panoramas usually depict recognizable geographic data and usually point towards information about how the structure of a city develops - in this work we would say that the information concerns only a gloomy future that was ultimately as close as can be presented by a contemporary satellite image that detects light pollution all over the plane. The work also highlights the past of a city that developed in a way contrary to any biophilic perception (Rigopoulos, 2010).

CONCLUSION

The article discussed contemporary photographic works that revolve around the theme of the night environment, offering various perspectives and approaches. These encompass both conventional and unconventional views, such as panoramas (as seen in Gursky's work), astrophotography (represented by Scmall), satellite photography (as demonstrated by Hadfield), and depictions of landscapes spanning urban (Luxemburg), suburban (Kokkinias), and rural (Tourlentes) settings. The "immaterials" project also intersects with the urban structure, providing additional visual context to the artworks within the spatial environment.

These photographic works collectively underscore the detrimental impact of capitalism-driven technology expansion on the environment, particularly concerning light pollution. Whether capturing the glaring urban landscapes of cities like Athens, documenting changes in rural scenery, or exploring the rapidly commercialized visual space of low earth orbits, light pollution emerges as a prevalent and expanding issue.

These diverse photographic genres and techniques serve to visualize the encroachment of technology, much like how a standard camera captures its subjects. The photographic depictions of light pollution showcase various consequences, including the loss of unobstructed views and stargazing opportunities, the transformation of nighttime landscapes, and the overall degradation of the nocturnal environment. Furthermore, the work delves into visualizing the radiation of wireless networks, offering a glimpse into the envisioned network of future smart cities.

The partial review through various techniques and practices framed and highlighted some dramatic changes in the environment. It also highlighted the photographic way in which spatial experiences are recorded through the tangible relationship between space and time. In the first decades, to render the night environment, photographic materials had to have sufficient sensitivity to produce a scene with clarity and adequate brightness. With the spread of the use of artificial urban lighting and technical improvements in sensitivity, the night depiction of the environment was incorporated into the work of many photographers. Today, photography seems to continue to improve the ability of night shots, responding to an increasing need for photos under any lighting conditions. At the same time, it evolved technologically, increasing the sensor's dynamic range with high bits per pixel, providing the ability to record high contrasts created by the artificial lighting between bright and dark areas. The evolution of photography shows a medium that, in a sense, adapts to the way the environment and culture dictate - in this case, the way artificial lighting imposes its own patterns on the landscape. And this way highlights a homogenization of modern conditions that arises not only from the ability and the way the camera captures but also emerges as a condition that arose from the intrusive and controlling approach to the environment.

In the beginning of photography, photographic missions aimed at the discovery, documentation, and exploitation of new places. In the contemporary environment, new places are shaped by technology and are located next to us, shrunk and minimal. Visible and invisible mechanisms of presence and recognition recording, smart cities with central security systems are some of the ways that prescribe the new experience.

The works included in a broader framework converse with the contemporary works of Robert Adams and Edward Burtynsky, who express their concern about the contemporary landscape and environment, as well as works that comment on the invisible "presence" of surveillance and recording mechanisms in urban space, such as those of Broomberg & Chanarin, “Spirit is a bone”.

The constant spatial transformations and rapid and radical upheavals imposed after the industrial revolution reflect an intrusive manipulation with traumatic environmental consequences. An ecological approach through photography can provide a framework for recognizing environmental impacts while also expanding the interpretation of the included works. In addition, the various aspects of the photographed spaces with a dark background record a new relationship between the natural and digital space through the photographic techniques and the dynamic presence of artificial lighting. Light is what reveals the space and what ultimately emerges is a constant brightness.

REFERENCES

Abbott, B. (1932). Night view, New York City, [Gelatin silver print]. Berenice Abbott / Commerce Graphics Ltd. Inc. Accessed April 20, 2023, https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/259570

Arnall, T., Knutsen, J and Martinussen, E.S. (2011) Immaterials: light painting WiFi film [Video still]. Accessed December 17, 2023, http://www.nearfield.org/2011/02/wifi-light-painting/

Bach B. P. (1989). To Light up Philadelphia: Lighting, Public Art, and Public Space. Art Journal, Critical Issues in Public Art (College Art Association Stable), 48(4), p. 325. Accessed March 09, 2023, http://www.jstor.org/stable/777017

Bate, D. (2009) *Photography - The key concepts*. Oxford -New York: Berg. pp. 9, 107

Brandt, B. (1939). Blackout in London, cresent moon and street lamp, the adelfi. [Vintage Gelatin Silver Print]. Accessed April 1, 2023, https://britishphotography.org/artists/70-bill-brandt/works/1036-bill-brandt-blackout-in-london-crescent-moon-and-street-lamp-1939/

Brassai (1932) La Colonne Morris dans le Brouillard. [Gelatin silver print], Accessed March 09, 2023 https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/286479

Brassai and Morand, P. (1993) Introduction. In *Paris de Nuit*, Edition "Arts et Metiers Graphiques".

Catalogue Essay on Andreas Gursky's Athens, 1995 (2004) Accessed March 3, 2023, https://www.phillips.com/detail/andreas-gursky/NY040116/48

Charles Marville: Photographer of Paris. (2014) Metropolitan Museum of Art. Accessed February 28, 2023, https://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2014/charles-marville

Dhaliwal R. (2014) Bodybuilders and angels: the pictures that changed photography - part two. *The Guardian*. Accessed April 20, 2023, https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/gallery/2014/dec/02/bodybuilders-angels-the-pictures-that-changed-photography

Delany, P. (2004) *Bill Brandt - A life*. Jonathan Cape.

Duennebier, I. (1997). The airplane - the trajectory, Thermaikos Gulf. [Scanned image], in H. Papaioannou (ed.) *Transphotometafores - Trajectories and Intersections*, (2000) Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Macedonian Museum of Contemporary Art. p. 86.

Eyes in The Sky: Exploring Global Light Pollution with Satellite Maps. International Dark-Sky Association (IDA). (n. d.). Accessed April 10, 2023, https://www.darksky.org/eyes-in-the-sky-exploring-global-light-pollution-with-satellite-maps/

Falchi Fabio et al. (2016) The new world atlas of artificial night sky brightness, Accessed April 01, 2023, https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/sciadv.1600377, DOI: 10.1126/sciadv.1600377

Falchi, F., Cinzano, P., *et. al.* (2016) Supplement to: The new world atlas of artificial night sky brightness. Accessed April 01, 2023, https://doi.org/10.5880/GFZ.1.4.2016.001

Fisher, M. (2022) *Capitalist realism: Is there no alternative?* Zero Books. pp. 16-20

Galassi, P. (2001) *Andreas Gursky*. The Museum of Modern Art. pp. 37-38

Greenough, S. (2002). Alfred Stieglitz: The Key Set. Accessed April 02, 2023, https://www.nga.gov/research/online-editions/alfred-stieglitz-key-set/essay/1884-1901.html

Gursky, A. (1995) Athens, diptych 1995, [Photograph]. Accessed March 3, 2023, https://www.phillips.com/detail/andreas-gursky/NY040116/48

Hadfield, C. (2013). Photograph of Berlin. Image courtesy of the Earth Science and Remote Sensing Unit, NASA Johnson Space Center. [Digital image]. Accessed March 01, 2023, http://eol.jsc.nasa.gov

Hartley, E. (2013) The Berlin divide: How Chris Hadfield's photo brought back memories of a city split in two. *The Guardian*. Accessed April 03, 2023, from https://www.theguardian.com/world/shortcuts/2013/apr/21/astronaut-chris-hadfield-berlin-divide

Harvey, D. (2015) The political economy of public space. K. Vourekas (Trans.). Accessed April 03, 2023, https://socialpolicy.gr/2015/05/david-harvey.html

Immaterials: Light painting WiFi (2011). Accessed December 4, 2022, http://yourban.no/2011/02/22/immaterials-light-painting-wifi/

Kokkinias, P. (2003) Spata. [Digital image]. Accessed March 3, 2023, http://www.panos-kokkinias.com/images/here-we-are/20_spata.html

Light pollution. International Dark-Sky Association (IDA). (n. d.). Accessed April 10, 2023, https://www.darksky.org/light-pollution/

Light Pollution Effects on Wildlife and Ecosystems. International Dark-Sky Association (IDA). (n. d.). Accessed April 10, 2023, https://www.darksky.org/light-pollution/wildlife/

Longcore, T., & Rich, C. (2004) Ecological light pollution. Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment, 2(4), pp. 191–198. Accessed April 10, 2023, https://doi.org/10.1890/15409295(2004)002[0191:ELP]2.0.CO;2

Marikken W. and Haarstad, W.H. (2019) The smart city as mobile policy: Insights on contemporary urbanism. Accessed April 05, 2023, https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0016718519303410?via%3Dihub

Mortillaro, N. (2022). Is the night sky part of our natural environment? Some astronomers say yes, and are trying to preserve it. Accessed April 10, 2023, https://www.cbc.ca/news/science/satellite-constellations-1.6361590

Moschovi, A. (2013). Realities and Plausibilities: Re-enacting Realism in Contemporary Photographic Art, in H. Papaioannou, (ed.) *Greek Photography and Photography in Greece*, Athens: Nefeli, p. 267.

Night Vision, (2011). Met Museum. Accessed April 20, 2023, https://www.metmuseum.org/press/exhibitions/2011/inight-visioni-at-metropolitan-museum-features-20thcentury-photography-made-after-dark

Papaioannou, H. (2000). *Transphotometafores - Trajectories and Intersections*. Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Macedonian Museum of Contemporary Art. pp. 16, 18, 86-7.

Pasley J. (2019). You can still see the divide between West and East Berlin from space. Accessed January 01, 2023, https://www.businessinsider.com/divide-between-west-east-berlin-from-space-today-2019-11
Petsini, P. (2009) 'Existensial Exposures- Panos Kokkinias' Work', in Ziogas I., Panagiotopoulos N. and Petsini, P. (eds.) *Global Landscapes*, Athens: Egokeros.
Rau, W. (1898) Peace Jubilee, Court of Honor, Broad and Sansom Street, Philadelphia. [gelatin silver photograph]. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Maro S. Hunting. Accessed January 01, 2023, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/the-wonder-of-electricity_b_7188492
Rigopoulos, D. (2010). Modernismos, to lathos tou 20ou aiona [Modernism, The mistake of the 20th Century]. Accessed April 01, 2023, https://www.kathimerini.gr/culture/413502/monternismos-to-lathos-toy-20oy-aiona/
Rut Blees Luxemburg (1995-2000). Histories. Accessed April 01, 2023, https://rutbleesluxemburg.com/histories.
Rut Blees Luxemburg et al. (2020). Urbannightproject. Accessed April 01, 2023, https://urbannightproject.com/dark-preview-one
Rut Blees Luxemburg (2020). The Value of light. Accessed February 28, 2023, https://urbannightproject.com/dark-preview-three
Schmall, R. (2019). The Prison of Technology [Digital image]. Accessed February 28, 2023, https://astronomy.com/sitefiles/resources/image.aspx?item=%7B47896111-667E-402C-B0E6-7624177E9593%7D
Schlör, J. (1998) Nights in the Big City. Reaktion Books, p. 21, 60, 72.
Schwendener, M. (2011) What photographers show after sunset. Accessed April 4, 2023, https://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/29/arts/design/night-vision-photography-after-dark-at-the-met-review.html
Stallabrass, J (2018) Radical Realities: Photography as Political Practice. H. Papaioannou (Trans), Thessaloniki: University Studio Press, p. 62
Terzoglou. I.N. (2009). Idees tou chorou ston eikosto aiona [Ideas of Space in the Twentieth Century]. Nisos Publications, p. 135
Tourlentes, S. (2018). Of Lengths and Measures. Accessed April 01, 2023, https://www.prisoninsider.com/articles/oflengthsandmesures

Acknowledgments
This text derives elements and excerpts from the research that is part of an ongoing doctoral thesis entitled: "Phenomenological interpretation of urban space in Greek artistic photography from 1975 to 2010". The doctorate research is supported by the Special Account for Research Grants (ELKE) - UNIWA.

PORTRAITS FROM ABOVE, HONG KONG'S ROOFTOP INFORMAL COMMUNITIES

Hercules Papaioannou
MOMus-Museum of Photography, Thessaloniki
Rufina Wu, Stefan Canham
Independent

Keywords:
Photography
architecture
urban landscape
inequality
Hong Kong

ABSTRACT

Rufina Wu and Stefan Canham's series, "Portraits from Above, Hong Kong's Rooftop Informal Communities" (2007-2008), meticulously examines the overlooked urban phenomenon of unauthorized rooftop dwellings in Hong Kong's central districts. Focusing on the makeshift homes constructed by migrants in search of affordable housing, the series unveils a unique social and architectural history often unnoticed at street level. Through a comprehensive approach encompassing photographs, architectural drawings, and interviews, Wu and Canham unveil a world shaped by personal necessity and characterized by its ephemeral yet enduring nature. The series captures the juxtaposition of these informal settlements against the sleek skyscrapers, revealing the invisible slums within the heart of Hong Kong. The work provides a nuanced analytical perspective on the sociocultural pressures of the modern metropolis while highlighting the resilience of communities existing under the shadow of the law. Wu and Canham's documentation offers a tangible portrayal of real people navigating a world teetering between hope and despair.

HERCULES PAPAIOANNOU is a photography historian, chief curator at MOMus Museum of Photography, Thessaloniki.

RUFINA WU is an architect based in Vancouver, Canada.

STEFAN CANHAM is a photographer based in Hamburg, Germany. From December 2007 to February 2008, they were artists-in-residence at Hong Kong's Art and Culture Outreach, collaborating on *Portraits from Above – Hong Kong's Informal Rooftop Communities*. The project won the 5th International Bauhaus Award (Dessau, Germany 2008) and the WYNG Masters Award (Hong Kong 2013). It was published by Peperoni Books (Berlin 2008), MCCM Creations (Hong Kong 2009) and Parco Publishing (Tokyo 2014). *Portraits from Above* has been in exhibited in galleries and museums in Europe, Asia, Oceanea, and North America.

PORTRAITS FROM ABOVE

The series "Portraits from Above, Hong Kong's Rooftop Informal Communities" (2007-2008) by Rufina Wu and Stefan Canham examines a unique urban feature of Hong Kong, a city that became a powerhouse of capitalism in Asia during British rule. Specifically, it showcases the phenomenon of spontaneous structures on the rooftops of buildings in Hong Kong's central districts, inhabited by migrants from China and other Southeast Asian countries. These individuals, in search of affordable housing in city centers where labor was in short supply, have spent the last half-century constructing unauthorized dwellings on the rooftops of high-rise, deteriorating buildings. These rooftops, where some people have lived for decades, have been built with the tacit approval of the state. Some of these structures are constructed from concrete and brick and come equipped with water, sewage, electricity, and amenities like internet connections. Others are makeshift shacks composed of sheet metal, wood, and rudimentary materials. Often, they form clusters with multiple walls, creating a juxtaposition of volumes and materials that adorn the summits of the buildings. Wu and Canham's comprehensive approach combines photographs that highlight the lodgings' position within the urban skyline, photographic views that depict their internal organization and daily life, and precise architectural drawings and floor plans that compare the original state of the buildings with their current rooftop condition, revealing the intricate arrangement of the roofs and their improvisational structure. Wu and Canham document an aspect of the city's social and architectural history that often goes unnoticed from street level. They have chosen five buildings that were part of an urban renewal project, entering twenty of these dwellings to create a documentary record that includes, in addition to the previously mentioned photographs and drawings, snippets of interviews with the occupants.

Their methodology provides an analytical perspective on these makeshift abodes, whose form is shaped by personal necessity. These small communities constitute an invisible slum in the heart of Hong Kong, marked by its ephemeral yet enduring nature. Wu and Canham's work profoundly encapsulates the social pressures exerted by the highly competitive environment of the modern metropolis. Simultaneously, it transcends the boundaries of clinical or abstract description by showcasing the layers of this phenomenon, unraveling the stories of real people. Consequently, the elliptical narratives of the tenants bear witness to individual experiences; the photographs position each rooftop within the city's architectural panorama and serve as a vital source of information regarding the interiors of these rooms; the drawings sketch their historical development and deeper structure. From this composite document emerges an unknown world that teeters between hope and despair, constantly devising survival solutions while existing under the shadow of the law. It's a world characterized by handmade and improvised creations, in stark contrast to the sleek and elegant forms of the surrounding skyscrapers, which proudly pierce the sky (Chui 2010).

Rufina Wu (Hong Kong, 1980) focuses her interests on informal settlement practices in relation to rapid urban development and population mobility. Stefan Canham (England, 1968), who works in documentary photography and television productions, primarily concentrates on the use of public space, particularly marginalized communities and forms of self-housing. His photographic record of nomadic squatter culture in Germany, entitled "Bauwagen / Mobile Squatters," is a testament to this focus. The series "Portraits from Above: Hong Kong's Rooftop Informal Communities," in which they collaborated, was awarded the 3rd prize of the Bauhaus International Prize.

Wu and Canham invite viewers to immerse themselves in the urban jungle of Hong Kong, where they uncover makeshift shacks and shed light on the social condition of anonymous workers contributing to yet another economic miracle. Their work does not attempt to conceal the fact that, both historically and in contemporary terms, photography has been a central tool for 'de-territorialization.' It has played a role in training people to perceive land as a spectacle and a developmental opportunity, breaking the deep ties that once bound individuals to it, driven by the rapid pace of metropolitan development. Instead, their work seeks to demonstrate that in the digital age of intangible places, land and architectural space still remain vital focal points of fierce contestation, speculative exploitation, and political opportunism.

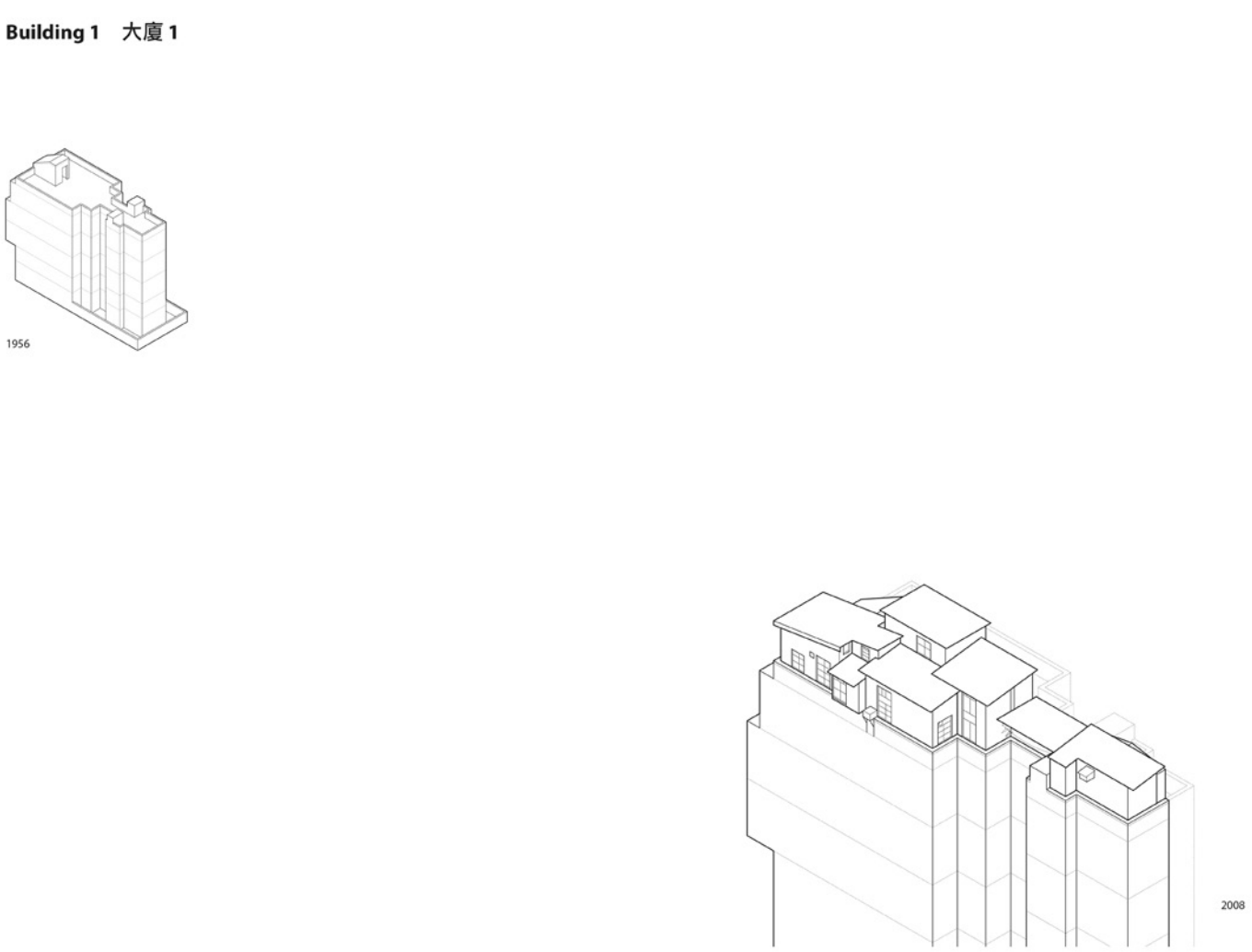


Figure 1: Building 1, Sham Shui Po Area

Figure 2: Building 1, Sham Shui Po Area

Building 1

Dating from 1956, Building 1 is an example of Cantonese-style shophouses found primarily in Southeast Asia and southern China. Designed with the harsh tropical climate in mind, this building type is characterized by high ceilings to allow greater indoor air circulation, and verandahs to provide shade and shelter from rain. When built in rows along a street, the cantilevered upper storeys protect pedestrians from the elements. A number of Hong Kong's remaining shophouses, some dating back to the pre-war period, can be found in the Sham Shui Po district.

Only half of what was Building 1 remains – it has been severed by the new residential development on the adjacent lot. The remnants are simply waiting to be demolished. All the regular flats are empty, only the rooftop units and the ground floor hardware shop remain occupied. A single, unguarded staircase leads up to the roof of this 4+2 storey building. Five rooftop huts, ranging from one to two stories high, sit on 100m2 of unconsumed roof area. Three rooftop households are documented.

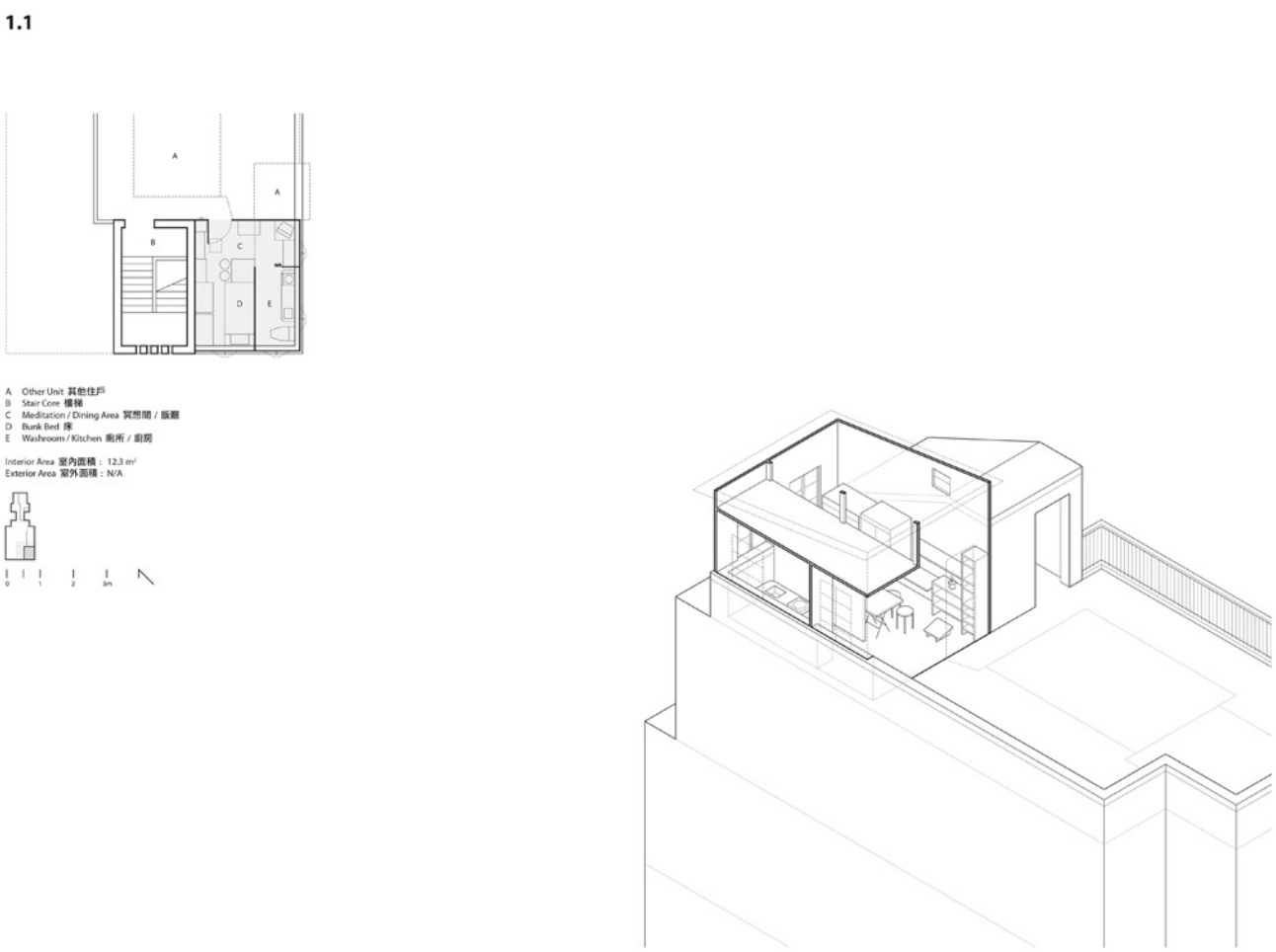


Figure 3: Building 1, Unit 1

Building 1, Unit 1

A native of Dongguan city in Guangdong province, he is a devout Taoist who follows a strict vegetarian diet and prays every morning and evening. Since his retirement, his wife's HK$6,000/month job in Tai Kok Tsui is the primary source of income for the family. The rent for this unit is very cheap because his relative is the owner, but his family will not be able to live here for very long. In fact, all the regular flats in this building have already been adorned with signs declaring them properties of Hong Kong's Urban Renewal Authority. Relocation is inevitable, but he intends to stay on this rooftop until the government provides a satisfactory flat in a nearby area. The transportation costs associated with living in a peripheral satellite town would be too burdensome for his family to shoulder.

Figure 4: Building 1, Unit 1

Figure 5: Building 1, Unit 1

1.2

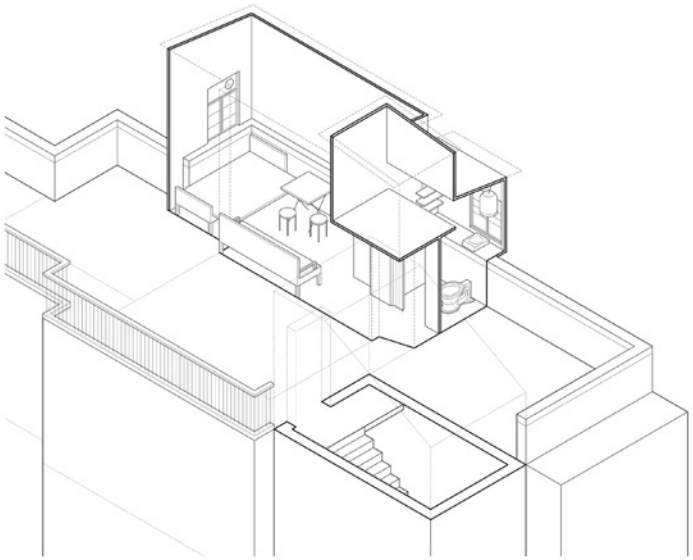


Figure 6: Building 1, Unit 2

Figure 7: Building 1, Unit 2

Figure 8: Building 1, Unit 2

Building 1, Unit 2

A 58-year-old security guard and his wife live in this rooftop unit with two birds. He also claims to timeshare his bed with uninvited rodent guests. He is a Hong Kong local. His wife came from Enping City in Guangdong province about two years ago. As a newcomer, she has little choice but to take on menial jobs like dishwashing. He left his 3-year-old son under his sister-in-law's care because he believes Enping, with more space and cleaner air, is a better environment for his child to grow up in. Before moving to this HK$1,200/month unit, he lived in a HK$1,000/month regular flat on the ninth floor of a nearby tenement building. He decided to move to his current address when stair climbing became too taxing. During the summer months, the electricity bill amounts to HK$900/month because of the constant need for air conditioning.

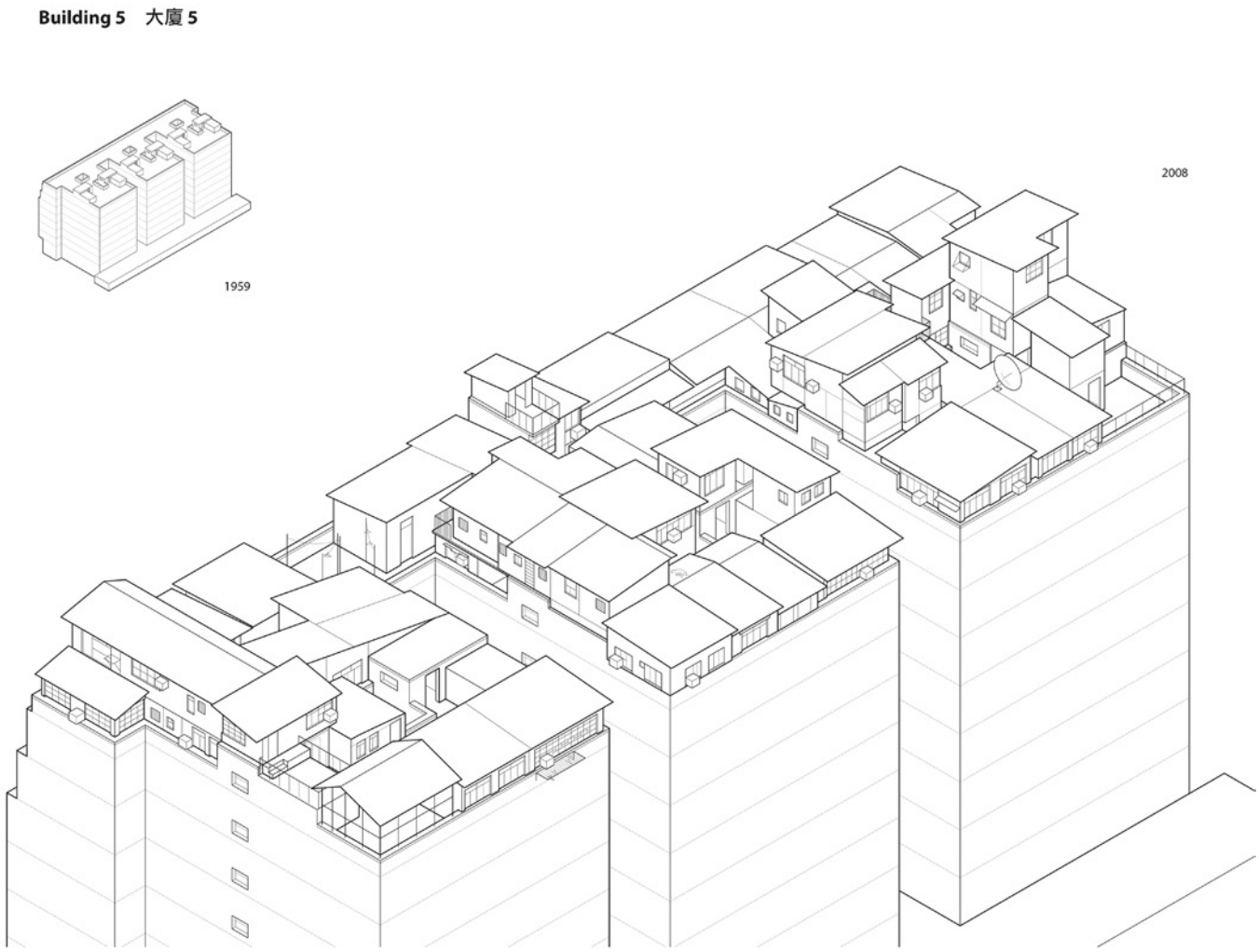


Figure 9: Building 5, Tai Kok Tsui Area

Figure 10: Building 5, Tai Kok Tsui Area

Building 5

Building 5 is a mixed-use structure located in the Tai Kok Tsui neighbourhood, an area within the Yau Tsim Mong district in the Kowloon Peninsula. The area began with the development of shipyards and other heavy industries, but since the 1980s, many of the factories have relocated elsewhere. Like Sham Shui Po and Kwun Tong, this area is a redevelopment site targeted by the URA and is expected to undergo major transformations.

Comprised of three housing blocks, Building 5 has a continuous roof area of 1145m2. Six unguarded staircases provide access to the roof of this 8+3 storey building. The incremental growth of rooftop habitats since 1962 resulted in a complex spatial configuration of more than thirty-five domestic units. The self-built huts, ranging from one to three storeys high, are linked by a maze-like system of corridors and stairs. Often treated as extensions to the residents' homes, these narrow pathways offer an impressive display of everyday life. Eleven households are documented.

Building 5　大廈 5

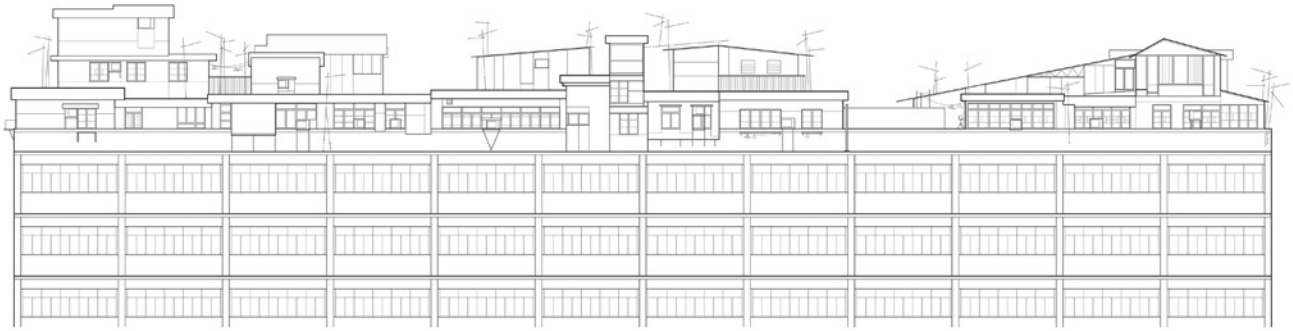


Figure 11: Building 5, Tai Kok Tsui Area, Informal Skyline

Figure 12: Building 5, Tai Kok Tsui Area

Figure 13: Building 5, Tai Kok Tsui Area

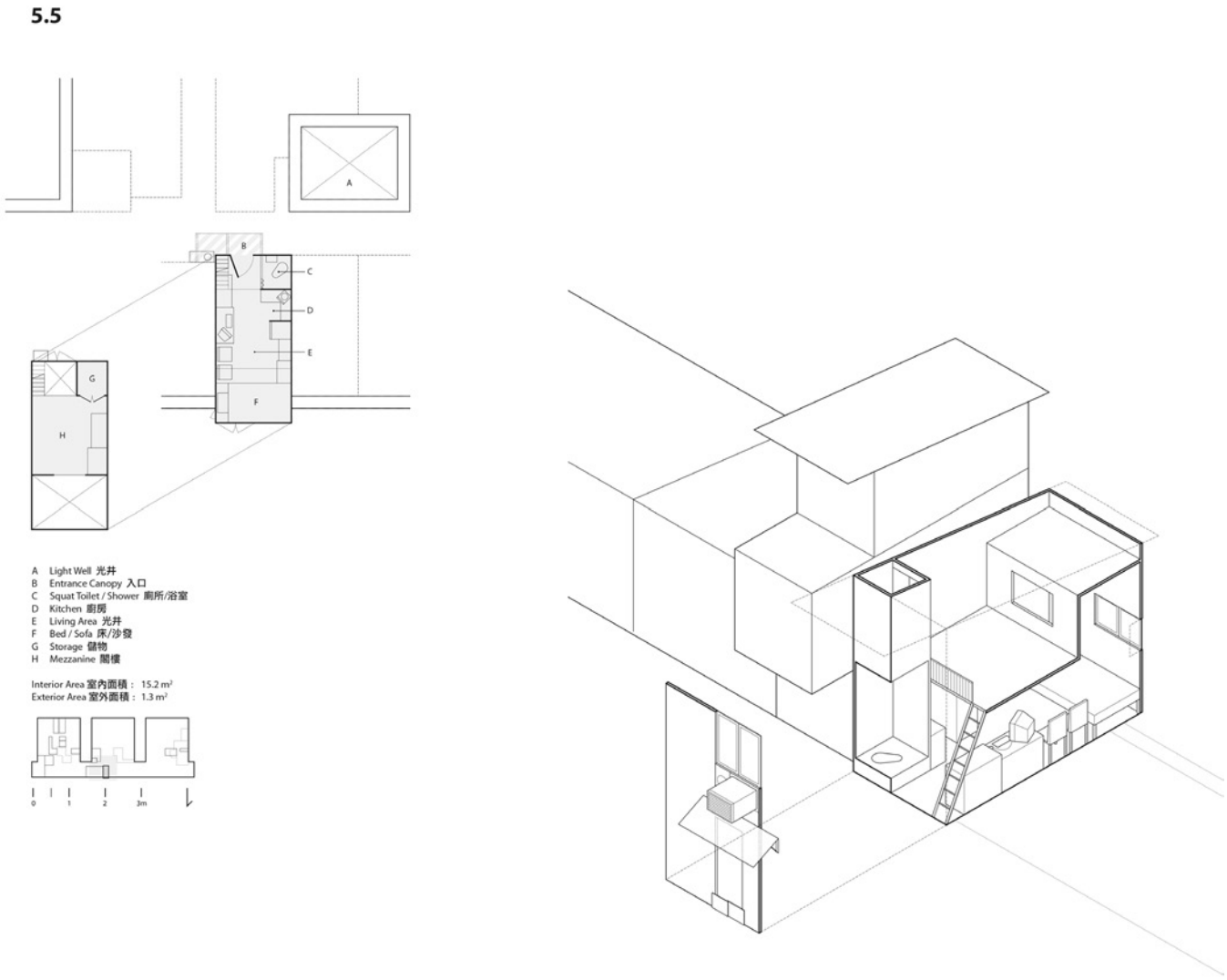


Figure 14: Building 5, Unit 5

Building 5, Unit 5

He decorates Unit 5.5 with a harmonized colour palette, simulated stained glass stick-ons, and potted greenery rotated between different locations to maximize direct sunlight. He believes the lusciousness of the plants brings good fortune. Uncertain of his tenure in this flat, he saw no need to purchase expensive furniture. Every piece was salvaged from trash. He rented a partitioned room with a small window in Sham Shui Po district for more than HK$2,000/month before moving here four years ago. He prefers to live on a rooftop – convenient, cheap (only HK$600/month), better air circulation, and more sunlight. The flat becomes overheated in the summer, but this does not bother him because he his hardly home during the day. As a chef, his workday begins at 9:00AM and ends at midnight. His wife and daughter live in Hangzhou, near Shanghai. He spends ten months every year working in Hong Kong, returning twice a year to Hangzhou. His family also comes to visit him. His daughter loves having the mezzanine level all to herself. His web camera and Internet connection allow him to keep in touch with his family.

Figure 15: Building 5, Unit 5

Figure 16: Building 5, Unit 5

Figure 17: Building 5, Unit 5

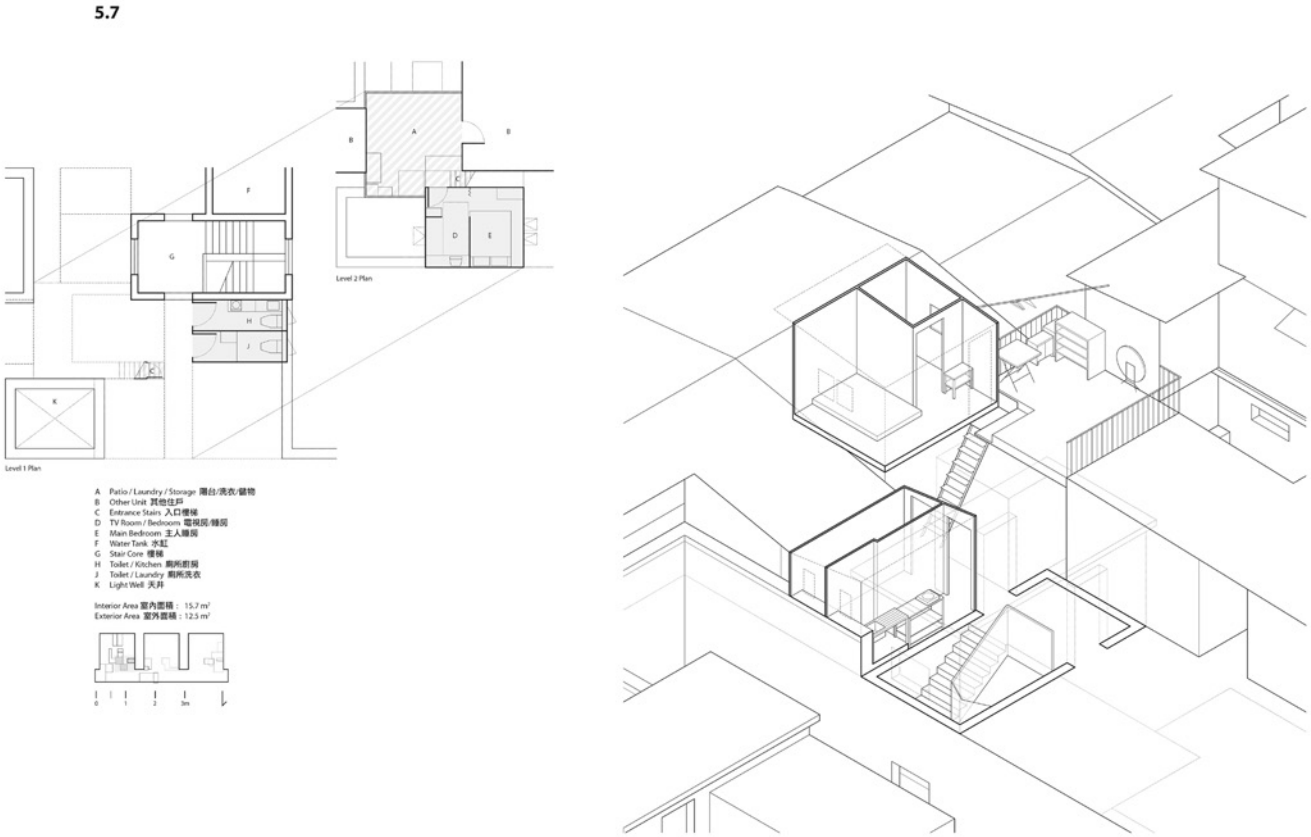


Figure 18: Building 5, Unit 7

Building 5, Unit 7

He lives here with his daughter and his girlfriend. The components of his unit are dispersed over two levels: utilities and service areas (kitchen, laundry, toilet, and shower) are on the lower floor, living and recreational spaces on the upper. He has to climb down a ladder and cross a public corridor to check on his pot of soup in the kitchen/washroom. The beds consist of thin mattresses laid out on the floor. A single mattress, located in the same room as the television, also functions as a sofa. The Tai Kok Tsui neighbourhood can be seen over the roofs of other rooftop structures from the shared outdoor patio. Numerous items help keep his own unit's roof in place and leak-proof; most notable ones are overlapping umbrellas and a broken microwave placed directly above the entrance into the main living space.

Figure 19: Building 5, Unit 7

Figure 20: Building 5, Unit 7

PORTRAITS FROM ABOVE: ARTIST'S STATEMENT

There is no elevator. We walk up the eight flights of stairs, hesitating on the last one, looking at each other, out of breath: we have no right to be here.

The roof is a maze of corridors, narrow passageways between huts built of sheet metal, wood, brick and plastics. There are steps and ladders leading up to a second level of huts. We get lost. Our leaflets in hand, Rufina knocks on a door. There is an exchange in Cantonese. Stefan stands in the background, the foreigner, smiling, not understanding a word. They hear us out, smile back and invite us into their homes.

Later, we look down at the building from a higher one across the street. The roof is huge, like a village. There must be thirty or forty households on it. From the outside there is no way of knowing what is inside. Whether they have Internet or not. Whether they have a toilet. And there is no way of knowing their stories.

Who makes a picture of this? Who keeps a record? Sometimes a newspaper will print an article, or an NGO will launch a campaign. Various government departments keep files on so-called "unauthorized building works", coding the huts with permanent markers and photographing them. The files are not on public record, but residents may look at them to learn why their homes are to be demolished. Very rarely do rooftop residents document their own spaces: the family pictures we saw were taken standing in a field of sunflowers, or in a village in the mainland, or down on the street beside someone else's car, smiling.

We walk up the stairs again. We no longer get lost in the corridors. We learn how residents modify and maintain their homes. There are people who have been living on the roof for twenty or thirty years who have helped to build the city. The new immigrants from Mainland China, from Southeast Asia, from Pakistan, continue to do so. In the seventies, they built the underground, and now they are working on the new tower blocks. Hong Kong's older districts are being redeveloped. Some buildings are crumbling because they were built with salt water concrete. Others have to make way for taller ones that yield higher profits. Few rooftop residents would mind living in the new towers, but they cannot afford it. All are afraid of being resettled to the remote satellite towns, where there may be few opportunities and limited social networks.

We walk up the stairs again. The rooftop settlements are an urban legacy, telling the story of Hong Kong, of political upheavals in Mainland China, of urban redevelopment, of people's hopes and their needs in the city.

REFERENCE

Chui, E. (2010) "Rooftop Housing in Hong Kong: An Introduction" in Rufina Wu – Stefan Canham, *Portraits from Above, Rooftop Settlements,* Berlin: Peperoni Books.

CONTEMPORARY REALISMS OF THE SELF AND CLASSLESS REPRESENTATION

Nina Kotamanidou
International Hellenic University

Keywords:
Selfhood
Realism
Richard Billingham
Capitalist Realism
Classless Representation

ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on perspectives for selfhood representations in contemporary era, whether autobiographical or not and is situated in the widened field of visual arts from the point of view of art as a practiced discourse. Therefore, the subsequent questioning of trends and traits that characterize contemporary realisms of the self aims in discerning possible fruitful representational tendencies within the interests of contemporary visual art debates. The idea of Mark Fisher, that class is omitted from almost all current academic discourses so that a classless understanding of self is the predominant understanding in sociopolitical selfhood representations is central in this review which discusses both high and low categories of such visualizations. For the former, the work of Richard Billingham *Ray's a Laugh* from 1996 is examined in comparison to his film *Ray and Liz*, made in 2018, in terms of the sociopolitical debates they have fostered. This conversation is extended to encompass Cleaning Shows that spin-off from Reality TV , a case which introduces into the conversation, apart from the obvious class debate the present competitive encounters of the real against its visualized representations. In order to review the understanding of realisms in the contemporary era, I also look in pertinent definitions from literary theory, employ current sociopolitical positionings and probe the circulation of class-asserting representations in the art field. In this multifold albeit brief examination of dead ends and opportunities I aspire to bring forth a live field of possible exits for the realisms of the self, where contemporary representations can lead to new, emancipatory understanding beyond the stale, stagnant dreads of late capitalism political fatalism.

NINA KOTAMANIDOU is a work focuses on everyday life and the representation of socially instigated, informal circumstances drenched in the feel-good indulgence of common culture. Within this context she looks for associations that give vent to privately nurtured emotions and autobiographical narratives, as DIY manifestations of contemporary selfhood. Accordingly, her academic research explores the field of informal, quotidian uses of visual culture and its meaning-making procedures. She works on a variety of media, such as painting, video and installation. She has participated in many exhibitions and has curated collective shows in Greece. Initially she studied painting in Aristotle University, Greece and then earned a PhD in Art (Wimbledon College of Art// UAL) specializing in video as a mode of self-presentation within pop culture. She works as an Academic Fellow in the department of Interior Architecture, IHU and the department of Interior Architecture, UniWA.

1. INTRODUCTION

Capitalism Realism came recently into the spotlight as a term that refers to a sociopolitical status quo by Mark Fisher and it denotes a systemic and pragmatic orchestration for the continuation of things as they are in an interminable present, an impossible stance all things considered. Under the same turn of phrase the "lapsed socialists" (Weiner, 2017:91) Richter, Polke and Kuttner instigated a movement which gets mentioned in many art-history orientated articles as the German Pop Art, "a commonly used rubric that reduces the movement to something like the local franchise of a global corporation" (Weiner, 2017:89). In many instances though Capitalism Realism has defied that labeling for it proved to be aesthetically more diversified than the other Pop Art branches but also it has thrusted cynicism towards both capitalist and socialist regimes of power, an attitude which sets it one step ahead from the happy rejoinders of the rest of the Pop Art movements. Yet, although the said Capitalist Realism was a moniker which admittedly was chosen as "another form of provocation" (Richter in Van Brugger, 1985: 84), it marked the place and the time of Western Germany sociopolitical negotiation of post war skepticism, rapid economic recovery and cold war politics. As Richter admitted in 1985 "Capitalist Realism was not intended to be taken seriously [...] This term somehow attacked both sides: it made Socialist Realism look ridiculous, and did the same to the possibility of Capitalist Realism." (Cras, 2014:9). The position of Richter at the time, a state of loneliness, expectation and confusion, as a cultural tourist who explored the western freedom (Smythe, 2014) also combined his experience of eastern bloc politics as a fleeing but trained cultural connoisseur. His circumstances highlight a twofold positioning for the interpretation of the-then socio-political juncture, in which he had intimate affinity to two things: the personal testimony of the sociocultural circumstances that he came from, which also demarcated his ideological past in the form of living conditions and training and his intimate involvement in the western environment which opened up a passage to pursue his future. The point of this discussion is to bring into attention that Richter's double-entry to a sociopolitical environment at that time was in truth an advantageous positioning that he lived up to its core. The possibility for reviewing the present circumstances from within but also from a distance appears at least challenging because we already reside to a perennial bracketing of an incessant present to which "there is no alternative", there is no outside. The continuation of things as they are is fostered as the only possible way. This improbable position, similar to the incessant wheel treading of a hamster, punctuates the efforts of the volatile contemporary selves to place themselves positively within the claustrophobia of late capitalist reality. Politically speaking, it looks as if there is no footing on centrifugal forces which might be able to dismantle the discordances of late capitalist societies and lead us someplace else. As Fisher observes, the disappearance of class from any discourse might be a reason for stalling the formation of a united consciousness (2021: 13), while Srninec & Williams (2015: 160) suggest "populism"[1] as a fragile alternative to class solidifications. Moreover, the proliferation of contemporary selfhoods oscillates between a "heightened sense that self-construction is now beyond self-control" and an "ever expanding, ever emancipating, horizon of possibilities" (Gumbrium & Holstein, 2000: 111-112). Accordingly, the circulating realisms for representing contemporary subjecthood are entangled into discourses that reflect on such multifarious readings.

2. METHODOLOGY AND AIMS

The production of empowering selfhood imagery which can reflect on everyday life conditions without succumbing to either nihilism or complacency is a pressing contemporary question. What sort of realism today can amount to that? In this paper the realisms under discussion are visually orientated, professional outcomes of high or low culture, artworks in the form of photographic series and film on the one hand and TV shows, keeping an eye also to the various digitized streams on social media platforms on the other. In particular, realism is interrogated and inferred into this discussion in order to comprehend the actual world as negotiated by a medium (including an apparatus and the technicalities involved) and with a view to its capacity to envelop a multilayered situation which materializes in a sociocultural context, verified by the presence of a community. By the same token, realism in art practice advocates a way to relate to the world aided by the manipulation

of formal, aesthetic and sensorial elements in order to invent new passages and reframe our experiences. As such conditioning defies the naturalized mirroring of an action as it happens, to overcome such connotations, realism is treated in this paper as "a method" (Roberts in Esanu, 2018: 61, Lye in Nilges[2], 2020: 88), a mechanism which defies its subordination to pictorial appearances, styles or aestheticism in order to disengage it from mimesis and use positively its formal limitations. In addition, realism is accepted as the "unstable, processual and transitive site of an indeterminate process of formal resolution" (Roberts in Esanu, 2018: 75). In accordance with this framework this paper examines realistic representations where class issues - in their presence or absence - have generated exemplary or characteristic selfhood imagery. The point of view for this exploration comes from the field of art practice, focusing on the ways the chosen examples choose to connect to what is there, situated opposite an capturing apparatus. Nevertheless, this paper does not aspire to be an art-historical or socio-cultural analysis, or a political essay but remains in the field of art as a practice.

In order to discuss the ramifications of class politics in art practices the works of Richard Billingham, *Ray's a Laugh* (1996) and *Ray and Liz* (2018), are seen against the background of their reception within and outside the perimeter of official art institutionalism. The case of these artworks, executed with a time span of almost 20 years and in a different medium each time, a series of photographs and a book in 1996 and a tripartite film aired also on TV in 2018 is unique. Both artworks handle the same controversial topic, the negotiation of selfhood portrayal in a state of precariousness, in a perennial lived-in crisis sustained in Billingham's family grim circumstances and supported in the stern sociocultural milieu of 'Thatcherite England.' In particular, the early work, due to the medium of choice – photography - together with Billingham's intention to capture real life as it happened questioned the resilience of contemporary realism to contain an otherwise unarticulated, reality. The kind of realism exercised both in the photographic series and the film of 2018 is seen parallelly to Cleaning Shows on Reality TV which touch on the poverty porn genre and similarly question the resilience of contemporary realism. In this case though, realism is tried for its willingness to encompass a series of selfhood representations within the dominant popular culture in conjunction with classless selfhood realisms. The juxtaposition is used in order to bring about a set of dynamic confrontations within predominant realisms under late capitalist. In this exploration Mark Fisher claims, that contemporary societies have become classless and for that unable to deal with the mounting challenges ahead of them (Fisher, 2021: 13), is central to this analysis of selfhood representations within the practiced visual arts field. I also utilize the ideas of Thomas Hirschhorn and Jacques Rancière about art and politics.

3. BILLINGHAM'S SENSATION

In 1985 (only four years prior to 1989 and while postmodernity was at its hype) Hal Foster advocated for an "art with a politic" which he understood to be a contextual endeavor that should seek "to produce a concept of the political relevant to our present" (Foster, 1985:155). Postmodernism, characterized by an amnesiac spell and a timeless historicity, was established rather as a cultural mode than a concrete materiality (Esanu, 2012) and its melancholy expressed the disenchantment from the avant-guard utopias of the past (Groys, 2015: 6). In this light the transformation of the political happened as a turn to socio-cultural narratives in ways that privileged the ethereal storytelling of a malleable, provisional "I". This process acquired meaning by being contextualized within a circumstantial present, both recognized and positioned within the existing socio-political status-quo and within the official art-system. Endowed with evanescence expressed in postmodern eclectic remembrance, haphazard appropriation and self-negating parody it is no wonder that the political agency of the postmodern subject was invariably an erratic, hit-or-miss performance, supported in various forms of autobiographical narrative in some sort or other of idiosyncratic "political expressionism" (Foster et all, 1993: 10, 23).

The early work of Richard Billingham, Ray's a Laugh makes an interesting case for inspection due to the controversial positioning it held within the established sociopolitical arrangement but also because of its strategic placement within mainstream postmodernist debates. This work is a palpable example where personal narrative is exulted over all other issues so it is partially treated as autobiographical whereas Billingham is never placed within the pictures shown. Moreover, the content of the pictures, the everyday whereabouts of Billingham's family, is described almost unanimously as marginal and impoverished – let alone shocking[3].

Class issues continue tobe present regardless the positive or negative take on the imagery, fueling a variety of approaches but they are usually sidetracked by the successful – sensational, to make justice to the exhibition that-

brought this work into the spotlight - impactof the images. One might consider that it is this controversy, inherent in the imagery, still active 25 years and going that has contributed to its unrelenting catch. Another entry to this debate is that in the subsequent critical writings about this work any political implication is flattened out as it is appreciated through the lenses of middle-class normality (Hatherley, 2017:106) while a leftist approach looks down on the work as an opportunistic exposure of unprivileged privacy (Molyneux, 1998). Both readings are based on an exacerbation of the initial shock element of the content because the reality impact of the represented material fused the aesthetics of the images with the aesthetics of everydayness of the people involved. This notion is also present in the repositioning of the overall validity of the images -their rightful claims to be exhibited – to Billingham's proximity to this subject (Lewis, 1997: 67), favoring a narrative where art is produced as part of an autobiographical art-therapy session. This claim, which was in tune with such autobiographical exposures of trauma during postmodernity[4] was partly adapted by Billingham himself in later interviews. Still in 1997 Billingham expressed his bafflement (Lewis, 1997) about the general disregard to the formal attributes of the images due to the audience's engagement with the reality -or better the unreality- of what was shown in them, a position he kept on to it in 2007[ ]. Yet in another understanding of the work, Smith claimed that lack of empathy "provides some critics and audiences with an opportunity to reinforce social stereotypes and denigrate the lower classes" (Smith, 2014: 10). Smith claimed that Ray's a Laugh illustrates "how class may condition the production of empathy in viewers" a position which partly explains the negative commentaries the work received, as voyeuristic, "class-porn", artless, poverty-porn (Hatherlay, 2017, Smith, 2014). So even while the impoverishment of Billingham's family was attributed to the neo-liberal politics of Thatcherism the images remained dependent to a personalized appreciation of authenticity or became prone to rude criticism because the unrelenting facingness of the represented subject was received as "obscene"[ ] or at best tragicomic (Adams, 2019). In any case the work was professed to promote an outworldish imagery for the art-elite, gallery-going spectator, whether this was received positively as an astounding autobiographical revelation (which we were not ready or pleased to see nevertheless) or in a negative manner as a faux-pas, an incomprehensible topic of filial exploitation (which betrayed its class and it should not be meant for us to see it anyway).

In 2016, while a friendlier article on Observer promoted the preparation of a tripartite film[7] inspired from the aforementioned series of photos, Billingham's oeuvre was heralded as "squalid realism" (Adams, 2016:1). Such characterizations, although delivered with the pleasant tone of a Sunday paper, ushered notions for the dissemination of realism into categories that merge degrees of cleanliness or repulsiveness and poverty as a representational methodology that avoids to mention class but insinuates it metonymically. This narrative is not new but it continues to play on repeat. The British TV show *How Clean is Your House*, which premiered in 2003 and spanned seven seasons provides many cases to ponder. According to Wikipedia it is an "entertainment/ lifestyle television programme in which expert cleaners Kim Woodburn and Aggie MacKenzie visit dirty houses and clean them up" (Wikipedia, 2023). What could be a more straightforward description of a Reality TV show? Between the two female presenters -one of which was actually working as a professional cleaner for wealthy houses at the time the show premiered in 2003 (Bell, 2022) while the other had been working as a journalist in "Good Housekeeping" magazine – none had appeared on screen prior to the show. This added an extra dash of reality to their performance, which was mostly unscripted as Aggie MacKenzie has admitted in an interview (Devereux-Evans, 2023). The duo has donned the part of unquestionable authorities as cleaners of the show appeared in spotless, even formal attire, a string of pearls and high heels semi-comically worn by Kim Woodburn in every episode.

The spirit of the show was light and non-chalant, focusing on the outrageousness of the portrayed cases while the presenters posed simplified questions with no further probing of how things ever came to this. Since each case was mockingly blamed on the residents' laziness and unwillingness to clean, this almost childlike quirkiness set aside and thus depoliticized any other facet of their lives. Following this line, the presenters held a humorous approach - more comical that severe but there was no space left for airing politics. In this case, as commended in an online feature, Kim Woodburn "had a strategy from day one. Go-

ing into filthy houses dressed in high heels and pearls created a contrast that wasn't lost on the viewers" (Bell, 2022). This decision aligned with the common policy for the production of Reality TV and post-Reality documentary TV shows, to hide any direct sign of class distancing while pointing indirectly exactly to an unbridgeable gap (Fisher, 2014). The fact that participants in the show lack bourgeois standards or aesthetic (this is usually noted in furniture or clothing for example) is served mildly but steadily as a defect, an inability to just cope efficiently. This tactic blurs the 'real' representation of such selfhoods for the viewer at the same time that all the action happens in front of us, admittedly "unscripted" and indisputably real. Who can dispute the reality of such set-up? Besides, whose side do you want to be? These are untold but ever-present questions.

Figure 1: Screenshots from the S05 E01 episode of the British TV programme *How Clean Is Your House* as seen on Youtube. Presenter Kim Woodburn in her usual attire or pearls, high heels and hairdo, the first visit in a messy household and Aggie MacKenzie in a confrontation to a participant (left to right). This episode was called "David &Angela, Cornwall". It was originally aired on Channel 4, on May 17, 2007 at 23:00.

Figure 2: Screenshots from the S05 E04 episode of *How Clean Is Your House* as seen on Youtube. The participant in is messy household and the duo in their introductory visit to the house (left to right). This episode was called "Steve Jones". It was originally screened on Channel on 4 June 7, 2007.

Another much disputed classless narrative of popular TV was the documentary *Benefit Street*[8], Channel 4, broadcasted in 2014-2015 for 2 Seasons - which provoked Mark Fisher to write an article about it (Fisher, 2014). There the images, vested with objectivity, are posed as an unmediated registering but it is not possible to withstand the not so flattering connotations of the unwittingly sordid poor (all the more un-class-y because they appear unable to understand the much coveted middleclass grace).

While class related issues turn from transparent to invisible, Reality TV's realism extracts the portrayed subjects from the actuality of their conditions at the same time that they are depicted within their environment. In such 'realistic' representations subjects become simply gross, styleless personalities, the awkward participants in a show of "miserabilism"[9] which shapes "despair and protest" as artistic expressionism (Tyree, 2019: 34). In a further clarification, miserabilism is seen as a "clumsy rush" to contain those "who have been "left behind" or simply left out, as if they are abandoned denizens of a remote island shipwreck" (Tyree, 2019: 38). In this, Billingham's film, *Ray and Liz* (2018) brings about the similarities between the era of Billingham's photos, the British 90s and the current upsurge in Brexit poverty. In acknowledging the film's realism, ideas of a cultural as much as a financial isolation are present again. Billingham's film, which expands the autobiographical experiences of the initial images with more incidents is appreciated as avoiding sentimentalism or didacticism in order to remain "truer to the life it records" (Tyree, 2018: 34). In another feature, the film is highlighted as "offering a sense of reality to the effect poverty, lack of choice and lack of help has on the individual and on the family" (Carrier, 2019). Although the protagonists are locked in a dead-end no solutions are suggested and there remains empathy, aesthetics or humor to guide us through the representation.

A review of the film in LA Times, epitomizes this by saying that the film is a "personal filmmaking with a diarist's sense of detail and an artist's generosity" (Chang, 2019). Tyree concludes that the film "is more disturbing and complex" (Tyree, 2018:41) exactly because it takes no posi-

tion or it makes no effort to "better" the poor, a position held in different undertones by many reviewers, stating either a lack of solutions or the film's open-endedness. Billingham himself insistently refuses any political intention extending from the making to the original pictures to the film's rendition (Tyree, 2019; O'Callaghan, 2019). "For me, it's about lived experience" he has stated elsewhere (Fullerton, 2016).

Figure 3: *Benefit Street*, Channel 4, S01, E04 (left) Still from the official Season 2 trailer (right), (Screenshots).

4. CONTEMPORARY NEGOTIATIONS

The photographic imagery of 1996 which comprised Ray's a Laugh was a legitimate art product intended for the gallery walls or the intimate reading of the ensuing book and as such its nakedness was justified, protected and promoted. Ray and Liz, in 2018, happened after countless Reality TV shows had intervened in our reception of the real. Initially produced as a tripartite fictional enterprise on TV, Ray and Liz conditions the matter-of-fact notions of poverty it presents. From the beginning the production was set to remain truthful to the original surrounding so the film was shot in a similar flat in the same floor of the same tower block where Billingham's family lived. The casting was also a trial, which lasted many scrutinizing auditions in order to reach the desired close resemblance to the members of the family[10]. As a result, all reviews agree that the film provides an upsetting recreation of social abandonment that feels true to the era and remains faithful to the original images. Although the ensuing personal deadlocks and poverty are conveyed forcefully, there can't be any of the denounced embarrassment that trailed the viewing of the Ray's Laugh photos (Cashell, 2009). The on-screen mediated reality is tailor-made for broadcasting so regardless its being "horribly true" (Carrier, 2019) to the imagery that shape it and the interrelated "Thatcherite misery" (ibid: n.p.) it addresses an audience already accustomed to watching gleefully poverty-porn imagery. In contrast, the initial works forced viewers to an endless bewildered crisscrossing of their surface without the possibility to acknowledge any conscious point to get to or depart from. Viewers were condemned to aimless gloating, since there was neither a gateway nor further resolution, a condition which Cashell referred to as "the repulsive attitude of cultural tourist" (Cashell, 2009:27). I consider this as one of the best merits of the work, to "implicate" the viewer (to paraphrase Hirschorn in Gardner, 2012: 39) by forcing them to trespass - however they can - their "predetermined frames of reference" (Gardner, 2012: 59). Such positioning frees political or ideological nuances from any given or accepted conventions and introduces political thinking in any possible way that is "idiosyncratic" (ibid) to the work.

In this point I will recourse to an autoethnographic analysis: when I had been faced with Billingham's work back in the 90s I had no idea what to make of it. It was stunning and I was stupefied because I could not tell, for the life of me, if it was staged or not. Even more, I could not fathom the indifference - sometimes even the gusto - that these people exhibited in living their lives, and as my provincial, petit-bourgeois self had no handles for such realism, it looked to me rather surrealistic. This fact, that Billingham himself had always declared, the nonchalance of his parents to his taking pictures of them (Fullerton, 2016; Adams, 2016) is exactly I think what shocked everybody the most - myself included. The pictures fashioned a sense of going-about-my-business, living-my-life-as-best-as-can stance, which oozed a pure indifference to the propriety standards so cherished by the widened middle-class[11] rationale we all one way or another have squeezed ourselves into. In this sense Billingham's work was never political, as himself insists but it was also only political, advocating a condition outside the system's periphery but - since there is no alternative - at the same time a casualty within its flawless surface.

Figure 4: Patric Romer as older Ray in *Ray and Liz* (2018). Director: Richard BIllingham (screenshot from the official trailer).

In the current discussion of classless realisms it is intriguing to ponder that Billingham's early work was both controversial and resonant through the 90s till now because it disregarded class propriety. Bypassing middle-class taboos, the produced dislocated representations reminded everyone of their class and their inhibitions. Billingham left politics out of the way in order to catch the experience and thus enhanced every other connection, "focusing to the possibilities of life and art, specific to this situation of misery" to use a description from Rancière's that fits accurately here (Rancière, 2008:14). As a result, the photographs - of the snapshot variety no less, were laden with the political messages they carried as their legitimate right to "cultural definition" (Sekula, 84:1982). To this end, their presentation as a series or in a book helped to reinforce their meaning while retaining their fluidity.

While *Ray's Laugh* force us to face our sociocultural placing as we understand it to be, the various instances of poverty porn on TV obstruct the fostering of a healthy social positioning, let alone class awareness. Through camouflaged spin-offs such as Cleaning Reality Shows[12] where sordid, squalid households get purged - if only for a while, a fabricated on-screen lightheartedness points covertly to modest socioeconomic backgrounds . Other versions are preoccupied openly with the lives of fringe income citizens[13] while home makeover shows such as the pioneering Reality Show Extreme Makeover: Home Edition[14] offer stylistic advice to benefit the lucky disadvantaged few. In these shows, reality is based on superficial truthfulness to surroundings while real life circumstances are buried under the intricacies of a representation policy where class is an unwanted burden. While people are seen within their environment, they are framed in ways filtered through a socio-economic partition of an affluent normality versus its ungainly aberration. Thus, they end up pictured as poverty-stricken, ill-advised or irresponsible[15]. Consequently, on representing the lives of the non - privileged, working-class poor, this realism is most often derisive, condescending and disempowering (Beswick, 2020).

This proliferation of TV realisms, which nowadays is reverberated in social media platform stories involves "people playing themselves outside traditional theatrical and media institutions" (Grindstaff, 2012: 35). In such forms of self-presentation "the concept of "authenticity" becomes both more important and more contested" (ibid). Realism is thus translated as a transparent pictorial evidence, a document that mirrors the world naturally. The connection of realism and realistic representations to mimesis seems convenient for the perseverance of late capitalist fables. In current literature approaches it has been argued that such "conservative" definition of realism in effect "ratifies" existing power relationships "insofar as the work derives its authority from the world" (Smith-Brechesein 2020: i). In view of the daily blurring that happens on visual representations between reality and veiled political fictions and borrowing from Sekula's claims that "the mean-

ing of any photographic message is necessarily context-determined" (Sekula, 1982: 85) as well as Warburg's notion of iconology[16] a subsequent line of inquiry should be to focus on the connections each image builds between itself and the world, regardless its authenticity claims or its manipulations. This will amount to an uncovering of the power relations involved in each visualization. Another critical question could be whether the circulating representations are capable to inform a narrative of the self which has the potential to disrupt the predominant middle-class ideas and thus make them visible for what they are. This line of thinking assumes the suggestion of a model inhabitant for each representation but simultaneously produces a proud negation. If the former idea presents us with the irony that this idealized someone is a fictional, artificial construction the latter is haunted by repercussions of failure. Moreover, whether the exposed "I" or the receiving "I" of a discursive exchange, the one in charge sets the rules and delineates any normalization processes, welding veracity and validity to the circumstances presented. This riddle leaves no room for an easy answer. It is no wonder thus that we are torn between fantasies of complacency and political entrapment. The newly expanded, classless middleclass ideology prompts us to enjoy the professed late capitalism well-beingism and blame everything that derails from it on pure misfortune and "a deficit on will and effort" (Fisher, 2014:4). In a similar way, feelings of 'naivité' or 'futility' continue to get prioritized over any political insinuation for change or any political message at all, now as strong as in 1985 (Foster, 1985: 154).

In response to these impasses, Thomas Hirschhorn, an artist whose work opens up to the possibility of new ways to counterbalance the power/weakness opposition has claimed that "Naivité doesn't interest me, utopianism does; nostalgia doesn't interest me, stupidity[17] does." (Estep, 2009: 83). In his view, categorizations such as "political art" and "making art politically"[18] "have long since been obsolete" (Timofejev, 2022: n.p.). What instead Hirschhorn suggests is that "[art] confronts reality" (Gingeras, 2004: n.p.) In a relevant approach but from a different point of view to the Hirschhorn's relational aesthetics, Jacques Rancière suggests a turn to "processes of dissociation: the break in a relation between sense and sense - between what is seen and what is thought, what is thought and what is felt. Such breaks can happen anywhere at any time. But they can never be calculated" (Rancière, 2008: 12). In a way, both Hirschhorn and Rancière ask for artistic representations to confront that which they are supposed to naturalize by producing "disjunctions" or "des-identifications" (Rancière, 2008). According to Rancière, "disjunctions" carry the possibility of political effect and are born from disturbances concerning the ways "in which bodies fit their functions and destinations" (Rancière, 2008: 11). "Des-identification" connects this procedure to the artistic practices as it characterizes the "aesthetic effect" which is "first an effect of des-identification" (ibid). Both Hirschhorn and Rancière remain obscure about further determining the form or the functions of the political effect in visual arts. This attitude reflects on the rupture between the smooth surface of the world as we -are supposed?- to know it and artistic interpretation. The unexpected encounter with the world remains equally surprising for the viewer and the artist. Such outcomes might touch on the class debates in various angles but should not be seen as set against it or in a position of either/or mutual exclusiveness. Moreover, this is not a question about a medium, or a qualification endowed to a tradition of representation. In fact, the proclaimed pointlessness of Communist Realism as a meticulously instructed method for the representations of the real (Khatib in Esanu, 2018, Groys, 2015) as well other 'toxic" topics such as Nazism is the only proven limitation to incorporate old-fashioned class discourses as political guidelines for the representation of reality. A departure from such positioning is expressed by the Irwin group, which comes from an ex-communist country art production. These artists suggest that we can treat all signs as inherently ideological instead of celebrating their emptiness. In this way "we become much freer in our choice of artistic forms and means" (Groys, 2015:6).

The hyper-productivity of mediated real in contemporary societies continues unwaveringly to create many free-floating hybridizations where the self is narrated in an unbroken circulation of de-classized imagery. The sociocultural preoccupation with temporality in the notion of co-presence or simultaneous image-sharing, leads to an endless publishing of televised narratives, mediated realities and social media users' content branded by the technical arrangements that support it. This real-time, Live streaming allows identities to be exposed in their innate fluidity and challenge the content and the scope of realism as an endeavor, since aesthetics and reality blend in a cultural experience. With class divisions obliterated as a "breech of decorum" (Fisher, 2021) from all discourses, such self-fashioning happens haphazardly according to fluid ideas of 'cool' and the ever-present notion of 'well-being' in collaboration with the tight clench of omnipresent 'work-ethics'. This kind of classless individualized everydayness gets streamed daily in mediated snippets which profess social

recognition for a self that is caught "actively involved in the creation and the production of culture" (Grindstaff, 2012: 36). Such mediation has been schooled from early Reality TV shows like Big Brother and Survivor in order to produce a kind of globalized DIY[19] realism that -in its universality- squeezes everything out context. Such points of entrance for contemporary Realism are rather confusing but while they fail to produce a succinct message, they indicate an arena where reality jostles ceaselessly with its representations. In view to this confrontation, while a part of postmodern selfhoods was unmindful of class divisions, absorbed mostly by trauma and a psychological framing in "oedipal naughtiness or infantile perversion" (Foster, 2015: 20), contemporary selves practice voluntary distribution as social media mediated texts. They seem eager to spread one installment at a time on varied screens and multiple filtered pictures with performative abandon. It might be a time to accept that realism, in order to match the visual exposure of contemporary reality should overcome any illustrative, formative, aesthetic or descriptive imagery and reach for the inclusion of experience.

5. EPILOGUE OR NEW BEGINNINGS

As it might already have emerged, the fortification of class consciousness alone cannot solve the complicated issues of contemporary subjecthood (Srninec & Williams, 2015: 156-160). One might also suppose that the reduction of selfhood along lines that might have worked in the past will not lead to feasible solutions in the present situation, where actually a new all-encompassing utopianism is direly needed (ibid: 138-141). Aligned to this line of thinking is the suggestion that we should explore realism as a fluctuating, volatile concept which has to review any pre-existent notions in order to claim equivalence to the era that fosters it (Nilges, 2020). Fisher agrees that only if we accept the contemporary multiplicity of desires there is the possibility to define a meaningful point of departure (Fisher, 2021). This disposition, to "unveil the space to create new modes of being" (Srninec & Williams, 2015:180) has no guideline than openness and intuitive imagination. Another point of entry, common both to Fisher and Srninec & Williams, advocates that we have to embrace the sociocultural juncture that we live in and understand class within its multiple fragmentation without evading or excluding any states of being or mediation processes. Therefore, on leaving behind the superficiality of fanciful escapism it is important to realize we are not safeguarded in an aloof elsewhere. We are part of this, firmly embedded in this messy situation. Therefore, it is important to appreciate where we stand – where classless representations hinder us to stand- in order to produce an eloquent realism that will speak a message of escape from this perennial "pseudo-present" (Fisher, 2016: 21).

In this regard the question posed by Mathias Nilges that "if we are interested in realism today we should ask what happens to realism in a present without a future" (Nilges, 2020:86) exposes an equation where a purposely stagnant, dominant realism tries to impose itself over the fluidity of extant, disorientated selfhoods. This interpretation calls for an acute readdressing of existing representations in order to discern those which purposely frame us within an inescapable condition and are probably the reason we perceive ourselves in "a frenzied stasis" (Fisher, 2021). There arises the possibility to exchange them with novel selfhood presentations that do not take anything for granted and as such are capable to convey a will or a need for change (Leger, 2014: 134). Moreover, it is not a flight from late capitalism technology and a return to a former purer primitive selfhood that we have to figure out. This misunderstanding inhibits the visualization of a feasible new future and delays the liberation from contrived substitutes that obscure the realization of our true desires. It should be challenging to attempt a meaningful address on a Realism that confronts contemporary late capitalist reality from within the systemic façade of normalized selfhood personifications. Class obliteration and its popular substitutes, thoughtless consumerism and selfhood commodification, spread everywhere as the predominant reality. The continuous bracketing of selfhoods within middle-class is a fiction which efficiently obscures any view beyond the foreshortened horizon of political despair. Whether we choose to dream emancipating new modes of personhoods in utopias or expose the uncertainties in our dystopian presents, everything is open and urgently important. The answers are locked in our un-middle-classy everydayness, away from the homogenizing grip of late capitalism. This bewildering area calls both practicing artists and theorists for further investigation. There, art might generate surprising encounters, which will re-establish a pure desire and reflect on emancipating selfhood representations.

NOTES

[1] Populism demarcates a horizon where political movements appeal and mobilize "cross section" parts of society, which thus unite different people under a "political logic" rather than class identities in order to solve inequalities or claim unmet demands. (Snrinec & Williams, 2015: 160)

[2] The former author examines realism in visual art, the latter in the field of literary studies.

[3] To see images visit https://www.saatchigallery.com/artist/richard_billingham and https://www.martinparrfoundation.org/bookdummies/richard-billingham-rays-a-laugh/ https://britishphotography.org/artists/132-richard-billingham/works/2448-richard-billingham- untitled-from-rays-a-laugh-1995/

[4] Tracey Emin's *All The People I Slept With*, Georgina Starr's *Crying*, Hanna Wilke's I*ntravenus*, all realized during the 90s exemplify the diversification of this particular art discourse at that time.

[5] "After I did the family pictures, I soon realised that people liked the family pictures for reason that I never intended ... there are very few people, I think, that get beyond the subject matter and can identify the artist's intention ... They just like to look at my mum's tattoos or the stains on the wallpaper or the dirty floor." (Billingham quoted in Outi Remes, 2007: 16).

[6] Hatherley discusses in a paragraph Kirsten Mey's opinion about *Ray's a Laugh* pictures as "the relationship between documentary tradition and notions of obscenity that derive from the obscene, that is from placing into public view what should have remained hidden from it" (italics on Hatherley, 2017: 127)

[7] In 2019 the film has been shortlisted as an outstanding debut by Bafta and won the same category at the British independent film awards.

[8] Thankfully there are Youtube channels that make it possible to view the episodes of the show. I provide a selection of links in the references section.

[9] Miserabilism is connected with notions of dark representations of a social-self who might indulge to nihilism "as a reaction to official picturesqueness or religious sentimentalism or as a disturbing identification with the infamies of hardship and 'degeneracy'". Modernism(s): Bohemia, Miserabilism and Black Painting.

[10] This was divulged by Billingham in an interview in *Express* & *Star*, in 2019

[11] As Fisher asks "How can everyone belong to the middle? Its impossible!" and then "well, if everyone's middle-class now, what are they in the middle of? But it seems to make sense -this pitch – as a form of direct suppression of class consciousness" (Fisher, 2021: 41).

[12]*How Clean is Your House*, (2003). Talkback Thames, UK (Production). 7 Seasons 21/5/2003 to 21/9/2009. Channel 4. Duration 30 min. https://www.gtech.co.uk/blog/what-are-the-best-cleaning-shows-ever/

[13] Benefits Street (2014). Turner Phil, Reid Ben Directors.. Love Productions, *Rebel Uncut* (Series 1) Channel 4. Every Monday, 21:00, from 6/1/2014 till 17/2/2014 (season1) and 11/5/2015 to 1/6/2015 (season2) Duration: 60 min including advertisements. The series documented the lives of several residents of James Turner Street, Winson Green, Birmingham, England, United Kingdom, where newspapers reported that 90% of the residents claim benefits. Later, one of the main characters that emerged from that show, Dee Kelly, played Billingham's mother, Liz at an older age in Ray and Liz.

[14] According to Wikipedia "Extreme Makeover: Home Edition (EM:HE; sometimes informally referred to as Extreme Home Makeover[3][4]) is an American reality television series that aired from February 15, 2004 to January 13, 2012 on ABC". The show received a lot of criticism because more or less ignored people's realistic budgets which created to people involved more problems that the one it solved. A local branch of the show was broadcasted also in Greece in 2007-08. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Extreme_Makeover:_Home_Edition

[15] Citizen responsibility has become a favoured notion in late capitalism as it connects with individualism. In Greece it was heard recently in the context of a political conservatism which is still being projected in political speech in many directions. Its key characteristic is the implicit notion that poverty, unemployment, or inability to benefit from the opportunities of the system happens from a stance of irresponsibility, lack of care or ignorance.

[16] "Iconology is a branch of art history that investigates the meaning of artworks in relation to their social and cultural background. The field, initiated by Aby Warburg's studies, evolved into a multidisciplinary approach leveraging sociology and the history of culture to read artworks as witnesses of a social memory" (Baroncini, S, Daquino, M. & Tomasi F, 2021: n.p).

[17] For Hirschhorn the bête is also a mode of seeing and reading. One way not to look away, he suggests, is to 'look dumb', that is, to allow that we are often 'dumbstruck' by the outrageous events of the world, such as the mass murder of innocent citizens during the Iraq war, gruesome images of which Hirschhorn presents in his Ur- Collages (2008) (Foster, 2015: 107).

[18] Thomas Hirschhorn has claimed that he aims to make "art politically" and he denies any implication with "political art" or "political graphic art" (Hirschhorn in Estep, 2009: 83) This ramification is all the more important coming from an artist who does make art with socio-political messages that aims to forgo any naturalization of the existing power structures (Gardner, 2012: 43).

[19] "The social media is more conducive to a DIY mode of person production. Reality TV, on the other hand, is better characterized by what I call a DI(t)Y aesthetic or mode and that stands for Do It to Yourself" (Grindfall, 2012: 36).

REFERENCES

Adams, Tim. (2016). Richard Billingham: 'I just hated growing up in that tower block'. *The Observer*. Accessed online on 01/04/2023 on https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2016/mar/13/richard-billingham-tower-block-white-dee-rays-a-laugh-liz

Adams, Tim (2019). Richard Billingham: 'Statistically, I should be in prison, dead or homeless, Interview. Accessed online on 01/04/2023 https://www.theguardian.com/film/2019/feb/23/richard-billingham-ray-and-liz-interview

Baroncini, S., Daquino Marilena and Tomasi Francesca. (2021). Modelling Art Interpretation and Meaning. A Data Model for Describing Iconology and Iconography. ArXiv abs/2106.12967: n. pag. Accessed on 22/08/2023 on https://arxiv.org/pdf/2106.12967

Bell, Stephanie. (2022). TV's 'queen of clean' Kim Woodburn on cleaning mansions to owning one: 'I'm ever so grateful and I've been so lucky'. *Belfast Telegraph*. Accessed online on 21/08/2023 on https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/entertainment/film-tv/tvs-queen-of-clean-kim-woodburn-on-cleaning-mansions-to-owning-one-im-ever-so-grateful-and-ive-been-so-lucky/41763635.html

Beswick, K. (2020). Capitalist Realism: Glimmers, Working-Class Authenticity and Andrea Dunbar in the 21st Century. *Intellect, International Journal of Media & Cultural Politics*. 16. 1. 75-89. DOI:10.1386/macp_00016_1

Billingham. Richard. (2018) Director and scriptwriter. Ray and Liz. Jacquie Davis, (producer). 104 min. https://player.bfi.org.uk/subscription/film/watch-ray-liz-2018-online

Bradshaw, Peter. (2018). Ray & Liz Review: A Brutal Story Of a Family Coming To Pieces. *The Guardian* online. Accessed on 21/08/23 on https://www.theguardian.com/film/2018/oct/17/ray-liz-review-brutal-study-of-a-family-coming-to-pieces

Carrier, Dan. (2019). Unhappy home truths in Ray and Liz. IslinghtonTribune (online). Accessed on 22/08/2023 https://www.islington-tribune.co.uk/article/unhappy-home-truths-in-ray-and-liz

Cashell, Kieran. (2009). Everybody Hates A Tourist. Aftershock: The Ethics of Contemporary Transgressive Art. London: I.B.Tauris, 17–50. Bloomsbury Collections. Web. 17 Nov. 2022. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9780755604043.ch-001>.

Chang, Justin. (2019). Review: 'Ray & Liz' is a bleak, beautiful memoir of an unhappy English childhood. Review online. Accessed on 02/05/2023 https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/movies/story/2019-07-18/ray-and-liz-movie-review

Cras Sophie. (2014). Nouveau Réalisme: From Socialist Realism to Capitalist Realism. OwnReality. 6. http://www.perspectivia.net/content/publikationen/ownreality/6/cras-en

Devereux-Evans, Olivia. (2023). We were chalk and cheese... that's why it worked': Aggie Mackenzie reveals she did not get on with How Clean Is Your House co-star Kim Woodburn - but thinks offscreen friction made the show better. Mailonline. Acessed on 22/08/2023 on https://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-11795681/Aggie-Mackenzie-reveals-Clean-House-star-Kim-Woodburn-did-not-on.html

Esanu, Octavian. What was contemporary art? ARTMargins. 1. 1. ARTMargins and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. 5-28

Esanu, Octavian. (2012). What was Contemporary Art?. ARTMargins. 1. 5-28. 10.1162/ARTM_a_00003.

Esanu, Octavian. Beech, Dave. Khatib, Sami. Roberts, John and Vishmidt, Marina. 2018. Realism Today? ARTMargins. 7.1 ARTMargins and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. 58-82. ISSN 2162-2574 https://doi.org/10.1162/ARTM_a_00200

Estep, Jan. 2009. Reading Hirschhorn: A problem of (his) knowledge, or Weakness as a virtue. *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context and Enquiry*. 9. The University of Chicago Press

83-89. https://www.jstor.org/stable/20711540

Fisher, Mark. (2014). Classless broadcasting: Benefits Street. New Humanist. https://newhumanist.org.uk/articles/4583/classless-broadcasting-benefits-street Accessed on 20/4/2023

Fisher, Mark. (2017). Touchscreen Capture. *Noon 6: An Annual Journal of Visual Culture and Contemporary Art*.12-27. Accessed o 04.04/2023 on https://egressac.wordpress.com/

Fisher, Mark. Matt Colquhoun (ed). 2021. *Postcapitalist Desire: The Final Lectures*. London : Repeater Books

Foster Hal. (1985). Recordings, Art, Spectacle. Bay press: Seattle.

Foster, H., Krauss, R., Kolbowski S., Kwon, M., Buchloh, B.. (1993). The Politics of the Signifier: A Conversation on the Whitney Biennial. *October*. 66. 3-27.http://www.jstor.org/stable/778752

Foster Hal, (2015). *Bad new days*. Verso. Edinbourgh.

Fullerton, Elisabeth, (2016). Down and Out and Back Again: Richard Billingham's Photographic Past Takes on New Life. Acessed on 01/04/2023. https://www.artnews.com/art-news/artists/down-and-out-and-back-again-richard-billinghams-photographic-past-takes-on-new-life-7421/

Grindstaff, Laura. (2012). Reality TV and The production of 'Ordinary Celebrity'. Notes from the field. *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*. 56. 22-40. Accessed on 01/04/2023 www.jstor.org.stable/23345258

Groys, Boris. (2015). NSK: From Hybrid Socialism to Universal State. *e-flux jurnal*. 67. 1-11. Accessed on 25/04/2023 on https://www.e-flux.com/journal/67/60709/nsk-from-hybrid-socialism-to-universal-state/

Hatherley, Frances (2017). Sublime Dissension: A Working-Class Anti-Pygmalion Aesthetics of the Female Grotesque, Doctoral dissertation, Middlesex University, Department of Visual Arts, Faculty of Arts and Creative Industries. Accessed on 01/04/2023 from https://eprints.mdx.ac.uk/23204

Hirschhorn, T. (2004). Interview with Alison Gigeras for Phaidon (2004). Accessed on 07/05/2023 0n http://www.thomashirschhorn.com/interview-with-alison-gigeras-for-phaidon-2004/

Large, Heather, Heath Crandley, Sandwell Entertainment, (2019). I hope people will be moved and it makes them think a bit': Black Country film-marker talks Bafta-nominated Ray and Liz. *Express & Star*. Online article accesses on 22/08/2023 on https://www.expressandstar.com/entertainment/sandwell-entertainment/2019/02/09/i-hope-people-will-be-moved-and-it-makes-them-think-a-bit-black-country-film-marker-talks-bafta-nominated-ray-and-liz-ahead-of-its-release/

Leger, M. J. (2014). Aesthetic Responsibility: A Conversation with Krzysztof Wodiczko on the Transformative Avant-Garde. *Third Text*. 28. 2. 123–136. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09528822.2014.885628
Lewis, Jim. (1997). No Place Like Home: The Photographs Of Richard Billingham. *ArtForum International*. 35. 5. 62-27.
Modernism(s): Bohemia, Miserabilism and Black Painting. (2006). Catalogue, Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, www.museunacional.cat/en/ii-modernisms-6
Molyneux, J. 1998. State of the Art: A review of the 'Sensation' exhibition at the Royal Academy of Arts, September – December 1997. *International Socialism*. 79. Accessed on internet on 2/5/2023 on https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/writers/molyneux/1998/xx/art.htm
Nilges, Mathias. (2019). Prolegomena: Prospective Realism in a Present Without Future. *Mediations: Journal of Marxist Literary Group*. 33. 1-2. 85-98.
Rancière, Jacques. (2008). Aesthetic Separation, Aesthetic Community: Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art. *ART&RESEARCH: A Journal of Ideas, Contexts and Methods*. 2. 1. Pp 1-12 Accessed on 2/07/2023 http://www.artandresearch.org.uk/v2n1/ranciere.html
Remes, O. 2007. Reinterpreting unconventional family photographs: Returning to Richard Billingham's "Ray's A Laugh" series. *Afterimage*. 34. 6. 16-19. https://doi.org/10.1525/aft.2007.34.6.16
Richardson, A. 2022. White Dee claims Benefits Street residents 'exploited' and 'hung out to dry' by Channel 4. BirminghamLive. https://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/midlands-news/white-dee-claims-benefits-street-23375512. Accessed on 21/8/2023.
O'Callaghan, P. (2019). Richard Billingham on Ray & Liz: "I lived through the Thatcher era, and it was horrible if you were poor". https://www.bfi.org.uk/interviews/richard-billingham-ray-liz. Accessed on 3/5/2023.
Perin, B. 2022. Fame, drugs, and tragedy - What happened to stars of Benefits Street. BirminghamLive https://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/midlands-news/fame-drugs-tragedy-what-happened-23398591. Accessed on 21/8/2023.
Sekula, Allan, (1982). On the Invention of Photographic Meaning. *Thinking Photography*. V. Burgin (ed). MacMillan Press Limited. London. Pp 84-109.
Smith-Brechesein Davis. (2020). Realism Reevaluated. *Mediations 33* (Fall 2019-Spring 2020). 1-2. i-vi. www. mediationsjournal.org/articles/ed-note-33
Smith, Matthew Ryan. (2014). Family Photography and the Documentation of Trauma in Contemporary Art. *Studies in Visual Arts and Communication: an international journal*. 1. 1. Accessed on 1/4/2023. https://journalonarts.org/previous-issues/vol-1-1-june2014/
Smythe, Luke. (2014). Freedom and Exile in Gerhard Richter's Early Photo Paintings. *Oxford Art Journal*. 37. 305–325. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxartj/kcu017
Srninec N. Wiliams A. (2015). *Inventing the Future*. Verso:London
Timofejev, S. (2022). How Thomas Hirschhorn Is Doing Art Politically? Accessed 05/05.2023 onhttps://arterritory.com/en/visual_arts/interviews/26177how_thomas_hirschhorn_is_doing_art_politically/
Tyrie, J.M. (2019). The Return Of Miserabilism: Richard Billingham's Ray & Liz. *Film Quarterly*. 73. 1. 33–41. https://doi.org/10.1525/fq.2019.73.1.33 https://www.jstor.org/stable/26855291. Accessed 2 May 2023.
Van Brugger, Coosie. (1985). Gerhart Richter: Painting as a Moral Act. *ArtForum*.23.9. (May 85). 82-91.

Online links for Richard Billingham works [accessed on 21/8/2023].
https://www.martinparrfoundation.org/bookdummies/richard-billingham-rays-a-laugh/
www.saatchigallery.com/artist/richard_billingham
https://britishphotography.org/artists/132-richard-billingham/works/2448-richard-billingham-untitled-from-rays-a-laugh-1995/
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g7mOK0X5KcY&embeds_referring_euri=https%3A%2F%2Fwww2.bfi.org.uk%2F&source_ve_path=MA&feature=emb_rel_end
https://www.indiewire.com/features/craft/ray-liz-sees-an-acclaimed-artist-return-to-his-family-and-80s-working-class-britain-63793/
https://www.telegraph.co.uk/content/dam/films/2019/03/08/TELEMMGLPICT000189865796_trans_NvBQzQNjv4Bq7cN0L8Ura0Bdva-robt0Wj602VQT6XhEWMIwOXdx7beM.jpeg?imwidth=680

Online links for *How Clean Is Your House* [accessed on 21/8/2023].
How Clean Is Your House https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/How_Clean_Is_Your_House%3F
https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=nLIUrwAAa-o
How Clean Is Your House a) S07 E06 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mjvsLn2t0j8
How Clean Is Your House b) S05 E04 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wczWmvyn44A
How Clean Is Your House (c) S05 E01 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MrDJjxAX0w4

Online links for *Benefit Street* [accessed on 21/8/2023]
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XkKJQF1xSJU trailer
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GvKfcqpiEHw
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3VZmFETThfI
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MrDJjxAX0w4

TUDDA NYUMA – LET'S LOOK BACK (A LETTER TO HAM MUKASA)

Andrea Stultiens
1. Hanze University of Applied Sciences, Groningen
2. Royal Academy of the Arts, The Hague

Keywords:
Photography
Colonialism
Uganda
Ham Mukasa
Performative interpretations

ABSTRACT

This contribution is positioned between what might be considered an artistic portfolio and a paper. It is perhaps best understood as a visual essay, in which a speculative correspondence with a prominent Ugandan chief and intellectual, the late Ham Mukasa (ca. 1870-1956), affords the activation of an ambiguous colonial legacy. It aims to complicate and question our relationship to- and understanding of archival materials and the web of privilege and precarity in which they were compiled and exist.

ANDREA STULTIENS NL, 1974) does things with photographs, using her artistic practice as a research method to investigate imaginations of 'Africa'. She received a PhD from Leiden University (NL) in 2018, lives and works in the Netherlands and Uganda, is employed as an educator and researcher at Hanze University of Applied Sciences, Groningen (NL), and Royal Academy of the Arts, The Hague (NL).

1[1]

[1] This likeness of Ham Mukasa was among the first I, a white Dutch artist and researcher who since then started to consider Uganda a second home, encountered back in 2012. One of his granddaughters, allowed Ugandan artist Canon Griffin (1991) and me to digitize part of the family collection in her care. The way the photographic, textual, and material signifiers here generate an ambiguous set of messages while, quite literally, framing one another is symptomatic for my work with historical photographs from and in Uganda.

Paraphrasing the wise words of long-term collaborator Kaddu Wasswa (UG, 1933), I allow the confusion - in terms of linguistic and ontological positioning of pictures produced with cameras – caused by this misalignment to stir my curiosity (Stultiens & Wasswa, 2019, p2).

Should the format of this paper – including awkward footnotes doubling as lengthy picture captions - be confusing too, please keep in mind that I take intervening in "generally distributed ways of doing and making" (Rancière, 2003, p13) to be one of the methodological foundations of my practice, alongside the position of the photograph as encounter (Azoulay, 2010). The footnotes and pictures they are connected to accompany a letter written - with Ham Mukasa as recipient – in 2017 as part of my doctoral thesis. Ham Mukasa (ca.1870-1956) was an early Christian convert in 19th century Buganda. Buganda is situated in present-day south-central Uganda. The nation state was named after the kingdom. Ham Mukasa fought in the religious wars of the region during the 1880s. He then was a prominent chief and landlord in the first half of the 20th century. Being a Christian convert meant that Ham Mukasa was also among the early 'readers' in his community. He would read and write extensively throughout his life. Correspondences – as in piles of letters written (or duplicates thereof) and received - form a substantial part of Ham Mukasa's legacy. Among those letters I encountered a thus far unknown list of described images, assumedly formulated by Ham Mukasa. These images were meant to illustrate Simuda Nyuma, a history of the lives and times of three successive Kabaka (Kings) of Buganda (Mukasa, 1938, 1942, 1962-3, 2012).

Ham Mukasa (ca.1870-1956), or rather his legacy, means a lot to me. This legacy includes a collection of photographic prints and negatives, piles of correspondence in the form of letters written to other members of the Buganda elite, European missionaries and British colonial administrators, and a document that brought me the insight that what I was taught a photograph to be does not necessarily align with what that same image object is and does in Ham Mukasa's world (Stultiens 2017).

Dear Mwami Ham Mukasa,

It is my hope that you have been well, Sir, ever since I wrote to you as part of my doctoral thesis. I am still ever so grateful your legacy allows me to consider how connections can be made between our present and your past. At the same time it raises questions on what was lost when scholars such as yourself left the world of the living while the entanglement of political, religious and economic powers prioritized partial forgetting over the fostering of diachronical connections. the insight that what I was taught a photograph to be does not necessarily align with what that same image object is and does in Ham Mukasa's world (Stultiens 2017).

2[2]

[2] Ham Mukasa's former bedroom in his house in Mengo, the seat of the Buganda government, with Camera Obscura projection of treetops from the garden through ventilation holes on opposite wall, photographed August 2023. This, and Ham Mukasa's other house in Nasuti, which was the headquarter of Ham Mukasa's operations as Ssekibobo, Chief of Kyagwe, was given a proverbial name. Kewerimide (Mengo) advocates a form of independence which manifests in growing one's own food versus having to ask for a portion. Kwata Mpola (Nasuti) translates to Slowly but Surely. Each of these houses has a library.

HOUSES

I am in the lucky circumstance of visiting your houses regularly. Time and again their construction and the atmosphere generated impress me. The thick walls guarantee that the rooms remain relatively cool, despite warm temperatures outside. The small ventilation holes just under the ceilings generate a spectacle of light.

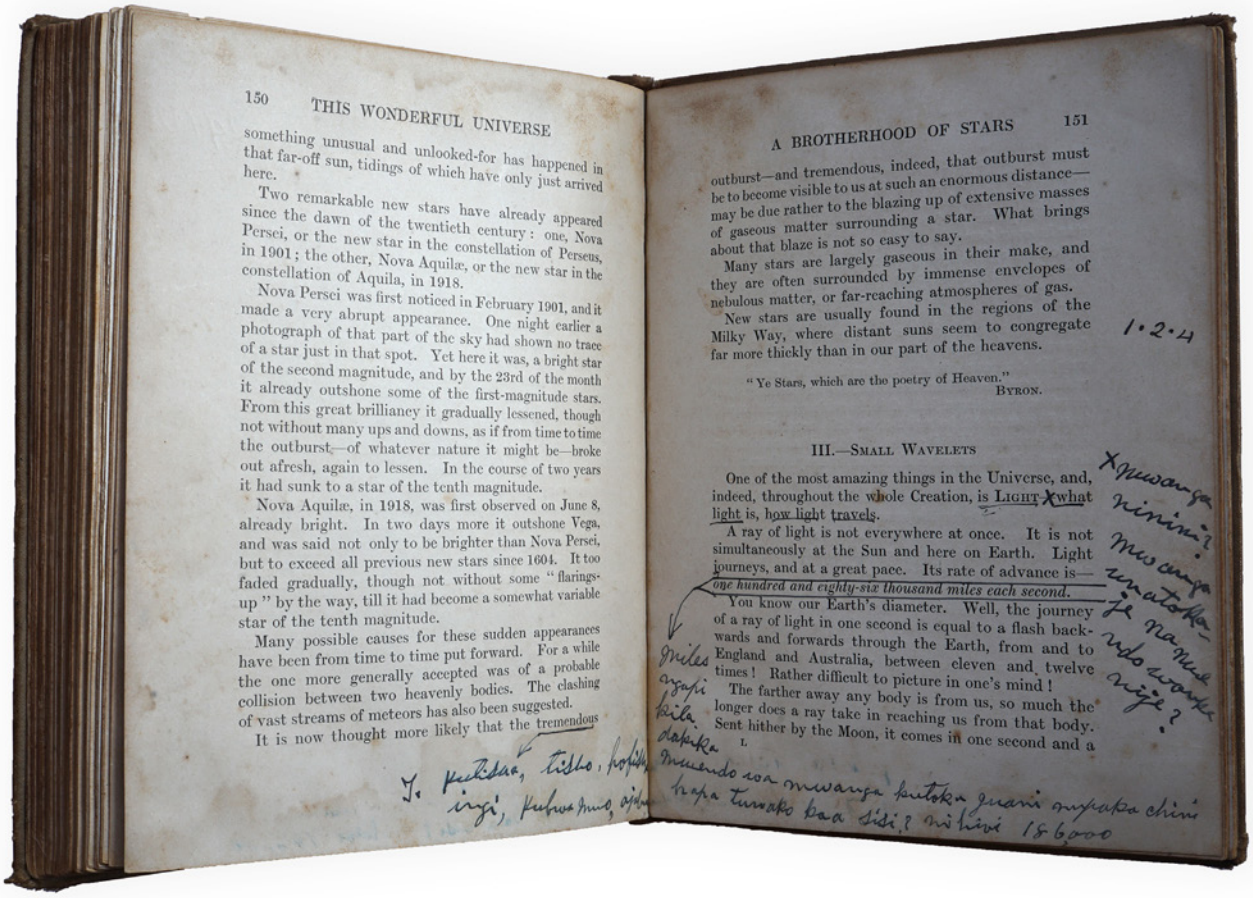
While working in Mengo last July and August, I noticed for the first time how these holes operate as aperture in the master bedroom and render the construction a camera obscura. Would it be fair to take this quality of the house as a metaphor for your never-ending hunger for knowledge to be projected onto your intellect through the study of literature in general and the books in your libraries in particular?

3[3]

[3] Three of the bookcases in Kewerimide House photographed August 2023 after sifting through the various collections now housed in the room, separating the books that were gifted to-, bought, read, handled by Ham Mukasa himself from more recent materials. The Ham Mukasa shelves include an abundance of encyclopedic reference books, numerous dictionaries (English – Swahili and vice versa), bibles, a Quran, an English translation of Hitler's Mein Kampf that Ham Mukasa wrote a comment upon, two copies of "The Wonderful Universe", and geography books concerned with earthly matters. Many of the volumes include piece of thin robe that guided the reading as well as notes on what was read when and which paragraphs caused interest and wonder.

LIBRARIES

Studying the way you studied, with the books in your libraries, provides a strange sensation of proximity. Your tendency to keep receipts of payment in the books shows that you bought most of them yourself, sometimes in duplicate to have a volume at hand in each of your libraries. The Britannica encyclopedia, once placed within reach of your desk in Kwata Mpola House, is now positioned next to the door connecting the sitting room of Kewerimide House to its library as a guard of sorts. I noticed the roughness of the papers on which the lemma devoted to Uganda was printed, while my hands travelled through the last volume of this resource. I wonder what led you to consult this information. Filling in gaps in your knowledge? Checking how the British positioned the country you lived in? In any case, such remnants of your interests both confirm the privileged position you had and challenge still prevailing simplifications in European communication concerning "Africans".



150 THIS WONDERFUL UNIVERSE

something unusual and unlooked-for has happened in that far-off sun, tidings of which have only just arrived here.

Two remarkable new stars have already appeared since the dawn of the twentieth century: one, Nova Persei, or the new star in the constellation of Perseus, in 1901; the other, Nova Aquilæ, or the new star in the constellation of Aquila, in 1918.

Nova Persei was first noticed in February 1901, and it made a very abrupt appearance. One night earlier a photograph of that part of the sky had shown no trace of a star just in that spot. Yet here it was, a bright star of the second magnitude, and by the 23rd of the month it already outshone some of the first-magnitude stars. From this great brilliancy it gradually lessened, though not without many ups and downs, as if from time to time the outburst—of whatever nature it might be—broke out afresh, again to lessen. In the course of two years it had sunk to a star of the tenth magnitude.

Nova Aquilæ, in 1918, was first observed on June 8, already bright. In two days more it outshone Vega, and was said not only to be brighter than Nova Persei, but to exceed all previous new stars since 1604. It too faded gradually, though not without some "flarings-up" by the way, till it had become a somewhat variable star of the tenth magnitude.

Many possible causes for these sudden appearances have been from time to time put forward. For a while the one more generally accepted was of a probable collision between two heavenly bodies. The clashing of vast streams of meteors has also been suggested.

It is now thought more likely that the tremendous

A BROTHERHOOD OF STARS 151

outburst—and tremendous, indeed, that outburst must be to become visible to us at such an enormous distance—may be due rather to the blazing up of extensive masses of gaseous matter surrounding a star. What brings about that blaze is not so easy to say.

Many stars are largely gaseous in their make, and they are often surrounded by immense envelopes of nebulous matter, or far-reaching atmospheres of gas.

New stars are usually found in the regions of the Milky Way, where distant suns seem to congregate far more thickly than in our part of the heavens.

"Ye Stars, which are the poetry of Heaven."
BYRON.

III.—Small Wavelets

One of the most amazing things in the Universe, and, indeed, throughout the whole Creation, is Light—what light is, how light travels.

A ray of light is not everywhere at once. It is not simultaneously at the Sun and here on Earth. Light journeys, and at a great pace. Its rate of advance is—

one hundred and eighty-six thousand miles each second.

You know our Earth's diameter. Well, the journey of a ray of light in one second is equal to a flash backwards and forwards through the Earth, from and to England and Australia, between eleven and twelve times! Rather difficult to picture in one's mind!

The farther away any body is from us, so much the longer does a ray take in reaching us from that body. Sent hither by the Moon, it comes in one second and a

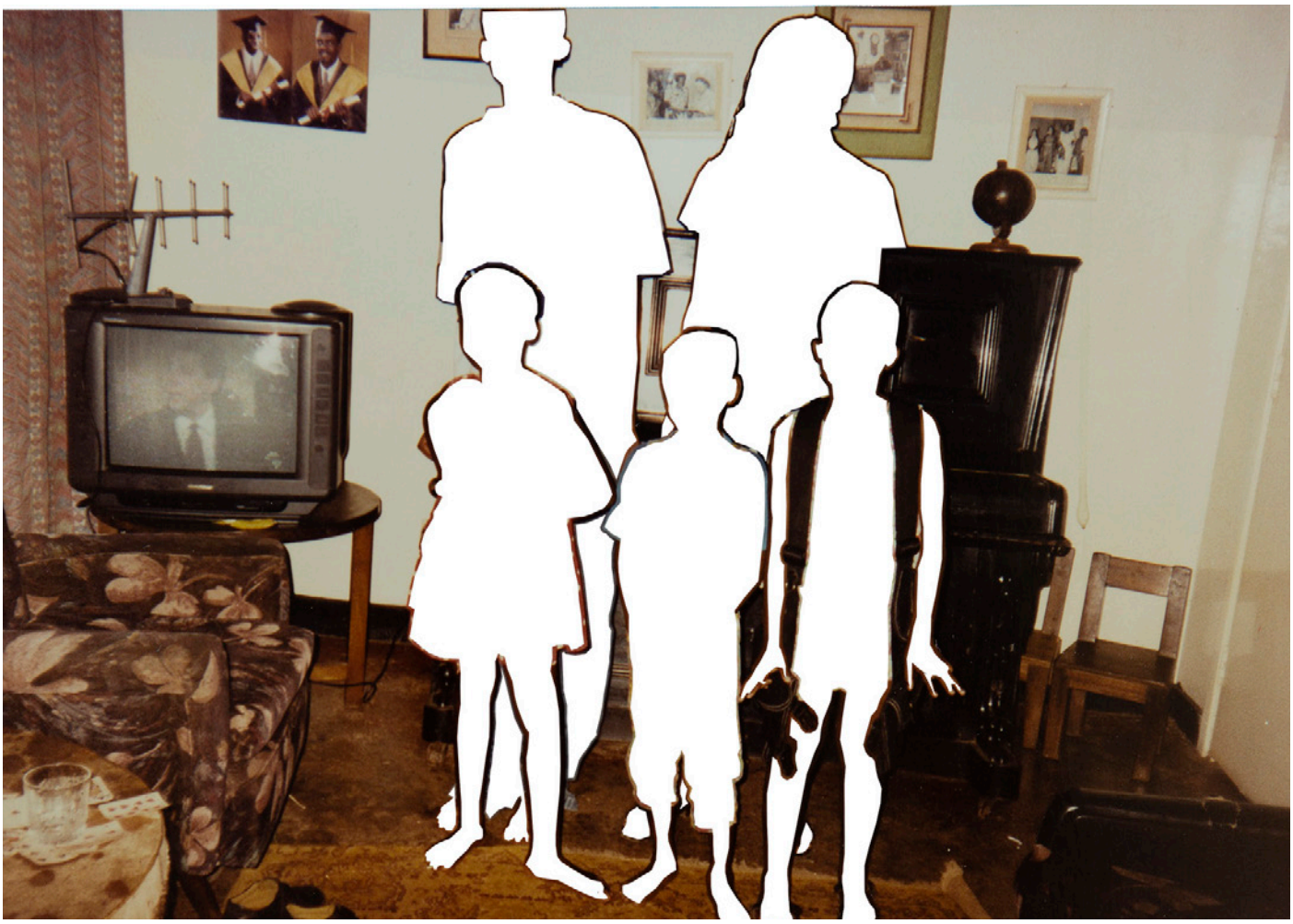
L

4[4]

[4] X What Light Is – Reading with Ham Mukasa. 2023 reproduction from Gilbern, 1920

DESCENDANTS

One of the grandchildren who is named after you mentioned that being your descendant is not only a blessing. It also means that your extremely high moral standards to looming over his own performance in life. He also shared with me that there are different positions among his peers on how to give form to such a burden. This was most poignantly exemplified by another one of your descendants wanting to denounce Christianity as non-African, causing conflict within the family. How does one live with the legacy of a grandfather who experienced, indeed was part of substantial shifts in the awareness of how the world could be constructed? Through the arrival and acceptance of Christianity, through advocating for and contributing to the availability of formal (western) education, through serving the King in particular and the nation with its citizens at large, through navigating traditions and novelties all in the service of progress. Could you imagine living on another continent? Following an ancestor for whom Christianity was the obvious way forward, while living in a context in which this religion is taken to be part of a colonial and violent past as well as a manifestation of problematic conventional positions?

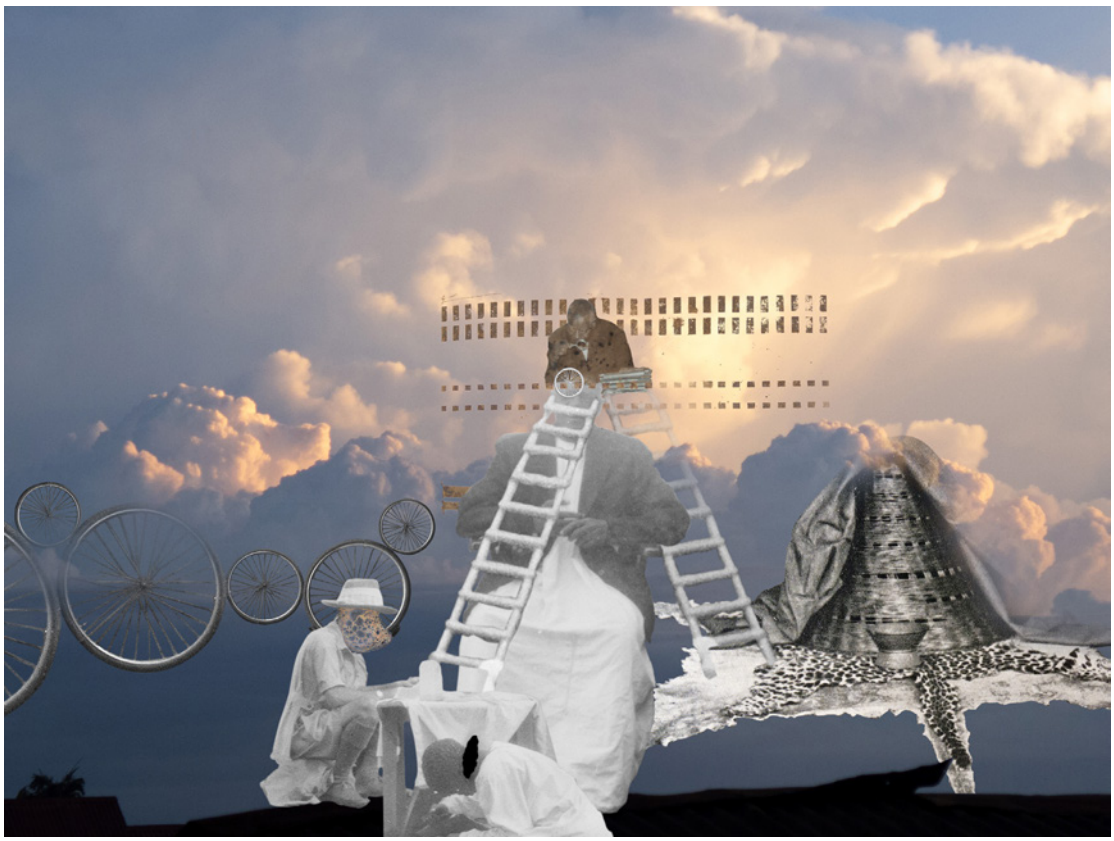


5[5]

[5] Family photograph from the collections of the Ham Mukasa foundation

ARTISTIC GESTURES

In the previous letter to you I mentioned how I take all histories to be performative interpretations of the past. I was pleasantly surprised to learn since then that you performed in such an interpretation of a scene included in a Luganda version of Bunyan's classic British 17th century Christian allegory 'Pilgrim's Progress', and that you were present at the history pageants celebrating the 50th anniversary of the arrival of missionaries in Uganda. This raised my confidence of the way in realizing the illustrations you desired for Simuda Nyuma. The artist who took this work upon him is Canon Griffin, who also helped in reproducing your photographic legacy. He uses that photographic legacy as a basis for collages in which he synthesizes selected pictorial fragments bring his understanding of the scenes you described into existence. As a result of this procedure, you appear in a substantial part of these pictures. In the example included with this letter, two pictures of you are used to illustrate the way your missionary hero Alexander Mackay taught the Kabaka. You could say that Canon Griffin takes a de-colonial approach, making the man on top look into the head of the man below after having climbed up one of the ladders leading to his position. The past you advocated to leave behind is present in the form of a still life placed on a leopard skin. Does this come anywhere near what you had imagined when composing the list of images to accompany your writing? Or would it be more suitable to appropriate pictures present in books written by friends of yours such as mr. Stanley (1875), mr. Ashe (1894), and mr. Roscoe (1911)?



6[6]

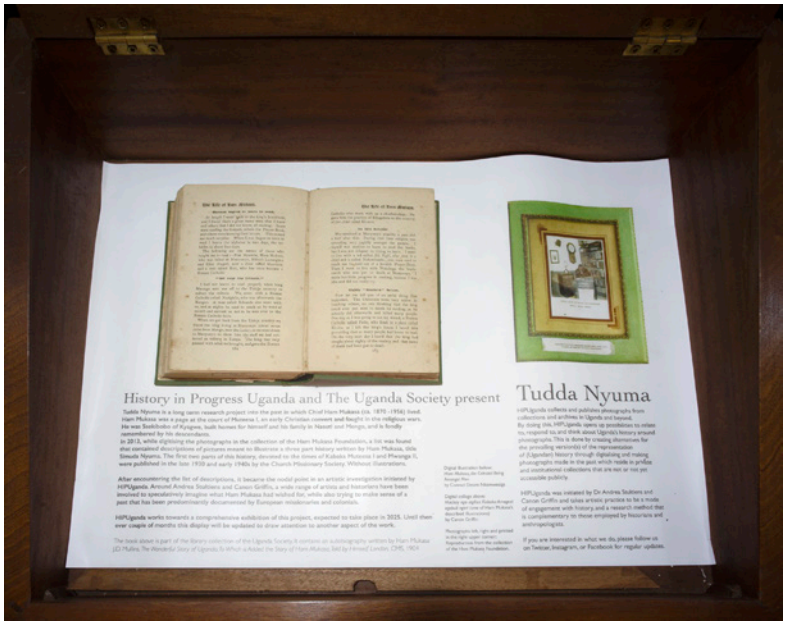
[6] Canon Griffin's interpretation of the described illustration for Simuda Nyuma, p.80 Mackay nga aigiliza Kabaka Amagezi agabuli ngeri / Mackay teaching the Kabaka wisdom of various nature (translation of description by Kaddu Wasswa).

PLATFORMS

So far, I have avoided addressing certain technological innovations that emerged over the last couple of decades in my updates to you. It just seemed to be too far away from the times in which you lived. However, having learned more about your interests in such innovations from the books in your library, I think I should figure out how to fill you in on this too. The novelties of printing photographs, of mass reproduction of texts to distribute ideas have to quite some extend been replaced by a virtual network that has emerged over the last couple of decades out of military intelligence and the expansive ambitions of those in power. I have been using this network to reach people who might be interested in your legacy and my work with it. In a future letter, after further developing my thoughts on how to bridge some of the experiential gaps between us in words, I will elaborate further on this. For now let me end with reassuring you that it is still possible to make books, and I will make every effort to produce one that will afford a stable and material form for our now entangled practices to live on. Meanwhile, I recently installed a small exhibition in the space that now functions as the Uganda Society, of which you used to be a member. This is meant to be the first in a series, leading up to a moment in which your legacy will be celebrated by your descendants alongside all those willing to look back at the way you proposed to look forward.

7[7]

[7] Overview of the first installation towards a comprehensive Tudda Nyuma show, projected to take place in 2025.



8[8]

[8] Detail of the first installation towards a comprehensive Tudda Nyuma show, projected to take place in 2025.

REFERENCES

1678, John Bunyan, T*he Pilgrim's Progress from This World to That Which Is To Come*, Vol. 1, No. 1: pp. 9-13
1875, H.M. Stanley, *Through the Dark Continent, or, The Sources of the Nile : around the great lakes of equatorial Africa and down the Livingstone River to the Atlantic Ocean*, London : Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, Rivington
1894, R.P. Ashe, *Chronicles of Uganda*, London : Hodder & Stoughton
1911, John Roscoe, *The Baganda; An Account of Their Native Customs and Beliefs*, London : Macmillan
1920, Agnes Gilberne, *This wonderful Universe; a little book about sunds and world, moons and meteors, comets and nebulae*, London : Society for promoting Christian knowledge
1927, John Bunyan, *Omutambuze* [The Pilgrim's Progress in Luganda, translated by Rev. E.C. Gordon, Frank Rowling], Sheldon Press
1938 & 1942, Ham Mukasa, *Simuda Nyuma* (Go Forward), part I & II, London : Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge
1939, Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* [translated by James Murphy], London : Hurst & Blackett Ltd.
1962/1963, Ham Mukasa, *Simuda Nyuma*, (Do not go back), part I & II, available on microfilm in various university libraries
2004, Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics, The Distribution of the Sensible*, London: Bloomsbury
2010, Ariella Azoulay, 'What is a photograph? What is photography?' in *Philosophy of Photography*, 1: 1, pp.9-13, doi: 10.1386/pop1.1.9/7
2012, Ham Mukasa, *Backward Never – Forward Ever* [Simuda Nyuma part I & II in translation of Francis Batte], Ham Mukasa Foundation
2016, Andrea Stultiens (ed.), *Ebifananyi IV, Simuda Nyuma*, Based on Images by Ham Mukasa, Paradox – HIPUganda
2017, Andrea Stultiens *Ebifananyi, A study of photographs in Uganda in and through an artistic practice*, Leiden University

CAPITALISM AND THE CAMERA: ESSAYS ON PHOTOGRAPHY AND EXTRACTION

Penelope Petsini

1. Panteion University
2. University of West Attica.

Keywords:
Photography
Capitalism
Capitalist Realism

ABSTRACT

A review of *Capitalism and the Camera: Essays on Photography and Extraction* (Verso, 2021), edited by Kevin Coleman and Daniel James..

PENELOPE PETSINI is a Doctor of Philosophy in Arts and Humanities, specialized in photography. Her recent publications include: *Sites of Memory: Photography, Collective Memory and History* (Athens: Hellenic Center of Photography & NEON Foundation, 2016); *Capitalist Realism: Future Perfect | Past Continuous* (University of Macedonia Press, 2018); the collective readers *Censorship in Greece* (Athens: Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, 2016) and *Companion of Censorship in Greece: Weak Democracy, Dictatorship, Metapolitefsi* (Athens: Kastaniotis, 2018) co-edited with Dimitris Christopoulos; as well as *Photography and collective identities: Greek Photography Studies I* (Athens: Koukkida 2021)and *Photography and the anthropological turn: Greek Photography Studies II* (Athens: Koukkida 2023) co-edited with John Stathatos.

Figure 1: Chemnitz, Stadt mit Kopfchen, Das Karl-Marx-Monument.

K. COLEMAN & DANIEL JAMES (EDS.), CAPITALISM AND THE CAMERA: ESSAYS ON PHOTOGRAPHY AND EXTRACTION, VERSO, 2021

Is it possible that capitalism and photography share more than just a historical timeline, but also an inherent connection in their modes of operation? Does a comprehensive understanding of the origins of photography necessitate an exploration of the imperial violence and rights that underlie its inception? To what extent can photography, a medium often intertwined with capitalism's alluring influence, be effectively employed to conceptualize and construct alternative image-worlds? Can it serve as a catalyst for inspiring movements aimed at fostering greater freedom and equality across societal boundaries? In transcending its conventional role as a mere recording tool, can the camera assume a transformative role in expanding freedom and equality within society? These are among the critical inquiries posed by this thought-provoking book, compelling readers to engage in a discerning examination of the intricate connections between image production, economic systems, and societal metamorphosis.

Verso's collective volume "Capitalism and the Camera" is about the intricate interplay between capitalism and photography, examining how these two realms interact, shaping and influencing each other in ways that often go unnoticed. The book examines how these two entities evolved in tandem during a critical period in history, between Adam Smith's "The Wealth of Nations" and Marx and Engels' "The Communist Manifesto", highlighting the emergence of both philosophical and practical aspects: one being the conceptualization of economy as a new analytical object and the other the development of photography as a means to capture images through light. In this perspective, they suggest the camera frame and the framework of capitalist hegemony share an inherent symbiotic connection, one intertwining itself within a "cultural ecosystem of images". Through a series of essays, the contributors unveil the multifaceted ways in which capitalism and photography are entwined, while also highlighting the potential for photography to critically engage with capitalist structures and envision alternative possibilities. In this sense, the book poses crucial questions about the intersections between capitalist accumulation and photography, as well as the potential for photography to challenge capitalism's encroachments on human freedom and the environment.

Drawing from Western Marxist traditions, "Capitalism and the Camera" challenges the notion of a teleological argument by highlighting the non-linear and symbiotic relationship between photography and capitalism. Indeed, the development of these two entities over time has been intertwined, influencing each other's growth: while photography's evolution wasn't solely driven by capitalism, the logic of exchange and value production in capitalism aligns with photographic replication. Throughout the volume,

the contributors provide novel insights into the intricate relationship between photography and capitalism, challenging Bertolt Brecht's skeptical perspective on the medium's capacity to encapsulate the essence of capitalism. They underscore that, notwithstanding its inherent limitations, photography possesses the potential to engage in a critical dialogue with capitalism, unveiling its underlying structures and facilitating the envisioning of alternative trajectories. The notion that photography can counteract the abstraction inherent in global capitalism by tangibly representing its intricate flows aligns with a well-established trajectory within concerned photography. Pioneers in this domain, such as Allan Sekula, have notably demonstrated this potential through iconic explorations like his profound investigation into the shipping industry (fig.2).

Figure 2: Allan Sekula, Panorama. Mid-Atlantic, November 1993 (1993). From Fish Story, 1989–1995. The Getty Research Institute, 2016.M.22.

POLITICAL ECONOMY AND PHOTOGRAPHIC TECHNOLOGY

In their Introduction, Coleman and James put forth three central arguments. Firstly, they assert the inherent connection between capitalism and the camera, examining the logics of accumulation and replication within constrained historical and ecological contexts. To do so, they examine the diverse realm of images, considering their role in cultural ecosystems and the infrastructures that lend them value. Secondly, they propose that photography, or the camera, can provide insight into capitalist production relations, the construction of social worlds, and the emotions that mobilize collective actions. Thirdly, they emphasize the camera's role in shaping publics – collective subjects that can transcend boundaries and work towards democratic expansion of freedom and equality. Photography, they argue, can serve as a tool for this struggle.

The book itself is divided into three main sections, each focusing on a distinct aspect of the relationship between capitalism and photography. The first section, "Accumulation—Imperial Image Worlds", examines the origins of photography and its connection to capitalism's destructive impact on lifeworlds. Overall, the essays expose the complexities of photography's relationship with capitalism, its potential for challenging dominant narratives, and the possibilities of building alternative communities through image-making. Siobhan Angus traces the importance of silver mining to photography's development and draws parallels between the metallurgist and the photographer; Ariella Aïsha Azoulay provocatively suggests 1492 as photography's birth year, highlighting the intersection of colonialism and image-making; Kajri Jain challenges medium-specific notions of photography, emphasizing its varied contexts and universalizing discourses.

Azoulay's essay redefines the concept

of photography's origins, challenging traditional narratives perpetuated by inventors, capitalists, and colonial powers. Instead of viewing photography's inception solely through the lens of technological invention, this viewpoint posits that the roots of photography can be traced back to the year 1492. The key idea is that photography, as we know it, didn't emerge in isolation but was intertwined with the imperial practices and ideologies prevalent during colonization. Rather than being seen as an isolated practice centered around the camera and the individual photographer, photography is understood as a product of imperial violence, dispossession, and the reconfiguration of worlds.

The act of imposing a "new world" through colonization necessitated the destruction of existing social fabrics, replacing them with new classifications, technologies, and meanings. Photography's association with documenting and recording, often from an assumed external viewpoint, is seen as an extension of this imperial ideology. The act of capturing images is framed as capturing what's already shaped by imperial influence, reinforcing the very processes of colonization. Thus, this perspective asserts that photography grew out of imperialism, embodying its values and practices. To acknowledge this alternative origin of photography, Azoulay calls us to unlearn conventional knowledge about its history and to explore it within the broader context of the imperial world. The decolonization of photography, she argues, is intricately tied to the larger goal of decolonizing the world itself and dismantling imperial practices.

In a similar vein, Kajri Jain's essay "Go Away Closer: Photography, Intermediality, Unevenness" challenges the idea of a postcolonial form of photographic practice that exists separately from other traditions. Instead, it asserts that photography, regardless of its context, inherently involves a mixture of media and traditions, rejecting notions of medium specificity. This rejection parallels the way capitalism tells its own story, emphasizing progress and universality while appropriating external elements for its functioning. Focusing on the bazaar and its mercantile ethos, Jain explores the lateral circulation of images beyond capitalism's borders, emphasizing the foundation of barter as a significant aspect.

Examining contemporary Indian devotional icons, she illustrates how photography mediates their aura, intertwining devotional imprints with popular consumer goods. The bazaar's visual grammar, as analyzed here, intersects with consumer culture at an oblique angle, creating an "unevenness" that defies crude valuation and capitalist transactions. Jain's discussions with artist Dayanita Singh exemplify this perspective, showcasing Singh's works that lateralize and scramble museum hierarchies, embracing the bazaar's ethos of humility and hospitality in her innovative practice. Jain's argument prompts a reevaluation of the need to see the whole, suggesting a nuanced understanding of the history of capital accumulation, its principles, and its various cultural and historical contexts — an inquiry which involves understanding the diverse aspects that capitalism subsumes and those it leaves outside.

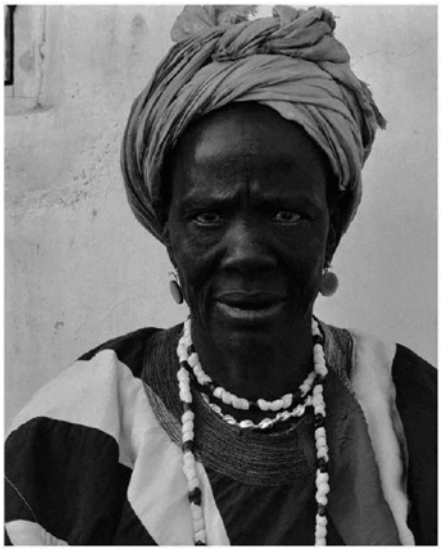


Figure 3, 4: Left: Paul Cézanne, Portrait de Madame Cézanne (1885-90)
Right: Paul Strand, Asenah Wara, Leader of the Women's Party (Wa, Ghana, 1964)

In "Mining the History of Photography," Siobhan Angus traces the metaphorical "alloys" of photographic reproduction, connecting silver mining in Cobalt, Ontario, to Eastman Kodak's technological consolidation. She argues that considering the materiality of photography through mining and metallurgy reveals it as both industry and labor. The essay unveils three "shadow histories" of photographic labor: the mine, the lab, and the darkroom, emphasizing Eastman Kodak's dematerialization of labor. Angus explores the erasure of extractive labor in Kodak's dominance, highlighting a postcard of striking mine workers as a counter-critique, showcasing the resistance and artisanal traces embedded in the silvered imprint.

Whilst the first section challenges conventional narratives of photography's development and offers a nuanced perspective on its historical emergence, in the second section, entitled "Critique—Images without Capitalism", contributors examine structures and fault lines within contemporary capitalism. Walter Benn Michaels examines how photographic form and artistic intent can make social class visible and inspire alternative imaginings; T. J. Clark explores the potential failures of the consumer capitalist image-world, while John Paul Ricco contemplates photography's limits in the face of ecological crises. The authors explore how capitalism's drive for consumption contributes to environmental crises, and how the proliferation of images fuels this consumption-driven cycle. They also emphasize the power of imagery in shaping desires and activism, noting that photography can both incite consumerism and encourage change through awareness. This exploration gives rise to new ways of thinking about photography's capacity to represent capitalism and its potential to envision alternative worlds. In essence, this section examines how photography can serve as a means of critique within capitalist societies, exploring the power dynamics embedded in photographic representation, the potential for photographic form to reveal class structures, and the role of photography in shaping public deliberation. These essays underscore photography's ability to illuminate the underlying forces at play within capitalism, simultaneously critiquing and deconstructing its mechanisms.

In this context, T. J. Clark's essay "Capitalism without Images" explores the dynamics of contemporary consumer society, accentuating the pivotal role of the image-world in shaping desires and propelling consumption. The essay initiates with a poignant anecdote involving a credit card adorned with Karl Marx's statue, thereby eliciting inquiries into the ironic utilization of Marxist symbolism within a post-Stalinist urban milieu. Clark then systematically probes the vulnerabilities inherent in the image-centric framework of capitalism, conjecturing on the repercussions should the image-world forfeit its persuasive efficacy. To do so, he engages in a critical examination of the surreal aspects of the modern image-world, querying its susceptibility to attrition and the resultant consequences for capitalist paradigms. Clark introduces the conceptualization of the "un-elated looter" to dissect occurrences such as the 2011 London riots, positing a crisis in the image-world manifesting as consumerism turns inward upon itself. He also provocatively posits that "consumption" may function as a euphemism for commodified addiction, with "modernity" encapsulating an essence of irony. Nevertheless, the essay leaves its readers in contemplation, pondering the trajectory of consumerism's evolution and the plausible emergence of the image itself as a malevolent force within a dystopian narrative.

Echoing Mark Fisher's concept of Capitalist Realism, where the dominant ideology forecloses alternatives and naturalizes existing social structures, in "Anti-Capitalism and the Camera," Walter Benn Michaels explores the parallel emergence of art photography since the late 1970s and neoliberalism, both marked by a subjective positioning that displaces class conflict for a discriminatory politics. Michaels analyzes Jeff Wall's "Mimic" (1982) to illustrate how art photography transmits a relational aesthetic, wherein intersectional politics of race and gender supersede class in influence. LaToya Ruby Frazier's "The Notion of Family" (2015) is examined as a bookend to this era, with Michaels delving into exploring the complexities of Frazier's self-portrait staging and its exclusionary impact, suggesting an affective depth charge against capitalism. In a similar spirit, in "Moths to the Flame: Photography and Extinction," John Paul Ricco provocatively challenges the normative human-centric perspective, suggesting that embracing absence and extinction in

Figure 5:
Hans Haacke, Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, a Real-Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971.

photography allows for a resistance against the destructive forces of capitalist hegemony. Ricco examines the profound relationship between photography and extinction, exploring the implications of absence and darkness in this context. His examination of non-human lifeforms, such as moths, silkworms, and bacteria, serves as a prelude to reconceptualizing photography as a "poor" medium, devoid of the values imposed by capital.

The final section, "State—Image of the People in Crisis", further investigates how photography influences social dynamics and the construction of citizenship, analyzing photography's role in shaping collective identity, from its use in state propaganda to its potential to foster public engagement and resistance: Blake Stimson considers the intrinsic privateness of photography and its potential to foster public deliberation; Christopher Stolarski's chapter on Soviet press photography demonstrates the co-optation of radical photographic practices for state propaganda; Tong Lam reflects on the role of cameras in mobilizing resistance to urban industrialization in China. Overall, the essays here provide insights into how photography operates within the broader context of the state and its influence on societal narratives.

In "Public Photography", for example, Blake Stimson explores the evolution of photography's role in society, focusing on the distinction between public and private photography and its connection to freedom within a capitalist framework. Stimson discusses the transformation of photography from a medium of democratic representation to a tool co-opted by propaganda, advertising, and surveillance within state capitalism. The essay scrutinizes photography's inherent nature, the impact of market and state dynamics, and its deviation from its initial promise as a public communication tool, emphasizing the commodification of personal experiences for capitalist interests. Drawing from John Berger's perspective, Stimson delves into the tension between private contracts and personal connections within capitalism, highlighting their potential to perpetuate unfreedom. He explores the prospect of authentic public photography that transcends capitalist influences, promoting genuine communication and connection. Stimson contends that photography, while often mythologizing privatized social interaction, can counteract this trend through reflexivity, historical context, and spatial-temporal orientation, ultimately contributing to the public good. He introduces the concept of "aesthetic distance" to achieve this abstraction and counteract photography's privatizing nature. Contrasting Greenberg's artistic perspective with Marxist materialism, Stimson argues that

materialist aesthetic distance arises from collective self-consciousness and political subjecthood. Ultimately, the essay highlights photography's potential to become a public good, transcending immediate capitalist influences and preparing individuals for active citizenship.

In "Marketing the Socialist Experiment: Soviet Photo-Reportage between the World Wars", on the other hand, Christopher Stolarski delineates the trajectory of Soviet photo-reportage in the consolidation of agencies like Souizfoto and influential publications such as SSSR na stroike, marking a transition wherein socialism assumed a performative image calibrated for both domestic and international consumption. Stolarski's meticulous historical examination illuminates a pivotal juncture in Soviet history, unraveling the complex interplay between modernist aesthetics and their subsequent instrumentalization for propagandistic purposes, thereby enriching our nuanced comprehension of engagement and critique within the

Figure 6, 7: Left: Aleksandr Rodchenko, layout (Novyi LEF, 1928). Right: "How Not to Photograph for the Competition 'At Work'" (Sovetskoe foto, 1927). Intentionally distinguishing itself from classical Tsarist poses, the sequence asserts its aesthetic uniqueness. In its endeavor to transparently depict the workforce, the editorial strategy consciously prioritized a "lively representation," giving precedence to candid and dynamic shots.

from its radical pursuit of social and economic transparency during the 1920s to its subsequent repurposing as an instrument of Stalinist administration and marketing in the 1930s. Stolarski discerns a critical dichotomy between conscious transparency, dedicated to presenting the entirety of Soviet infrastructure, and legibility, an expedient conveyance of bureaucratic values.

The 1920s witnessed the ascendancy of avant-garde photographers, notably exemplified by Aleksandr Rodchenko, who leveraged innovative techniques like film montage to champion the cause of transparency. However, Stolarski observes a discernible trend towards centralization within photo periodicals and agencies, leading to a stylistic shift favoring a centrist aesthetic aligned with Stalin's state managerial objectives. The culmination of this evolution is evident realm of Soviet photo-reportage.

Concluding this section, Tong Lam provides a firsthand narrative of the "politics of attention" within Xian Village, a Guangzhou slum facing capitalist demolition. Lam engages in undercover docu-installation efforts, navigating the tensions between capitalist hyper-development, active resistance by long-term villagers, and the precarious position of migrant workers. He explores the evolving counter-aesthetic among the resisting coalition, noting the nuanced "politics of looking" within the villagers who desire visibility but also assert "the right not to be looked at" in compromising circumstances. Lam's critique advocates for an alternative documentary approach to reveal the complex dynamics of the shifting village slums and challenges capitalism's objective bias in favor of a more resonant expression of class and

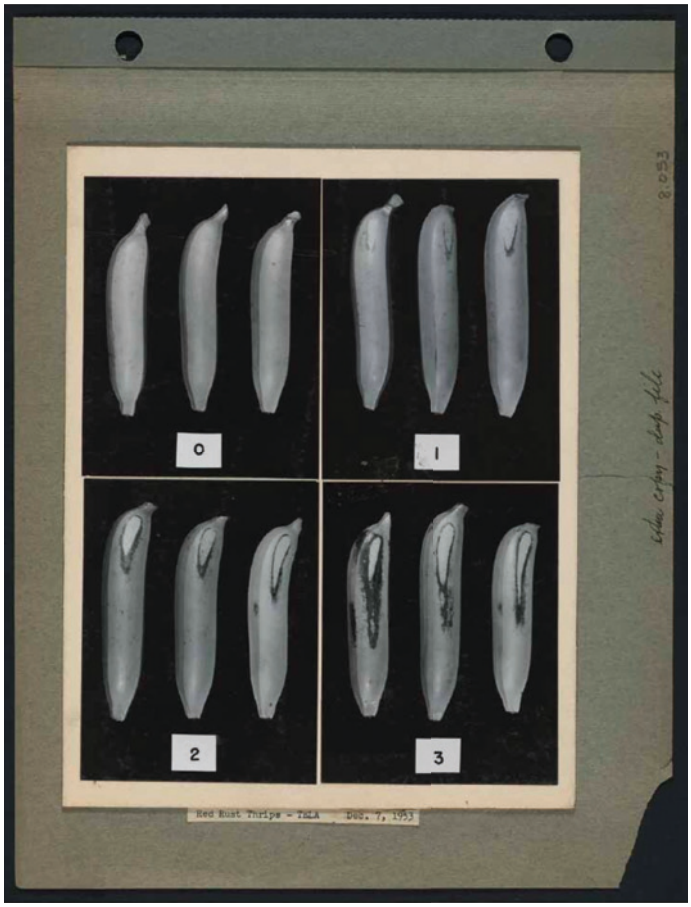


Figure 8:
United Fruit Company Photograph Collection, Baker Library, Harvard Business School

social dynamics.

The book's epilogue, written by Jacob Emery, reflects on photography's unique ability to represent the edge between a legible scene and the larger world from which it is extracted. Emery explores the borders of photographs, questioning what is excluded and whether capital's extractions are evident within the frame. Citing examples from William Wordsworth to Sebastião Salgado, he scrutinizes the interplay between labor and artistic practice; he also discusses the redefinition of labor as non-hierarchical artistic activity and its challenges in the face of neoliberalism recalling the work of Joseph Beuys.

Throughout the book, a common thread emerges: the recognition that while capitalism exerts significant control over photography, the medium itself possesses the potential to disrupt and challenge capitalist paradigms. By examining the intricate relationships between capitalism, photography, and social dynamics, the book encourages readers to reconsider the role of images in our world. It emphasizes that photography is not a passive medium but a tool that can be harnessed to reflect, critique, and reimagine the structures that shape our lives.

Arguably, "Capitalism and the Camera" redefines the discourse on photography's role within capitalism, challenging tradi-tional notions and offering new insights. As such, the book is a significant contribution to understanding the intertwined narratives of capitalism, imagery, and social change, a book that prompts readers to reevaluate their perceptions of both photography and capitalist systems and inspires critical reflection on their collective impacts. In essence, "Capitalism and the Camera" opens up avenues for understanding how photography, despite its entanglement with capitalism, can serve as a tool for critical reflection, revealing the complexities of our contemporary world and offering glimpses of potential transformation. By engaging with the essays in this volume, readers gain a deeper understanding of the ways in which images can not only influence our perception of the world but also inspire us to envision more just and equitable societies. An invaluable task in itself.